

# PTAC/PDE Equity and Inclusion Initiative Survey Comparisons: Rural, Suburban, Urban Teachers



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## Survey Notes

N = 176 Rural

N = 307 Suburban

N = 489 Urban

All respondents indicated that they are current classroom teachers who work with students in Pennsylvania public schools.

## Grade Levels Taught by Respondents (some teach more than one level)

Pre-K = 20

Primary (K-2) = 216

Intermediate (3-5) = 291

Middle School (6-8) = 387

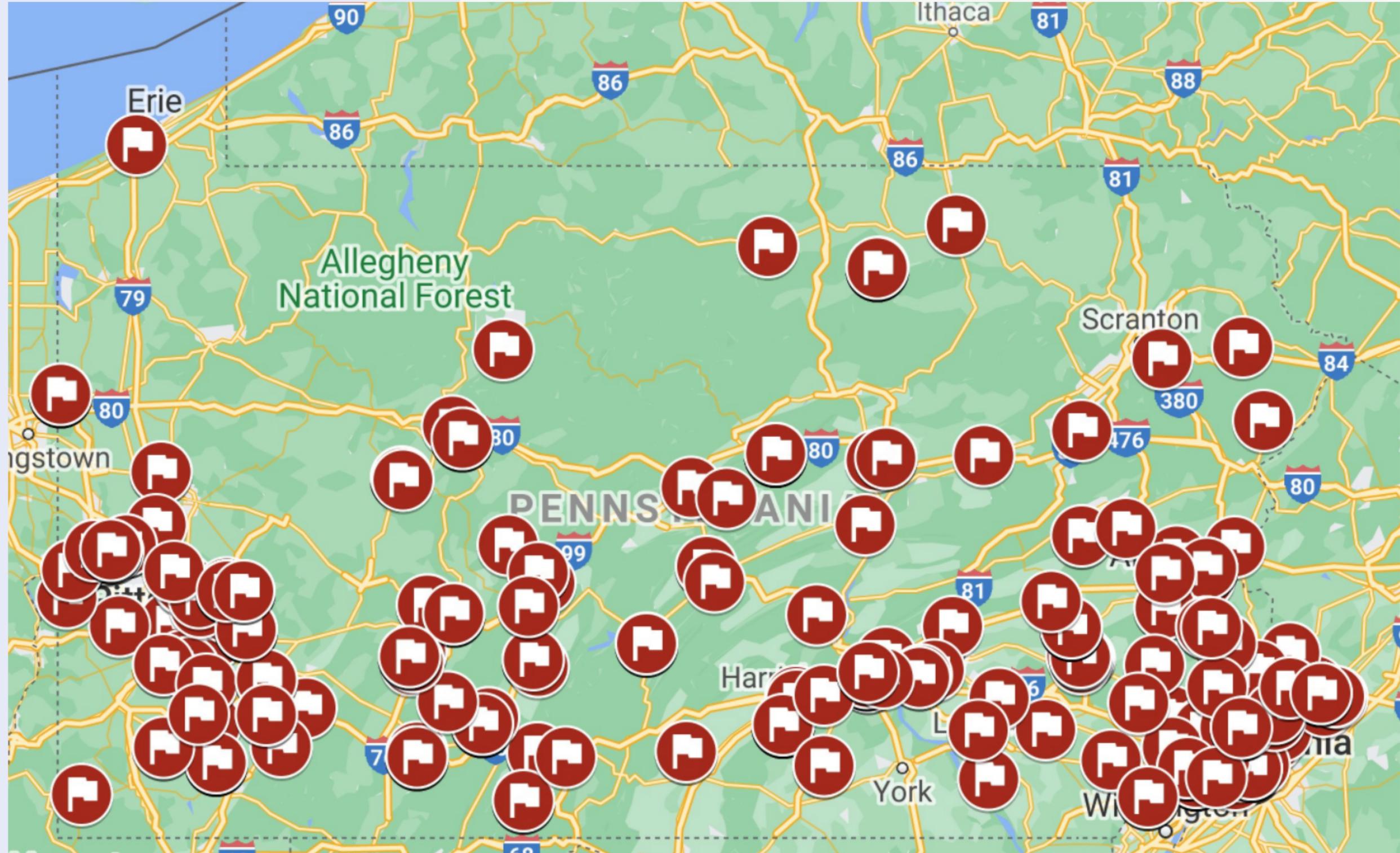
High School (9-12) = 289

## PA Department of Education Equity Definition

"Every student having access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, family background and/or family income."



