

Highlights From Indicators of Educational Outcomes in Rural Areas

Highlights

- In general, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) the percentages of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 performing at or above *NAEP Proficient* in reading, mathematics, and science were lower for students in rural areas than for those in suburban areas in 2019.
- Overall, the adjusted cohort high school graduation rate (ACGR) in rural areas was the highest of all locales in 2019-20.
- Students from rural areas did not participate in postsecondary education to the same degree as their peers from suburban areas. A lower percentage of students from rural areas than students from suburban areas took or planned to take postsecondary classes in 2013, and a higher percentage had never enrolled in postsecondary education as of 2016.
- Completion of a bachelor's or higher degree was less common for adults in rural areas than for their city and suburban counterparts in 2019.

Education has a significant impact on students' lifelong health, social and economic success, and overall well-being.^{1,2,3,4} Indicators from this section provide a snapshot of educational outcomes in rural areas, focusing on academic achievement, high school graduation rates, enrollment in postsecondary education, and overall educational attainment.

Key Findings

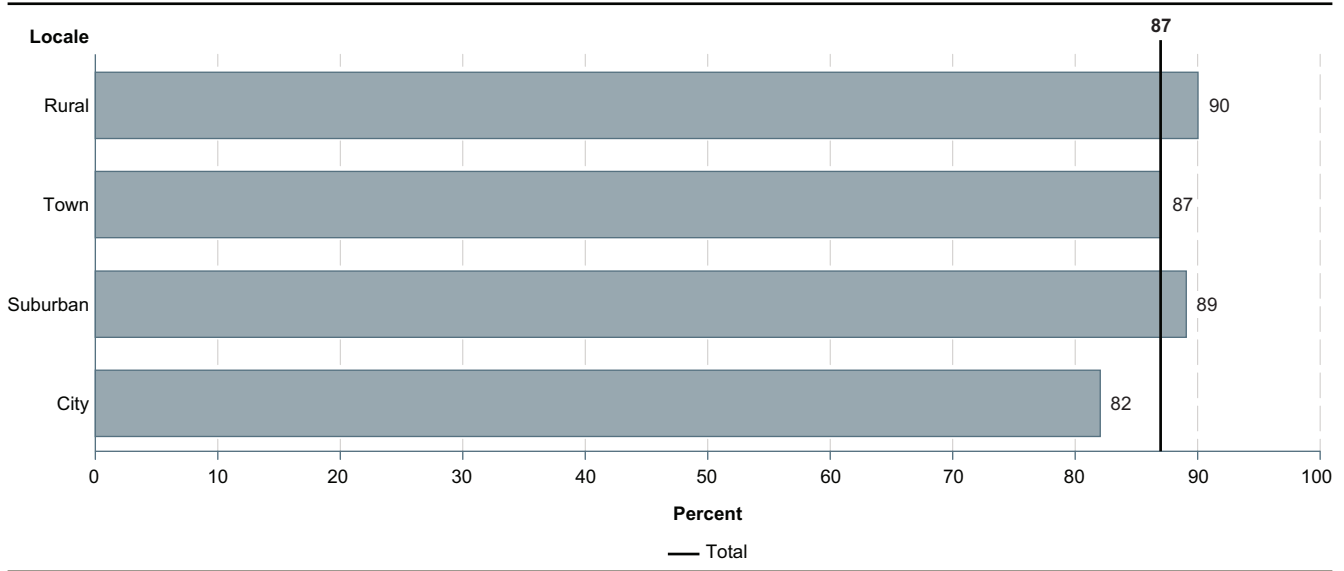
Academic Achievement: In general, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the percentages of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 performing at or above *NAEP Proficient* in reading, mathematics, and science were lower for students in rural areas than for those in suburban areas in 2019 (retrieved September 1, 2022, from the [Main NAEP Data Explorer](#)).

- In 2019, the percentages of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 performing at or above *NAEP Proficient* in reading, mathematics, and science were lower for students in rural areas than for those in suburban areas, except for grade 4 science.

- The percentages of students in grades 4 and 8 performing at or above *NAEP Proficient* in reading and mathematics were higher for students in rural areas than for those in cities and towns in 2019.
- In mathematics, average scores decreased for 9-year-old students across all locales⁵ from 2020 to 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a 5-point decrease in scores for students in rural areas, compared with a 7-point decrease each for students in cities and towns and a 9-point decrease for students in suburban areas.
- In reading, the average scores for 9-year-old students in cities and rural areas were not measurably different from 2020 to 2022. However, the average scores for their counterparts in suburban areas and towns decreased from 2020 to 2022.

