

**Issue 9 – Rural Georgia: It Matters, A Lot!**

**Issue Overview**

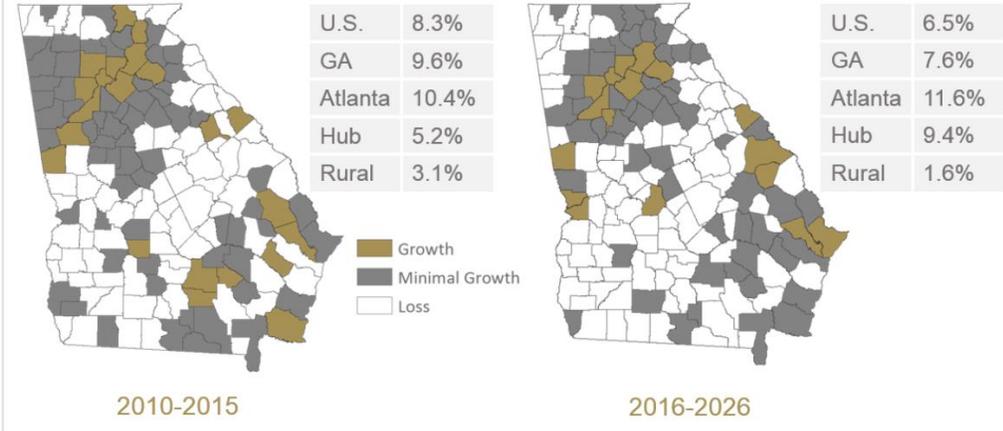
Rural Georgia matters. Supporting rural communities has been a growing concern in Georgia and across the nation in recent years. These areas have fallen behind the growth and prosperity of more urban areas. In 2016, 30.9% of Georgia’s schools were classified as rural.

Many parts of rural Georgia are in a precarious situation as populations shrink and change, and economic sectors of longstanding significance decline or, in some cases, disappear. Rural education, a crucial sector in any thriving community, is also facing increasing challenges. How Georgia responds to this current decline in many of the state’s rural communities will impact not only the lives of the citizens living there, but the economic future of the state as a whole.

**Significance for Georgia**

To frame the current situation for rural education in Georgia, it is important to understand the broader rural context and its effects on the educational sector. Issues such as health and access to health care, economic distress, and funding strategies all impact educational outcomes for students living in rural areas.

**Job Growth in Georgia**



While rural districts have been seeing an increase in students requiring greater supports to achieve academically, state funding for education has decreased, increasing the financial responsibilities of local government in recent years.

**Action Steps for Georgia**

Georgia is home to the third largest absolute rural student enrollment in the United States – almost 380,000 students. The future of Georgia depends on these students becoming successful, productive adults. To address some of the inequities that plague rural Georgia, the state has begun some important initiatives that focus on their unique and significant needs.

For Georgia to thrive, focus on rural development must continue. It represents a good start and is indicative of the attention and commitment that Georgia has to its rural citizens. That commitment must continue and, importantly, it must move beyond the study stage to the action stage. Any intervention supporting rural Georgia must be built on the understanding that in smaller communities, every sector is tied together more tightly than in urban or suburban communities. Thus, cross-sector collaboration and alignment is critical, as each sector immediately affects the others.