

## Characteristics, Credentials, and Experiences of Teachers in Rural Schools

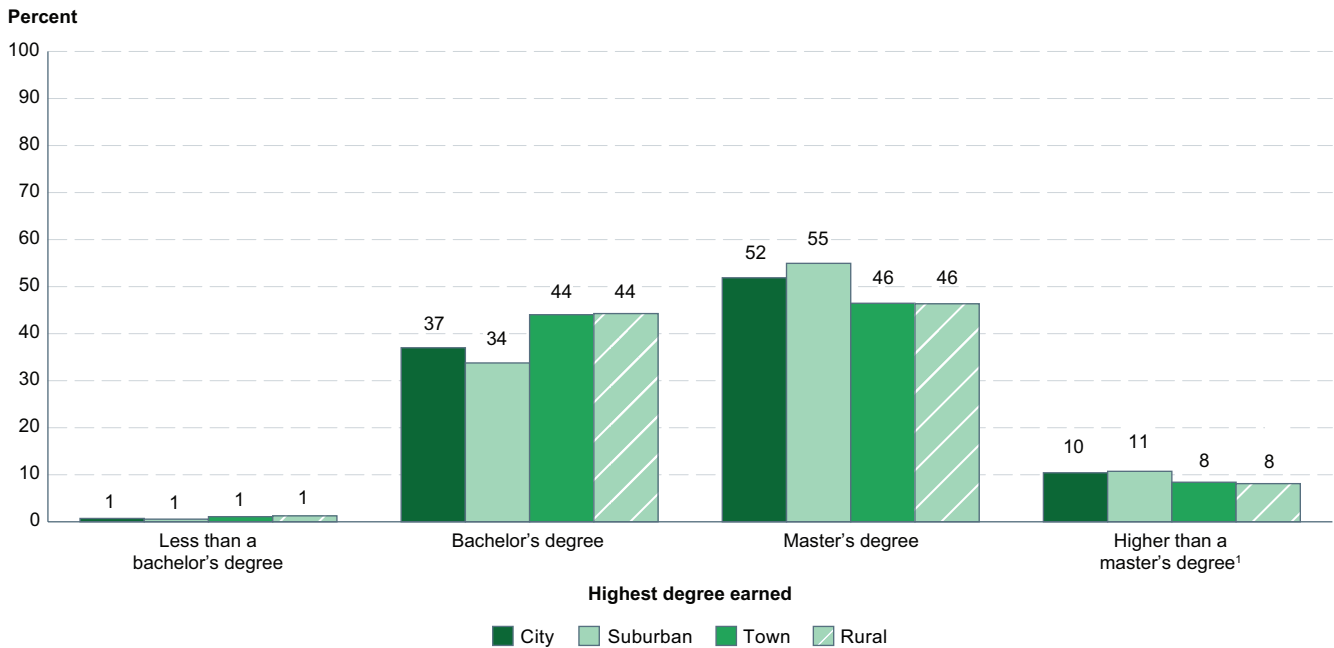
*In general, public school teachers in rural areas tended to have lower educational attainment than teachers in cities and suburbs in 2020–21. For example, the percentages of public school teachers who held a master’s degree (46 percent) or a degree higher than a master’s (8 percent) as their highest degree were lower than the corresponding percentages in cities (52 and 10 percent, respectively) and suburban areas (55 percent and 11 percent, respectively).*

There are differences between the characteristics of teachers in rural areas and teachers in other locales, as well as differences in their preparation.<sup>1, 2</sup> Using data from the 2020-21 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), this indicator explores differences in the race/ethnicity, educational attainment, credentials, and experience of public and private school teachers by school locale. Comparisons between public and private school teachers in rural areas are also made.

Similar to the racial/ethnic composition of the public school student population (see [Children in Rural Areas and Their Family Characteristics](#)), in 2020-21 the percentages of public school teachers who were White and American Indian/Alaska Native were higher in rural areas (89 and 0.7 percent, respectively) than in

cities (70 and 0.3 percent, respectively) and suburban areas (80 and 0.2 percent, respectively).<sup>3</sup> However, the percentages of teachers in public schools who were Asian, Black, and Hispanic were lower in rural areas (1, 3, and 5 percent, respectively) than in suburban areas (3, 6, and 10 percent, respectively) and cities (4, 9, and 14 percent, respectively). In addition, the percentage of public school teachers who were of Two or more races was lower in rural areas (1 percent) than in cities (2 percent). Similar to the pattern observed for public schools, in private schools the percentage of White teachers was higher in rural areas (92 percent) than in cities (80 percent) and suburban areas (83 percent), and the percentage of Hispanic teachers was lower in rural areas (3 percent) than in cities (9 percent) and suburban areas (9 percent).

