



Why Funding Matters for Rural Schools



Almost half of Alabama's public schools (45.5%) are in rural areas, and they serve more than a third of the students in the state (35.1%). Since Alabama's current funding formula only takes into account the number of students in a school, rural schools often don't have as much money as schools in cities or suburbs. There are fewer students in each building and it costs more to build and maintain schools. Additionally, rural communities have less capacity to contribute a significant amount of local revenue due to lower property values and smaller population size.

For example, rural districts may spend more per student on buildings, as there are fewer students in each building to divide the cost. Resources like transportation or nutrition cost more in rural areas. Rural communities also face difficulties in recruiting and retaining the best teachers. More funding for rural schools ensures that they can face these challenges and provide a world-class education for their students.

Student-Weighted Funding Formulas Matter for Rural Schools

Educating students in sparse and isolated schools requires more resources to meet student needs and keep a school up and running. Student-weighted formulas are a way to make sure that schools have enough money to help all students, no matter how much money their families have or where they live. Forty-one states use this type of formula to give more money to rural schools and districts.

A student-weighted formula would allow the state to provide more funding to schools with fewer students per square mile. Less dense, more spread-out districts would receive additional funding through a rural "weight" on top of the base amount they receive from the state to ensure that they can provide the resources that their students need. This amount could be easily changed to respond to the needs of these schools over time.

A New Funding Formula for Alabama Should Include:

- An escalating weight for each student enrolled in a rural district, as defined by the number of students per square mile. Districts with the fewest students per square mile would receive the most funding.

What Other States Are Doing

- [Arkansas](#) provides an additional weight for districts based on the number of students in the district, the number of schools designated as isolated, and the density ratios. Weights range from 5% to 20%.
- [Texas](#) uses 5 tiers based on the severity of poverty to determine student weights, which range from 22.5% to 27.5%.
- [Tennessee](#) has a 5% weight for “sparse” school districts, defined as those with fewer than 25 students per square mile.

See a complete 50-state comparison of funding for rural schools [here](#).

Additional Resources

- [How Can School Finance Systems Support Students with Additional Learning Needs?](#) Bellwether, 2021
- [Why Rural Matters](#), The Rural School and Community Trust, 2018-2019



*Base amount is the same for every student