



Rural Illinois: Nurturing Rural Roots, Fostering College Futures

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Introduction

Presenter Introductions

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(Exp. 2024)

Agenda

1. Speaker Introductions
2. Geographic disparities in educational attainment and economic mobility
3. What does it mean to be “rural?”
4. Navigating challenges: Rural students' experiences and policy support
5. Spotlight on RASI



Purpose

Rural residents in Illinois face disparities in postsecondary educational attainment and workforce participation. The purpose of our presentation is to shed light on the challenges that rural students face in the high-school-to-college transition, and to consider mechanisms to better recruit, support, and retain Illinois college students from rural areas.

Geographic Disparities in Illinois: Educational Attainment and Economic Mobility



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).



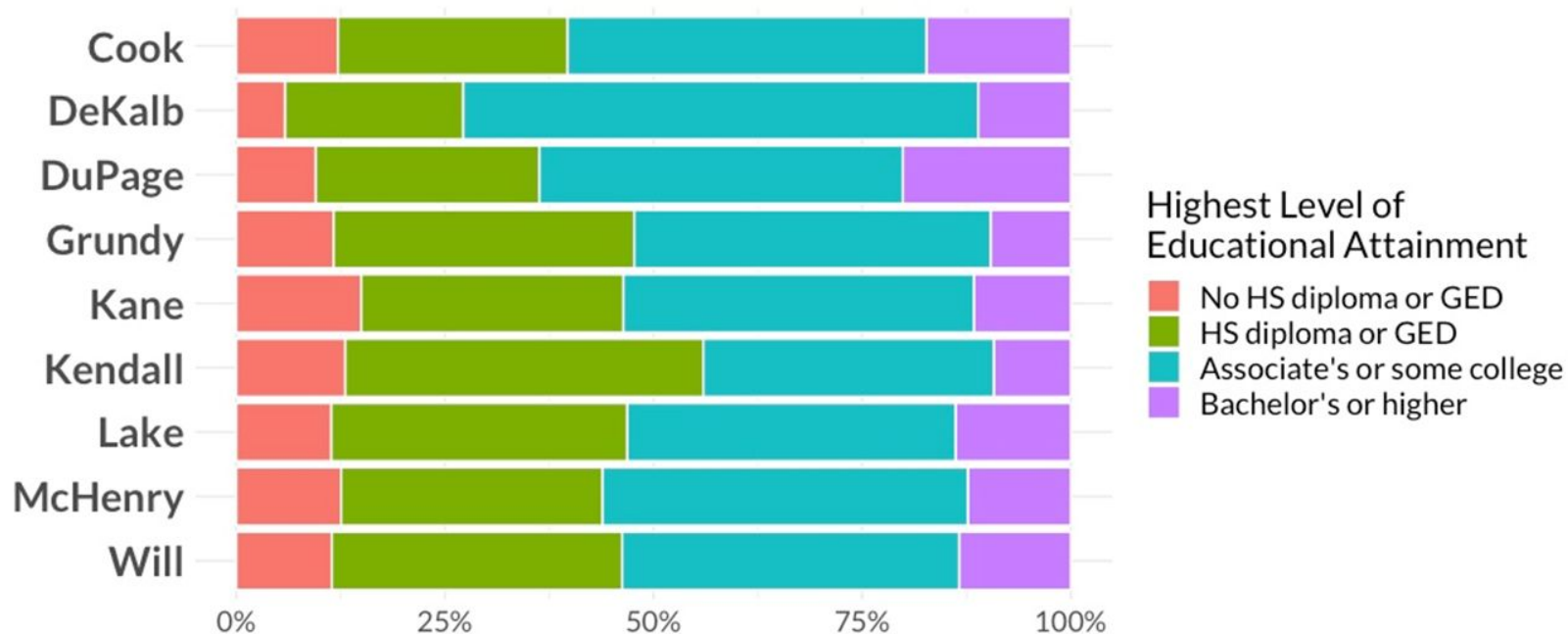
Rural parents are more likely to possess *only* a high school diploma and expect lower rates of educational attainment from their children than non-rural parents (McCulloh, 2022).