# Map of LEAs Represented by Combined Survey Data

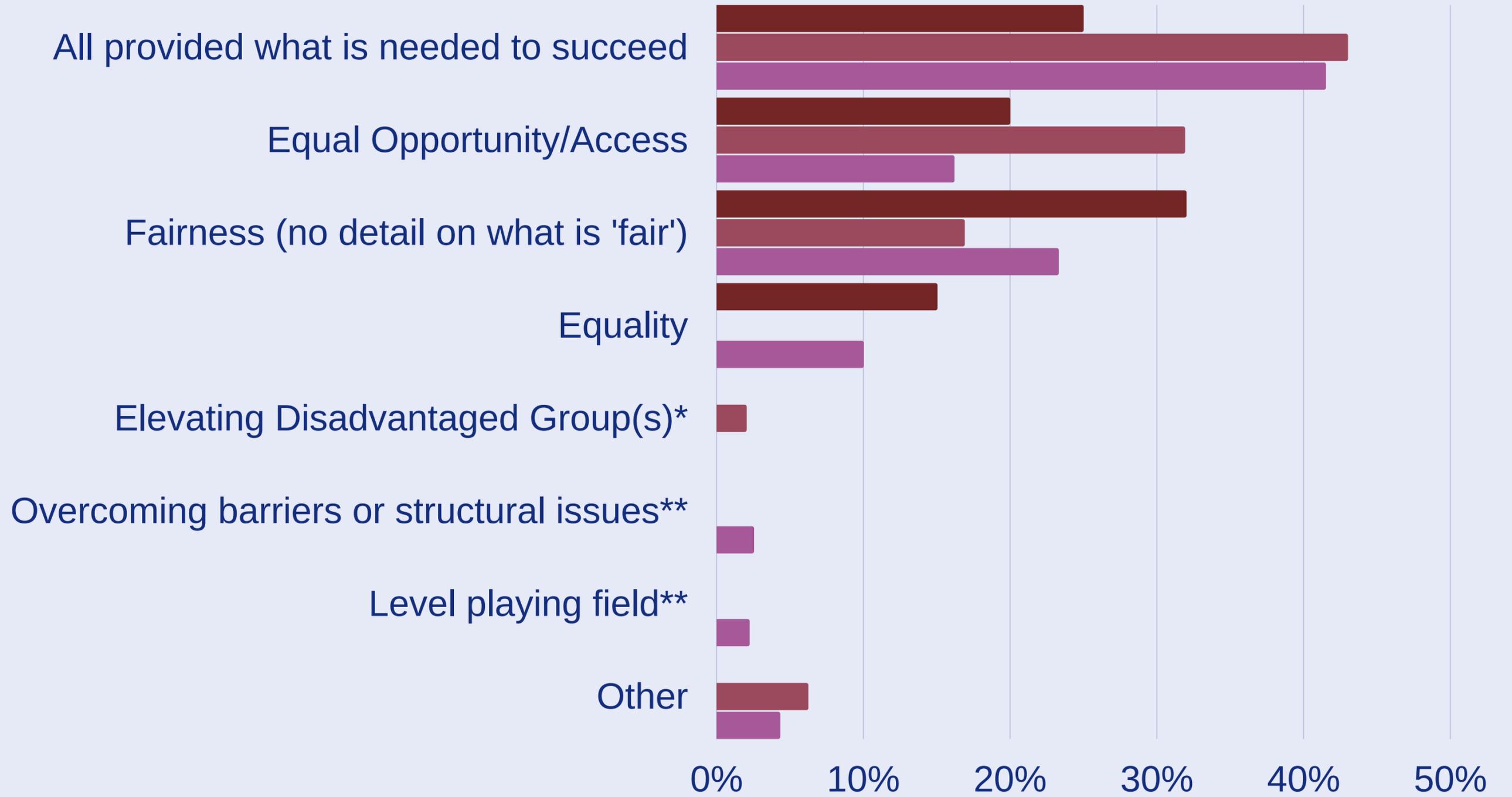


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# What is your personal definition of "equity?"



