

2023



COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING[®]
CONFERENCE

Rural Illinois: Nurturing Rural Roots, Fostering College Futures





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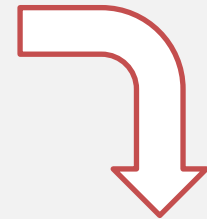
BALAS in Neuroscience &
Sociology (Exp. 2024)

*Presentation developed with guidance from:
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Assistant Professor, School of ACES*

A gravel path leads from the bottom center towards a dense forested mountain in the background. The path is flanked on both sides by tall, green corn plants with yellow tassels. The background features a steep, forested mountain with some rocky outcrops visible at the top.

Rural is not a monolith

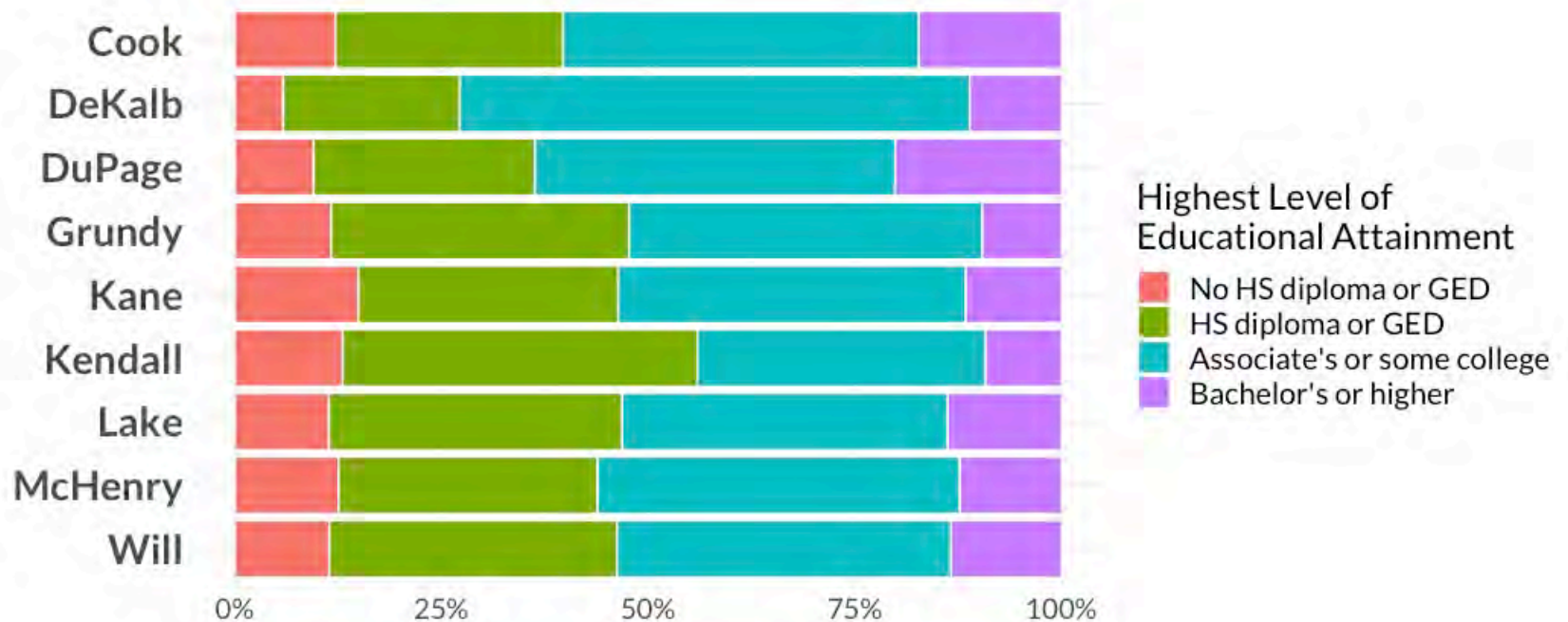
“Policymakers, researchers, and politicians define ‘rural’ in a ‘dizzying’ number of ways” (Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, 2019)



