

THE RURAL EDUCATION
AND
TECHNOLOGY
INITIATIVE of AMERICA



THE TODAY FOUNDATION

BACKGROUND

More than, 3,700 K-12 schools in the U.S, 79% located in rural and small towns, lack access to the fiber networks needed to access broadband enabled digital learning opportunities. Additionally, the E-rate program that provides affordable internet support to schools and libraries must be expanded. Although reading and math achievement scores and graduation rates are relatively stable, the poverty and death rate in rural areas far outpace their urban and suburban counterparts. Nationally renowned companies that can boost local economies often overlook rural areas due to a shrinking workforce that does not have the skills and expertise required by today's information and knowledge economy. This can be remedied by developing regionally situated education/ technology hubs that offer quality online academic and workforce programs. Until actuated, Rural America faces a technology and education crisis!

PURPOSE

To prepare Kindergarten-12th grade students, living in rural areas, with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure 21st c career opportunities by offering **access** to evidence-based reading, math, and science academic programs and training using state of the art technology systems.

ISSUES

Lawmakers who represent rural areas are concerned that the [No Child Left Behind](#) law, as well as ESSA's [blueprint for overhauling it](#), failed to take into account the problems of rural schools, and their nine million students.

A new report from the [Census Bureau](#) addresses some of these issues with its release of a numbers-driven, county-level glimpse into America's urban-rural divide. The latest American Community Survey (2011 and 2015) shows that 47 million adults and 13.4 million children under the age of 18 lived in counties outside of America's major metropolitan regions. Fewer than 1 in 5 or 19.5% in rural communities earned a bachelor's degree as opposed to 29% of America's urban dwellers.

The report estimates less than 1 out of every 5 citizens was a resident of rural America, although such regions cover "97 percent of the nation's land area."

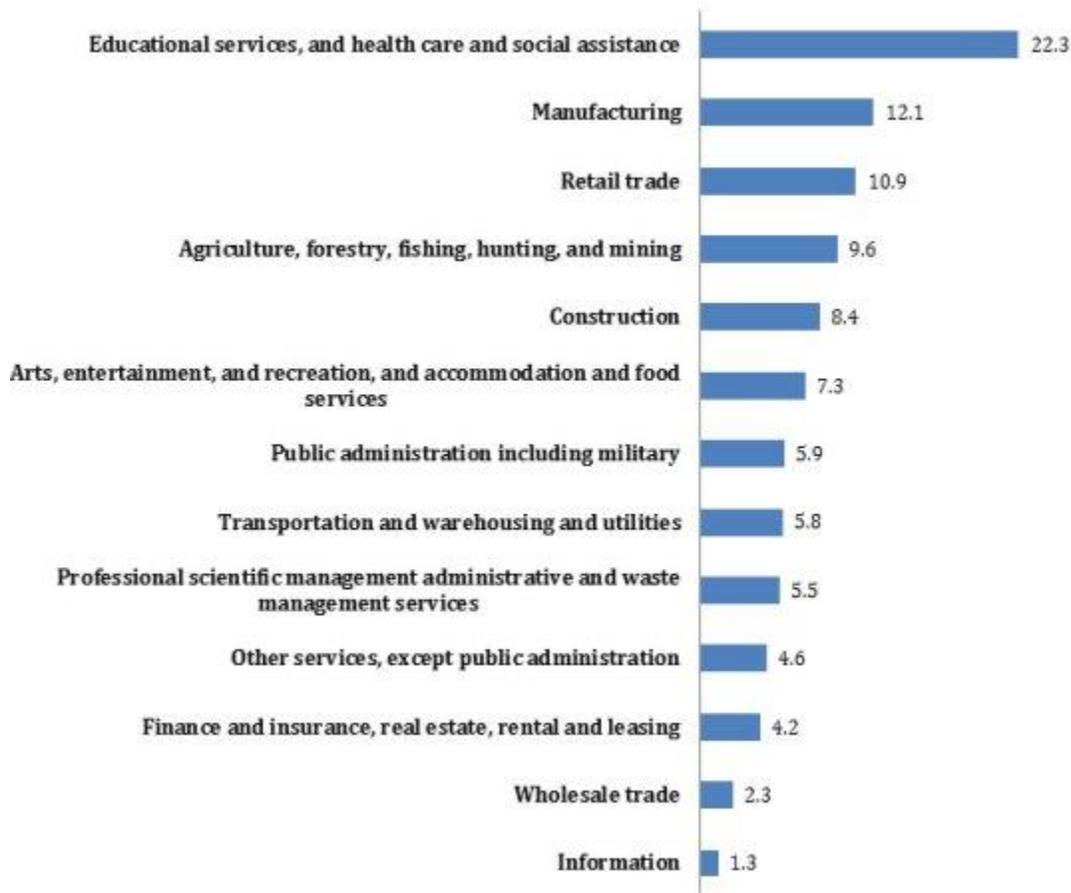
In 1910, more than 54 percent of the country lived in a rural area. But with job growth in city centers continually outpacing other parts of the country, Americans – particularly those just starting out in their careers – have flocked to urban areas en masse. Consequently, the current median urban adult is six years younger than his rural counterpart: 45 years old vs 51.