\*Marks categories reflected only in suburban teacher responses

\*\*Marks categories reflected only in urban teacher responses

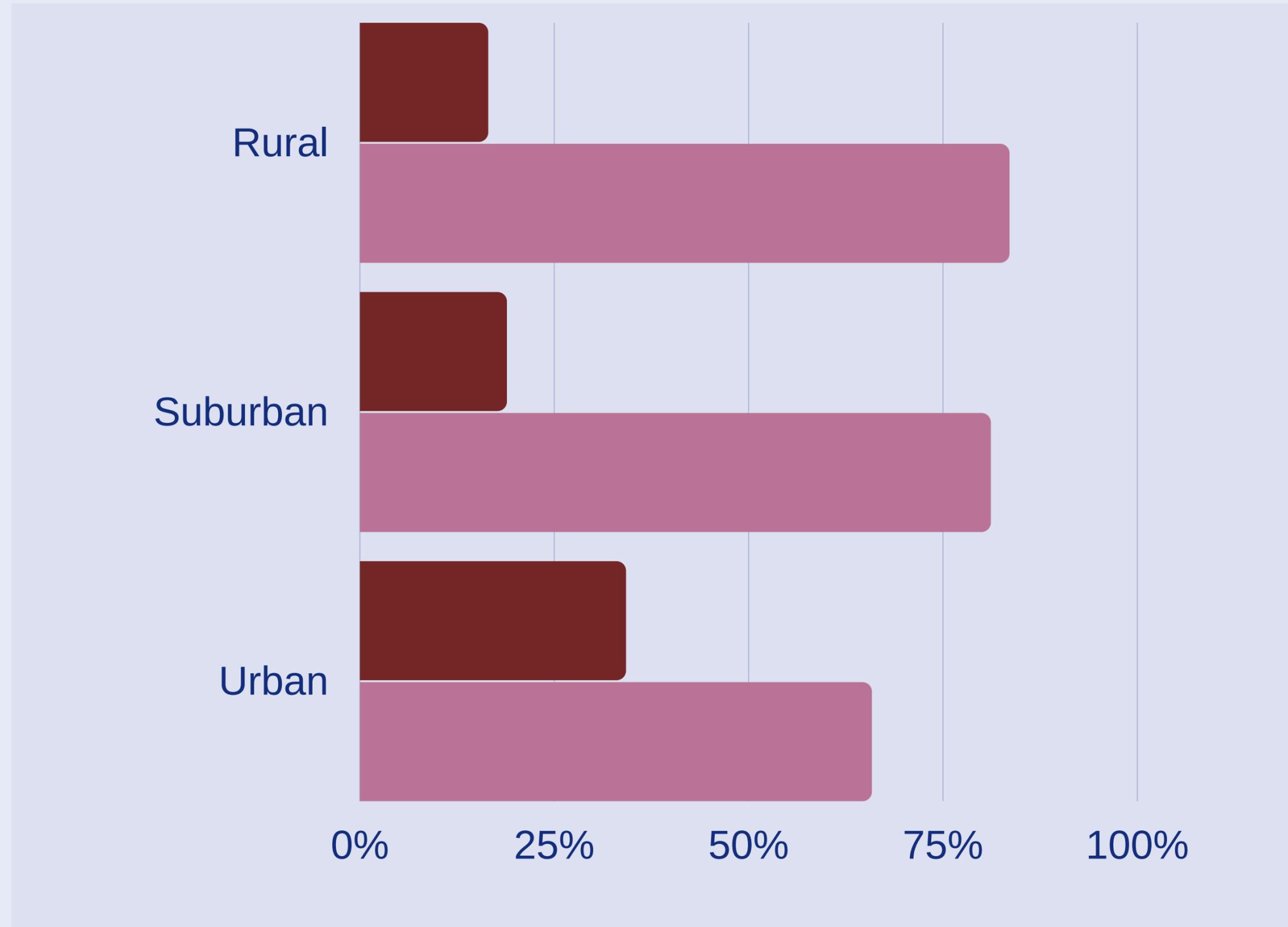


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# Before taking this survey, were you familiar with the Pennsylvania Department of Education's published definition of "equity?"



Pennsylvania Teachers Advisory Committee  
Survey of Rural, Suburban, Urban PA Teachers, April-May 2021

