

Trends in Rural Pennsylvania

July/August 2003

About Trends in Rural Pennsylvania

This fact sheet is the fourth in a series of nine that examines trends in rural Pennsylvania. Each fact sheet focuses on a specific area of interest, and is based on the mandates outlined in the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's enabling legislation (Act 16 of 1987). The areas of interest are agriculture, economic development, local government capacity and fiscal stress indicators, transportation, socio-demographics, health care and human services, the environment and natural resources, education and the condition of existing local infrastructure. For more information on any of the data presented, contact the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy research within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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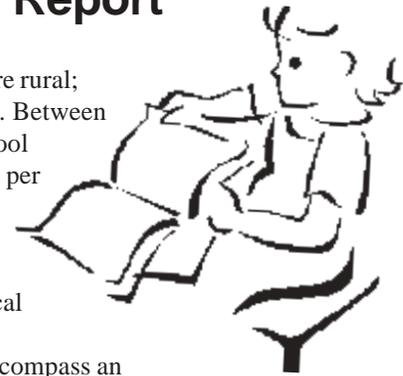
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Education Progress Report

Of the state's 501 school districts, 243 are rural; that's about 49 percent of the state's total. Between them, rural districts have about 1,080 school buildings, or an average of four buildings per school district. The majority of these buildings (64 percent) are for elementary students. Within rural areas, there are 7 charter schools and 36 vocational-technical schools.

Geographically, rural school districts encompass an average of 150 square miles each, but there are 35 rural districts that stretch more than 250 square miles each. In 2000, the average rural school district served a population of 13,600. Between 1990 and 2000, the population in Pennsylvania's rural school districts increased nearly 6 percent.

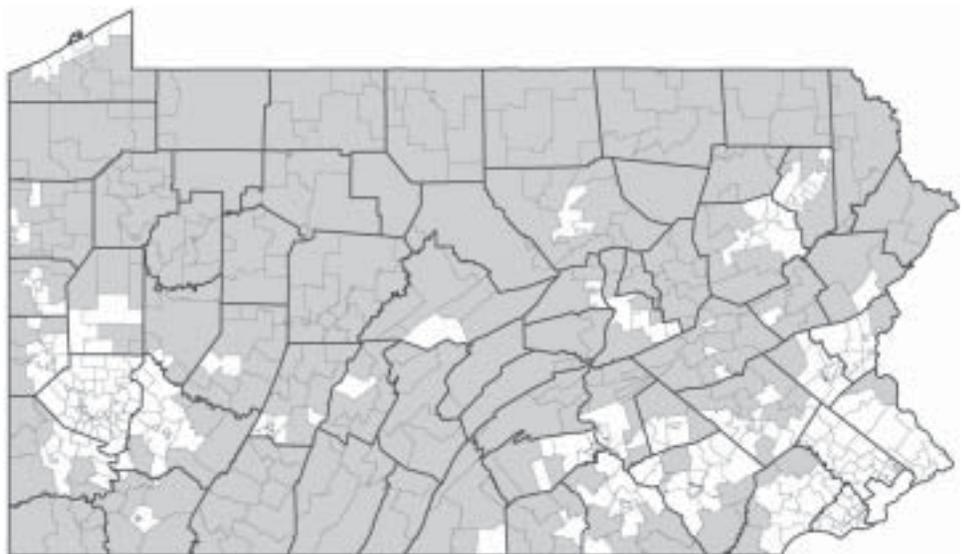
According to data from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, school districts are among the five largest employers in 54 percent of the state's 48 rural counties.



Enrollment

During the 2000 school year, there were nearly 2.2 million school students in Pennsylvania. Approximately 27 percent of these students, or 584,000, were enrolled in a rural school. Among these rural students, 8 percent were enrolled in a

Rural and Urban School Districts, 2000



Source: PA Dept. of Education and U.S. Census Bureau
Map prepared by Center for Rural Pennsylvania

■ Rural School Districts □ Urban School Districts

private or non-public school, 2 percent were home schooled, and the remaining 90 percent were enrolled in public schools. In urban areas, 18 percent of students were enrolled in private and non-public schools, 1 percent was home schooled, and the remaining 81 percent attended public schools. Since public schools have the largest enrollment, the information presented here focuses exclusively on public education statistics.

Among the 243 rural school districts in Pennsylvania, the average enrollment in 2000 was 2,166. About 53 percent of these students were enrolled in elementary schools (K-6), and 47 percent were in secondary schools (7-12).