Data sources: [Nation's Report Card](#)

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. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, ED^{FACTS} file 151, Data Group 696, extracted from the ED^{FACTS} 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.

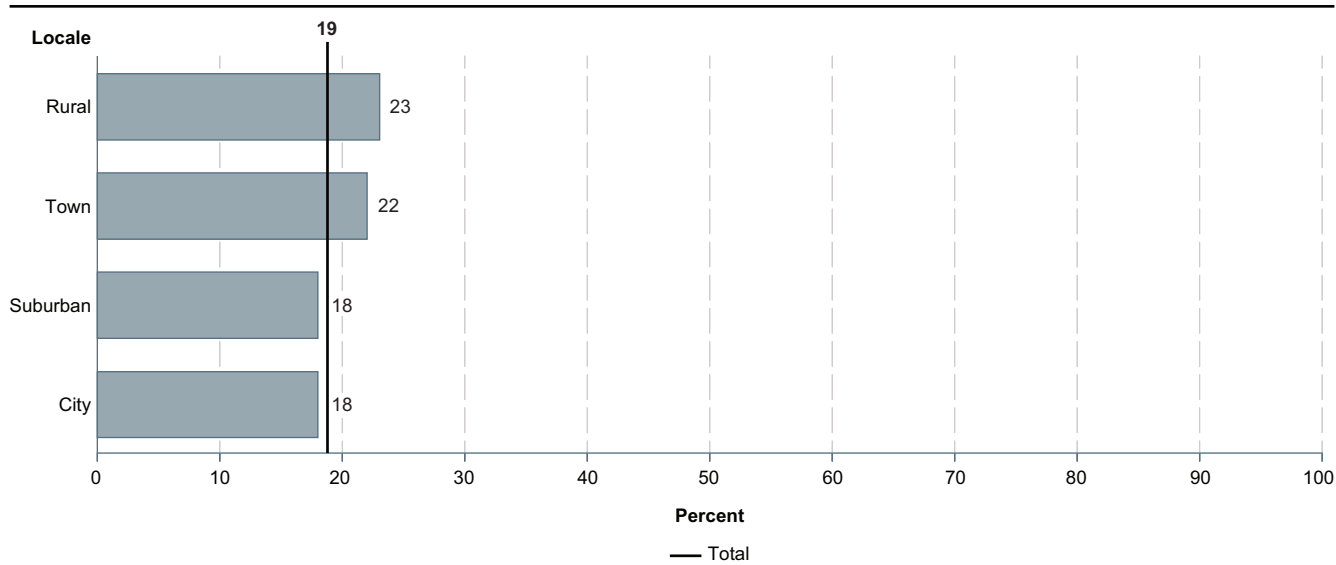
High School Graduation (see *Public High School Graduation Rates in Rural Areas*): Overall, the high school graduation rate in rural areas was the highest of all locales in 2019-20.

- In 2019-20, the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR)⁶ was 90 percent in rural areas, which was higher than the rates in suburban areas (89 percent), towns (87 percent), and cities (82 percent).

- The ACGRs for Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students were higher for those in rural areas than for their counterparts in all other locales in 2019-20.

Data sources: [ED^{FACTS}](#)

Figure 2. Percentage of fall 2009 9th-graders who were not taking and not planning to take postsecondary classes in November 2013, by locale



NOTE: Data collection for the 2013 Update occurred in summer and fall of 2013. Some respondents were surveyed prior to November 2013; therefore, they were asked about their plans for November instead of their actual status. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09), 2013 Update. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 302.46.

