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## Differences in Education in Urban and Rural Areas

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Running Head: URBAN AND RURAL EDUCATION

Jacob Shreve

Honors Research Project

The University of Akron

Differences in Education in Urban and Rural Areas

**Abstract**

This research project examines the educational differences and disparities of urban and rural schools in Ohio. The focus school districts are Switzerland of Ohio Local and Akron Public Schools. Demographic information from each of the focus school districts is examined and compared to the outcomes of the schools to determine if factors such as poverty inhibit student learning. Data and statistics, published research, and personal experience will be used to make connections between the school districts, their students, their environment, and their learning. Differences in educational quality, opportunities, and funding will also be discussed.

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## Differences in Education in Urban and Rural Areas

### **Introduction**

Malcolm X once stated, “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today” (Juma, 2021). Thousands of students in the state of Ohio and across the country are enrolled in public schools that are considered to be in urban or rural areas. While there are more similarities between these types of school districts than one might imagine, there are still distinct differences that set them apart from each other, as well as apart from other school district types, such as suburban. The findings and connections made by this project can be generalized to other states and areas outside Ohio. This is because up until very recently, Ohio was considered to be a bellwether state that represented the population of the entire United States (Sewell and Seewer, 2020). While demographics have shifted slightly in recent years, the information presented here can still be applied to other urban and rural areas. The main problem regarding this topic is that students in rural and urban areas do not always receive an education that is as high of quality as their suburban counterparts, according to the Ohio School Report Cards and other methods of measuring student success. The question “What are the differences in education in urban and rural areas?” will be addressed. This work will examine the meaning of a rural and urban school, identify each of the focus school districts and examine the demographic information of their locations, examine the state report cards for each, and explain how this demographic information affects the schools and students’ education.

### **Definition of a Rural and Urban School**

The state of Ohio has a diverse array of school districts across the state. The four main types of school district, defined by the Ohio Department of Education, are categorized as rural, small town, suburban, and urban. It is important to understand what each means, to gain a better

understanding of how the school systems operate and the unique challenges and benefits that each possesses. For this work, only rural and urban schools are being examined because of the similar challenges that they face. Shown below is a chart that the Ohio Department of Education created in 2013 and amended in 2015 to show the classifications of various types of school districts in Ohio.

**Figure 1**

*2013 Ohio School District Typology Chart*

<b>2013 Typology Code</b>	<b>Major Grouping</b>	<b>Full Descriptor</b>	<b>Districts Within Typology</b>	<b>Students Within Typology</b>
1	Rural	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population	124	170,000
2	Rural	Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population	107	110,000
3	Small Town	Small Town - Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population	111	185,000
4	Small Town	Small Town - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	89	200,000
5	Suburban	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	77	320,000
6	Suburban	Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population	46	240,000
7	Urban	Urban - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population	47	210,000
8	Urban	Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population	8	200,000

*Note.* 2013 School Typology Chart from the Ohio Department of Education

On the web page “Typology of Ohio’s School Districts,” within the Ohio Department of Education website, one will discover the chart shown above as well as a spreadsheet that lists

every school district in the state, the county in which it is located, which category each belongs to, total enrollment (as of 2013), median income, the student poverty rate, and the percentage of minority students. According to the spreadsheet, Switzerland of Ohio Local School District is under typology code 1, which means that it has a high rate of student poverty and a small student population (Ohio Department of Education). Akron City Schools are under typology code 8, meaning that the district has a very high rate of student poverty and a very large student population (Ohio Department of Education). The spreadsheet also includes exemplar districts for each typology. Some exemplar districts for typology 1, such as Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools, are Georgetown Exempted Village, Ridgewood Local, Meigs Local, Hardin-Houston Local, and Pymatuning Valley Local (ODE). Some exemplar districts for typology 8, such as Akron City Schools, are Toledo City, Cincinnati City, Cleveland Municipal City, Dayton City, and Columbus City (ODE). Akron Public Schools have made many improvements since this spreadsheet was created in 2013, so it is possible that Akron Public Schools could be considered an exemplar district in 2021.

