

Highlights From Indicators of Educational Experiences in Rural Areas

Highlights

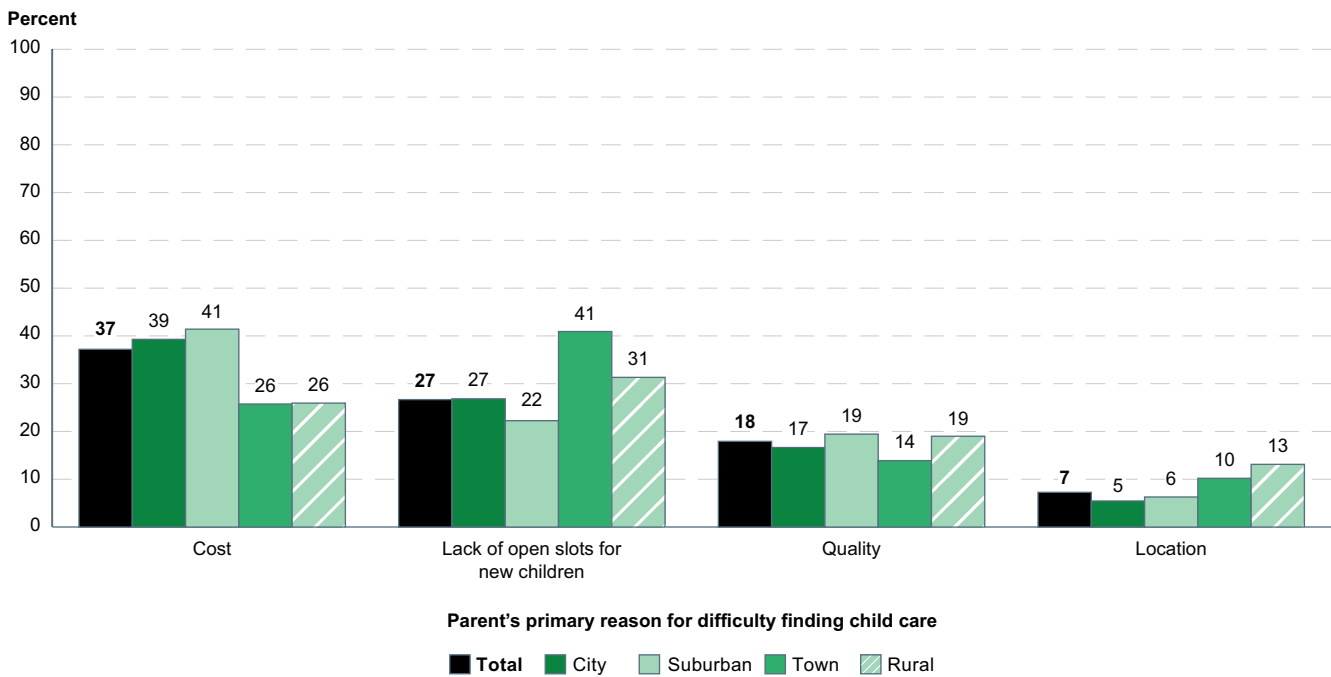
- In 2019, “lack of open slots for new children” was more commonly cited by parents as the main reason for difficulty finding child care or an early childhood program in rural areas than in suburban areas. In addition, “location” was more commonly cited as the main reason for difficulty finding child care or an early childhood program in rural areas than in suburban areas and cities.
- The prevalence of homeschooling varies by geographic location, with a higher percentage of students being homeschooled in rural areas than in cities, suburban areas, and towns.
- In fall 2019, rural public schools had a lower percentage of English learner students but a higher percentage of students with disabilities,¹ compared with public schools in cities and suburban areas.
- In 2019, the percentages of high school graduates who had completed any advanced mathematics credits or engineering science credits were lower in rural areas than in cities. Conversely, the percentage of graduates who had taken a dual enrollment course in high school was higher in rural areas than in cities.
- In 2019, a higher percentage of high school graduates in rural areas took any career and technical education (CTE) courses—defined as courses that focus on the skills and knowledge required for specific jobs or fields of work, particularly in agriculture, food, and natural resources—compared with those in cities and suburban areas.