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of students attending rural schools increased 2 percent. This growth, however, was not consistent statewide. Nearly 60 percent of rural school districts, primarily those located in western Pennsylvania, actually had a decline in enrollment during this period.

Only about 8 percent of rural school districts, generally located in eastern Pennsylvania, had enrollment increases greater than 20 percent.

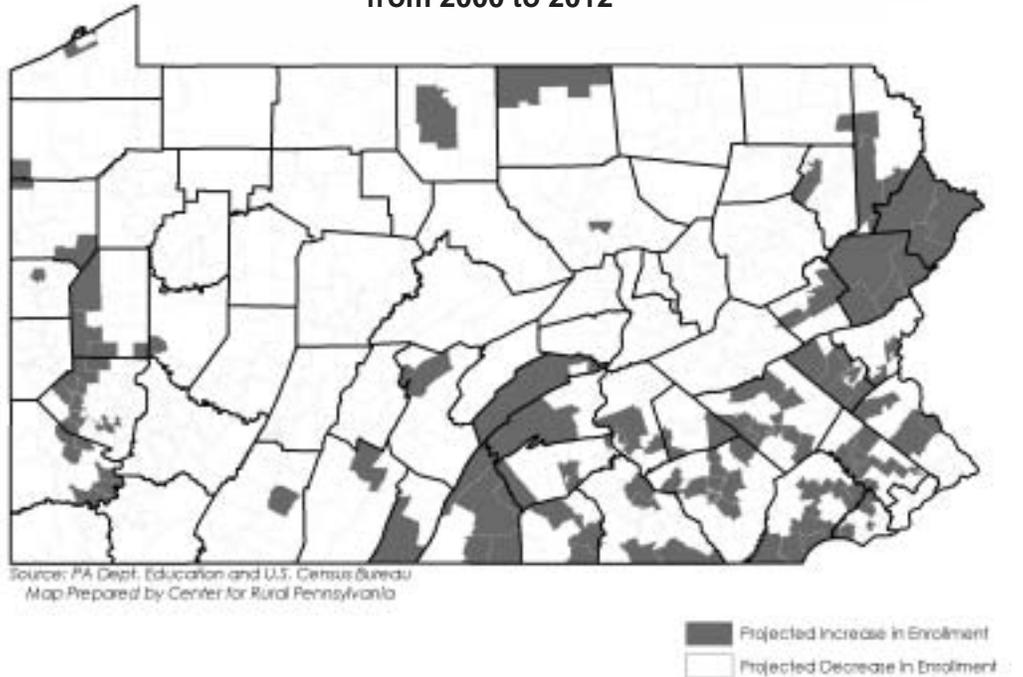
In urban school districts, enrollment increased 14 percent. Twenty-one percent of these districts, however, reported a decline in enrollment, while 31 percent reported growth rates in excess of 20 percent.

Between 2000 and 2012, enrollment in both rural and urban school districts is projected to decline; about 12 percent among rural districts and 8 percent among urban districts. Statewide, only 23 percent of school districts are projected to see enrollment increases.

Teachers

In 2000, there were 32,300 rural classroom teachers, or an average of one teacher for every 16.3 students. In

School Districts with Projected Enrollment Increases from 2000 to 2012



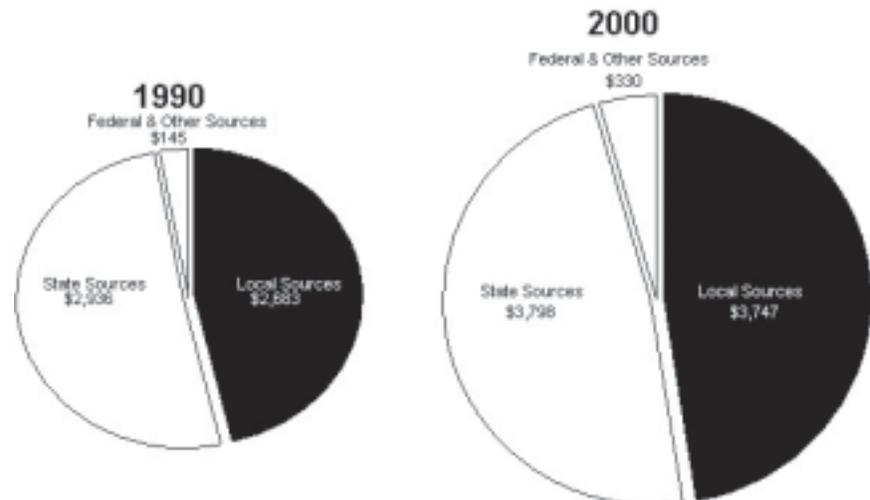
1990, the average was one teacher for every 17.9 students. In general, rural schools have slightly lower student-teacher ratios than urban schools.

