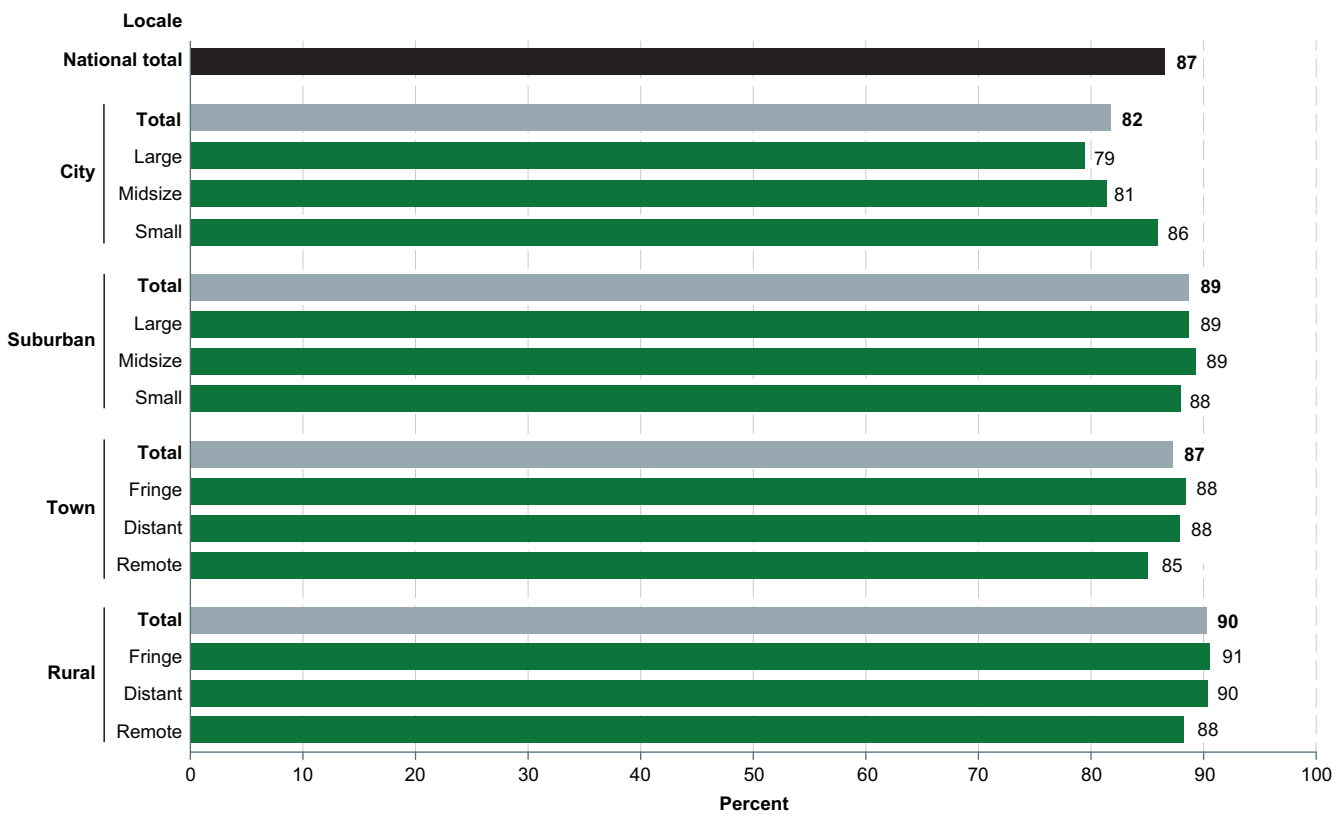# Public High School Graduation Rates in Rural Areas

In 2019–20, the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) was higher in rural areas (90 percent) than in suburban areas (89 percent), towns (87 percent), and cities (82 percent).