Postsecondary Education Enrollment (see

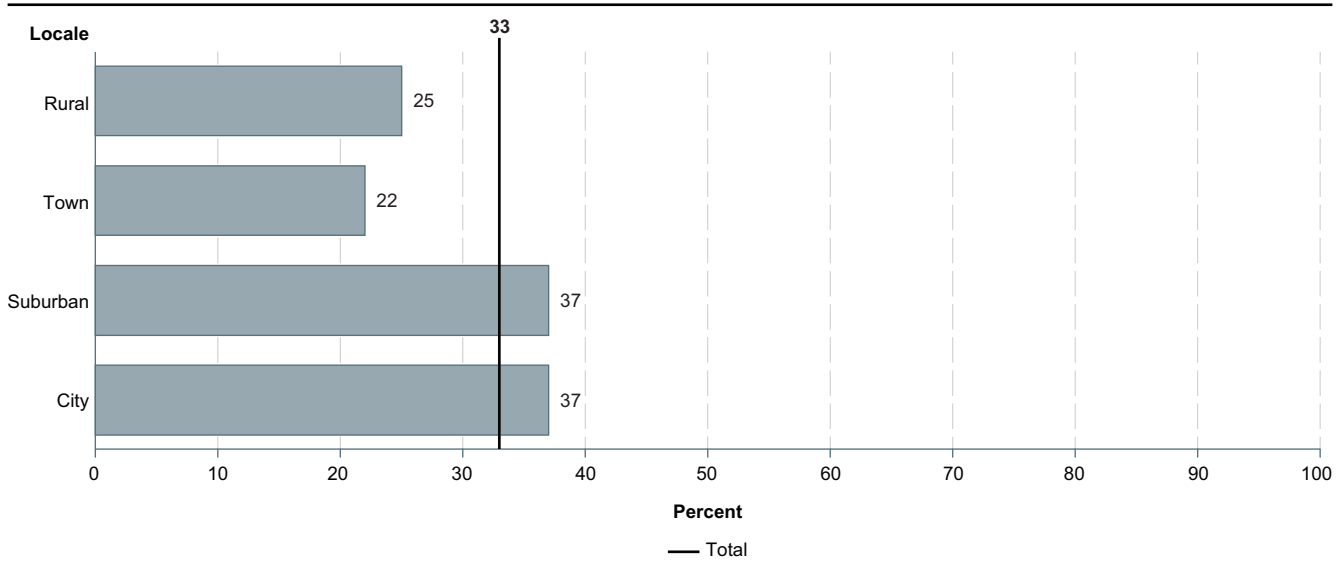
Postsecondary Enrollment Status of Youth From Rural Areas): Students from rural areas did not participate in postsecondary education to the same degree as their peers from suburban areas. A lower percentage of students from rural areas than students from suburban areas took or planned to take postsecondary classes in 2013, and a higher percentage had never enrolled in postsecondary education as of 2016.

- In 2013, the percentage of fall 2009 9th-graders who were taking or planning to take postsecondary classes was lower for those who attended high schools in rural areas than for those who attended high schools in suburban areas (68 vs. 74 percent).⁷

- In 2013, the percentage of fall 2009 9th-graders who reported neither taking nor planning to take postsecondary classes was higher for those who attended high schools in rural areas (23 percent) than for those who attended high schools in cities and suburban areas (18 percent each).
- The percentage of fall 2009 9th-graders who attended high schools in rural areas who had never enrolled in postsecondary education as of 2016 (29 percent) was higher than the percentage for those who attended high schools in suburban areas (24 percent) but lower than the percentage for those who attended high schools in towns (35 percent).

Data sources: High School Longitudinal Study of 2009

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of adults ages 25 and over whose highest level of educational attainment was a bachelor’s or higher degree, by locale: 2019



NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing in the United States, including both noninstitutionalized persons (e.g., those living in households, college housing, or military housing located within the United States) and institutionalized persons (e.g., those living in prisons, nursing facilities, or other healthcare facilities). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 104.25.

Educational Attainment (see *Educational Attainment in Rural Areas*): Completion of a bachelor’s or higher degree was less common for adults in rural areas than for their city and suburban counterparts in 2019.

- In 2019, a higher percentage of adults ages 25 and over in rural areas held a high school degree as their highest level of educational attainment, compared with all other levels of educational attainment. In contrast, higher percentages of adults in cities and suburban

areas held a bachelor’s or higher degree as their highest level of educational attainment compared with all other levels of educational attainment.

- The percentage of adults ages 25 and over who had earned a bachelor’s or higher degree was lower in rural areas (25 percent) than in suburban areas and cities (37 percent each) in 2019.

Data sources: [American Community Survey](#)

Endnotes:

¹ McMahon, W.W. (2004). The Social and External Benefits of Education. *International Handbook on the Economics of Education*, 211, 259.
² Kajonius, P.J., and Carlander, A. (2017). Who Gets Ahead in Life? Personality Traits and Childhood Background in Economic Success. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 59, 164-170.
³ Schuller, T., and Desjardins, R. (2007). *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning*. OECD Publishing.
⁴ Sen, A. (1998). Mortality as an Indicator of Economic Success and Failure. *The Economic Journal*, 108(446), 1-25.
⁵ Please visit NCE’s [Education Across America website](#) for the definition of locale.
⁶ 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.
⁷ The typical year of high school graduation for those who were 9th-graders in fall 2009 is 2013.