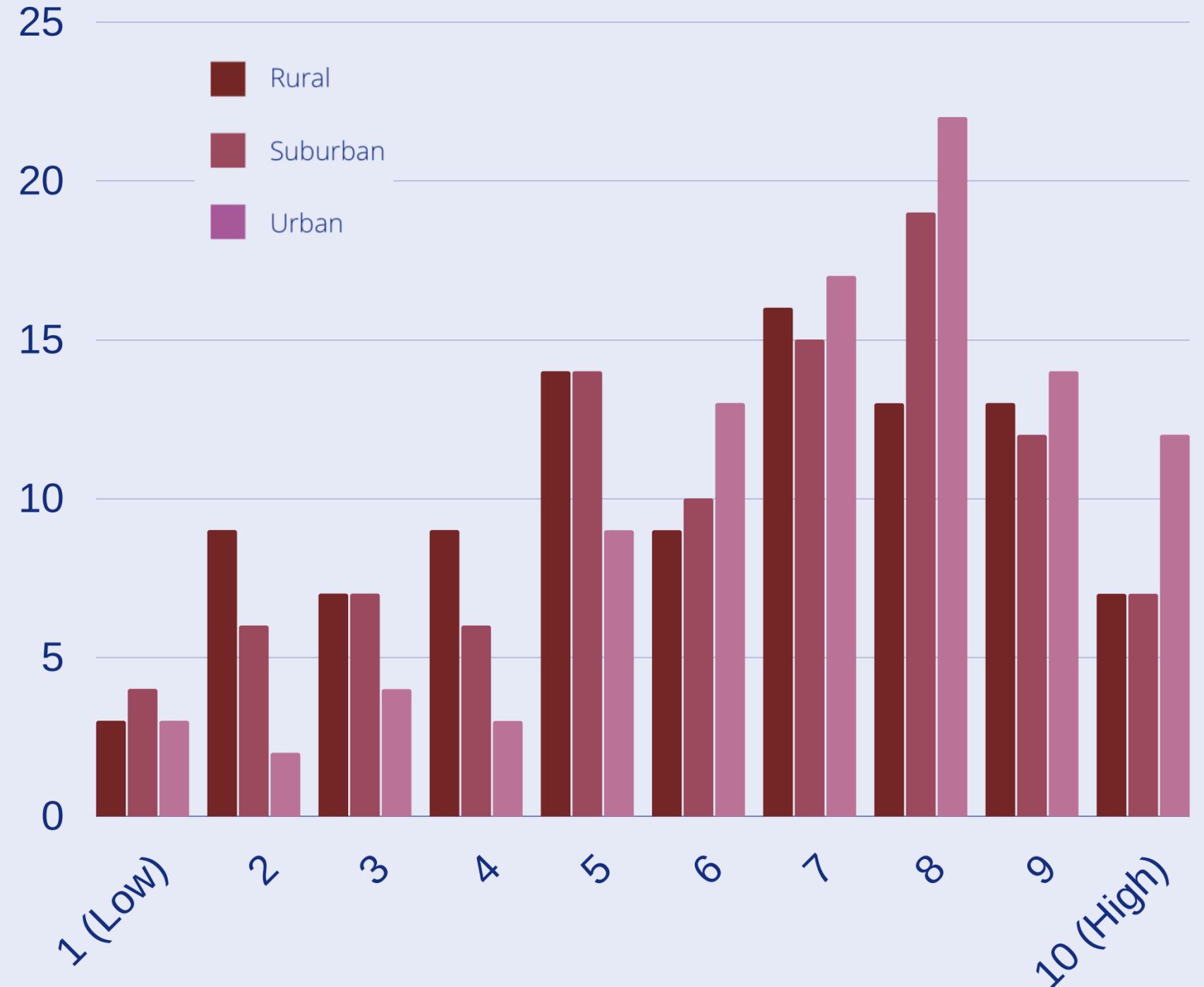




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**During your planning and teaching practice, how much focus do you put on students understanding the experiences and perspectives of those with different "races, genders, ethnicities, languages, disabilities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, family backgrounds and family incomes?"**

	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Mean:	6.03	6.23	6.95
Median:	6.00	7.00	7.00





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# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected rural responses

## High School Teacher, North Central PA

Equity isn't a priority in my rural district with very little diversity; however, for students in categories listed by PDE, it is **EXTREMELY** important. They need to know they're acknowledged, understood, & valued as a members of the school community.

## Middle School Teacher, Central PA

Students' understanding of the experiences and perspectives of those with different "races, genders, ethnicities, languages, disabilities, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, family backgrounds and family incomes" - what does this have to do with teaching core subject matter? If the topic arises - we address it. I address some during World History - again in context of subject matter.

## Intermediate Teacher, Central PA

There is much kindness in my district, but not a strong understanding of trauma, poverty, racial or religious differences. Teachers proceed with the books they know (without characters of color), the activities they have always done about religious holidays (without much consideration of those in the minority), and annoyance with the behavior of students (without adjusting the the trauma the child has experienced). There is a strong lift-yourself-by-your-bootstraps ethos in our area, which makes many teachers blind to the fact that many of our students simply don't have any bootstraps.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected suburban responses

## **MS Business, Computer & Information Technology Teacher, Southeastern PA**

I feel like there's a disconnect between the goal and the practical realities that need to exist as preconditions in order to get there. I personally may want equity for my students, but teaching in a politically heterogeneous district means that teachers here catch heat when they do anything that might vaguely be understood to have a political dimension to it. Our district administration routinely directs us to avoid and shut down classroom conversations about political hot topics. I comply, but realize that we are missing an opportunity (obligation?) to have trusted, informed, caring adults help students understand complex issues like those surrounding equity. It's not a safe space for teachers to risk engaging in this work. In fact, our district by its actions and omissions has designed a culture of that stifles teacher risk-taking, despite lip-service to the contrary.

## **HS English Teacher, Southeastern PA**

We need to be cognizant of the fact that sometimes our best intentions can have harmful outcomes. Several years ago, my school began an initiative to reflect more diverse voices through a building-wide reading initiative. In the first year, we used several books about interactions between Black teens and the police. It was an eye-opening experience for many of our students. One Black student, however, told me that it made him uncomfortable and that it was not something he wanted to spend his school time discussing because this was something he had to worry about constantly.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected urban responses

## High School Teacher, Philadelphia

Orientation on culturally responsive practices comes to mind. I think it's important that professional learning and development sessions aimed at promoting equity actually led by members of the school community – educators, students/alumni, parents, etc.

## Primary Teacher, Western PA

As an African American educator in a small city I felt very isolated and lonely at times. None of these issues were addressed in my district. It's truly sad and a disservice to all our children! There was no support/acknowledgment from the district about current events, black history month, women's history month, etc.

## Elementary School Teacher, Eastern PA

Educators need support in anti-bias curriculum and teaching techniques. Educators need to practice self-awareness and to be aware of the biases they may hold (we all have them!) and how they affect classroom outcomes. Both things are achievable through quality PD.

## MS Special Education Teachers, Southeastern PA

Many staff members are unaware of their personal social bias... They do not have the full understanding of how poverty and race impact individuals' lives.