In fall 2021, some 27,500 public elementary and secondary schools were in rural areas in the United States, serving more than 9.8 million students.² This highlight describes how educational experiences can vary by locale.³ For example, in terms of school choices, not all options are available in all communities due to factors such as the density of the student population

as well as local and state policies.⁴ Indicators from this section provide a snapshot of educational experiences in rural areas, focusing on early childhood care and education, school choice, English learners and students with disabilities, college preparatory coursework, dual enrollment, and career and technical education programs.

Key Findings

Figure 1. Percentage of children under 6 years old and not yet enrolled in kindergarten, by selected primary reason for parent's difficulty finding child care and household locale: 2019



NOTE: Excludes children whose parent/guardian reported either "have not tried to find care" or "no difficulty" finding the type of child care or early childhood program wanted. Data are based on parent reports. Children whose parent/guardian reported that the primary reason for difficulty finding child care was that they "needed a program for children with special needs," were "looking for specific hours/schedule," or had "some other or more than one primary reason" are not shown because children represented by each category accounted for 6 percent or less of children. Due to categories not shown, detail does not sum to 100 percent. Please visit NCES's [Education Across America](#) website for the definition of locale and sublocale. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (ECPN-NHES:2019). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 202.30a.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programs (See [Early Childhood Care and Education Programs in Rural Areas](#)): In 2019, "lack of open slots for new children" was more commonly cited by parents as the main reason for difficulty finding child care or an early childhood program in rural areas than in suburban areas. In addition, "location" was more commonly cited as the main reason for difficulty finding child care or an early childhood program in rural areas than in suburban areas and cities.

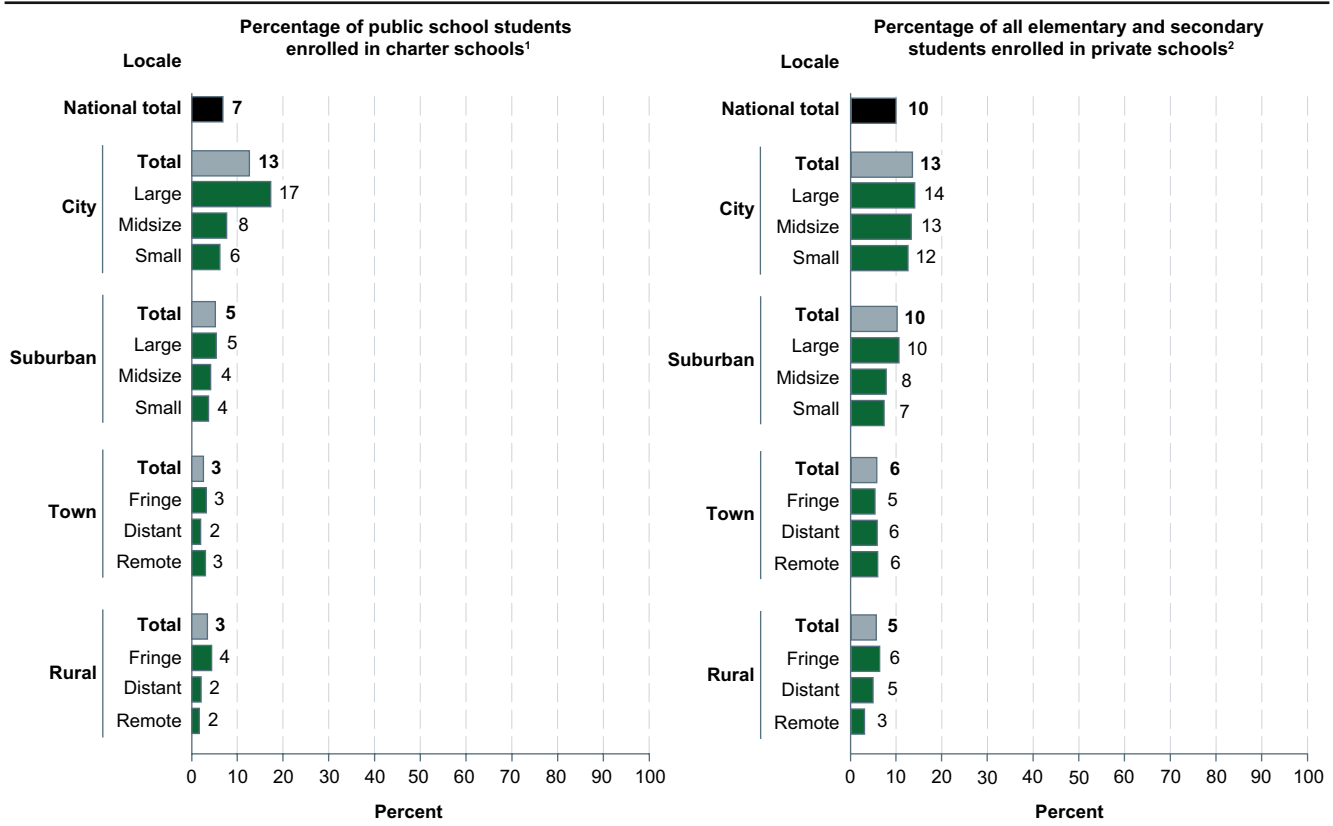
- In rural areas in 2019, among children under 6 years old who were not enrolled in kindergarten, 43 percent did not have any regular nonparental care or education arrangements.
- In 2019, among children under 6 years old who were not enrolled in kindergarten, "lack of open slots for new children" was more commonly cited as the main reason for difficulty finding child care or an early childhood program by parents of children in

