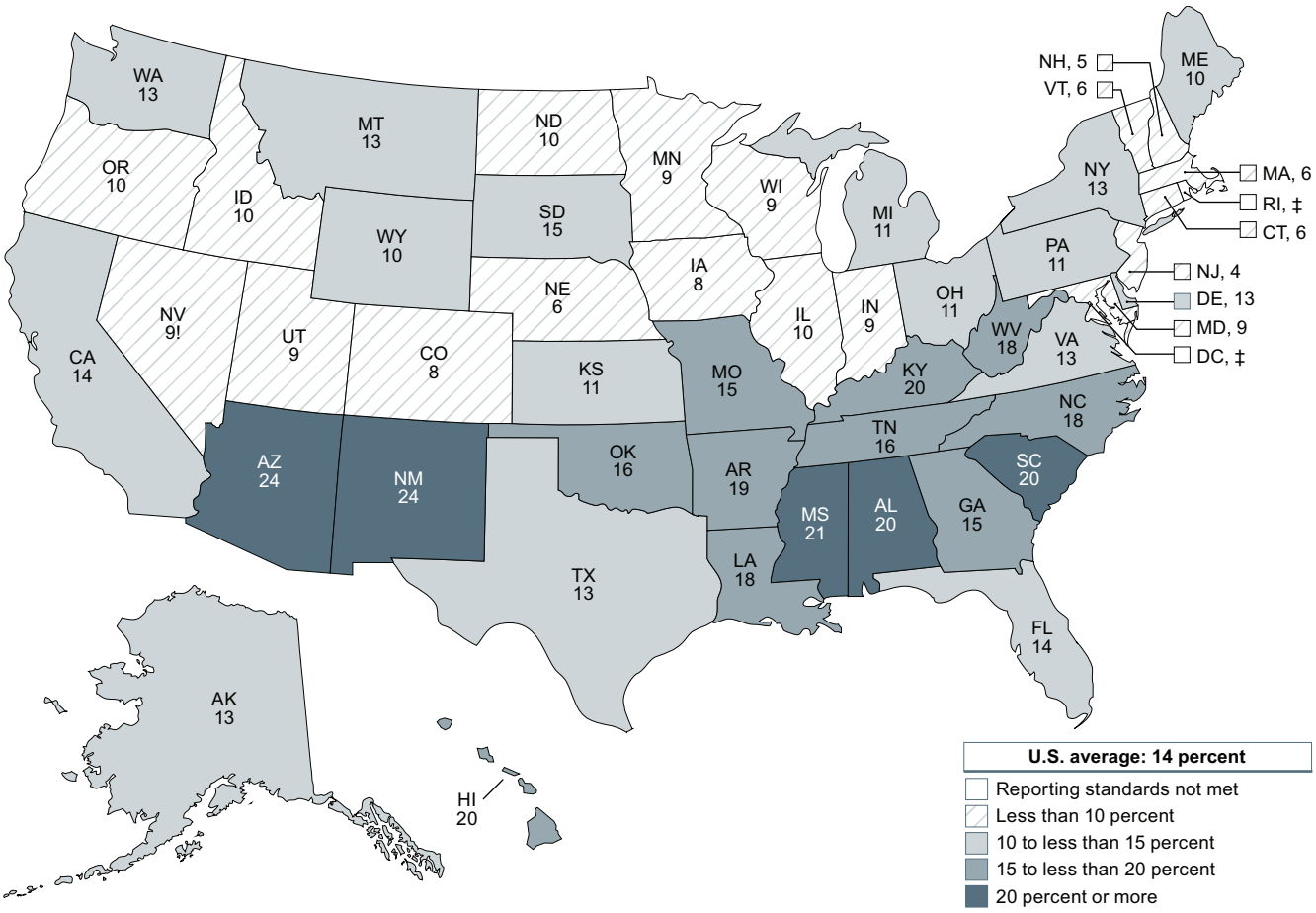
# Highlights From Indicators of Family Characteristics in Rural Areas

## Highlights

- In 2019, the percentage of 5- to 17-year-olds in kindergarten through 12th grade who resided in households with nonparental guardians was higher in rural areas (5 percent) than in suburban areas and cities (3 percent each).
- In 2019, the poverty rate of 5- to 17-year-old related children—that is, children who live in a household and are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption—in rural areas was higher than in suburban areas but lower than in towns and cities.
- Compared with students in other locales, in 2019, it was less common for 5- to 17-year-old students in rural areas to have fixed broadband internet access at home (76 percent) and more common for them to have only mobile broadband internet access at home (16 percent).
- In 2019, the percentages of kindergartners through fifth-graders whose parents reported doing various education-related activities outside the home with their children were generally lower for those in rural areas than for those in other locales.
- In general, parents of kindergartners through 12th-graders in rural areas in 2019 had lower expectations for their children's educational attainment, compared with parents of students in cities and suburban areas.