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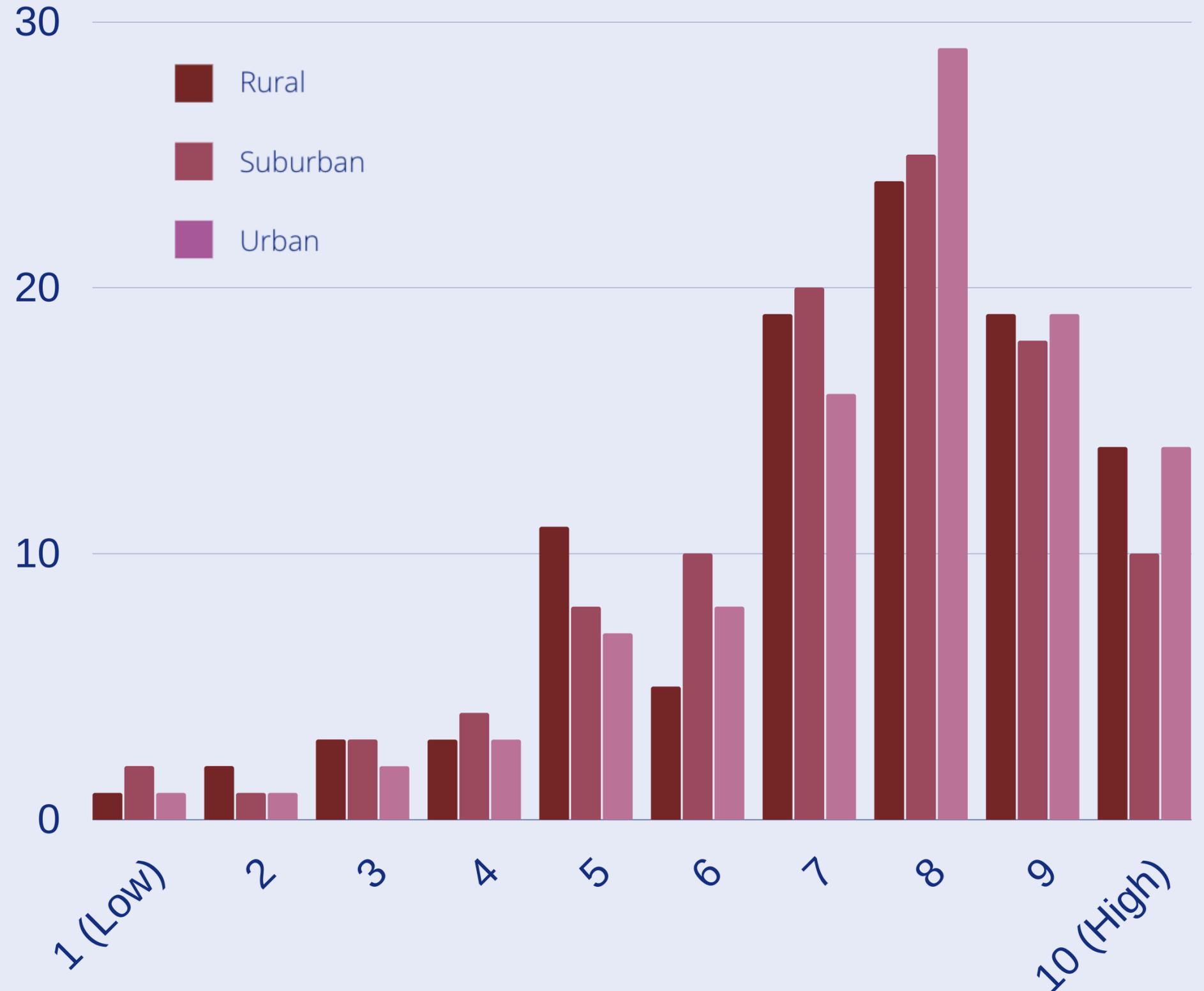
## How well informed do you feel about being able to promote equity (as defined by PDE) through your teaching practices?