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of teachers in rural schools increased nearly 13 percent, or more than 6 times the enrollment rate change. Among the 142 rural districts that lost enrollment

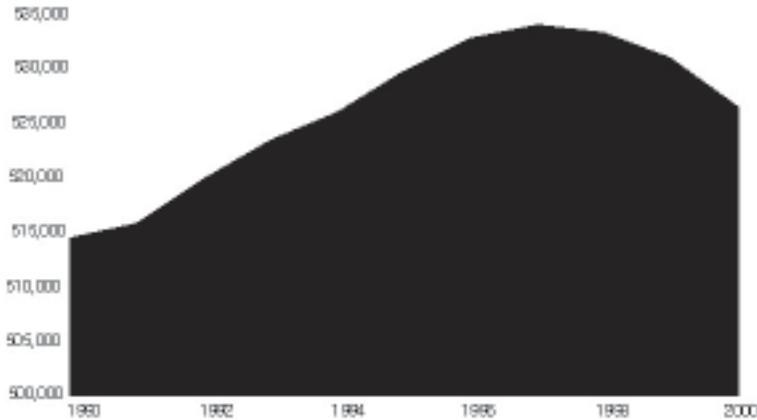
during this period, 72 percent gained classroom teachers.

In 2000, the average rural teacher had been in the classroom for nearly 17 years and earned \$44,287 a year. In comparison, the average urban teacher had been teaching for less than 16 years and earned nearly \$50,290 a year. Between 1990 and 2000, both rural and

Source of Rural School District Funding Per Student 1990 and 2000 (Adjusted for Inflation to 2000 Dollars)



Average Daily Attendance in Pennsylvania's Rural Schools 1990-2000



urban teachers have seen salary increases. The average rural teacher salary increased 15 percent and the average urban teacher salary increased nearly 8 percent.

School Finances

Revenues

In 2000, the average rural school district received more than \$17 million in revenues, about 48 percent of which came from local sources, primarily real estate taxes. Another 48 percent came from state government and the remaining 4 percent came from the federal government and other miscellaneous sources.

Funding for rural school districts has increased from 1990 to 2000; however the proportion of funding from local, state and federal sources has remained relatively the same.

On a per student basis, funding from local sources increased nearly 37 percent. This increase may be attributed to an increase in the market value of taxable property. For example, between 1990 and 2000, market values in rural areas, adjusted for inflation, increased 31 percent. This meant that each mill of real estate taxes generated more revenues.

Expenditures

In 2000, the average rural school district spent \$7,777 per student. Between 1990 and 2000, spending per student, adjusted for inflation, increased 28 percent. For this analysis, school expenditures were broken down into five main categories: instructional; support services; operation of non-instructional services; facilities acquisition, construction, and improvement; and other financing. Instructional services made up 58 percent of total spending in 2000. This

category is divided primarily into regular education (72 percent), special education (16 percent), and vocational education (7 percent). Support services accounted for 29 percent of total spending, with transportation taking up 20 percent of its monies. Less than 2 percent of total school expenditures went to the operation of non-instructional services and facilities acquisition, construction, and improvement. During the 1990s, the per student expenditure gap between rural and urban school districts narrowed.

Free and Reduced Lunches

In 2000, about 140,000 rural students, or 28 percent, were eligible for the free or reduced school lunch program, which provides a hot lunch to students from low-income families. From 1997 to 2000, the number of students eligible for this program declined 7 percent.

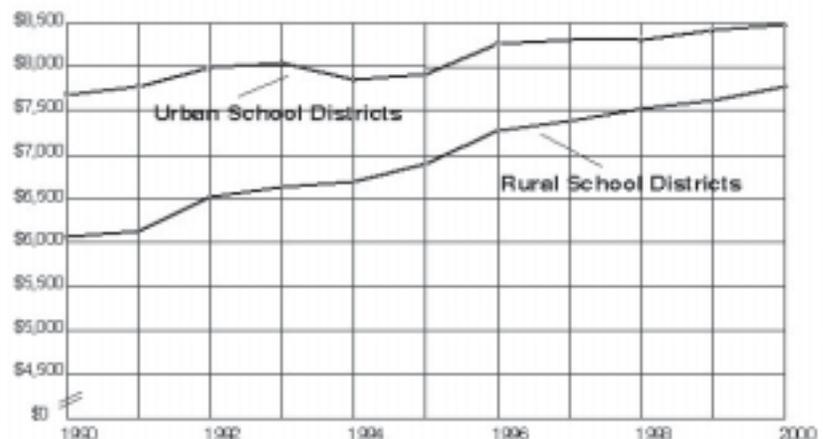
In urban school districts in 2000, 33 percent of students were eligible for this program. Between 1997 and 2000, the number of urban students eligible increased 7 percent.

