

ONE COUNTRY

Rural Educational Attainment Gap

Though rural students are more likely than the national average to graduate from high school in four years, they are significantly less likely to continue on to higher education than their metropolitan counterparts. This gap in educational attainment has lifelong consequences, and in order to build a more equitable society, the educational needs of rural students must be addressed.

The Wrong Approach to Rural Education

- The Trump administration has emphasized increasing “education freedom,” all the while proposing to **slash education spending by \$7.1 billion**. This takes a backward approach to rural education:
- First, **rural schools already face unique challenges** due to declining economic bases and limited access to qualified faculty.
- Second, **68 percent of school districts** in the United States have fewer than four traditional public schools, with dense clusters in rural areas.
- Because rural communities are served by fewer schools with limited resources, and **only 17 percent of rural families live within 10 miles** of a charter school, the Trump administration’s push for expanding charter waivers while cutting education spending in the name of “school choice” **ignores the reality of education in rural America.**



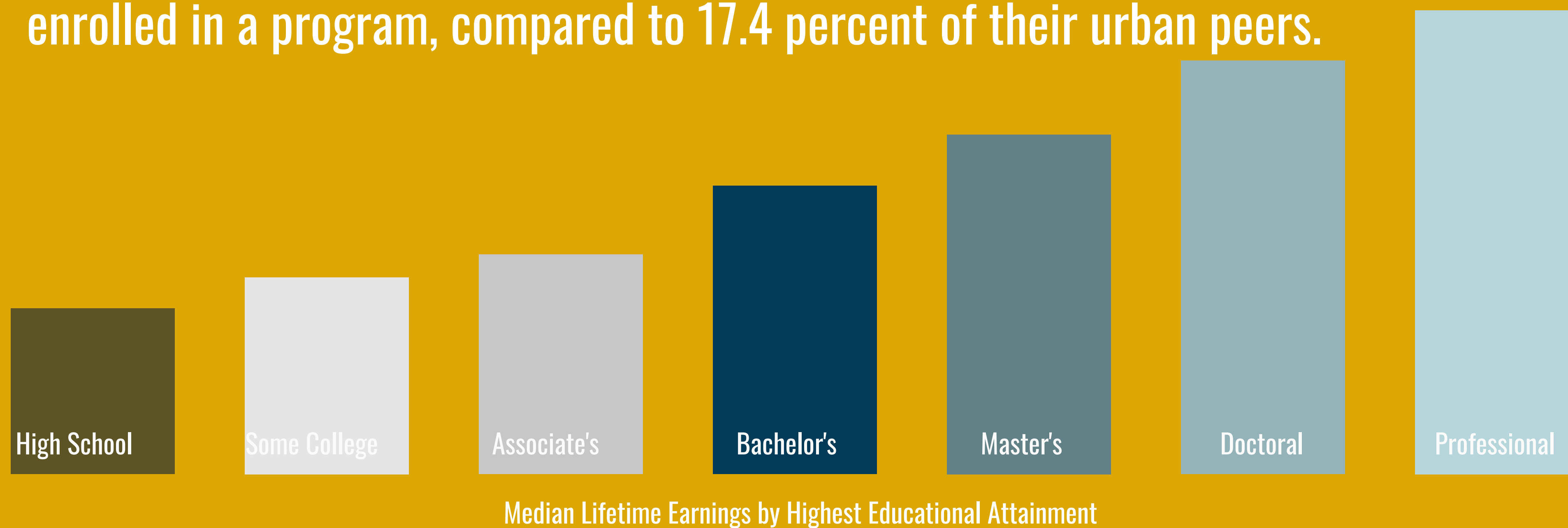
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Life After High School

- According to the Urban Institute, **33.1 percent of the rural population lives in a “physical education desert,”** meaning that millions of American adults lack access to a physical university.
- The above is significant because the **farther prospective students live** from a college or university, **the less likely they are to matriculate.**
- **Only 59 percent of rural students attend college** the following fall after graduation, lower than the 62 percent and 67 percent matriculation rates for urban and suburban students, respectively.
- As time passes, the negative trend continues. **Only 29.3 percent of rural persons age 18-24 are enrolled in college** or university compared to 47.7 percent of urban persons. For those 25-29, only 10 percent of rural persons are enrolled in a program, compared to 17.4 percent of their urban peers.



- This **lack of higher education has real life effects** and is starkly illustrated by comparing median earnings for those with a high school diploma versus those with a bachelor's degree: \$712 a week (or \$37,024 a year) compared to \$1,173 a week (or \$60,996 a year).
- This **negative feedback loop further exacerbates the rural-urban divide** and can have negative implications for everything from stress levels to life expectancy.

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