Rural Mean: 7.48

Suburban Mean: 7.27

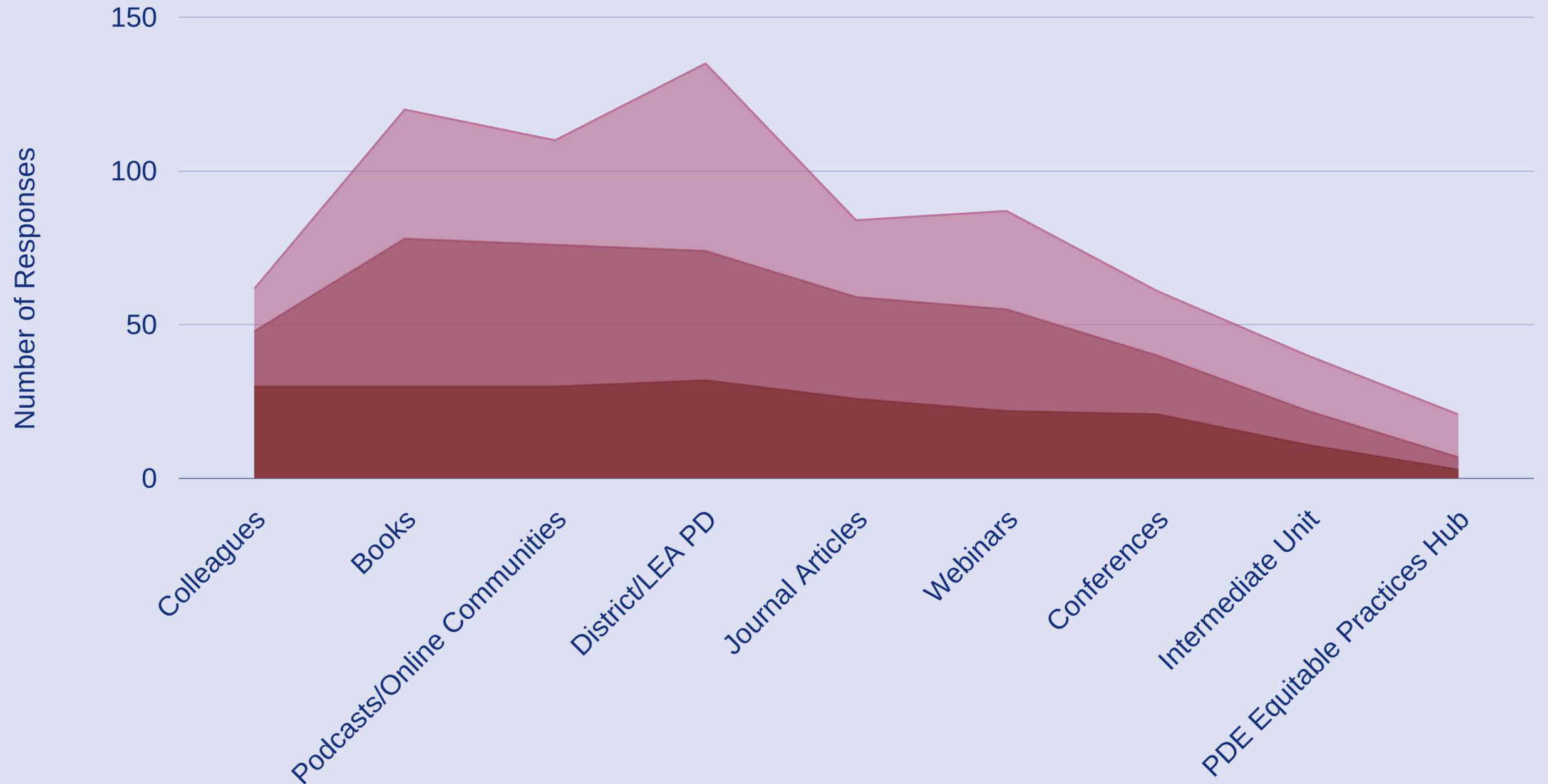
Urban Mean: 7.60

Median: 8.00





# What resources do you use when looking for information about equitable education practices?





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# What resources do you use when looking for information about equitable education practices?

Pennsylvania Teachers Advisory Committee  
Survey of Rural, Suburban, Urban PA Teachers, April-May 2021



**Rural**

**30%**



**Suburban**

**18%**



**Urban**

**14%**

*Percentage of teachers that report not looking for resources about equitable education practices*





# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected rural responses

## High School Teacher, South Central PA

I think more needs to be done to help low-income students persevere and see their worth. When I look at PDE's "list", I see these students as the least talked about because their issue isn't necessarily tied to identity. It is tied to circumstance, which is often seen as a choice. Being low income isn't a choice students get to make.

## K-12 Teacher, Southwestern PA

Sensitivity training would be helpful. Also, standardized tests are inequitable. With not being able to even read test questions, there is no way teachers even have a voice to make it fair. In years past I heard there was a practice question that involved a parking garage. My rural students have never seen one.

## Intermediate Teacher, Northeastern PA

Many educators don't know what they don't know. In rural schools, the importance of professional development on equity must be clear to educators. Recently, a virtual student of color logged into a virtual class. She was walking around the house with her computer with no lights on. The teacher told the student, "you're really dark so it's hard to see you." The child burst into tears and the teacher didn't understand why. The teacher felt horrible but had no understanding of what she had done to upset the student. Many of our students are experiencing trauma caused by our own ignorance. This is where effective professional development can help us.



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# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected suburban responses

## **Primary Teacher, Eastern PA**

When states impose inflexible inappropriate high stakes academic requirements, teachers find themselves teaching skills rather than children. This has dire consequences in terms of teaching and reaching the 'whole child'.

Equitable early learning opportunities are embedded in the development of real contextual and experiential learning. This becomes critical in the areas within suburban districts that have sizable concentrations of poor families with young children. Skills are more easily mastered and then measured when they are contextualized. Decision makers must not value only discrete measurable skills, especially during the early years, for it is the less visible aggregate of experience that facilitates the transfer of learning and the acquisition of skills.

## **MS/HS ESOL Teacher, Southeastern PA**

English learners should not be required to take standardized tests during their first year in the United States. These tests are not translated into their home languages. Students are entitled to a word to word glossary and an interpreter; however, the process of interpreting complex questions and answer choices in disciplines like Biology and Algebra is imperfect at best, leading to numerous discrepancies between translations and intended meanings of questions/choices, My most recent newcomers to the US took an average of 8 hours to complete their Biology Keystone. This is inequitable, damaging to students' sense of esteem, and an invalid measure of their proficiency in Biology.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected urban responses

## **Kindergarten Teacher, Southeastern PA**

This year I had 31 kindergarten students in my class. 5 of those had IEP's, 6 were English Language Learners, and I referred 3 more for further testing. It is nearly impossible to meet the needs of all of these students. Smaller class sizes would allow me to provide more equitable education to my students.