Associate's Degree or Higher Attainment by IL County

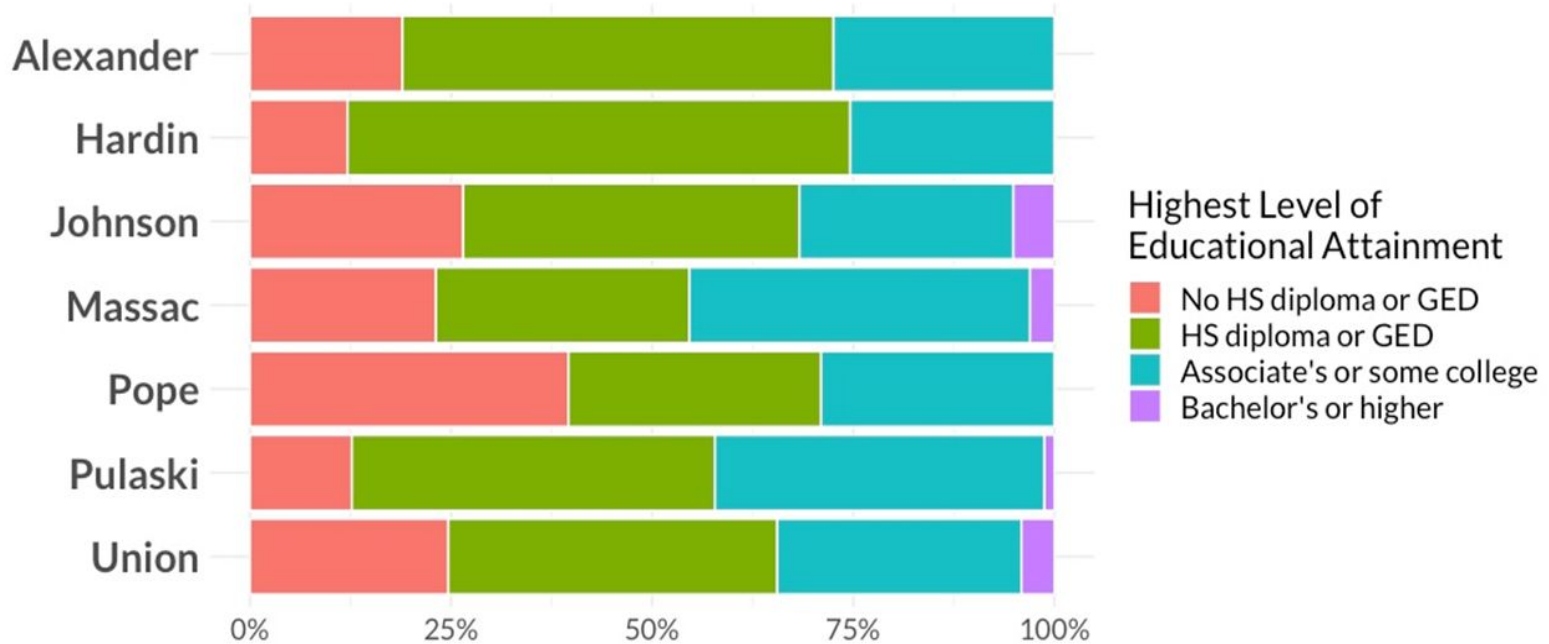
DuPage	McLean	Champ...	Lake	Monroe	Kendall	Woodf...	Cook	Piatt	McDon...	McHenry	Will	DeKalb	Sange...	Jackson	Peoria
60.1%	56.1%	55.7%	53.5%	52.9%	49.6%	48.6%	48.5%	47.5%	47.0%	46.9%	45.6%	45.1%	45.0%	44.0%	43.3%
Effingh...	Kane	St. Clair	Richland	Clinton	Iazewell	Wabash	Madison	Coles	Clark	Washin...	Henry	Jersey	Hancock	Crawford	Adams
42.3%	42.2%	41.8%	41.5%	40.9%	40.8%	40.5%	40.4%	40.2%	39.9%	39.4%	39.0%	38.8%	38.3%	37.9%	37.6%
Willia...	Wayne	Menard	Edwards	Bond	Ogle	Jasper	Calhoun	Boone	Rock Is...	Saline	Grundy	Ford	Hamilton	Schuyler	Marshall
37.4%	37.1%	36.7%	36.4%	36.4%	36.2%	36.1%	35.8%	35.7%	35.6%	35.4%	35.0%	34.6%	34.6%	34.4%	34.3%
Jo Davi...	Warren	Bureau	Edgar	White	Cumbe...	Macon	Jefferson	De Witt	Stephe...	Winne...	Kankak...	Knox	Hender...	Carroll	Shelby
34.3%	34.1%	33.8%	33.7%	33.5%	33.5%	33.5%	33.5%	33.4%	33.2%	33.1%	32.5%	32.4%	32.2%	32.1%	32.0%
Stark	Mason	Lee	Fulton	Clay	Macon...	Moultrie	Logan	Mercer	Massac	Whites...	Douglas	Union	Putnam	Franklin	Iroquois
31.7%	31.6%	31.5%	31.5%	31.3%	31.1%	31.0%	30.8%	30.8%	30.5%	30.4%	30.3%	30.3%	30.3%	30.1%	30.0%
LaSalle	Morgan	Marion	Christian	Lawren...	Pike	Montg...	Scott	Hardin	Vermili...	Johnson	Perry	Livings...	Brown	Cass	Gallatin
30.0%	29.9%	29.3%	29.1%	28.8%	28.6%	27.8%	27.7%	27.4%	27.0%	26.4%	25.6%	25.2%	24.4%	24.2%	23.6%
Randol...	Alexan...	Fayette	Pulaski	Greene	Pope										
23.2%	23.1%	23.1%	22.6%	22.3%	21.5%										