Characteristics of children's families are associated with children's educational experiences and their academic outcomes. For example, living in a household with no parent who has completed high school, living in a single-parent household, and living in poverty are found to be associated with poor educational outcomes.[1,2,3,4] These outcomes include scoring lower on achievement tests than their peers, having to repeat a grade, and dropping out of high school. In contrast, factors such as access to the internet and participation in education-related activities are associated positively with academic achievement.[5,6,7,8] Indicators from this section provide a snapshot of characteristics of children and their families, availability and method of internet access, and home educational environments for students in rural areas.

**Figure 1. Percentage of related children ages 5 to 17 in rural areas living in poverty, by state: 2019**




! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate, the type of locale does not exist within the state or jurisdiction, or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.
NOTE: Includes only 5- to 17-year-old related children. Related children include all children who live in a household and are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Excludes unrelated children and householders who are themselves under the age of 18. Poverty status is determined by the Census Bureau using a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. For additional information about poverty status, see https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey Education Tabulation (ACS-ED), 2019, Custom Tabulated Data File. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 102.45.

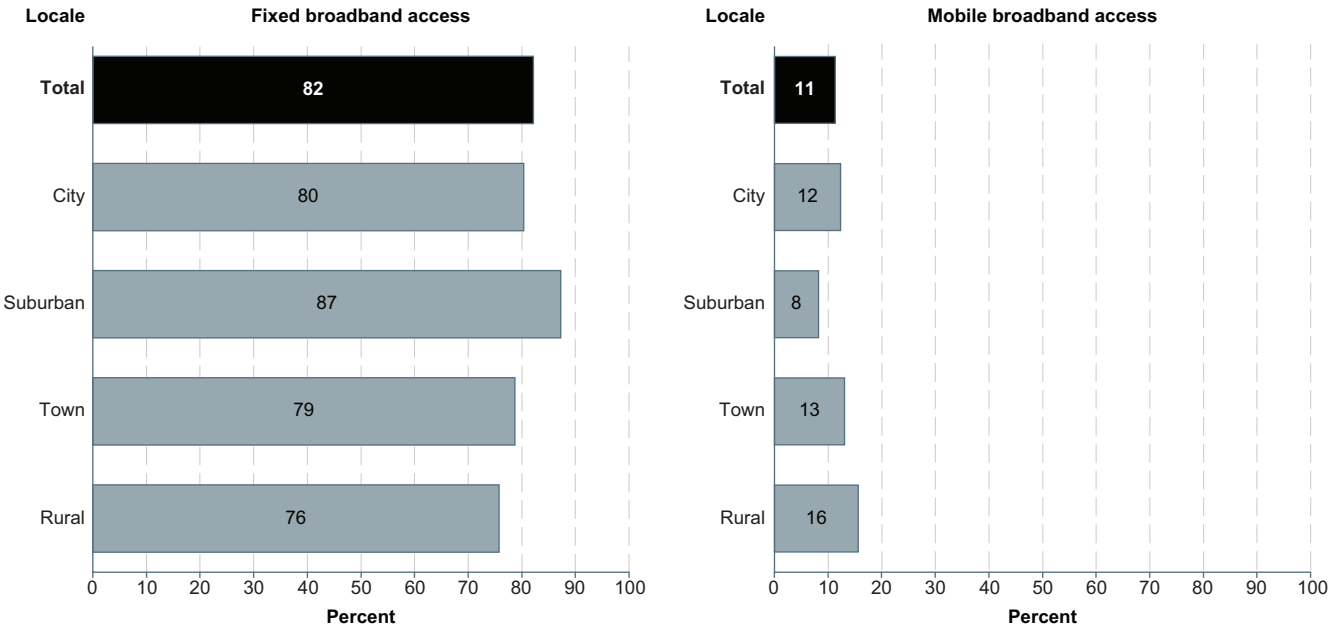
## Key Findings

**Children in Rural Areas and Their Family** (see *Children in Rural Areas and Their Family Characteristics*): In 2019, the poverty rate for related children[9] ages 5 to 17 in rural areas (14 percent) was higher than in suburban areas (12 percent) but lower than in towns and cities (21 percent each).