rural areas (31 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas (22 percent).

- In 2019, among children under 6 years old who were not enrolled in kindergarten, "location" was more commonly cited as the main reason for difficulty finding care or an early childhood program by parents of children in rural areas (13 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas (6 percent) and cities (5 percent).
- However, among children under 6 years old who were not enrolled in kindergarten, "cost" was less commonly cited as the main reason for difficulty finding care or an early childhood program by parents of children in rural areas (26 percent) than by parents of children in suburban areas (41 percent) and cities (39 percent) in 2019.

Data Source: [Early Childhood Program Participation Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program \(ECPN-NHES\)](#)

Figure 2. Percentage of public elementary and secondary students enrolled in charter schools and percentage of all elementary and secondary students enrolled in private schools, by school locale: 2019–20



¹ Enrollments are based on data reported by schools and may differ from data reported in tables that reflect aggregate totals reported by states.
² Includes special education, vocational/technical education, and alternative schools. Includes enrollment of private school students in prekindergarten through grade 12 in schools that offer kindergarten or higher grade.
 NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Please visit NCES's [Education Across America](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/education-across-america/) website for the definition of locale and sublocale. Figures are plotted 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," 2019–20; Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2019–20; and Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 205.90 and 216.92.

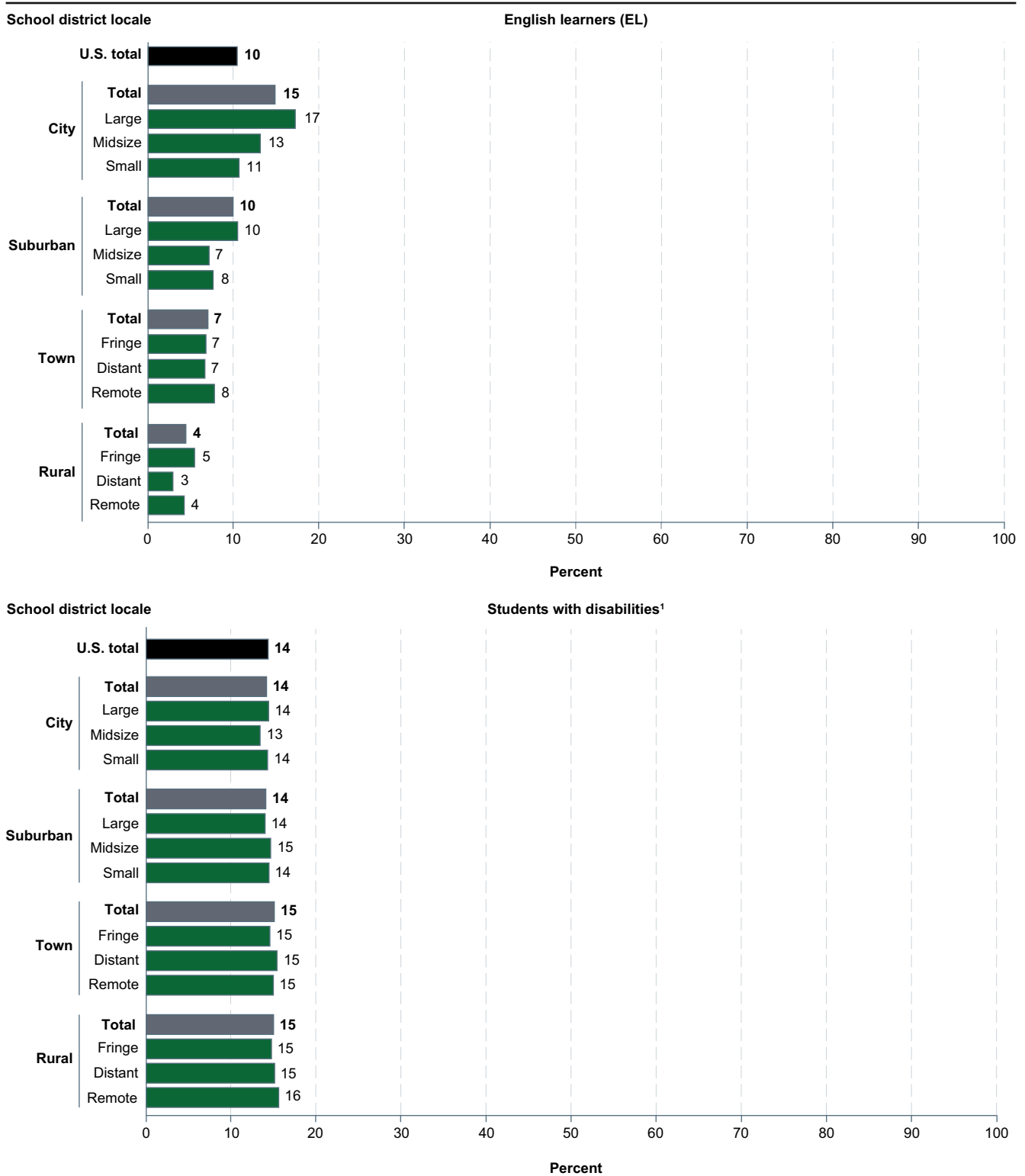
Enrollment and School Choice (See [Enrollment and School Choice in Rural Areas](#)): The prevalence of homeschooling⁵ varied by geographic location, with a higher percentage of students being homeschooled in rural areas compared with cities, suburban areas, and towns.