### **About Each Focus School District**

The two school districts being examined are different in many ways. Switzerland of Ohio Local School District is located in Monroe County, which is situated in Southeastern Ohio along the Ohio River. This expansive district is the largest in the state of Ohio by land area, covering over 450 square miles in Monroe County, and the district covers a small sliver of Noble County and Belmont County as well (U.S. Census Bureau). There are nine schools in the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District (National Center for Education Statistics). Besides personal experience, this district was chosen because it is located in one of the most rural and poorest areas of Ohio.

**Figure 2***Monroe County, Ohio*

*Note.* Map showing the location of Monroe County, home of Switzerland of Ohio Local School District; from *Birding in Ohio*.

One method that a school district can be analyzed is by looking at per-student spending. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2017-2018 school year, Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools spent \$15,842 per student. 52 percent was spent on instructional expenditures, 9 percent was for student and staff support, 14 percent was for administration, and 24 percent was for operations, food service, and other needs (National Center for Education Statistics). Like all public school districts, Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools receives its funding from federal, state, and local sources. Each district receives different percentages of their income from each source, which is another way that school districts can be compared and analyzed. Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools receives 6 percent of its funding from the federal government, 59 percent of its funding locally, and 35 percent from the state of



Ohio (National Center for Education Statistics). It is important to note that the percentage of locally sourced funding has exploded in the last few years due to the oil and gas industry moving into the county. Before this influx of funding from an outside industry, a much higher percentage of funding was sourced from the state.

The second school district being examined is Akron Public Schools. It is located in Summit County in Northeastern Ohio. Akron is the fifth largest city in Ohio, and Akron Public Schools operates 46 individual schools throughout the city. Akron Public Schools is a much larger district that serves a vastly different population than that of Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools. Akron Public schools was chosen because it is a large, urban district in one of Ohio's largest cities. Although Akron and its inhabitants are quite different than those of Monroe County, there are many similarities between the school systems and the struggles that each face.

**Figure 3**

*Summit County, Ohio*



*Note.* Map showing the location of Summit County, Ohio, where Akron Public Schools is located.

As listed above, per-student spending and other financial information is based on the 2017-2018 school year and is sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics. Akron public schools spent \$14,819 per student during the 2017-2018 school year, which is about one thousand dollars less than what Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools spend per student in the same time period. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Akron Public Schools spent 56 percent of their per-student funding on instructional expenditures, 36 percent on student and staff support, 13 percent on administration, and 18 percent on operations, food service, and other needs. Compared to Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools, Akron Public Schools spent similarly on per-student instructional expenditures and administration but spent a much higher percentage on student and staff support. Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools spent just 9 percent of the per-student expenditures on student and staff support, compared to 36 percent in Akron. Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools spent a higher percentage than Akron on operations, food service, and other needs. This is likely due to the fact that extensive busing is needed, given the expansive land area of the district.

### **Demographic Information**

The demographic information of a school district can help one understand some of the underlying reasons for a struggling or thriving school system. Many demographic factors affect the school systems, such as household income, average age of the population, the unemployment rate, and others, such as race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are not discussed in detail for this work, as this research prioritizes poverty and its consequences as a unifying bridge between rural and urban schools. Research on the relationship between race and ethnicity and poverty, while valuable, is outside the scope of this particular study. For this section, two Ohio school districts,

one rural and one urban, will be analyzed to show the backgrounds of the students in these school systems.

The first district to be examined demographically is Switzerland of Ohio Local School District in Monroe County. Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools covers the entirety of Monroe County, so this is where the demographic information is sourced from. Because schools in Ohio are funded in part by property taxes, as well as income taxes in some cases, the unemployment rate of a county or school district area can have a large impact on whether or not the citizens are willing to contribute to the school district by voting for the passage of levies. This practice was ruled unconstitutional over two decades ago, yet the system in Ohio has not changed (John, 2020, para. 2). According to Monique John, “The state was found to have failed to provide a thorough and efficient network of schools with common, equitable conditions and called for a systemic overhaul,” because Ohio relies too heavily on property taxes for funding (John, 2020, para. 2).