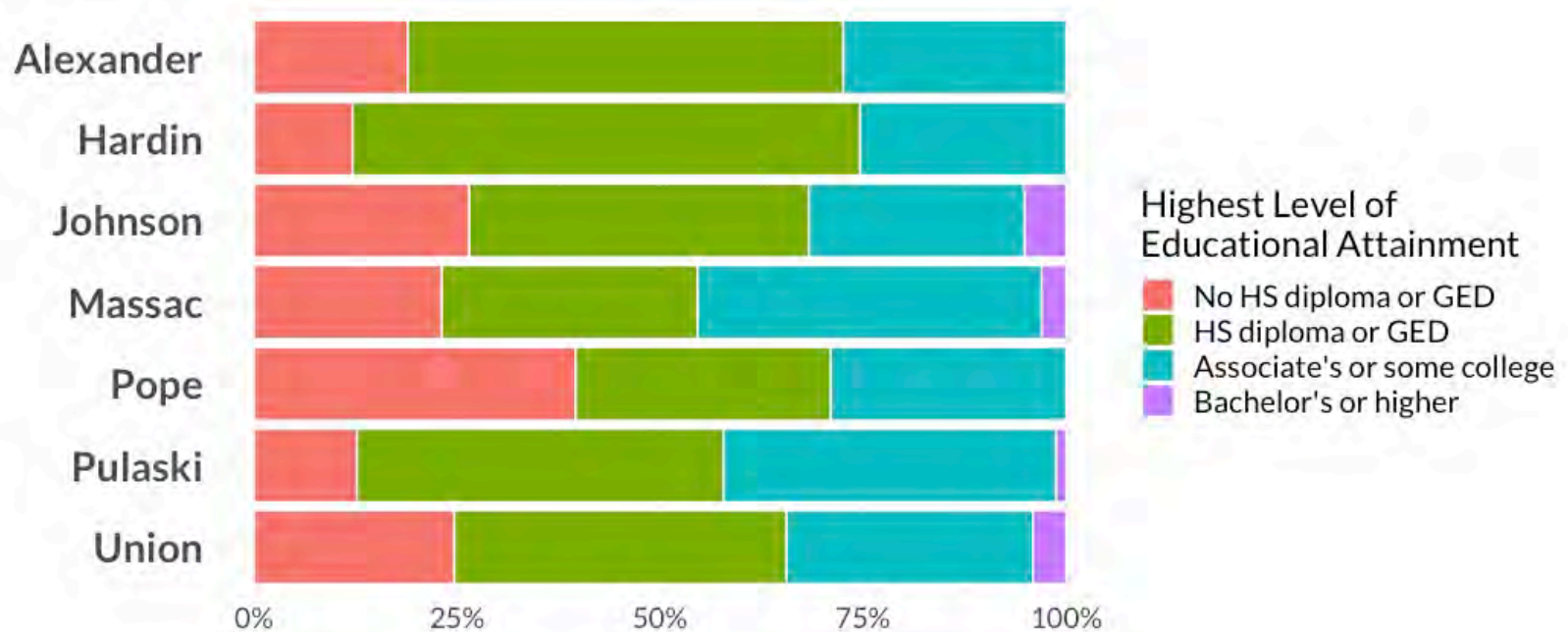
Most metrics define rurality via two variables:

- a. Population
- b. Distance from an urbanized area

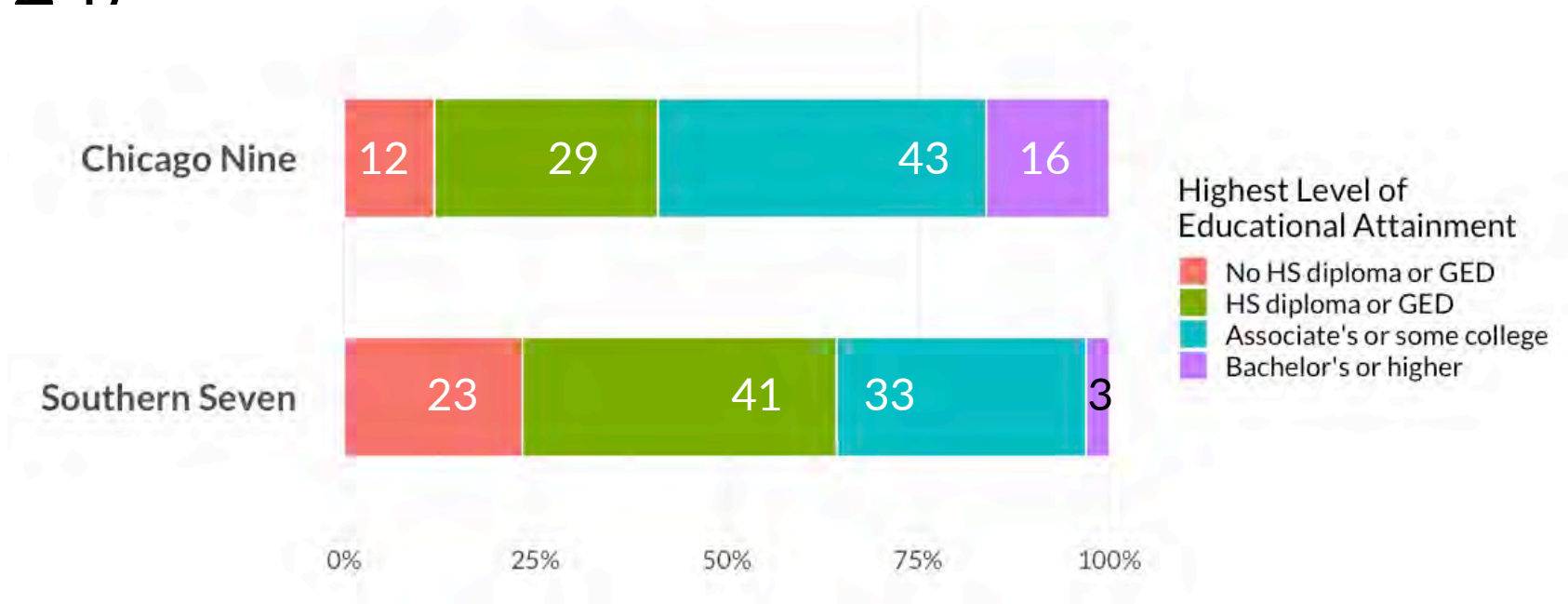
Educational Attainment of “Chicago Nine” Residents (ages 18-24)



