

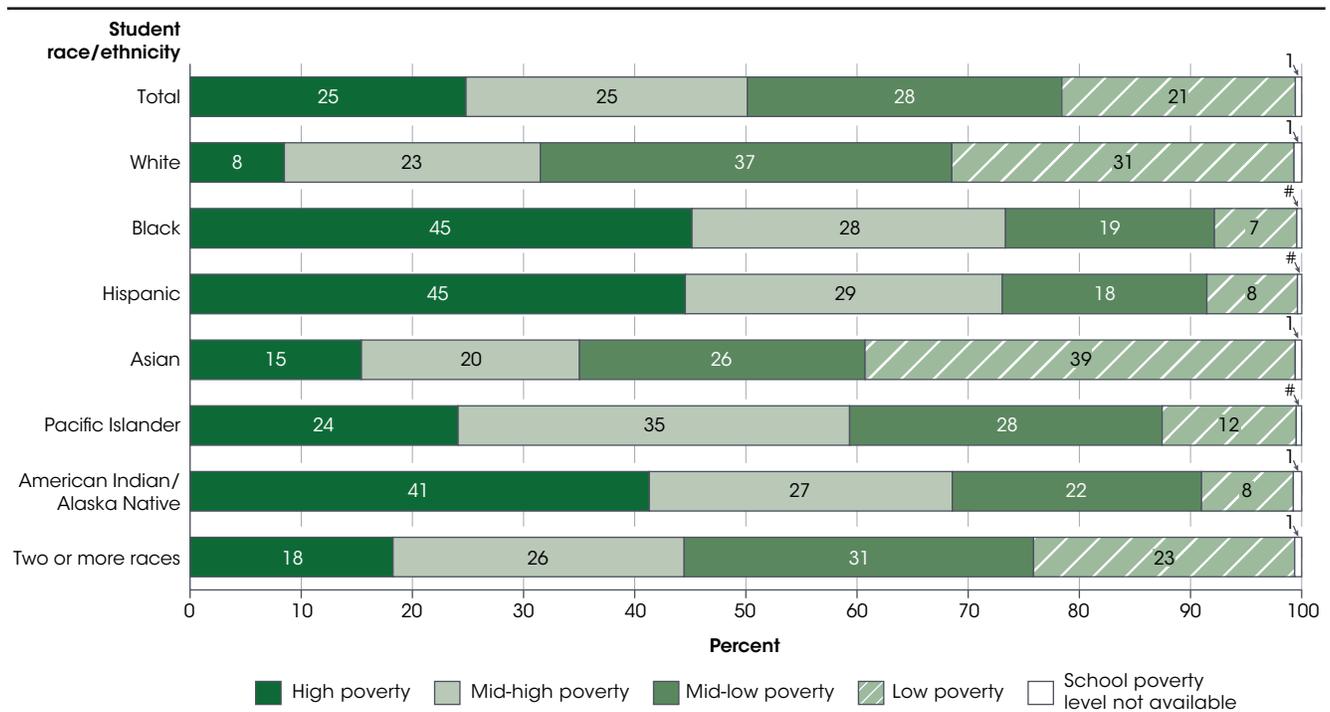
## Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

*In fall 2017, the percentages of students who attended high-poverty schools were highest for Black and Hispanic students (45 percent each), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native students (41 percent), Pacific Islander students (24 percent), students of Two or more races (18 percent), Asian students (15 percent), and White students (8 percent).*

In the United States (defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia in this indicator), the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program provides a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school. In this indicator, public schools<sup>1</sup> (including both traditional and charter) are divided into categories by FRPL eligibility.<sup>2</sup> Low-poverty schools are

defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL.

