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America's Rural High Schools: Challenges and Opportunities for Success



Every Child a Graduate

ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Governor Bob Wise

President

Alliance for Excellent Education



Lori Meyer

Vice President

***Collaborative Communications
Group***



Current Challenges and Opportunities in Preparing Rural High School Students for Success in College and Careers



Facts-at-a-Glance

- **One in five** children—almost 10 million—attends a rural school.
- Of these, approximately 3.4 million attend a rural high school.
- More than **half of all school districts and one third of all public schools** are in rural areas.



Facts-at-a-Glance

- **Prevalence of small schools:** A larger percentage of public school students in rural areas (10 percent) attend very small schools.
 - **Private school enrollment:** Only 6 percent of rural students are enrolled in private schools.
 - **Charter schools:** Only 2 percent of rural high schools are charter schools. Just 1 percent of rural high school students attend charter schools.
 - **Homeschooling:** Twenty-eight percent of students who are homeschooled live in a rural area.
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Facts-at-a-Glance

- **Rural child poverty** rates are **higher (21 percent)** than poverty rates for urban children (18 percent).
- The highest-need education regions are generally located in the **Southwest, Mid-South Delta, Southeast and Appalachia.**



The Dropout Crisis

- **Nationwide**, only **two-thirds** of students who enter ninth grade each year can expect to graduate four years later.
- In **rural** high schools , the figures are only slightly better—**three out of four** students can expect to earn a diploma within four years.
- As with national trends, there are **disparities for minority students** in rural high schools:
 - White (75%)
 - American Indian/Alaska Native (51%)
 - Asian and Pacific Islander (68%)
 - Hispanic (61%)
 - Black (54%)



The Dropout Crisis

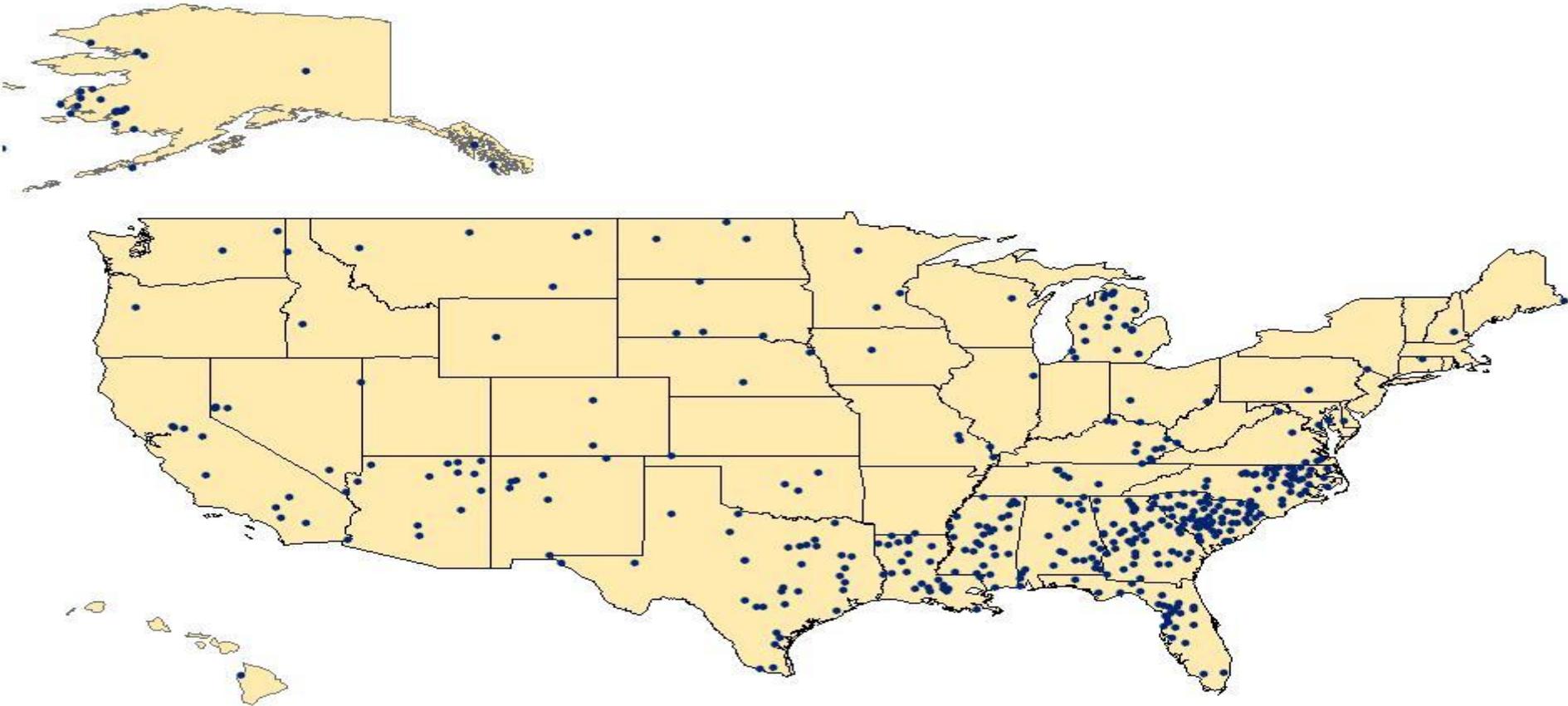
- **Almost two thousand of the country's high schools produce half of the nation's dropouts.** These schools have been dubbed as “dropout factories.”