According to the Ohio Department of Job and Family services, the Office of Workforce Development, and the Bureau of Labor Market Information, the unemployment rate in Monroe County as of February 2021 is 7.8 percent. This places Monroe County at the seventh highest unemployment rate in the state of Ohio (2021). Just 47.5 percent of the total population participate in the civilian labor force (U.S. Census Bureau). Compared to more affluent areas of the state, the median household income and the per capita income are quite low. The median household income for Monroe County in 2019 was \$45,289. The per capita income for the same time period was just \$26,476 (U.S. Census Bureau). These dollar amounts are reflected similarly upon examination of the percentage of persons in poverty, which is 14 percent (U.S. Census Bureau). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 27.8 percent of families are

deemed to be below the poverty level based on their income, and 30.7 percent of families receive Food Stamp/SNAP benefits. On a positive note, though, the owner-occupied housing rate in Monroe County is 78.3 percent, which means that most families own their own home, rather than renting their place of residence (U.S. Census Bureau).

Another factor that can affect children's education is the level of education that parents received. Only about 12.5 percent of adults hold a bachelor's degree or higher, while about 89 percent of the adult population graduated from high school (U.S. Census Bureau). Perhaps the most staggering statistic found on Monroe County's Census Bureau page is that 97.6 percent of the population is white, meaning that all other races or ethnicities make up less than three percent of the total population. Students in the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District are therefore not able to experience diversity relating to race or language.

The next school district to be examined demographically is Akron Public Schools, located in Summit County in Northeastern Ohio. In urban areas, one will notice some surprising similarities with rural areas such as Monroe County, but there are also some notable differences that can drastically alter the living and educational experiences of children. The unemployment rate of Summit County in February 2021 was 6.2 percent, and for the city of Akron, it was 6.1 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Summit County, which has a similar unemployment rate to the city of Akron, places thirty-fifth in the state of Ohio, compared to Monroe County's seventh (Ohio Labor Market Information). In Akron, over 62 percent of adults participate in the civilian labor force, which is significantly higher than the rate of Monroe County.

The city of Akron struggles in the areas of median household income, per capita income, and persons in poverty even more than Monroe County does. The median household income in

Akron is just \$38,739 while the per capita income is a disappointing \$24,688 (U.S. Census Bureau). Another shocking revelation is that the rate of persons living in poverty is 23.5 percent in Akron, which is nearly 10 percent higher than the rate in Monroe County (U.S. Census Bureau). When examining the data posted on the National Center for Education Statistics website, it shows that 31.3 percent of families have an income that is considered to be below the poverty level, and that 48.6 percent of families receive Food Stamp/SNAP benefits. Without this statistical knowledge, one could make the incorrect assumption that Akron, one of the largest cities in Ohio which contains many well-known corporations, would have a lower poverty rate than a sparsely populated Appalachian county in Southeastern Ohio.

Unfortunately for the residents of Akron, the rate at which residents own their own homes is much lower than Monroe County, at 50.1% (U.S. Census Bureau). This means that the remaining half of the population rents or leases their living space and do not contribute to property taxes needed to fund the school system. It is also worth noting that the median value of owner-occupied housing units in Akron was \$82,400, compared to \$110,000 in Monroe County (U.S. Census Bureau).

Another way in which the city of Akron differs from Monroe County are the statistics for education of adults. While still not very high, 21.3 percent of adults in Akron earned a bachelor's degree or higher, nearly ten percent more than Monroe County. Akron's percentage of high school graduates is slightly lower, however, at 87 percent compared to 89.1 in Monroe County. Perhaps the biggest differences of all between Akron and Monroe County are that of the demographics relating to race and ethnicity. In Akron, 59.9 percent of the population is white, while 30.3 percent are African American, 4.6 percent are Asian, and 2.8 percent are Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau). This is a sharp contrast to Monroe County's rate of over 97 percent

white. From this data, one can assume that the students in Akron Public Schools receive more varied experiences and interactions with people of different races and ethnicities.

### **State Report Card Data**

One of the central aspects of the education system in Ohio of late is the school report card, established by the Ohio Legislature and operated by the Ohio Department of Education. Their rationale for the Report Card system is stated below.

Report Cards are designed to give parents, communities, educators and policymakers information about the performance of districts and schools—to celebrate success and identify areas for improvement. The information provides transparent reporting on student performance, drives local conversations on continuous improvement and identifies schools to receive intensive supports. The goal is to ensure high expectations and equitable outcomes for all Ohio’s students.