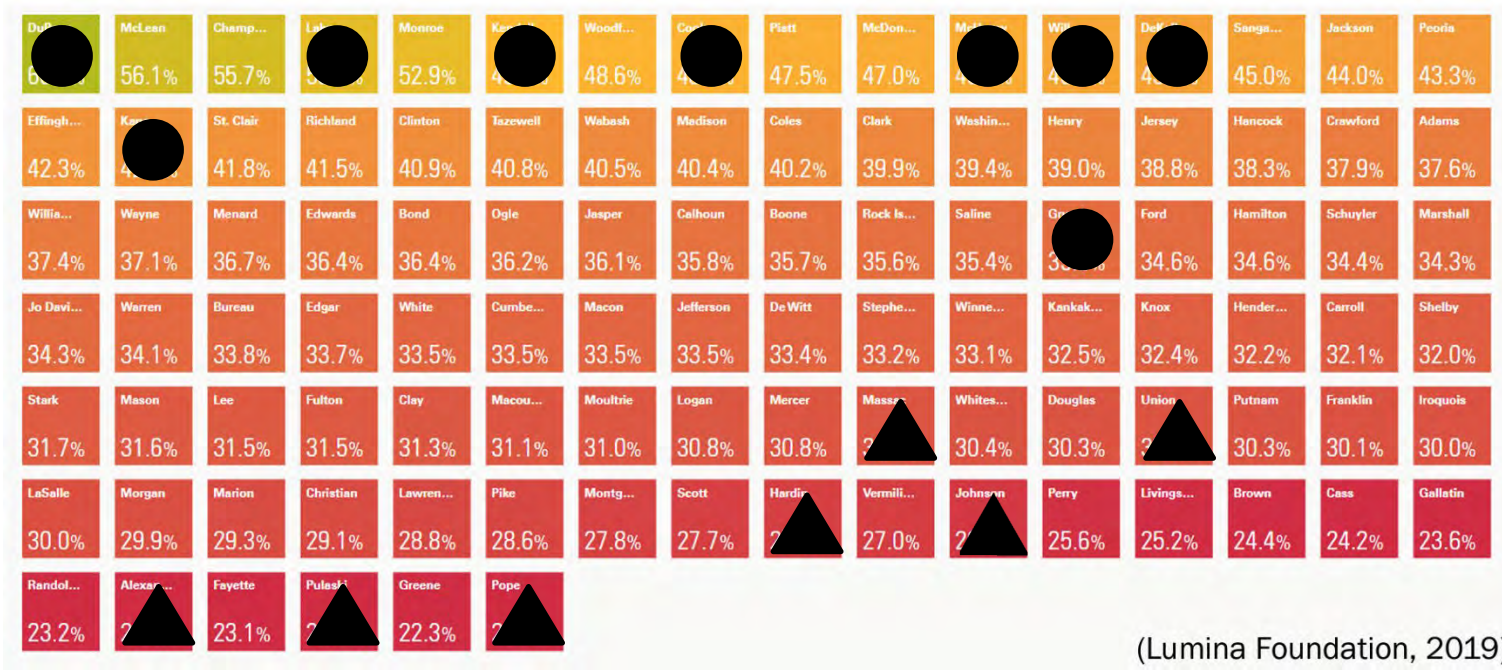
Educational Attainment of “Southern Seven” Residents (ages 18-24)



Educational Attainment of “Chicago Nine” and “Southern Seven” Residents (ages 18-24)



Associate's Degree or Higher: County Percentages



● = Chicago Nine

▲ = Southern Seven



Rural students in Illinois are “significantly more likely to be in the lowest income bracket” and possess more student loan debt than their non-rural counterparts (PCC, 2019, p. 4).



