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June 14, 2017

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## Nation's Rural Students Deserve Better From State, Federal Leaders, New 50-State Report Shows

**WASHINGTON**— As the 2016 presidential election has brought newfound attention to rural areas, a new 50-state report urges state and federal leaders to make rural students and their communities a far greater priority.

The new edition of *Why Rural Matters*, from the nonprofit, nonpartisan Rural School and Community Trust, provides an overall “priority” ranking of the 50 states, showing the greatest needs in rural education. The report also ranks the states and includes state-by-state data on demographics and poverty, student achievement, state resources, and college and career readiness.

“While some rural schools thrive, far too many rural students face nothing less than a national emergency. Many rural schools and districts face vastly inequitable funding and simply cannot provide the opportunities that many suburban and urban schools do,” said Robert Mahaffey, the executive director of the Rural School and Community Trust, based in Washington, D.C.

Rural schools offer many attributes of quality schools that parents want for their children: smaller settings, personal attention, and a strong sense of community and identity. But many rural schools and students face serious challenges, the report shows.

Some of the *Why Rural Matters* report's key findings:

- **Lots of students are rural:** Nearly 8.9 million students attend rural schools—more than the enrollments of the New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago—and incredibly, the nation's next 75 largest school districts combined. More than one in four schools are rural, more than one in six students attend schools in rural areas, and more than one in four rural students is a child of color. At least half of public schools are rural in 13 states.
- **Many districts are very small:** Half of rural school districts in 23 states have enrollment smaller than 485 students (the national median enrollment for rural districts)
- **States with greatest rural needs:** The top 10 national “priority” states—those with the greatest needs in rural schools across an array of measures—are: **1) Mississippi, 2) Arizona, 3) Alabama, 4) South Carolina, 5) South Dakota, 6) Georgia, 7) Nevada, 8) Florida, 9) Oklahoma and 10) Alaska.**

- **Most rural students live in big states:** Half the nation’s rural students live in just 10 states. The largest rural enrollments are in **Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Alabama, Indiana, and Michigan.**
- **Achievement impressive overall—but low in some states:** On average, student achievement in rural schools is comparable to those in suburban areas on the Nation’s Report Card (the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP). Even still, scores are lowest for rural students in **New Mexico, Mississippi, Alabama, Hawaii, and Louisiana.**
- **Rural readiness varies:** Measures of students’ preparedness for higher education and career paths are mixed nationally. A majority of rural 11th and 12th graders in **Ohio** take one or more Advanced Placement course, but only 5 percent do in **Louisiana.** Fewer than one in four rural juniors and seniors take the SAT or ACT in **California** and **Oregon.**
- **Diversity is substantial:** Rural America’s demographics are changing like those of many places across the country: The majority of rural students identify as nonwhite in several states, including **California.** In **New Mexico,** 85 percent of rural students are children of color, the highest rate in the U.S.; the state also has the highest rate of students from low-income families at 85 percent. **Nevada** has the nation’s highest mobility rate for rural students at 17 percent—followed by **Oregon** and **Colorado.**
- **Resources, equity elusive:** Resources for rural schools often are still a major problem. Per-student investment for rural students is lowest in **Idaho** and **Oklahoma,** each spending less than \$4,400 per rural student, and highest in **Alaska** and **New York,** each spending roughly \$12,000 per student. Rural educator pay is often low, despite challenges in finding and keeping quality educators. Salary averages are lowest in **Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas,** and highest in **Alaska** and **New York.**
- **Lack of early childhood programs:** Most of the top 10 overall “priority” states enrolled no more than 12 percent of their 4 year olds in public pre-K classes—including **South Dakota, Nevada, Alaska, Mississippi, and Arizona,** all of which enrolled 6 percent or less of eligible preschool students.

*For more information, contact the Rural School and Community Trust. The full report is available at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org) and [www.instituteforchildsuccess.org](http://www.instituteforchildsuccess.org).*