Neither Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools nor Akron Public Schools performed well on the School Report Cards. Data is sourced from the 2018-2019 school year, because that was the last full year of normal score reporting before the COVID-19 pandemic. The Report Card contains an overall letter grade (A-F) for the district and individual letter grades for six other categories, which are Achievement, Progress, Gap Closing, Graduation Rate, Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers, and Prepared for Success. The State Report Cards for each of the two focus districts are shown below.

Figure 4

*Akron City's Report Card*

## Ohio School Report Cards



## 2018 - 2019 Report Card for Akron City

**Achievement**

The Achievement Component represents whether student performance on state tests met established thresholds and how well students performed on tests overall. A new indicator measures chronic absenteeism.

**Performance Index**

56.0%.....D

**Indicators Met**

0.0%.....F



Component Grade

**Progress**

The Progress component looks closely at the growth that all students are making based on their past performances.

**Value-Added**

Overall.....F

Gifted.....F

Lowest 20% in Achievement.....F

Students with Disabilities.....F



Component Grade

**Gap Closing**

The Gap Closing component shows how well schools are meeting the performance expectations for our most vulnerable students in English language arts, math, graduation and English language proficiency.

**Annual Measurable Objectives**

72.9%.....C



Component Grade

**Graduation Rate**

The Graduation Rate component looks at the percent of students who are successfully finishing high school with a diploma in four or five years.

**Graduation Rates**

79.8 % of students graduated in 4 years.....D

79.9 % of students graduated in 5 years.....F



Component Grade

**Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers**

This component looks at how successful the school is at improving at-risk K-3 readers.

**Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers**

34.5%.....C



Component Grade

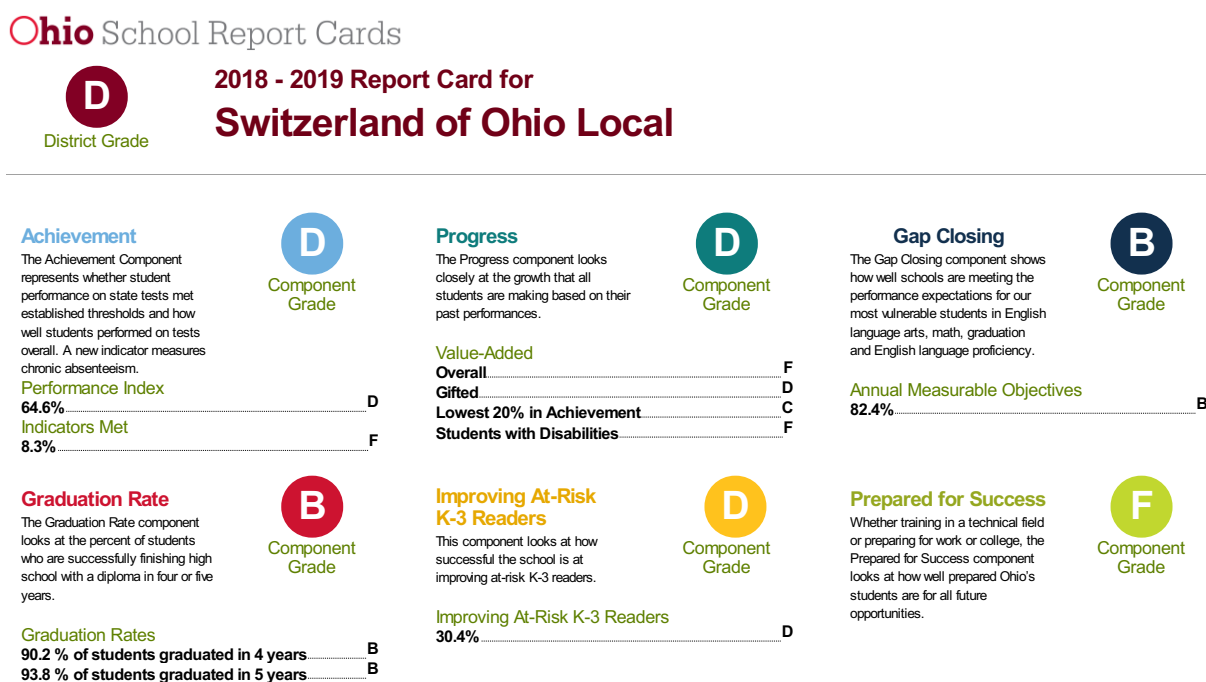
**Prepared for Success**

Whether training in a technical field or preparing for work or college, the Prepared for Success component looks at how well prepared Ohio's students are for all future opportunities.