(Lumina Foundation, 2019)

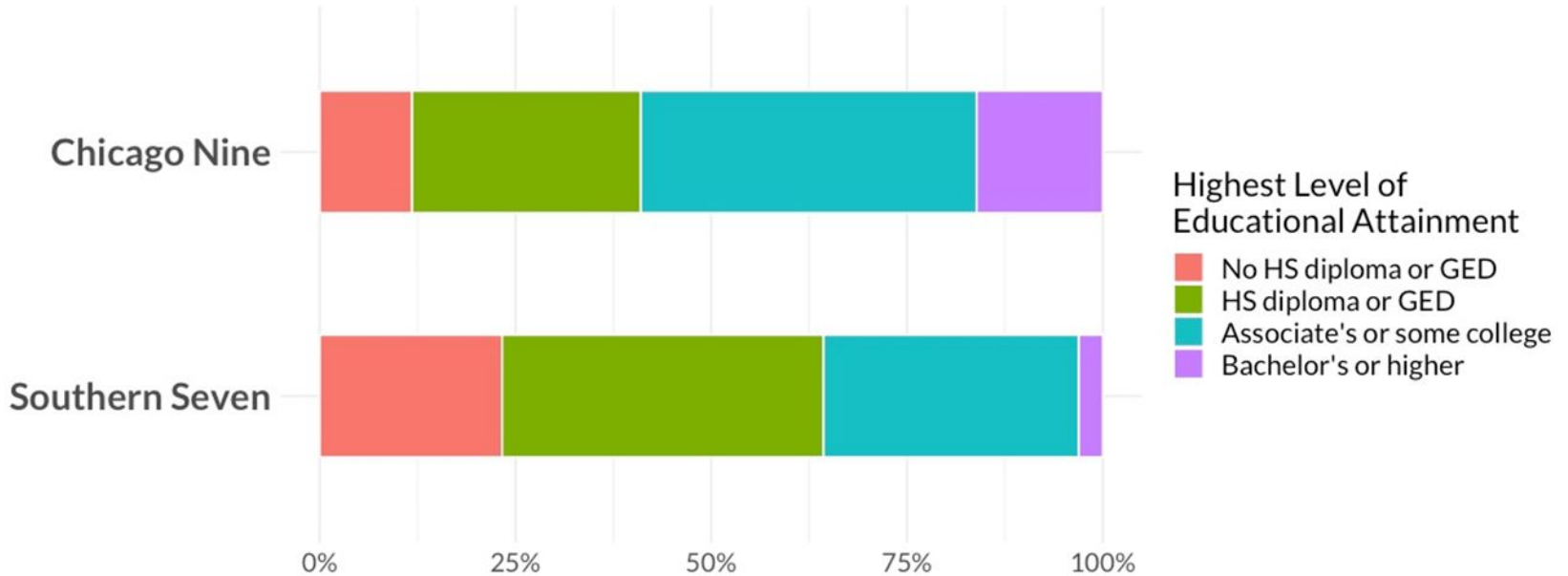
Educational Attainment in “Chicago 9” (ages 18-24)



Educational Attainment in “Southern 7” (ages 18-24)



Educational Attainment in “Chicago 9” & “Southern 7” (ages 18-24)



Associate's Degree or Higher Attainment by IL County



● = Chicago Nine

▲ = Southern Seven

(Lumina Foundation, 2019)

Defining Rurality

“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

Defining Rural

- The two most commonly used definitions of rurality come from the United States Census and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- The 2010 Census uses population-based criteria to define rurality as **any “population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.”** (United States Census Bureau, 2021, para. 2)
- Urban areas, in this case, consist of **a densely settled core of 50,000 people (2,500-49,999 for an urban cluster) along with “adjacent territory containing non-residential urban land use”** (United States Census Bureau, 2021a10, para 2).