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of teachers in public schools, by highest degree earned and school locale: School year 2020–21



<sup>1</sup> Higher than a master's degree is defined as a teacher who completed any of the following: an educational specialist or professional diploma, a certificate of advanced graduate studies, or a doctorate or first professional degree.

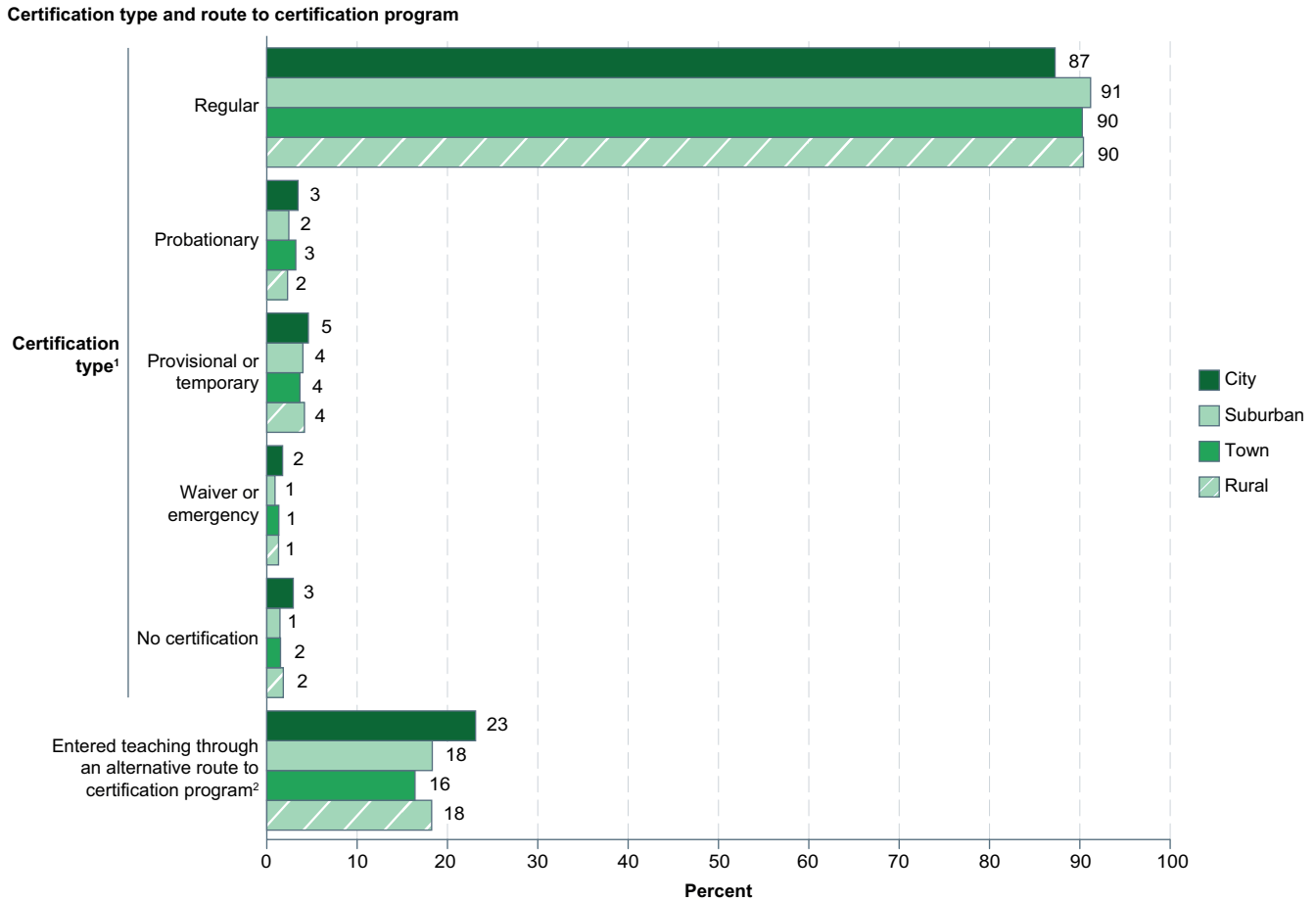
NOTE: Teachers include both full-time and part-time teachers. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher and Private School Teacher Data Files," 2020–21, and *Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States: Results From the 2020–21 National Teacher and Principal Survey—First Look*, table 4.