Component Grade

Note. Akron City's Report Card from the Ohio Department of Education.

**Figure 5***Switzerland of Ohio Local's Report Card*

*Note.* Switzerland of Ohio Local's Report Card from the Ohio Department of Education.

Switzerland of Ohio Local School District and Akron Public Schools both received an overall grade of "D." They scored the same on Achievement and Prepared for Success. Achievement is based primarily on state test scores and Prepared for Success measures if students are ready to enter college or the workforce (Ohio Department of Education). Switzerland of Ohio Local scored slightly better on Progress and Gap Closing, earning a "D" and a "B," respectively, while Akron City received an "F" and a "C" in the same categories. According to the Ohio Department of Education, "The Progress component looks closely at the growth that all students are making based on their past performances" and Gap Closing measures if schools meet the expectations set for vulnerable students in areas such as language arts, math, graduation, and English language. Akron City scored slightly higher than Switzerland of Ohio Local on Improving At-Risk K-3 Readers, scoring a "C," while Switzerland of Ohio Local



scored a “D.” Finally, Switzerland of Ohio Local scored significantly better than Akron City on Graduation Rate, receiving a “B,” as opposed to Akron City’s “D.”

### **Effects on Schools and Learning in Rural and Urban Areas**

The demographic information examined above makes it clear that urban and rural school districts are more similar than one might expect. However, these similarities relating to the struggles and disadvantages has a common root: poverty. As shown above, high rates of poverty greatly impact both rural and urban areas in Ohio. Many other states face similar situations.

According to Diane Ravitch in “A New Era in Urban Education,” there are many contributing factors to the dismal state of urban education, but “worst among them is the spread of dense areas of poverty, where multiple social ills converge” (1998, para. 6). Ravitch goes on to state that the correlating effects of poverty, such as “poor health, inadequate housing, high crime rates, single-parent families, substance abuse—create an environment in which heroic efforts are necessary in order to sustain aspirations for the future and a willingness to work hard for delayed benefits” (1998, para. 6). These challenges that are commonly faced by students in urban areas are not commonly faced by students in wealthier suburban areas. When students are worried about where they will sleep, where their next meal will come from, or whether or not their family can afford medication, it is much harder for them to focus on their education.

Given these circumstances, one can also assume that the parents of these children are also more focused on survival than their child’s reading or math skills. In “Education and urban schools,” Cynthia Hudley, PhD, wonders if “families can support student achievement if they are able to lift their vision from a daily struggle for survival” (2013, para. 6). While some urban schools provide services to families such as health services and adult education, their main responsibility is to “provide a superior education to the children; if they don’t do it, no other

institution will,” according to Diane Ravitch (1998, para. 6). According to Pennsylvania State University, “many students have unstable family situations and little adult guidance,” and that “urban schools are notorious for low parental engagement and subsequently students are not incentivized to care about their academic achievement” (2017, para. 4). The issue of low parent engagement is not one of location. Socioeconomic status is the underlying issue with the lack of parental support for students. When parents work multiple jobs, raise children as a single parent, or are simply not supportive for other reasons, the children’s education and learning will suffer. As children get older and reach the end of high school and the beginning of college-age, their situation will likely not improve. According to The University of Pennsylvania, students in rural areas are told that “if they work hard they can achieve their dreams, yet college costs too much for their family, or their parents do not know where to acquire information about financial aid” (2017, para. 4). Children are much more likely to be placed in this type of predicament in urban and rural areas because of their increased poverty rates when compared to wealthier suburban areas.