"When looking at the populations of both rural and urban America, we find a distribution with two peaks, baby boomers in their 50s and 60s forming one, and 'millennials' in their late teens and 20s forming the second," "While there are more people in the millennial generation in urban areas, baby boomers form the higher peak in rural areas." Census statistics.2015

Income Distribution

City dwellers earned nearly \$54,300 in median household income each year, about \$2,000 more than their rural counterparts. And rural employment was significantly more skewed toward goods production, with more than 20 percent of workers in manufacturing or construction fields.

Figure 1. Percent Employed by Type of Industry: Completely Rural Counties
(Civilian labor force, 16 years and over)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015 5-Year estimates. For information on the ACS, see www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/

More than a fifth of rural employees work in educational services, health care and social assistance positions. Another 12.1 percent work in manufacturing. Source: Census Bureau

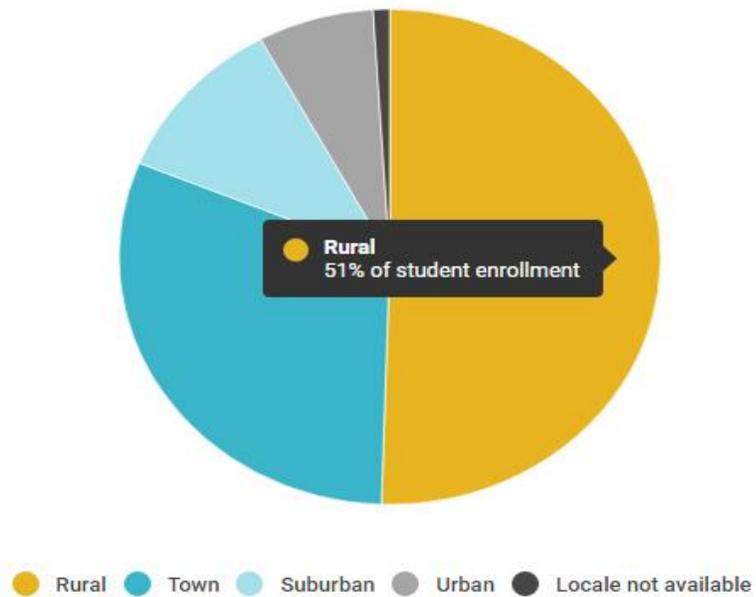
The urban poverty rate of 16 percent, meanwhile, was nearly 3 percentage points higher than rural areas' 13.3 percent.

"For rural areas, the poverty rates varied from the lowest (4.6 percent) in Connecticut to the highest (21.9 percent) in New Mexico," "Poverty rates for the urban areas ranged from the lowest (8.7 percent) in Alaska to the highest (24.9 percent) in Mississippi." Source: Census 2015

Urban regions of the country have higher poverty rates than rural areas, according to the Census Bureau Source: Census Bureau 2015

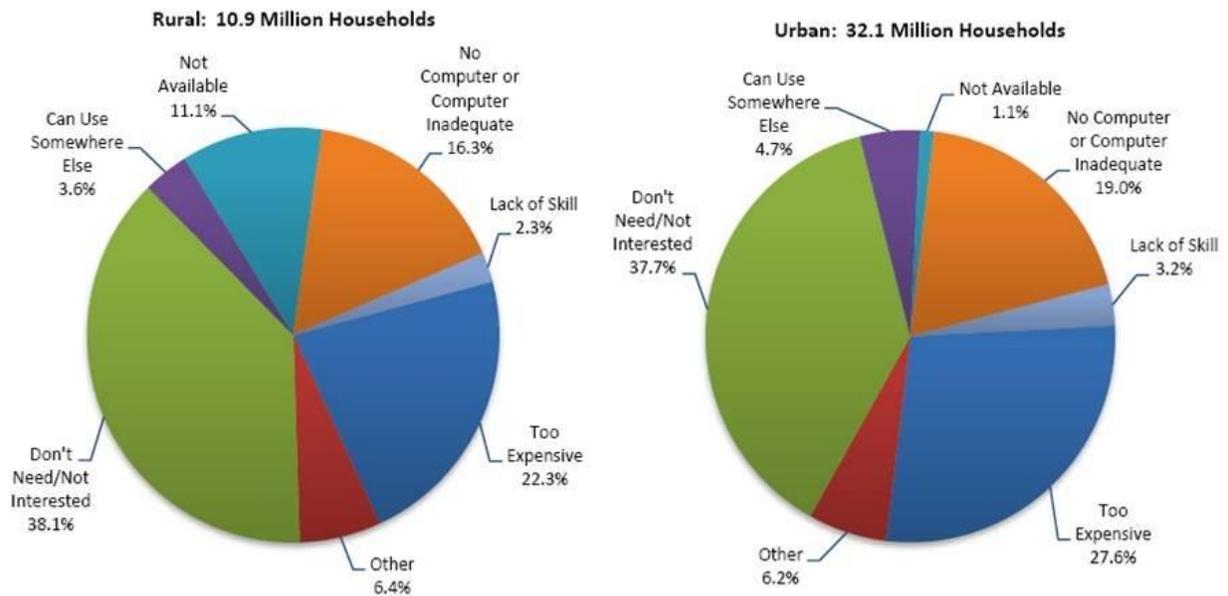
Education Distribution

The bureau also provided an infographic for a more direct comparison between rural and urban



