



Center for Public Education



Back-to-School Statistics: Students in Rural Public Schools

AN **nsba** PUBLICATION

Define Rural

The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as that which is not urban — in other words, after defining individual urban areas, rural is the area that is left. ([Source](#))

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines three subtypes of rural as follows ([Source](#)):

Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster.



Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.



Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.



Students in Rural Schools

IDEA: In 2019, 1.1 million students with disabilities (15% of enrollment) attended rural schools. [\(Source\)](#)

Enrollment: In 2021, 9.8 million students (20% of all K-12 students) attended public schools in rural areas. [\(Source\)](#)

English Language Learners (ELs): In 2020, 320,000 students (4.4% of enrollment) were ELs in rural schools.



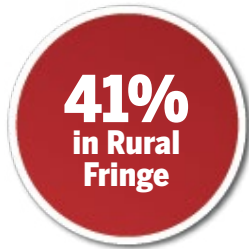
Children Living in Poverty: In 2019, 14% of rural children ages 5-17 lived in poverty. [\(Source\)](#)

Minority Students: In 2021, 66% of rural students were White, 16% Hispanic, 9% Black, 4% multiracial, 2% Asian, 2% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.2% Pacific Islander.

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: In some rural schools, more than 75% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. These schools are high-poverty schools. In the fall of 2021, 1.3 million rural students attended high-poverty schools. The racial/ethnic profile of rural students in high-poverty schools included 35% American Indian/Alaska Native, 30% Black, 25% Hispanic, 22% Pacific Islander, 12% multiracial, 8% White, and 6% Asian. [\(Source\)](#)

Rural Schools in the U.S.

Number of Rural Schools: In 2021, there were 27,494 public elementary and secondary schools. (Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.)



Pupil/Teacher Ratio: In 2021



Average School Size: In 2021



(Source)



Teachers in Rural Schools

Number of Full-Time Teachers:

About 633,000 full-time teachers work in rural public schools, according to the most recently available national data. ([Source](#))



Teacher Demographics:

Approximately 90% of rural teachers are White. ([Source](#)) In 2022, 6% of fourth-grade and eighth-grade teachers in rural schools identified themselves as Black; about 4% Hispanic; 1% Asian; and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native. ([Source](#))

Teacher Shortages:

In May 2022, 76% of public schools in rural areas had non-teaching staff cover classes when substitute teachers were unavailable. In October 2022, 36% of rural schools reported having at least one teaching vacancy in the 2022-23 school year. ([Source](#))

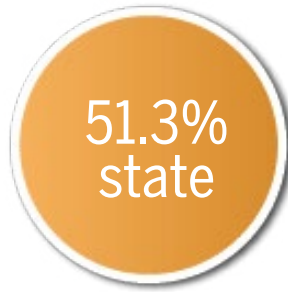


Teacher Turnover:

In the 2021–2022 school year, 10% of rural teachers and 21% of rural principals retired or resigned. ([Source](#))

Revenues and Expenditures

Total revenue amounts (in unadjusted dollars) — In the 2019-20 school year, rural schools received nearly \$114 billion from these revenue sources: [\(Source\)](#)



Per pupil amounts (in unadjusted dollars) — In the 2019-20 school year, per-student spending varied by location: [\(Source\)](#)