- In fall 2019, the percentages of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in rural areas who were Black (9 percent) or Hispanic (15 percent) were lower than the percentages in other locales.[10]
- In 2019, the percentage of 5- to 17-year-olds in kindergarten through 12th grade who resided in households with nonparental guardians was higher in rural areas (5 percent) than in suburban areas and cities (3 percent each).
- In 2019, the percentage of 5- to 17-year-olds in kindergarten through 12th grade whose parents or guardians had earned less than a high school diploma as their highest level of education was lower in rural areas (9 percent) than in cities (14 percent), but there was no measurable difference between those in rural areas and those in suburban areas or towns.
- Among the 49 states with poverty data available for rural areas, the percentages of related children in rural areas living in poverty in 2019 ranged from 4 percent in New Jersey to 24 percent in Arizona and New Mexico.

***Data sources:*** American Community Survey (ACS), Common Core of Data (CCD), and Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES: 2019)

**Figure 2. Among 5- to 17-year-old students with known poverty status living in households, percentage with fixed broadband access to the internet at home and percentage with mobile broadband access to the internet at home, by home locale: 2019**



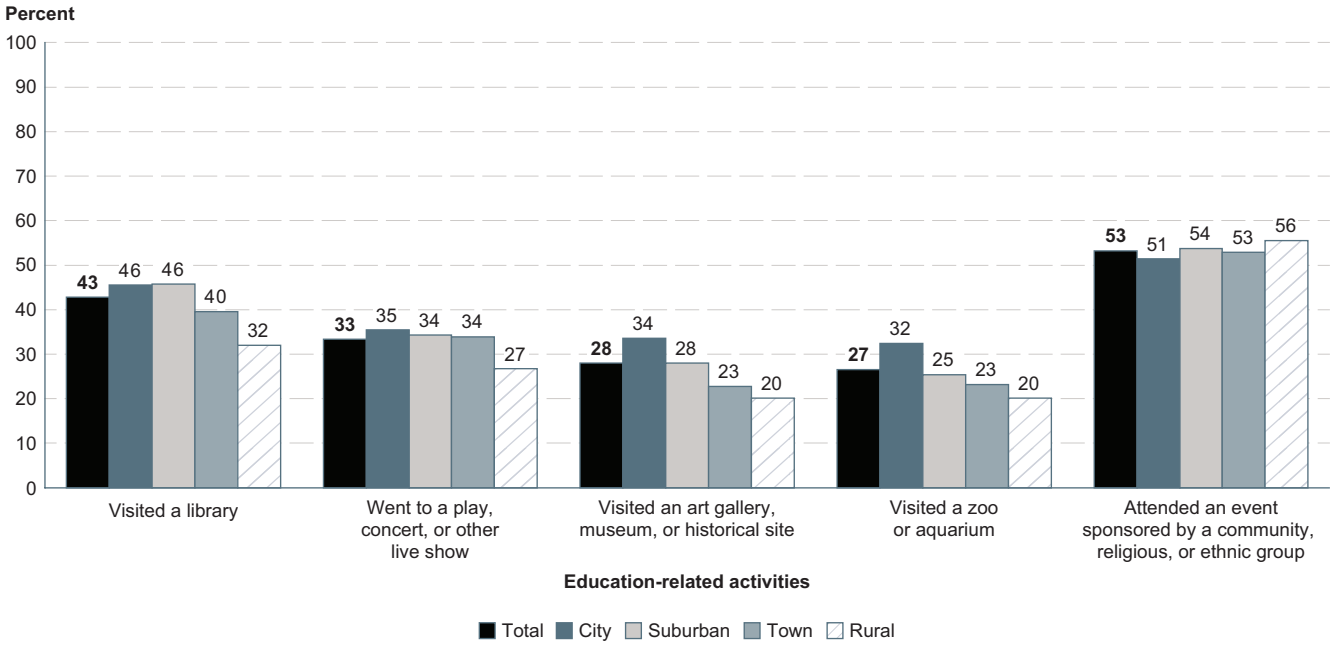

NOTE: "Fixed broadband access to the internet" excludes households with mobile broadband but includes households with all other non-dial-up internet services, such as DSL, cable modem, and fiber-optic cable. Mobile broadband includes computer and cell phone plans. Data are based on sample surveys of the entire population residing within the United States. This figure includes only students living in households, because respondents living in group quarters (e.g., shelters, healthcare facilities, or correctional facilities) were not asked about internet access. Excludes children under age 15 who are not related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (e.g., foster children) because their family and individual income is not known and a poverty status cannot be determined for them. Although rounded numbers are displayed, figures are based on unrounded data.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019, Restricted-Use Data File. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 218.70.