In general, public school teachers in rural areas tended to have lower educational attainment than teachers in cities and suburbs in 2020-21. For example, the percentages of public school teachers who held a master's degree (46 percent) or a degree higher than a master's (8 percent) as their highest degree were lower than the corresponding percentages in cities (52 and 10 percent, respectively) and suburban areas (55 percent

and 11 percent, respectively). In contrast, the percentage of public school teachers who held a bachelor's degree as their highest degree was higher in rural areas (44 percent) than in cities (37 percent) and suburban areas (34 percent). As with teachers in public schools, in 2020-21 the percentage of teachers in private schools who held a master's degree as their highest degree was lower in rural areas (35 percent) than in cities (44 percent).

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of teachers in public schools who held each type of certification and percentage of teachers who entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, by school locale: School year 2020–21**



<sup>1</sup> Refers to certification of teachers to teach in the state where they are currently teaching. A teaching certificate is probationary if all requirements have been satisfied except completion of a probationary period. It is provisional or temporary if additional coursework, student teaching, or passage of a test is required to obtain regular certification. It is a waiver or emergency certificate if a certification program must be completed to continue teaching.

<sup>2</sup> Teachers were asked whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program, which is a program that was designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program).

NOTE: Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

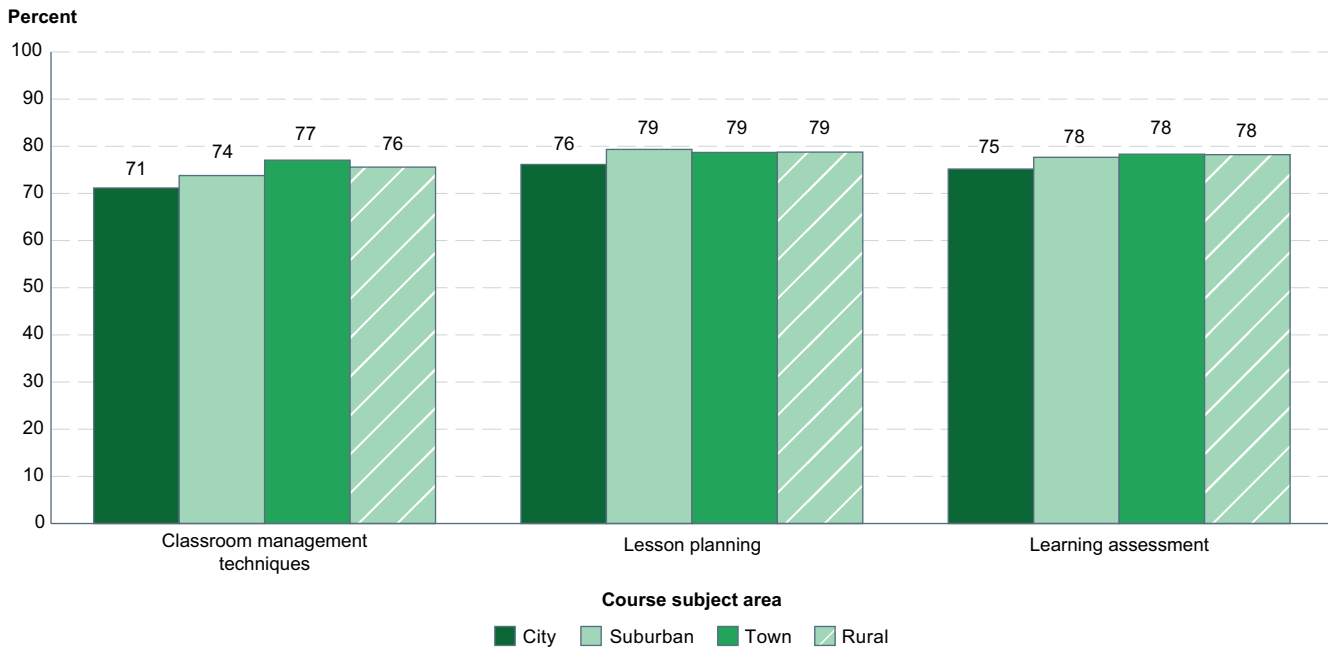
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Teacher Data File” and “Private School Teacher Data File,” 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 209.26.

