The primary goal of this paper is to provide detailed information about local patterns of achievement in rural communities. Questions that we address specifically include:

1. Do students from a given racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, or gender background achieve or grow at higher or lower levels in rural versus non-rural districts?
2. Are rural/nonrural differences in achievement and growth accounted for by community socioeconomic status?
3. Among rural school districts, are there systemic regional differences in student achievement and growth? The regional differences we consider are: region of the country, relative geographic isolation, and type of local economy.
4. If there are regional differences in student achievement and growth, are these differences accounted for by demographic factors such as community socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic composition?
5. Finally, do communities factors such as school, health, and social resources explain regional differences in student achievement and growth?

We use 350 million standardized test scores, including test scores from over 6,000 rural school districts, to describe educational opportunity in rural America. While we find modest differences in outcomes between rural and non-rural students overall, these disparities are larger for socioeconomic and racial/ethnic subgroups. We also find that the relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement is less dramatic in rural areas compared to non-rural areas. Variation in 3rd grade achievement and growth rates is considerable among rural districts, indicating that rates of early and middle childhood educational opportunity are not evenly distributed throughout rural America.

The primary data source for this paper is the Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA, version 3.0), which reports nationally standardized measures of student achievement for nearly all schools and districts in the U.S., including measures disaggregated by student race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic subgroup. SEDA assessment data is drawn from the EDFacts database at the U.S. Department of Education; achievement score estimates are linked to a common scale using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math and reading scores, enabling comparisons of achievement scores across the nation.