**Access to the Internet** (see *Rural Students' Access to the Internet*): Compared with students in other locales, in 2019, it was less common for 5- to 17-year-old students in rural areas to have fixed broadband internet access at home and more common for them to have mobile broadband[11] internet access at home.

- In 2019, about 7 percent of 5- to 17-year-old students in rural areas were living in homes with either no internet access or only dial-up access. This was higher than the percentages living in towns (6 percent), cities (5 percent), and suburban areas (3 percent).
- Also in 2019, the percentage of students who had only mobile broadband internet access at home was higher for students living in rural areas (16 percent) than for students living in towns (13 percent), cities (12 percent), and suburban areas (8 percent).
- In contrast, the percentage of students who had fixed broadband internet access at home in 2019 was lower for students living in rural areas (76 percent) than for students living in towns (79 percent), cities (80 percent), and suburban areas (87 percent).

***Data sources:*** American Community Survey (ACS)

**Figure 3. Percentage of kindergartners through fifth-graders whose parents/guardians reported doing education-related activities with their children in the past month, by selected activity and locale: 2019**




NOTE: Excludes children whose parents reported any homeschooling. Locale of student's household is determined by classifying the household's residential ZIP code into a set of four major locale categories: city, suburban, town, and rural. Although rounded numbers are displayed, figures are based on unrounded data.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES:2019). See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 207.20.

**Home Educational Environment** (see *Educational Expectations and Involvement of Parents in Rural Areas*): In 2019, the percentages of kindergartners through fifth-graders whose parents reported doing various education-related activities outside the home with their children were generally lower for those in rural areas than for those in other locales. Additionally, in general, parents of kindergartners through 12th-graders in rural areas in 2019 had lower expectations for their children's educational attainment, compared with parents of students in cities and suburban areas.

- In 2019, about 32 percent of kindergarteners through fifth-graders in rural areas had parents who reported visiting a library with their children in the past month, compared with 40 percent of students in towns and 46 percent each of students in cities and suburban areas.
- In 2019, about 20 percent of kindergarteners through fifth-graders in rural areas had parents who reported visiting a zoo or aquarium with their children in the past month, compared with 32 percent of students in cities and 25 percent of students in suburban areas. The percentage for students in towns (23 percent) was not measurably different from the percentage for those in rural areas.
- In 2019, the percentage of kindergartners through 12th-graders in rural areas whose parents expected them to earn a graduate or professional degree (25 percent) was lower than the percentages in suburban areas and cities (42 percent each).
- The percentage of kindergartners through 12th-graders in rural areas in 2019 whose parents expected them to attend a vocational or technical school or some college (30 percent) was higher than the percentages in cities (19 percent) and suburban areas (17 percent).

***Data sources:*** Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES: 2019)

**Endnotes:**

[1] Pungello, E.P., Kainz, K., Burchinal, M., Wasik, B.H., Sparling, J.J., Ramey, C.T., and Campbell, F.A. (2010, February). Early Educational Intervention, Early Cumulative Risk, and the Early Home Environment as Predictors of Young Adult Outcomes Within a High-Risk Sample. *Child Development, 81*(1): 410–426. Retrieved January 8, 2021, from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01403.x/full.

[2] Radel, L., Bramlett, M., Chow, K., and Waters, A. (2016). Children Living Apart From Their Parents: Highlights From the National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care. Retrieved July 19, 2022, from https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files//146232/NSCNC.pdf.

[3] Ross, T., Kena, G., Rathbun, A., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, J., Kristapovich, P., and Manning, E. (2012). *Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study* (NCES 2012-046). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved January 8, 2021, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2012046.

[4] Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G.J. (1997). The Effects of Poverty on Children. *The Future of Children, 7*(2): 55–71. Retrieved June 24, 2022, from https://doi.org/10.2307/1602387; Misty, L., and Laura, D.T. (2011). The Effects of Poverty on Academic Achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews, 6*(7): 522–527.

[5] Daoud, R., Starkey, L., Eppel, E., Vo, T.D., and Sylvester, A. (2021). The Educational Value of Internet Use in the Home for School Children: A Systematic Review of Literature. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 53*(4): 353–374. Retrieved July 19, 2022, from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15391523.2020.1783402.

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[7] Farver, J., Xu, Y., Eppe, S., and Lonigan, C. (2006). Home Environments and Young Latino Children's School Readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*(2): 196–212. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200606000238.

[8] Jong, P., and Leseman, P. (2001). Lasting Effects of Home Literacy on Reading Achievement in School. *Journal of School Psychology, 39*(5): 389–414. Retrieved February 15, 2022, from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022440501000802.

[9] Related children include all children who live in a household and are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit.

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

[11] Includes computer and cell phone plans.