In 2020–21, teachers provided information on their certification type: regular certification, probationary certification, provisional or temporary certification, waiver or emergency certification, or no certification.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of public school teachers who had a regular certification was higher in rural areas (90 percent) than in cities (87 percent) and the percentage who had no certification was lower in rural areas (2 percent) than in cities (3 percent). The percentage of public school teachers who had probationary certification was lower in rural areas (2 percent) than in cities and towns (3 percent each). About 1 percent of public school teachers in rural areas held a waiver or emergency certification, a percentage higher than that in suburban areas

(0.9 percent) and lower than that in cities (2 percent). Among private school teachers, however, there were no measurable differences by locale in terms of the percentages having a certain certification type.

Teachers also reported whether they entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program.<sup>5</sup> The percentage of public school teachers in 2020–21 who entered teaching through an alternative route to certification program was lower in rural areas (18 percent) than in cities (23 percent). Among private school teachers there were no measurable differences by locale in terms of the percentages who had taken an alternative route to certification.

**Figure 3. Percentage of teachers in public schools who took undergraduate or graduate courses on selected topics before their first year of teaching, by course subject area and school locale: School year 2020–21**



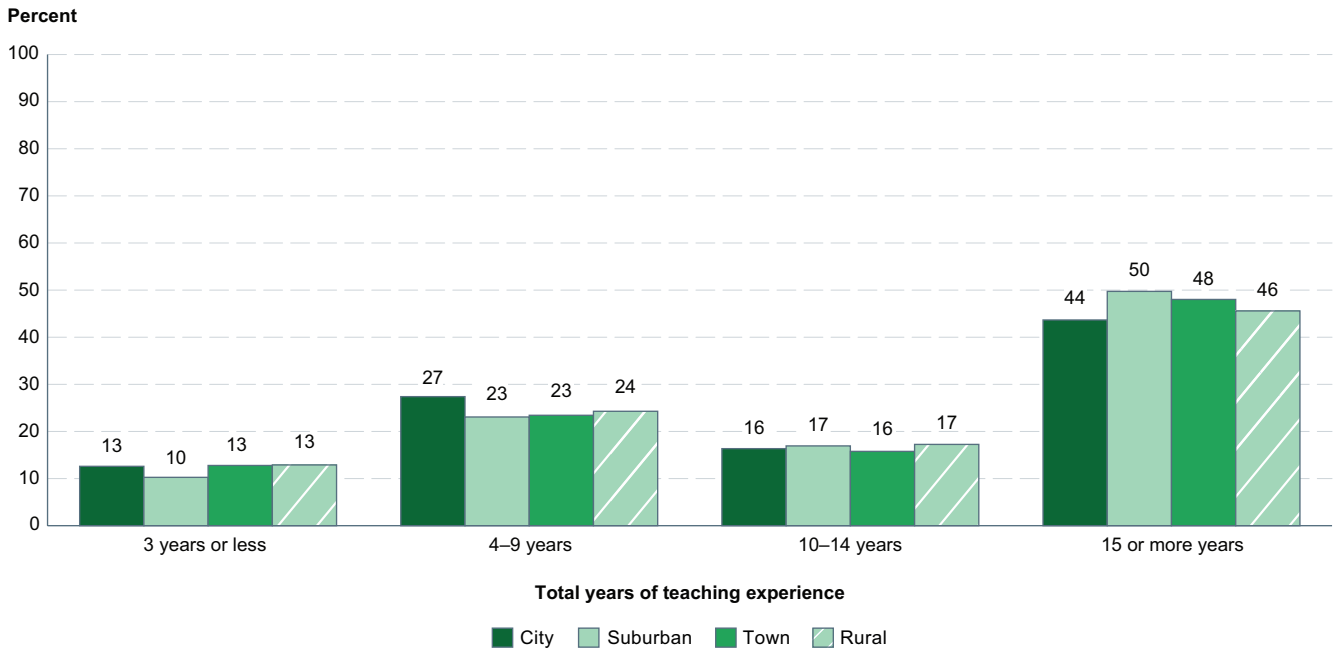
NOTE: Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Teacher and Private School Teacher Data Files,” 2020–21, and *Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States: Results From the 2020–21 National Teacher and Principal Survey—First Look*, table 8.