The quality of education as well as educational opportunities are much fewer in urban and rural areas. As stated by Herzog and Pittman in “Home, Family, and Community: Ingredients in the Rural Education Equation,” rural schools employ “a younger, less well-educated faculty and administration who earn lower salaries and benefits than their metropolitan counterparts” (1995, p. 1). This problem also extends into urban schools as well. Teachers in high-poverty schools are often certified in other areas, rather than the one they are assigned to teach (Hudley 2013, para. 2). Cynthia Hudley states that “mathematics classes in high-poverty high schools are twice as likely to be taught by a teacher with a credential other than mathematics classes at low-poverty high schools,” and that “for science classes at high-poverty

high schools, teachers are three times as likely to be credentialed in areas other than science as those who teach science at low-poverty high schools” (2013, para. 2). This puts both the teachers and the students in an unfortunate position. Teachers who are forced to teach outside of their certification area will probably not be as effective, and students who take these classes may not receive as high of a quality education when compared to teachers instructing within their certification area.

One area in which rural schools struggle more than urban schools is with course offerings. According to Herzog and Pittman, due to smaller numbers of students and less funding, rural schools offer “fewer teachers and fewer advanced or specialized courses, thus putting rural students at a disadvantage” (1995, p. 8). Herzog and Pittman then reference a study regarding one rural high school with 190 students and one urban high school with 1,640 students. The highly populated urban high school offered 116 more courses than the rural one (Herzog and Pittman 1995, p. 8). In many rural districts, not a single student took an Advanced Placement (AP) exam, because there were no AP courses offered. This is also mentioned in “The Facts on Rural Schools,” when the author states “In low-wealth districts, schools are often unable to offer the diversity of course offerings found in wealthier counties, meaning that many students in these districts are unable to access advanced courses or electives that are important in developing college and career readiness” (2021, para. 12).

This is still the case today in many rural districts in the state of Ohio. Waterloo Local Schools, a rural district in northeast Ohio where I am currently student teaching, does not offer any Advanced Placement courses. There are very few AP courses offered at Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools, where I attended school. Part of this is because of low student populations. In small, rural schools, there simply are not enough students to support niche electives.

Administrators and teachers may feel that it is not worth it to create, plan, and implement an entire course for a handful of students. According to “The Facts on Rural Schools,” “Offering advanced coursework would require additional training or more teachers, something rural schools often cannot afford to fund” (2021). On the other hand, urban schools usually have a high enough student population to support more elective classes, if the budget allows.

Another issue that affects rural schools more than urban ones is the allocation of funding and resources based on student population or other unfair ways of measuring student need. Although rural schools make up half of all districts in the United States and educate one in five students, they receive just 17 percent of state education funding (“The Facts on Rural Schools,” 2021, para. 10). Programs like Title I may not provide as many resources to rural schools because of their funding formulas. The funding formula for Title I “emphasizes the number of students in poverty rather than the percentage of a school’s students that are in poverty” (2021, para. 10). Funding allocation such as grants may also not be taken advantage of by rural schools, because “many rural schools have a small staff that may not have the time or training to complete applications for competitive grants” (2021, para. 10).

Another frustrating reality is that “even when rural schools do receive grant money, if it is awarded based on student population size, the amount awarded may not be significant” (2021, para. 10). Last year, the Department of Education changed how districts should report how many of their students live in poverty (Green, 2020, para. 2). According to Erica L. Green in “Education Dept. to Cut Off Federal Funding for Some Rural Schools,” the government had been allocating funding based off how many students in a school district were provided free or reduced lunch. However, the Department of Education began requiring that districts report from the “Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates to determine whether 20

percent of their area's school-age children live below the poverty line" (2020, para. 3). For the past 17 years, schools that had been receiving supplementary funding based on the previous way of estimating poverty were cut off (Green, 2020, para. 4). Situations such as this are all too common in rural districts. Many students, teachers, and administrators in rural districts feel that they have been forgotten about as urban and inner-city districts receive much more supplementary funding and attention from state and federal departments of education as well as attention in the media.