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public school students, for each racial and ethnic group, by school poverty level: Fall 2017**



# Rounds to zero.

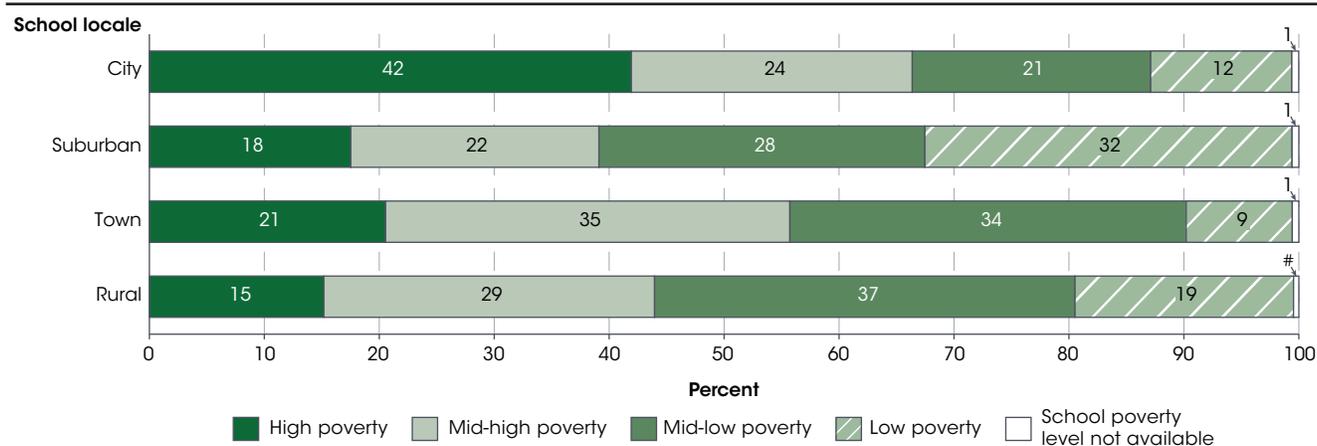
NOTE: High-poverty schools are defined as public schools where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and low-poverty schools are those where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. "School poverty level not available" includes schools for which information on FRPL is missing and schools that did not participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a "process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications" (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCEES blog post "Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?" Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. 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, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2017–18; and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 216.60.

In fall 2017, the percentage of public school students in high-poverty schools was higher than the percentage in low-poverty schools (25 vs. 21 percent), and both percentages varied by race/ethnicity. The percentages of students who attended high-poverty schools were highest for Black and Hispanic students (45 percent each), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native students (41 percent), Pacific Islander students (24 percent), students of Two or

more races (18 percent), Asian students (15 percent), and White students (8 percent). In contrast, the percentages of students who attended low-poverty schools were higher for Asian students (39 percent), White students (31 percent), and students of Two or more races (23 percent) than for Pacific Islander students (12 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students (8 percent), Hispanic students (8 percent), and Black students (7 percent).

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of public school students, for each school locale, by school poverty level: Fall 2017



# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: High-poverty schools are defined as public schools where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and low-poverty schools are those where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL. "School poverty level not available" includes schools for which information on FRPL is missing and schools that did not participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a "process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications" (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCEES blog post "Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?" Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. 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, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2017–18; and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 216.60.

The percentage of students attending public schools with different poverty concentrations varied by school locale (i.e., city, suburban, town, or rural). In fall 2017, about 42 percent of students who attended city schools were in high-poverty schools, compared with 21 percent of students who attended town schools, 18 percent of students who attended suburban schools, and 15 percent of students who attended rural schools. In contrast, 32 percent of

students who attended suburban schools were in low-poverty schools, which was more than three times as large as the percentage of students in town schools who attended low-poverty schools (9 percent). The percentage of students who attended low-poverty schools was higher among suburban schools (32 percent) than among rural schools and city schools (19 and 12 percent, respectively).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> In fall 2017, information on school poverty level was not available for 1 percent of public school students. This included schools for which information on FRPL was missing and schools that did not participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

<sup>2</sup> Students with household incomes under 185 percent of the poverty threshold are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch under the NSLP. In addition, some groups of children—such as foster children, children participating in the Head Start and Migrant Education programs, and children receiving services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act—are assumed to be categorically eligible to participate in the NSLP. Data

include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a "process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications" (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). Also, under the Community Eligibility option, some nonpoor children who attend school in a low-income area may participate if the district decides that it would be more efficient to provide free lunch to all children in the school. For more information, see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 216.60

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Children's Families](#); [Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools](#); [Mathematics Performance](#); [Reading Performance](#)

**Glossary:** Free or reduced-price lunch; Locale codes; National School Lunch Program; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group