Teachers were asked to report whether they had taken undergraduate or graduate courses on selected topics related to effective teaching before their first year as teachers. A higher percentage of public school teachers in rural areas reported having taken a course on classroom management techniques (76 percent) than public school teachers in suburban areas and cities (74 and 71 percent, respectively). Also, higher percentages of public school teachers in rural areas took courses on lesson planning (79 percent) and assessing learning (78 percent) than did public school teachers in cities (76 and 75 percent, respectively). In terms of the percentages of private school teachers who took courses on selected topics related to effective teaching, there were no measurable

differences between teachers in rural areas and teachers in other locales.

In 2020-21, a lower percentage of private school teachers in rural areas took courses on the selected topics related to effective teaching mentioned above, compared to the percentage of public school teachers in rural areas who took these courses. For example, lower percentages of private school teachers in rural areas took a course in assessing learning (64 percent), classroom management techniques (65 percent), or lesson planning (66 percent) than did public school teachers in rural areas (78, 76, and 79 percent, respectively).

**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of total years of teaching experience for teachers in public schools, by school locale: School year 2020–21**



NOTE: Teachers include both full-time and part-time teachers. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Teacher and Private School Teacher Data Files,” 2020–21, and *Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Teachers in the United States: Results From the 2020–21 National Teacher and Principal Survey—First Look*, table 3.

On average, public school teachers in rural areas had fewer years of total teaching experience (14.5 years) than public school teachers in suburban areas (14.9 years) and more years of total teaching experience than public school teachers in cities (13.8 years) in 2020–21. A higher percentage of public school teachers in rural areas than in suburban areas had 3 or fewer years of total teaching experience (13 vs. 10 percent). The percentage of public school teachers having between 4 and 9 years of total teaching experience was lower in rural areas (24 percent) than in cities (27 percent). The percentage of public school teachers who had 15 or more years of total teaching experience was higher in rural areas (46 percent) than in cities (44 percent), but lower in rural areas than in suburban areas (50 percent). The average years of teaching experience of private school teachers

in rural areas was not measurably different from those in other locales. However, the percentage of private school teachers who had 10 to 14 years of teaching experience was lower in rural areas (12 percent) than in suburban areas (17 percent).

Further, there was no measurable difference in the average years of total teaching experience between public school teachers and private school teachers in rural areas. However, the percentage of public school teachers with 3 or fewer years of total teaching experience (13 percent) was lower than for private school teachers (19 percent) in rural areas. A higher percentage of public school teachers had 10 to 14 years of total teaching experience (17 percent) than private school teachers (12 percent) in rural areas.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Burton, M., Brown, K., and Johnson, A. (2013). Storylines About Rural Teachers in the United States: A Narrative Analysis of the Literature. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 28(12): 1-18. Retrieved July 23, 2019, from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a405/3c2e44babda96c82eeb9536803d20d979b10.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Please visit NCEs's [Education Across America website](#) for the definition of locale.

<sup>3</sup> Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

<sup>4</sup> A teaching certificate is probationary if all requirements have been satisfied except completion of a probationary period.

Certification is considered provisional or temporary if additional coursework, student teaching, or the passage of a test is required to obtain regular certification. A waiver or emergency certificate means that a certification program must be completed to continue teaching.

<sup>5</sup> An alternative route to certification program is a program designed to expedite the transition of nonteachers to a teaching career (for example, a state, district, or university alternative route to certification program).

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 209.26 and NTPS First Look, tables 1, 3, 4, and 8

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Public School Teachers](#) [*Condition of Education*]; [Characteristics of Public School Teachers Who Completed Alternative Route to Certification Programs](#) [*Condition of Education*]

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**Glossary:** Bachelor's degree; English learner (EL); Locale codes; Master's degree; Private school; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group