Rural Illinois

12.6 million

Number of Illinois residents, total.

1.1 million

Number of Illinois residents, rural.

102

Number of Illinois counties, total.

62

Number of Illinois counties, rural.

What Does It Mean to be “Rural”?

Background

Liz grew up on the Missouri border in Chester, Illinois.

The most largest employers in my area are the coal mines, factories, and prisons.

In fact, **half** of the town's **7,000-person population** consists of prison inmates.



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

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.

College Readiness Challenges



- Underfunded school districts
- Little to no access to AP/IB programs
- High teacher and principal turnover
- Lack of dedicated SAT & ACT prep
- College advising gaps

Navigating Challenges: Rural Students' Experiences and Policy Support

Retention

The **campus culture shock** rural students experience is seldom spoken about, leaving many to struggle silently as a result.

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



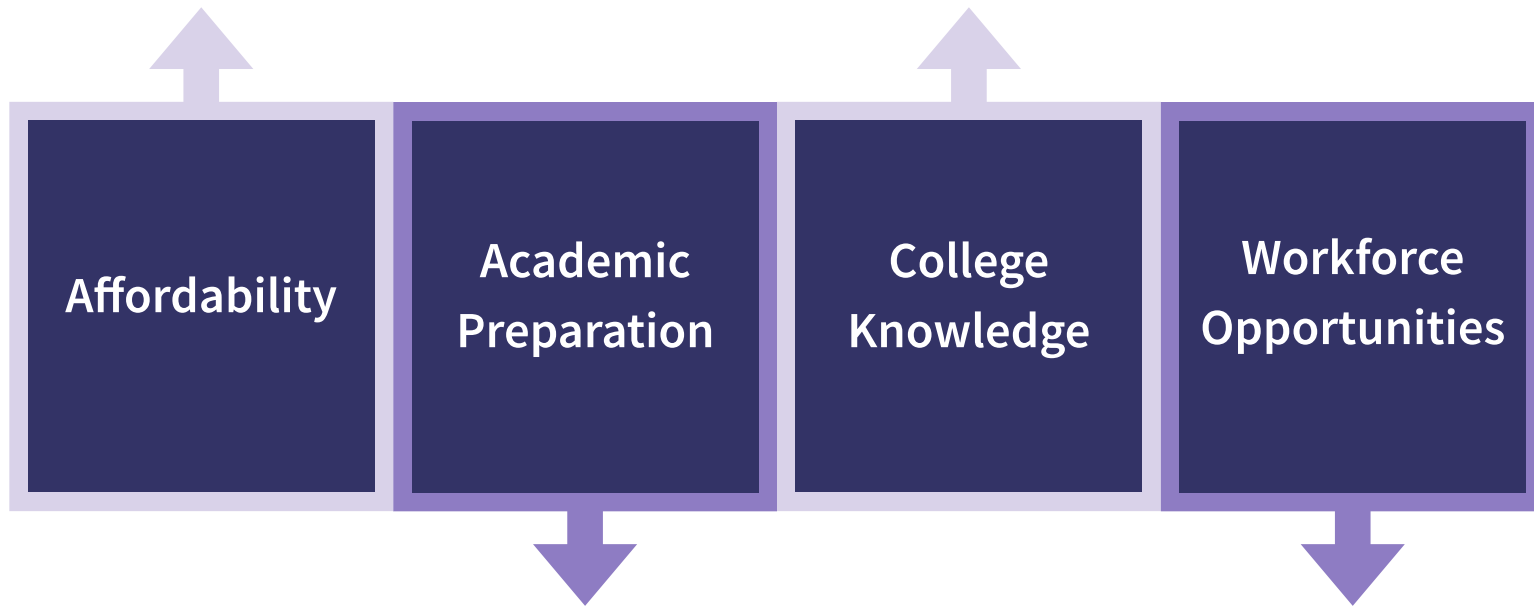
Recruitment Challenges

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** but with less of a return than lower energy efforts targeted at non-rural areas.

Four Pillars of Policy Support



Spotlight on RASI

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

The Liaison Program is a grassroots initiative that aims to mitigate the unique **financial, academic, and cultural challenges** faced by rural high school students.



Awareness to Action



- Nurturing rural learners from cradle to career
- Intersectional and targeted policy approaches
- Institutional (HS, 2-and 4-year) collaborations
- Leveraging community knowledge - asset-based thinking

Questions & Contact

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