- In fall 2019, 19 percent of all public school students (or 9.8 million) were enrolled in elementary and secondary public schools in rural areas. Fewer students were enrolled in rural areas than in suburban areas and cities (39 and 31 percent, respectively, of all elementary and secondary public school students).
- In fall 2019, 3 percent (or 334,500) of all public elementary and secondary students in rural areas were enrolled in public charter schools. This percentage was lower than the percentages in suburban areas (5 percent) and cities (13 percent).

- In 2019, among children living in rural areas who were 5 to 17 years old (with a grade equivalent of kindergarten through grade 12), 5 percent were homeschooled (or 423,300 children). The percentage of children in rural areas who were homeschooled was higher than the percentages in cities, suburban areas, and towns (2 percent each).
- In fall 2019, 5 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in rural areas (or 570,400 students) were enrolled in private schools. This percentage was lower than the percentages in suburban areas (10 percent) and cities (13 percent).

Data Sources: [Common Core of Data \(CCD\)](#), [National Household Education Survey \(NHES\)](#), and [Private School Universe Survey \(PSS\)](#)

Figure 3. Percentage of students enrolled in public school districts who were English learners (EL) and percentage who were students with disabilities, by school district locale: Fall 2019



¹ Students with disabilities refers to students who receive special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
 NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are based on locales of school districts rather than locales of schools. Data include all students identified as EL, regardless of program participation. Data on ELs and ELs as a percent of enrollment exclude students who are enrolled in prekindergarten. Please visit NCES's *Education Across America* website for the definition of locale and sublocale. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 214.40.