Graduation from high school is a key factor in later outcomes for students. Research has demonstrated that high school completion is related to future employment and wages.[1] The adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) is the percentage of public high school 9th-graders who graduate with a regular diploma, or with a State-defined alternate high school diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, within 4 years of starting 9th grade.[2] This indicator examines differences in the ACGR by locale[3] in school year 2019-20 for students who were 9th-graders in school year 2015-16.[4] The ACGR for public high school students across the nation was 87 percent in school year 2019-20.

Figure 1. Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by locale: School year 2019–20

NOTE: The adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) is the percentage of public high school 9th-graders who graduate with a regular diploma, or with a state-defined alternate high school diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, within 4 years of starting 9th grade. Students who are entering 9th grade for the first time form a cohort for the graduating class. This cohort is "adjusted" by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who subsequently transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die. ACGRs by locale are calculated using data reported at the school level. ACGRs by locale exclude Illinois, Texas, and Washington because either reliable school-level data were not available or data were not reported; however, these states are included in the national totals. National totals are based on data reported at the state level. The 2019–20 national totals include imputed data for Illinois and Texas. The time when students are identified as having certain characteristics varies by state. Depending on the state, a student may be included in a category if the relevant characteristic is reported in 9th-grade data, if the characteristic is reported in 12th-grade data, or if it is reported at any point during the student's high school years. In 2019–20, some states may have changed their requirements for a regular high school diploma to account for the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. These changes are at the discretion of each state but may have resulted in less comparability in the ACGRs between 2019–20 and prior school years.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, EDFacts file 151, Data Group 696, extracted from the EDFacts Data Warehouse (internal U.S. Department of Education source) and current as of May 19, 2021, and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 219.47.

In 2019-20, the ACGR for rural areas (90 percent) was higher than the national average ACGR (87 percent). However, the ACGR for cities (82 percent) and several student groups was lower than the national average, including American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic students (75, 81, and 83 percent, respectively), student with disabilities (71 percent), English learners (71 percent), and economically disadvantaged students (81 percent).[5]

In comparing locales, the ACGR was higher in rural areas (90 percent) than in suburban areas (89 percent), towns (87 percent), and cities (82 percent). This pattern can also be seen for several student groups, including Black students, Hispanic students, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students. For example, the ACGR for economically disadvantaged students in rural areas was 85 percent, which was higher than the ACGR for these students in towns (83 percent), in suburban areas (83 percent), and in cities (77 percent). However, the ACGR for Asian/Pacific Islander (94 percent), White (92 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (78 percent) students in rural areas was lower than in suburban areas, with the difference ranging from less than 1 percent to 1 percent.[6]

Among sublocales, the percentage of public high school students in remote rural areas who graduated on time as measured by the ACGR (88 percent) was higher than the percentages in all sublocales in cities (ranging from 79 percent in large cities to 86 percent in small cities) and in remote towns (85 percent). The ACGR in remote rural areas however was lower than the ACGR in large and midsized suburban areas (89 percent each) as well as in fringe and distant rural areas (91 and 90 percent, respectively).

Endnotes:

[1] Murnane, R.J. (2013). U.S. High School Graduation Rates: Patterns and Explanations. *Journal of Economic Literature, 51*(2), 370-422. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from https://www.nber.org/papers/w18701.

[2] Students who are entering 9th grade for the first time form a cohort for the graduating class. This cohort is "adjusted" by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who subsequently transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die. The ACGR was first collected in 2010-11. It is calculated by state education agencies and submitted to the U.S. Department of Education through the ED*Facts* submission system.

[3] Please visit NCES's Education Across America website for the definition of locale.

[4] ACGRs by locale are calculated using data reported at the school level. ACGRs by locale exclude Illinois, Texas, and Washington because either reliable school-level data were not available or data were not reported; however, these states are included in the national totals. National totals are based on data reported at the state level.

[5] Economically disadvantaged students were defined as students who met state criteria for classification as economically disadvantaged.

[6] Differences are based on unrounded data.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 219.47

Related indicators and resources: Public High School Graduation Rates [*Condition of Education*]

Glossary: Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), English learner (EL), High school completer, High school diploma, Locale codes, Public school or institution, Racial/ethnic groups