

# The Implementation of Special Education Services in Rural Versus Urban Public School Districts

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## Abstract

The implementation of special education services was compared between rural and urban public schools in the United States. To answer this question, existing laws and policies were evaluated and analyzed, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), among others. Interviews were conducted with rural and urban families and educators who are involved in special education. Interviews were used to gain personal experience and opinions on SPED implementation. The literature collected includes information surrounding the history of special education, other laws and policies that protect the rights of students with disabilities, the services provided in urban and rural public schools and their limitations, special education teacher preparation, and the relationship between special education and race. Findings from this research showed that there are few differences between rural and urban schools, with the main difference being the amount of funding the two regions receive. There has been great progress in special education, but more improvements can be made.

## Background Information

Early special education history began with an era of institutionalization where individuals suspected of having a disability were sent to asylums. These asylums were created to protect society. School managers were allowed to expel students who they felt to be undesirable, immoral, and economically unnecessary to the community. It was not until 1900 that state laws began to be passed. Federal action began in 1930 with advocacy evidence and the first federal law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, was passed in 1990.

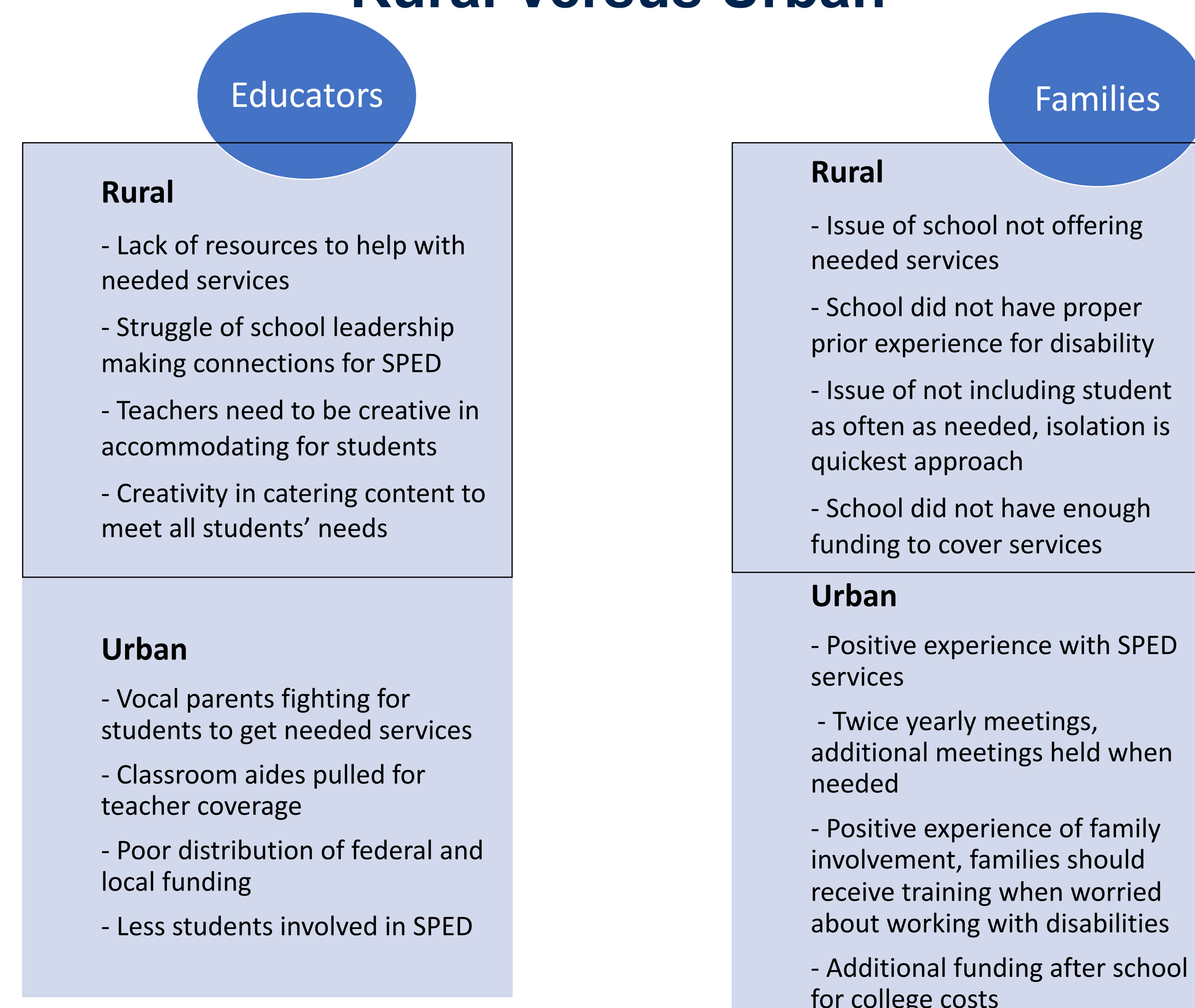
## SPED Federal Laws

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973)	Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975)	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990)	No Child Left Behind (2002-2015)
Restricted discrimination against any person with a physical handicap.	No person with a handicap can be excluded from school activities	Federally funded schools must provide access to SPED services	Adaptation of the EHA but with person-first characterization	Federal grants issued based on standardized test performance levels

## Interviews

Interviews were conducted with both rural and urban educators and families whose child(ren) were under IEPs. A special education coordinator was also interviewed to provide further background and expertise to the research. Participants were voluntary and answered specific sets of questions relating to their role in special education.

## Rural Versus Urban



## SPED Coordinator

Teachers and parents need to be more informed to ensure students are getting their needed services

Teachers must also act as advocates for their students. Advocates are available but can be expensive or have long waitlists

Implementation is dependent on regions, districts and how much funding areas receive

## Teacher Preparation

It is the responsibility of special education teachers, school staff, and administrators to ensure students with disabilities are benefitting. Special education administrators are obligated to provide equitable education for students with disabilities. Providing a strong educational foundation, including resources and knowledge, benefits both students with disabilities and their educators. Teachers have improved their responsibility in special education. Technology has played a large role in service implementation to aid students with basic material. Both rural and urban school districts experience limitations to technological access, forcing schools to accommodate a nontechnological approach to learning. There is a balance between too much reliance on technology and not enough. Issues of teachers relying too heavily on technology typically imply that teachers have not fully prepared to work with students with special needs. There are also issues with teachers not using technology to its fullest potential, due to traditional approaches.

## Race

Minority students with disabilities have significantly lower academic performance levels. Not only do students with disabilities have lower graduation rates, but race and ethnicity also contribute more to these rates. Racial discrimination is evident in numerous societal issues. In education, and more so in special education, more Black students are enrolled in special education programs or receiving more accommodations than their white counterparts. Students with disabilities are more likely to experience cases of racism and ableism in both rural and urban public schools. Black students who suffer from behavioral disabilities are more susceptible to suspensions due to their actions being perceived as more vicious or aggressive than white students.

## Findings

Overall findings from this study showed what prevents special education services from being implemented. There are minimal differences between rural and urban public schools with some differences being funding for needed services, the lack of teachers in the field, how often students are sent for interventions or diagnosis, district resources, and connections with higher education or the community. Districts in certain areas, mostly rural, struggle to provide teachers with what they need causing them to leave the district. Existing prejudice leads to disadvantages for minority students in special education. There has been a great amount of progress made in special education but there is still more to go. The next steps should focus on inclusion in the classroom, race, funding, and teacher preparation.

## Rural

## Urban