English Learners (EL) and Students with Disabilities (See [English Learners and Students With Disabilities in Rural Public Schools](#)): In fall 2019, rural public schools had a lower percentage of students identified as ELs but a higher percentage of students with disabilities than did public schools in cities and suburban areas.

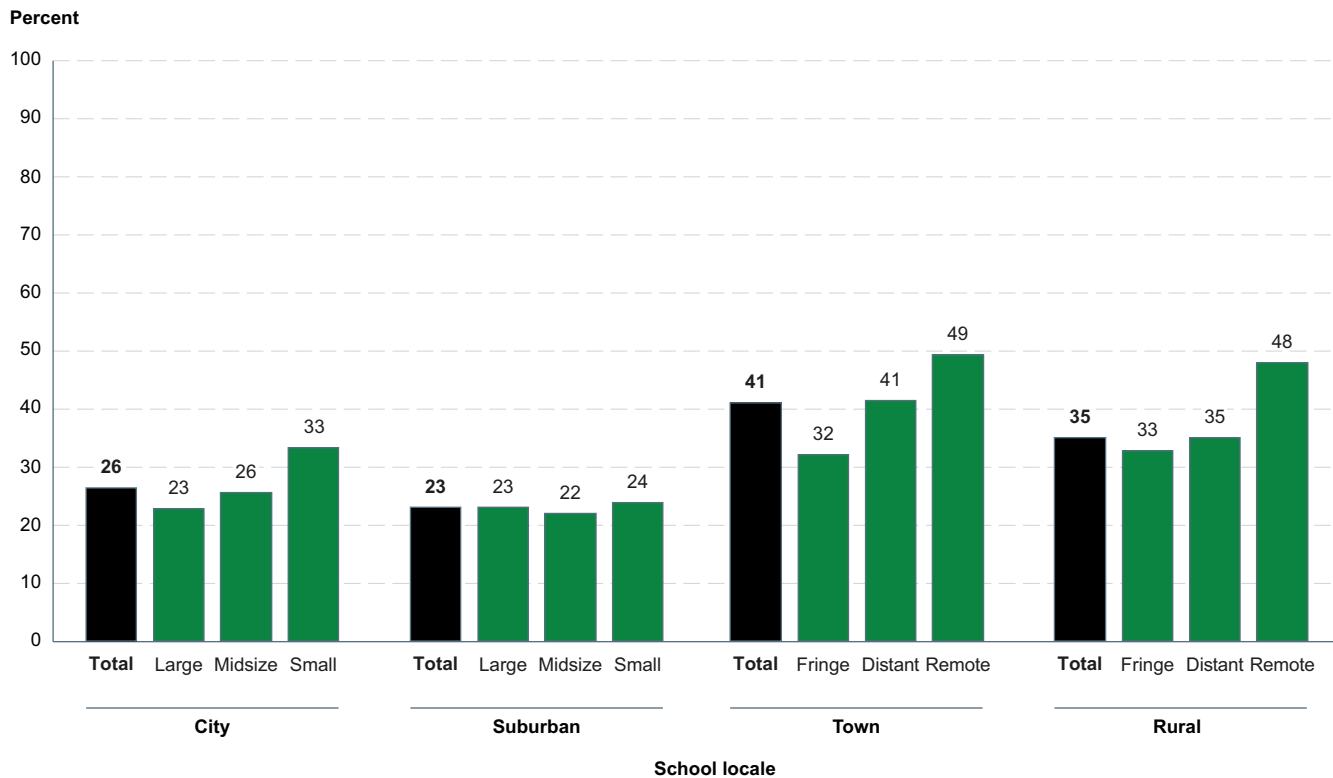
- In fall 2019, students identified as ELs made up 4 percent of total public school district enrollment in

rural areas, compared with 7 percent of enrollment in towns, 10 percent of enrollment in suburban areas, and 15 percent of enrollment in cities.

- In fall 2019, the percentage of public school students who were students with disabilities was higher in rural areas and towns (15 percent each) than in cities and suburban areas (14 percent each).