**In Rural Fringe
Schools**



**In Rural Distant
Schools**



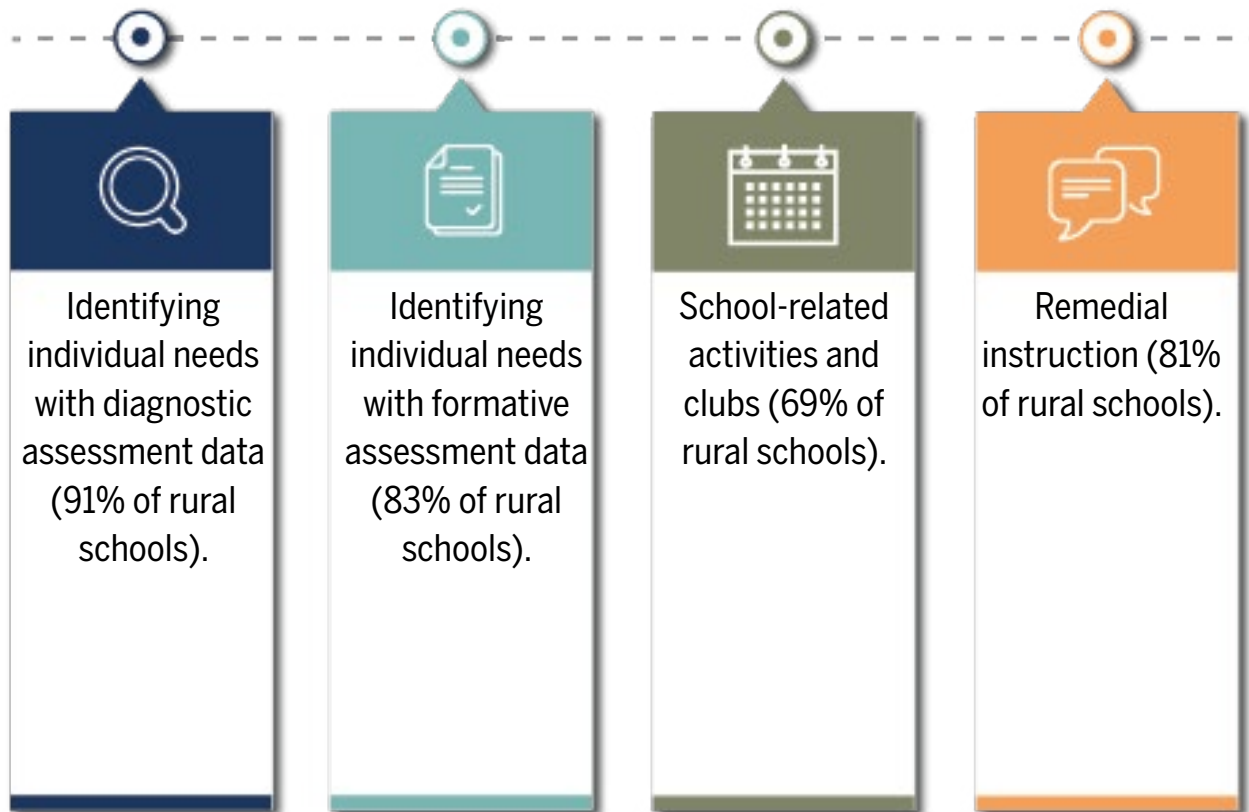
**In Rural Remote
Schools**



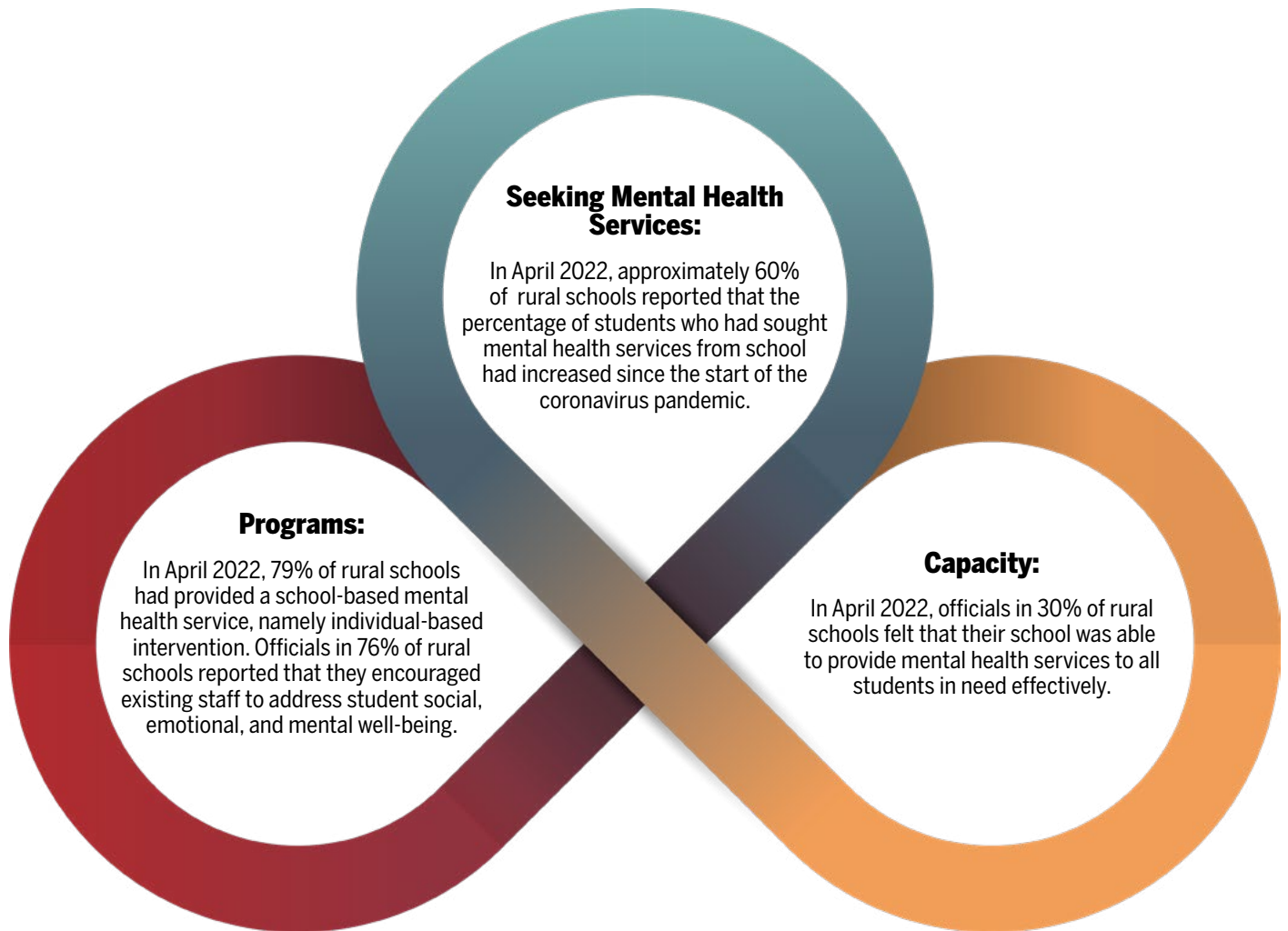
Learning Recovery

Learning Loss Caused by the Disruption of the COVID-19 Pandemic: In December 2022, nearly all public schools in rural areas had students behind grade level in English language arts (98%) and math (99%). ([Source](#))

Learning Recovery Support: To support students' pandemic-related learning recovery, public schools implemented a variety of strategies during the 2021–22 school year. The following were some of the most reported strategies used to support pandemic-related learning recovery in rural schools:



Mental Health



(Source)

About CPE

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) believes that accurate, objective information is essential to building support for public schools and creating effective programs to prepare all students for success. As NSBA's research branch, the Center for Public Education (CPE) provides objective and timely information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation. Launched in 2006, CPE emerged from discussions between NSBA and its member state school boards associations about how to inform the public about the successes and challenges of public education. To serve a wide range of audiences, including parents, teachers, and school leaders, CPE offers research, data, and analysis on current education issues and explores ways to improve student achievement and engage support for public schools.

About NSBA

Founded in 1940, the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) purpose is to ensure each student everywhere has access to excellent and equitable public education governed by high-performing school board leaders and supported by the community.

With members spread across the United States, the Virgin Islands, and Canada, NSBA is the only national organization representing school boards. Along with its member state associations and member public school districts representing locally elected school board officials serving millions of public school students, NSBA believes that public education is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people and that each child, regardless of their ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, identity, or citizenship, deserves equitable access to an education that maximizes their individual potential.

For more information, visit [nsba.org](https://www.nsba.org).