## **MS Mathematics Teacher, Central PA**

Our students have issues at home that can prevent them from doing their best at school. We need more resources to help these students be able act like the teenagers they are, instead of having to worry about how they are going to pay bills and babysitting their siblings all day.

## **MS STEM Teacher, Philadelphia**

I need PD on how can I address equity specifically as a science teacher. Of course, I can use what is discussed in terms of reading/math, in which equity PD has been focused more often, but are there topics in science that provide opportunities to promote equity? We also need more examples of how we can incorporate these practices into our daily interactions with all students. I already look for ways to do this. However, I am limited by my own biases (known or not known).

## **HS Special Education Teacher, Central PA**

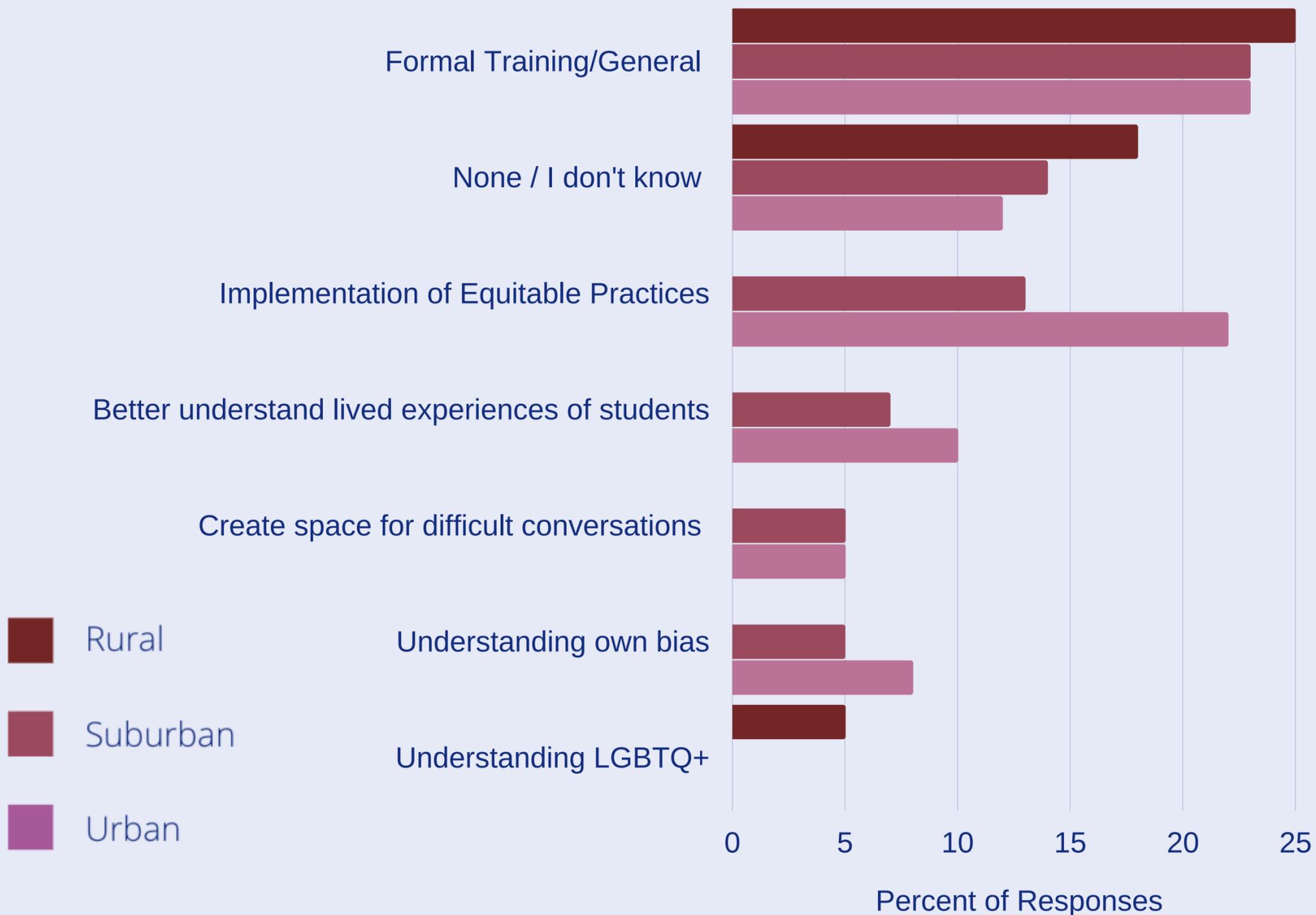
So much focus is on the push for us to always be delivering content related to testing. Our PD opportunities are always about data and testing. We don't prioritize equity because of that.



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# What professional learning and development do you believe is necessary to promote equity (as defined by PDE)?