Data Source: [Common Core of Data \(CCD\)](#)

Figure 4. Percentage of public and private high school graduates who took dual enrollment courses in high school, by school locale: 2019



NOTE: Percentages are for students who took any dual enrollment course. Dual enrollment courses may include college-level academic courses taught either at the high school or at a local college, advanced career/technical education courses that count for credit at vocational colleges and/or trade schools, and high school-level academic courses that count for credit at liberal arts or community colleges. For a high school graduate to be included in the analyses, their transcript had to meet five requirements: (1) the graduate received either a standard or honors diploma, (2) the transcript had three or more years of delineated courses, (3) at least one course on the transcript was taken during the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and High School Transcript Study (HSTS) assessment year, (4) the transcript contained 16 or more Carnegie credits, and (5) the transcript contained at least 1 Carnegie credit in English courses. The Carnegie unit is a standard of measurement that represents one credit for the completion of a 1-year course. Please visit NCES's [Education Across America](#) website for the definition of locale and sublocale. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019 High School Transcript Study (HSTS). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 225.65.

College Preparatory Coursework (See [College Preparatory Coursework in Rural High Schools](#)): In 2019, the percentages of high school graduates who had completed any advanced mathematics⁶ credits or engineering science credits were lower in rural areas than in cities. Conversely, the percentage of graduates who had taken a dual enrollment course in high school was higher in rural areas than in cities.

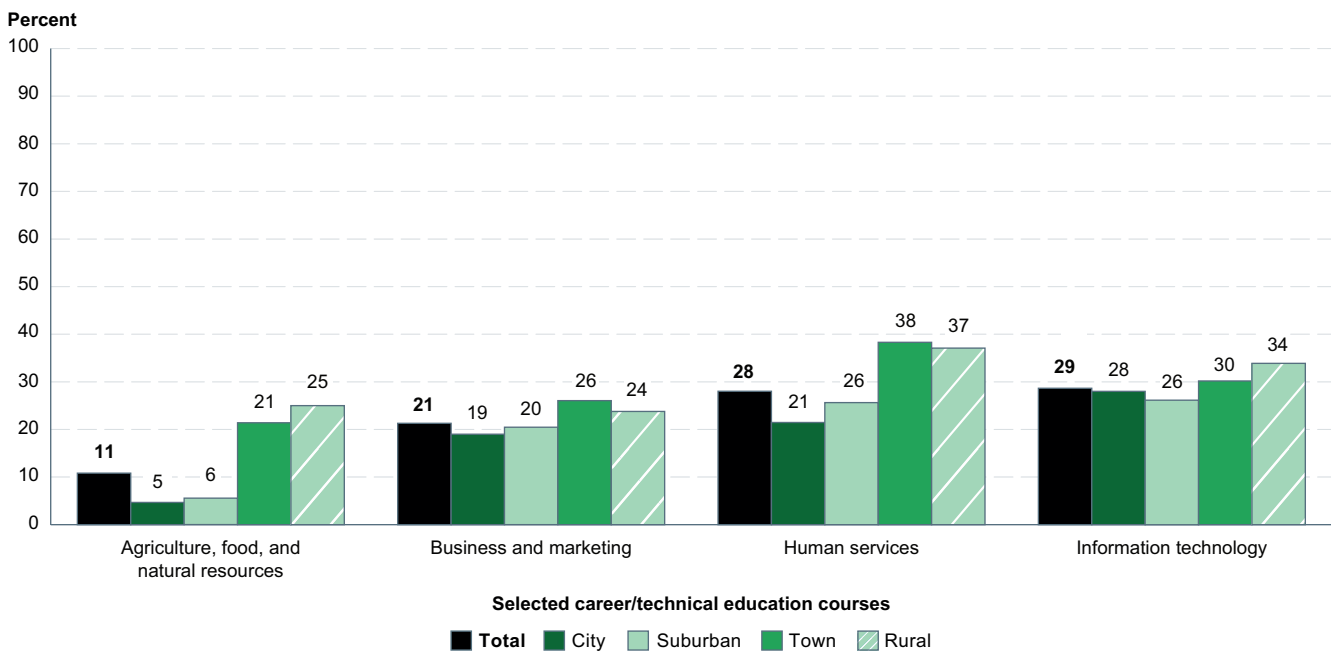
- In 2019, a lower percentage of high school graduates in rural areas than in cities had completed any advanced mathematics credits (88 vs. 91 percent). For example, 12 percent of high school graduates in rural areas had earned any credits in calculus, compared with 16 percent in cities and 19 percent in suburban areas.
- In 2019, the percentage of high school graduates who had completed any advanced science and engineering credits was lower in rural areas (86 percent) than in cities and suburban areas (90 percent each). For example, the percentages of high school graduates