### **Personal Reflection**

The two focus districts both have a strong personal connection attached to them. From kindergarten to twelfth grade, I attended school within the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District. I know rural education firsthand, and I experienced many of the struggles described above. My elementary school had approximately 25 students per grade level, and my graduating class, when combined with the other elementary schools, was just 75 students. Until recently, financial and infrastructure problems plagued the district. Before the 2010s, none of the eight school buildings had air conditioning. The newest one was built in the 1960s. Air conditioning was the least of our concerns, though, when some school buildings were condemned and had major structural problems that could endanger students and teachers. During the decades long struggle to pass a levy, a [YouTube video](#) was created that documented the deplorable conditions of various school buildings in the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District. The video consists mainly of photographs showing water damage, structural issues, and poorly maintained facilities in the district's schools. This was done in an effort to convince the public to pass a levy (2009).

Besides the condition of the facilities, we did not have many educational opportunities. In middle and junior high school, there were no electives or advanced classes of any kind. There

was no foreign language, computer skills class, or art class. Our art instruction was “free drawing” on occasional Fridays at the end of science class. Even the core subjects were not taught to their fullest. Because we had very few computers and no lab at all, science class consisted mostly of worksheets and outlining the chapter. Our music class, which alternated days with physical education, was held on the stage of our half-size gymnasium because there was no music room. Middle school band practiced in the cafeteria because there was no band room. Junior high band students were bused to the high school for band instruction for the last 40 minutes of the day. There was a talented and gifted class, however, that I had the pleasure of participating in. We were pulled from our regular instruction for one day a week and spent the day at the high school with a different instructor.

Once a levy to build new schools finally passed in 2009, the district was finally brought into the twenty-first century. However, problems still lingered. Class offerings were still very low, and the district quickly plunged into a financial emergency. An emergency levy failed in 2013. Many teachers, and what little electives were offered, were cut. Thankfully, Switzerland of Ohio Local School District no longer has any financial worries because of the revenue brought in by the oil and gas industry that is thriving in Monroe County and other parts of Southeastern Ohio. In fact, Switzerland of Ohio Local Schools has become one of the wealthiest, if not the wealthiest district in the state. Although the financial problems have been solved, other problems and struggles still remain.

The newfound wealth of the school district does not apply to the population of Monroe County, in most cases. Many people in Monroe County are affected by poverty. As discussed earlier, poverty inhibits education because students and families are forced to worry about money, affording food, or their living situation rather than their education. Older students may

not have time to complete homework or catch up on schoolwork at home because they work to support their family or have to babysit multiple siblings. In this area, education is not highly valued. In many cases, parents and families do not want their children to go away to college due to the perceived costs, or simply the fear of their child being in an unfamiliar place. Many students are discouraged from dreaming big when it comes to college education and are instead encouraged to attend a local community college, if at all.

My first experience with Akron Public Schools came as a freshman in college. As one of the few students in my high school graduating class to attend college outside of the Ohio Valley, I was able to gain experience in a new place that many others were not. I have completed over 20 field hours at schools in Akron such as Firestone High School, Leggett Community Learning Center, and Helen Arnold Community Learning Center. There are notable similarities and differences from the schools I attended. The first difference I noticed when visiting schools in Akron was the size and newness of the school buildings. Rural districts can only dream of constructing such buildings. Another major difference is the diversity of the student body and the teachers. At Switzerland of Ohio Local, nearly every student and teacher are white, except for a student or two in each building who have a different racial or ethnic background. One more difference between the two districts are the extensive course offerings at Akron Public Schools and the supports given to students and families. The main similarity I noticed between the two districts is poverty, which is reflected in the demographic information described previously.

### **Conclusion**

By examining the demographic information, state report card data, and personal experience, it is clear that urban school districts and rural school districts both share the consequences of poverty in teaching and learning. When comparing demographic information to

student success within urban and rural districts, it becomes evident that poverty has much more of an effect than location. However, not all is similar. Both urban and rural school districts have their own strong suits and benefits, but they also face unique, individual challenges and hardships that still have not been overcome. After completing this research and reflecting on my personal experiences, I would recommend that all prospective teachers conduct research on urban and rural education. The similarities are noticeable, but each has its own challenges. Teacher preparation programs should focus more on the issues presented in this work. Too often, prospective teachers only experience wealthy suburban schools. This is unfortunate as education majors, our nation's future teachers, can best learn challenges associated with the impact of poverty on youth and families when placed in urban and rural districts.



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