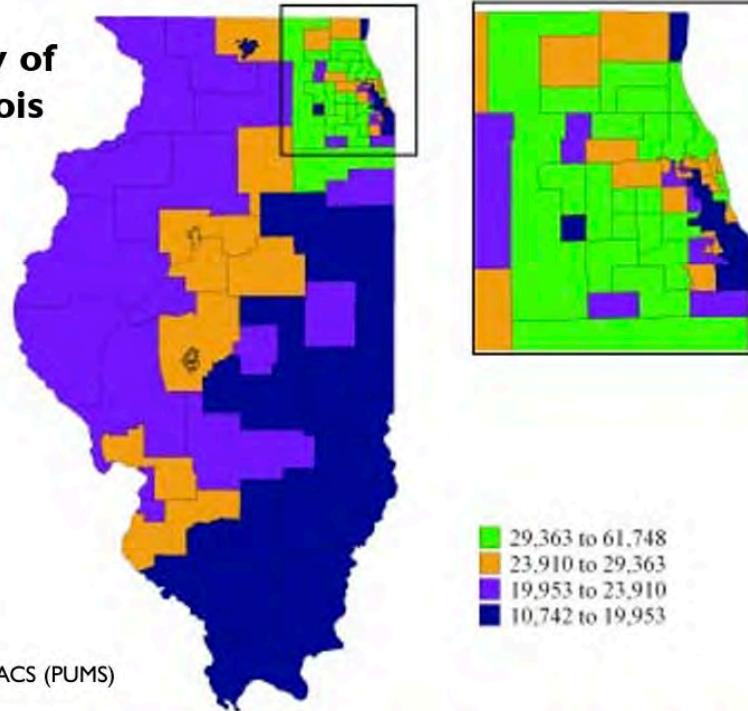
Rural citizens of Color are half as likely to have a Bachelor’s degree compared to rural White residents (Marre, 2017).



Rural parents are more likely to possess only a high school diploma and expect lower rates of educational attainment from their children than non-rural parents (McCulloh, 2022).

Regional wealth inequities

The Geography of Wealth in Illinois



Source: 2006 ACS (PUMS)

Figure 2. Personal income per capita, 2006 (Public Use Microdata Areas). While Illinois is considered a wealthy state, there are vast regional disparities.

Background

I grew up on the Mississippi River in Chester, IL. Prison inmates consist of **half** of the town's **~7,600** population.

The most popular job industries are coal mining, factory work, and the prison system.





Opportunity adjacency

“You don’t know what you don’t know”

Rural students must drive farther distances than non-rural students to reach the closest college (Byun et al., 2012).

Rural students that are also of Color, first-generation, and/or low-income can have different experiences tied to those respective identities than their non-rural counterparts.

Past precedent & college- going culture

- Fewer adults in the community have college degrees
 - Less exposure to the concept of higher education for rural children
- Forced to be pioneers when applying for and attending college
- Community and familial support issues
 - Post graduation employment opportunities

College readiness

- Quality of high school education
 - Underfunded school districts
 - Little/no access to AP or IB programs
 - Teacher and principal turnover
 - SAT/ACT prep





Retention

The culture shock rural students experience once arriving to campus is seldom spoken about, leaving these students to suffer silently as a result.

Rural college students **are retained at lower rates** than their non-rural counterparts (McCulloh, 2022).



Recruitment challenges

Recruiters don't make the trek out, and rural students don't make the trek in. If recruiters do make it out, the “outsider dilemma” poses an additional obstacle.

Rural schools are considered “low-yield”, and sparsely populated areas generate less statistical power.

As a result, rural recruitment efforts often require a greater investment, funding and labor wise, but with less of a return than lower energy efforts targeted at non-rural areas.

RASI's mission:



to not only support UIUC students from rural areas as they navigate the transition to higher education, but also provide resources to rural high school students interested in pursuing higher education



The Liaison Program

is a grassroots effort that aims to mitigate the unique financial, academic, and cultural challenges faced by rural high school students.

As alumni of their respective high schools, RASI members know better than anyone how best to serve the students of their area.

Resources

curated by rural college students,
for rural high school students



<https://www.ruralareastudentinitiative.com>

- Application
- Mentorship
- Planning
- ACT
- SAT

In summary...

Rural students, especially those that are underrepresented in more ways than one, require unique solutions that acknowledge the ways in which their rural identity shapes their academic and cultural challenges.

Questions?



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