who had earned any credits in chemistry, advanced environmental/earth science, and physics were lower in rural areas than in other locales. Conversely, the percentage of high school graduates who had completed any credits in advanced biology (39 percent) was higher in rural areas than in towns (33 percent), suburban areas (35 percent), and cities (34 percent).

- In 2019, the percentage of high school graduates who had taken a dual enrollment course in high school was higher in rural areas (35 percent) than in cities (26 percent) and suburban areas (23 percent). The most common dual enrollment course types in rural areas were career/technical education, English language and literature, social science and history, and mathematics (taken by 15, 15, 13, and 10 percent of students, respectively).

Data Source: [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) High School Transcript Study \(HSTS\)](#)

Figure 5. Percentage of public and private high school graduates who earned at least one Carnegie credit in career/technical education courses in selected subject areas in high school, by school locale: 2019



NOTE: For a high school graduate to be included in the analyses, their high school transcript had to meet five requirements: (1) the graduate received either a standard or honors diploma, (2) the transcript had 3 or more years of delineated courses, (3) at least one course on the transcript was taken during the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and High School Transcript Study (HSTS) assessment year, (4) the transcript contained 16 or more Carnegie credits, and (5) the transcript contained at least 1 Carnegie credit in English courses. The Carnegie unit is a standard of measurement that represents one credit for the completion of a 1-year course. Please visit NCES's [Education Across America](#) website for the definition of locale and sublocale. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019 High School Transcript Study (HSTS). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 225.25.

Career and Technical Education Programs (See [Career and Technical Education Programs in Rural High Schools](#)): In 2019, a higher percentage of high school graduates from rural areas took any career and technical education (CTE) courses—defined as courses that focus on the skills and knowledge required for specific jobs or fields of work, particularly in agriculture, food, and natural resources—compared with those in cities and suburban areas.

- In 2019, the percentage of high school graduates who earned at least one Carnegie credit⁷ in any career/technical education course was higher for those from schools in rural areas (92 percent) and towns (91 percent) than for those from schools in suburban areas (83 percent) and cities (80 percent).
- In 2019, some 25 percent of high school graduates from schools in rural areas and 21 percent of those from schools in towns had taken a course in agriculture, food, and natural resources, compared with 6 percent of those from schools in suburban areas and 5 percent of those from schools in cities.
- In 2019, human services; information technology; agriculture, food, and natural resources; and business and marketing were some of the most common CTE subject areas in which high school graduates from schools in rural areas had earned credits (earned by 37, 34, 25, and 24 percent of high school graduates, respectively).

Data Source: [National Assessment for Educational Progress \(NAEP\) High School Transcript Study \(HSTS\)](#)

Endnotes:

- ¹ Students with disabilities refers to students who receive special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- ² See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 214.40.
- ³ Please visit NCES's [Education Across America](#) website for the definition of locale.
- ⁴ Wang, K., Rathbun, A., and Musu, L. (2019). *School Choice in the United States: 2019* (NCES 2019-106). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- ⁵ Students are considered to be homeschooled if (a) their parents reported them being schooled at home instead of at a public or private school, (b) their enrollment in public or private schools did not exceed 24 hours per week, and (c) they were not being homeschooled when surveyed only due to a temporary illness.
- ⁶ Advanced mathematics course includes algebra II, precalculus/analysis, calculus, other advanced mathematics.
- ⁷ For a high school graduate to be included in the analyses, their high school transcript had to meet five requirements: (1) the graduate received either a standard or honors diploma, (2) the transcript had 3 or more years of delineated courses, (3) at least one course on the transcript was taken during the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and High School Transcript Study (HSTS) assessment year, (4) the transcript contained 16 or more Carnegie credits, and (5) the transcript contained at least 1 Carnegie credit in English courses. The Carnegie unit is a standard of measurement that represents one credit for the completion of a 1-year course.