Outcomes

PSSA Scores

Scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests vary in rural Pennsylvania. In 2000, fifth graders in more than 52 percent of rural school districts scored above the statewide average. However, by the eighth grade, less than 40 percent scored above the statewide average, and in the eleventh grade, less than 33 percent scored above the statewide score. In comparison, more than 50 percent of students in urban school districts scored above the statewide average for each of these three grades.

Total Rural and Urban School District Expenditures Per Student, 1990-2000 (Adjusted for Inflation to 2000 Dollars)



Dropout Rates

In 2000, more than 4,900 secondary students dropped out of school, or 2.0 percent. Approximately 60 percent of these students were male, and 40 percent were female. In urban school districts, more than 16,000 secondary students dropped out of school or 2.8 percent of the total secondary enrollment. Without Philadelphia and Pittsburgh School Districts, the urban dropout rate falls to 1.9 percent.

Throughout the 1990s, the dropout rate in both rural and urban schools remained fairly constant; about 2 to 3 percent of secondary students.

Postsecondary Plans

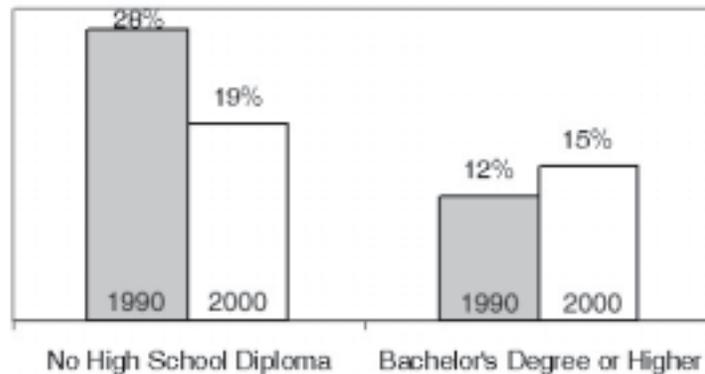
In 2000, 68 percent of rural high school seniors indicated plans to continue their education after graduation. This rate represents a 5 percentage point increase from 1993, when the postsecondary participation rate was 63 percent. In 2000, all but eight rural school districts reported postsecondary participation rates above 50 percent. In 1993, 26 rural districts reported participation rates below 50 percent. In 2000, the postsecondary participation rate among urban school districts was 77 percent, a 4 percentage point increase from 1993.

In 2000, among rural high school seniors who did not plan to continue their education after high school, approximately 47 percent planned to work in either blue collar or service jobs; 7 percent planned to work in white collar jobs; and 15 percent planned to enter the military. The remaining 31 percent were not sure of their plans.

Educational Attainment

According to the Census Bureau, educational attainment is climbing. Decennial Census data show that in 1990, 28 percent of residents in

**Rural Adult (Age 25+) Educational Attainment
1990-2000**



Pennsylvania's rural counties age 25 and older had less than a high school education. Through the decade, this figure improved and fell to 19 percent in 2000.

In addition, more people had college experience. In 2000, 19 percent had some college education but less than a bachelor's degree, up from 15 percent in 1990. And the number with a bachelor's degree or more increased from 12 to 15 percent.

Although rural educational attainment is rising, it has far to go to reach urban figures. In the commonwealth's urban counties, 18 percent of those age 25 and older had not completed high school while 25 percent had obtained at least a bachelor's degree.



Summary

In the past decade, there have been a number of changes in rural education. Rural Pennsylvania's slow population growth is reflected in the one additional student per full-time teacher. Expenditures per student have increased and the per student expenditure gap between rural and urban school districts has narrowed. While the dropout rates have remained fairly constant, a larger part of the population has completed high school and is achieving higher levels of educational attainment.

Definitions and Sources

Rural: Residents of school districts whose Census 2000 population density is less than the statewide figure of 274 persons per square mile. In the section, "Educational Attainment," rural is counties whose 2000 Census population density is less than the statewide figure of 274 persons per square mile.

Charter schools, vocational-technical schools, and private/non-public schools were not included in the data.

Unless otherwise noted, all statistics reflect the year 2000 and come from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.