K-12 education in America:

Technology Access



Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2010

[Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

Note: Although it appears that the % of access to technology is similar in urban and rural areas, it is important to realize that the number of students in each jurisdiction is not the same. (compare)

Education

While rural LEAs face many of the same obstacles confronting urban districts (such as high rates of childhood poverty, difficulty recruiting and retaining effective teachers and administrators, and limited access to quality health care), these challenges frequently are exacerbated by the remoteness and small size of rural districts. Rural schools and LEAs are often at a distinct disadvantage compared to their urban and suburban counterparts during grant competitions. While many large districts may have dedicated grant-writing staff, many rural districts lack personnel with the knowledge and experience to complete complex grant applications. In addition, **rural districts lack access to reliable broadband internet access, causing additional difficulties in applying for grants, providing classroom instruction, and administering programs.** Even in those areas where connectivity for the schools is not an issue, schools are often the only locations where students are able to get online, making completion of assignments and research more difficult. Other difficulties typically unique to rural areas include; fewer career options and apprenticeship opportunities; the inability to attract, train, and retain teachers and principals in communities with fewer amenities and activities than urban and suburban areas; a tax base more susceptible to fluctuations caused by changes in local and regional economic conditions; and an inability to offer advanced courses or training that better prepare students for college and relevant 21st century careers. Adding to these challenges is the reality that each rural community is distinct. There are vast contrasts between and among rural communities in different states, and even within states. Communities in Appalachian West Virginia are very different from those in the Nevada desert. Circumstances in the mountains of western Colorado vary greatly from those in the plains of the eastern part of the state. Some rural communities are among the poorest in the nation, while others lack sufficient workers to fill the available jobs. Rural communities occupy every point on the boom-and-bust cycle. “Rural” is not a monolith but a compilation of thousands of unique communities and circumstances. Source: **US Department of Education, The Rural Education Report (2018).**

Education Solutions

‘The Rural Education Report’, issued by the US Department of Education (2018) highlighted several areas that can be resolved not only by the department’s effort to prioritize rural education in America, but also other agencies, companies, and community collaborations which focus specifically on how to best prepare students with knowledge and skills that match 21st century workforce demands and provide the vehicle or means to access these services. Such efforts include: developing efficient technology systems or hubs to provide easy access to courses, professional development, and meaningful, relevant job skills training that entice corporations to establish and maintain a presence in rural America.

> “Increase access to educational choice for students in rural communities.”

> “Expand access to and participation in rigorous computer science ... coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in rural communities”. > “Utilize technology for educational purposes in communities served by rural local educational agencies and areas identified as lacking sufficient access to such tools and resources.”

> “Promote innovative strategies to increase the number of students who have access to effective educators, administrators and other school leaders in schools that are located in communities served by rural local educational agencies.”

Additionally, a **Call to Action Report published by the US Department of Agriculture** recommends:

Achieving e-Connectivity for Rural America by establishing executive leadership provided by the Department of Education and other agencies to expand e-connectivity across rural America and advance educational opportunities for rural America while innovating options for rural housing.

The Rural Education and Technology Initiative Advances solutions recommended by the US Department of Education's The Rural Education of America report by

HOW

- 1) Secure funding from multiple government agencies and private sources to develop the technology infrastructure in 50 state rural areas that connect effective online academic programs to districts within states and schools within districts for students residing in America's outlying communities.
- 2) Develop and implement Rural Technology infrastructure plans and strategies that ensure rural students have access to proven academic programs which match current 21st c. workforce demands through easy to use, reliable and stable technology systems.
- 3) Build awareness and demand by coordinating a Rural Education Initiative of America effort among various diverse constituencies at the state, district and local community level targeting the key decision-makers at each level.
- 4) Design and execute an effective communication marketing strategy, including social media that highlights the need for the Rural Education Initiative of America within and among diverse communities. Communicate need, plan and progress (ongoing-timely).
- 5) Designate one or more spokespersons (notables) to articulate Initiative message. Target: 'Bring Innovative Jobs to America's Heartland' Here's How! by offering Quality, Accessible, Practical Education in Rural America – Prepare Students for 21st C Careers.
- 6) Connect the plan to the funds to the decision-makers to the programs and students.