- **More than 20 percent of these dropout factories are located in rural communities.**



The Dropout Crisis

Geographic Location of Rural Dropout Factories



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Johns Hopkins University, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.



College Enrollment and Completion

- **College enrollment rates** for eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds and twenty-five to twenty-nine-year-olds are generally **lower** in rural areas than in all other locales.
- **Only 17 percent** of rural adults twenty-five and older had **completed college** in 2000—half the percentage of urban adults.
- **Rural college graduates** currently **make more than twice** as much as rural high school dropouts and have significantly **lower unemployment rates**.



Earnings and Employment Rates

- Regardless of educational attainment, individuals in rural areas generally **have higher median earnings than those in cities but lower median earnings than those in suburban areas**, when adjusted to reflect local cost differences.
- The **unemployment rate** for adults twenty-five to thirty-four was **lower in rural areas** (7 percent) than in cities (8 percent). The unemployment rate for adults thirty-five to sixty-four was lower in rural areas (4.5 percent) than in all other locales (5-6 percent).

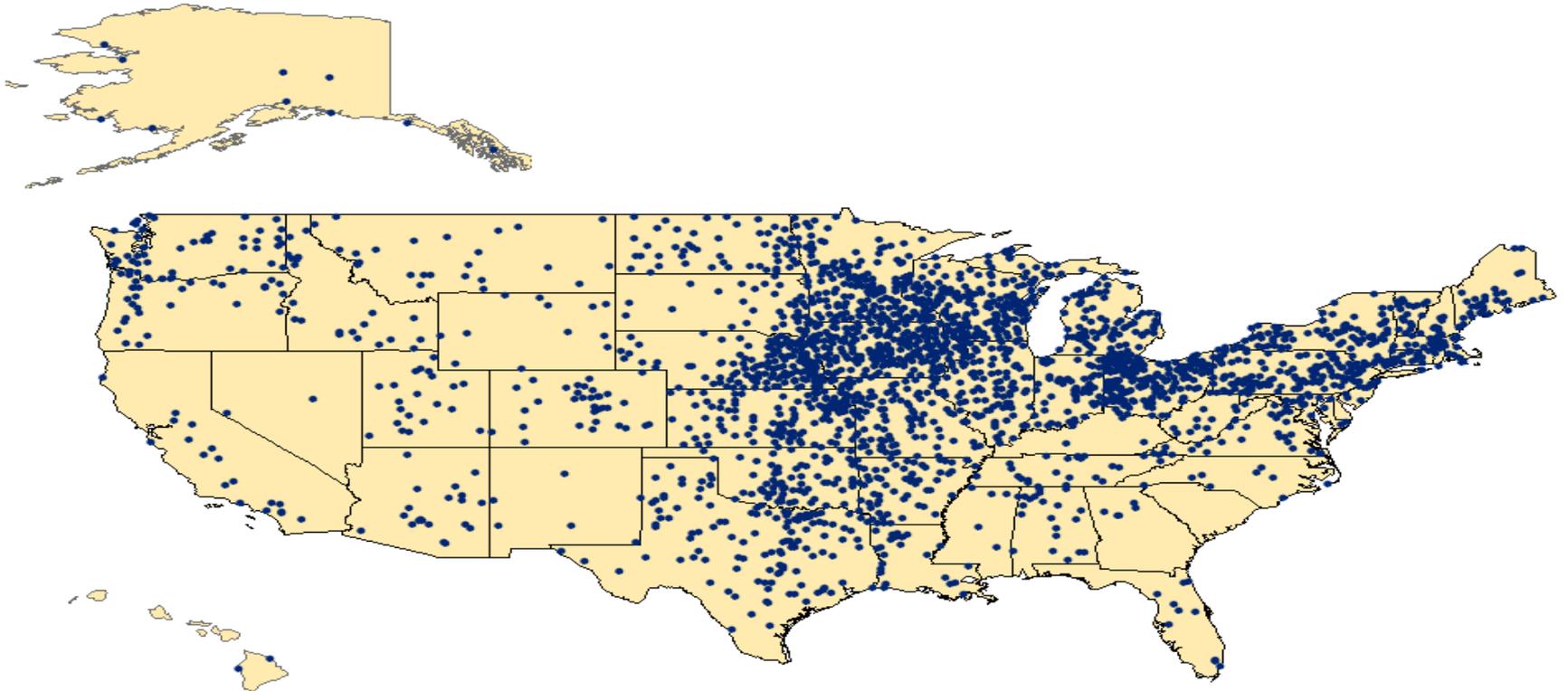


Goal of Federal Policy:
Build on Assets and Overcome
Challenges



The Goal: Build on Assets

Rural High Schools with High Promoting Power



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Johns Hopkins University, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.



The Goal: Build on Assets

Rural high schools provide a solid, community-focused foundation for change:

- High levels of parental involvement
- Supportive local partnerships
- Strong teacher-student relationships
- Personalized academic support



The Goal: Build on Assets

Rural high schools are opening doors to more hands-on learning directly linked to their community:

➤ Pioneering place-based education



The Goal: Build on Assets

Rural schools report high job satisfaction among teachers:

➤ In addition to supportive, tight-knit communities, a more relaxed pace, and access to natural beauty, rural teachers generally report a high level of job satisfaction, greater autonomy, and more direct influence over school policy.



The Goal: Overcome Challenges

Many rural high schools—especially those in smaller, geographically remote, and poor counties—do not have the same levels, financial, community, and transportation resources:

- Shrinking tax bases
- Shifting local economies
- Low salaries
- Brain drain among young people and educated professionals
- Difficulty recruiting teachers and leaders
