

# Beyond The One-Room Schoolhouse

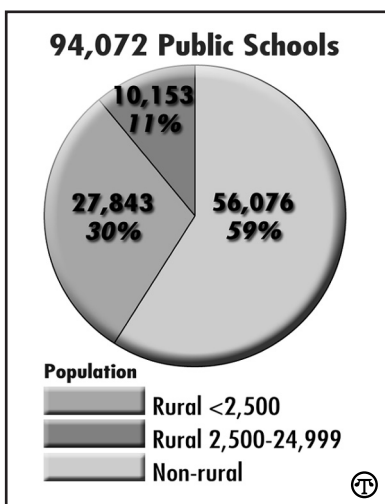
(NAPSA)—Mention “rural schools,” and many people conjure up an image of a one-room schoolhouse.

While a few one-room schools do still exist, this image is largely one of memory and made-for-TV nostalgia. The reality of rural communities and their schools is far different—and much more complex.

According to the Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust), nearly 38,000 (more than 40 percent) of the 94,072 public schools in the United States are located in rural areas or small towns of fewer than 25,000 people. These schools serve nearly one-third of U.S. schoolchildren in communities as diverse and varied as the rural American landscape.

What do these places look like? The rural communities where 14.3 million American children go to school include coastal fishing villages, Appalachian mining communities, Western mountain towns, ranching communities of the Great Plains, Native American reservations, border *colonias* of the Rio Grande, northwoods towns in New England, and rural farm towns of the Mississippi Delta.

The students who go to school in these places are diverse, as well. Overall, 19 percent of rural schoolchildren are minorities. In the Deep South, many rural students are African American. Minorities, largely African American, make up 46 percent of the rural student population in Mississippi, 42 percent in South Carolina and 32 percent in Louisiana. In the rural schools of Hawaii and New Mexico, approximately three-quarters of students are minorities, most of them Native American; in Alaska more than half of rural students are Alaska Natives. The border states are home to large numbers of rural Hispanic students—35 percent of the rural



students in Texas and 41 percent in California are minorities.

Rural communities are not free from the problems common to cities. In fact, rural America is far poorer than metropolitan areas. Of the 66 poorest counties in America, 59 are rural, and close to 14 percent of all rural children live below the poverty level. If you are African American or Hispanic, your chances of living in poverty are greater if you live in rural America than if you live in the inner city.

Rural schools tend to be small, which benefits the children who attend them. Small school advantages include strong community and parent involvement, the chance for each child to be known, improved academic achievement, higher graduation rates, and fewer discipline problems. Rural school struggles include difficulty finding and keeping good teachers, long bus rides when schools are consolidated, and property-tax-based school funding that shortchanges rural districts.

To learn more about America's rural schools and the challenges they face, visit the Rural Trust's Web site at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org). The site includes many free publications available for download.