- Social service gaps
- Funding and policy disparities (Title I)



The Goal: Overcome Challenges

Some rural communities may not be fostering the same high expectations for college and career:

- The percentage of students whose parents' highest level of education was a high school diploma is higher than in cities and suburbs.
- The percentage of rural parents who expected their children's highest level of education to be less than a bachelor's degree was higher (42 percent) than their urban (30 percent) and suburban (25 percent) peers.
- Nearly one half (47%) of nonmetro youth reported little chance they would be enrolled in regular school in five years.
- Rural employers are less likely to invest in work-based opportunities due to a lack of resources to provide training and recruiting.



The Goal: Overcome Challenges

Due to the shortage of appropriately trained teachers, financial constraints, and geographic isolation, many rural high schools offer limited access to rigorous classes:

- Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, for example, is significantly lower in rural areas (69 percent and 1 percent, respectively) than in cities (93 percent and 8 percent).
- Rural high schools often lack the necessary staff and infrastructure to incorporate technology.



The Goal: Overcome Challenges

Some rural high schools experienced challenges in meeting goals of NCLB:

- Rural schools sometimes lack key community resources, such as libraries and tutors, to help students overcome their educational challenges.
- District staff often had to assume multiple roles which reduced the amount of time they could spend on collecting and disseminating information on promising implementation strategies, as well as designing and implementing them to raise student performance.
- Information about key education reforms through professional development, advanced learning technologies, and supplemental services is less readily available to rural high schools.
- The most extreme remedies, such as full school closure and restaffing, are close to impossible given the shortage of highly trained and qualified personnel available.



When 1 out of every 4 students fails to graduate from our nation's rural high schools, it's not just a "local" issue; it's a national crisis.



Panel Discussion

Moderator:

Ms. Elizabeth Schneider, *Alliance for Excellent Education*

- **Dr. Gene Bottoms**, *High Schools That Work, Southern Regional Education Board*
- **Mr. Greg Darling**, *Humboldt Community School District (Iowa)*
- **Dr. John Hill**, *National Rural Education Association*
- **Mr. Steven Means**, *U.S. Department of Education*



Gov. Bob Wise

President

Alliance for Excellent Education



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