Most common responses. No other responses above 5%

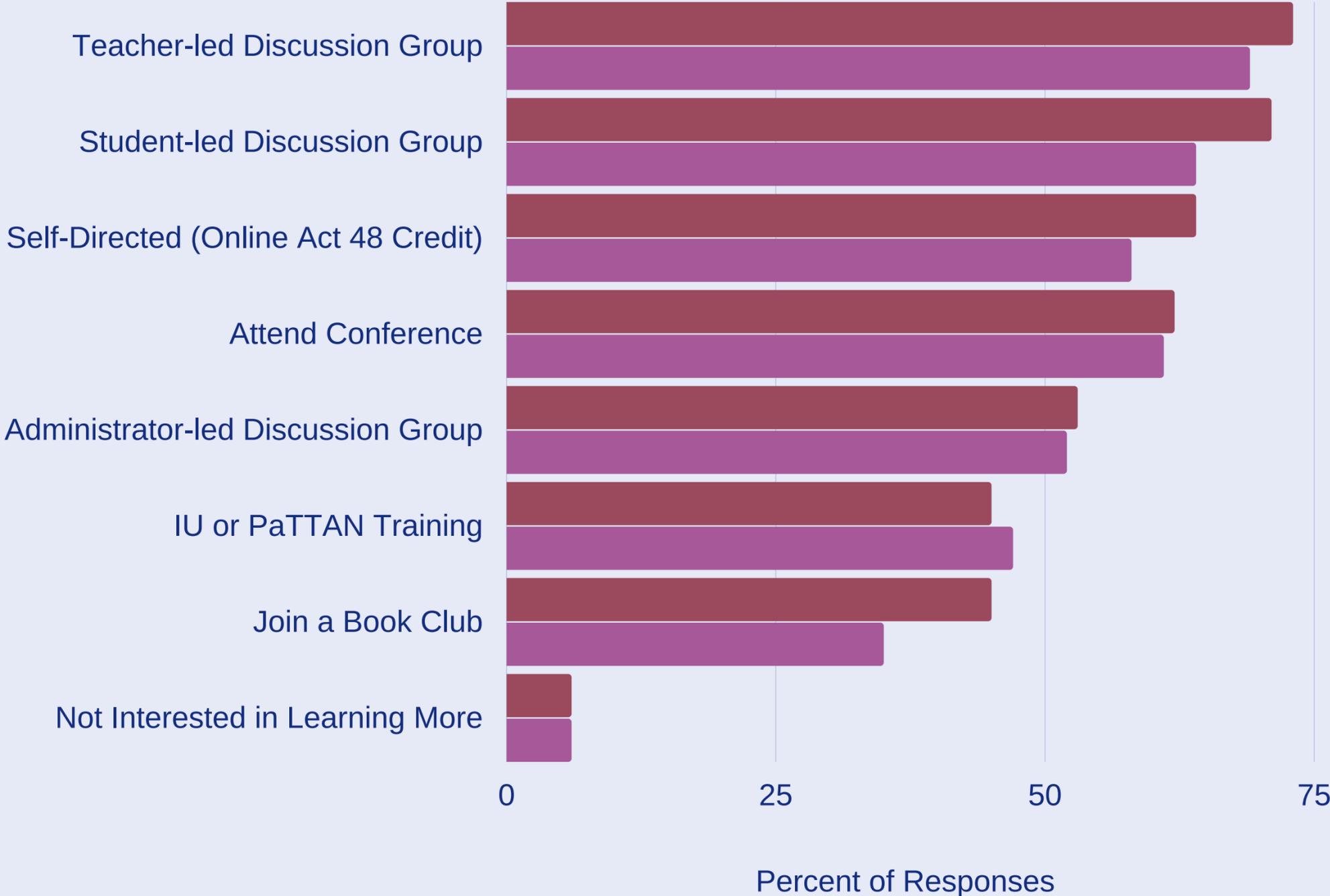




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# Which of the following actions would you be willing to take to learn more about educational equity and inclusion?

Only  
**Suburban & Urban**  
Survey





# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected rural responses

## High School Teacher, Central PA

We have students who come to me and say that they routinely hear classmates use transphobic, racist, or other derogatory terms. While they aren't saying them directly to students who would be in those categories, they say them loudly and in such a way that it can't help but be heard. Yet, because they aren't actively saying them "to" a student, they are not disciplined. . . Any time I have brought a situation to [administration's] attention, they have done the best they could. They say their hands are tied.

Unless students cross a very distinct line, all that can be done is to tell them to not say those things because we can't infringe on student beliefs. At what point though do we, as educators, take a stand and say "no?" We need to be the adults who say, "You can have whatever belief you want, but you may NOT discuss things that are cruel or harmful to others."

## High School Teacher, Southwestern PA

It takes money to make things equitable. Our district is low-income, low-tax base, low everything. We get no funding to increase equity.

## Middle School Teacher, North Central PA

I would love to see more trauma informed training and I wish we had the resources needed to provide books, and more to our students. Forcing teachers to find resources on their own takes time away from us learning about our students and trying to figure out the best way to help them succeed.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected suburban responses

## **HS Social Studies Teacher, Southwestern PA**

Equity is not just a buzzword, it is a real need for students in every district. When our school went virtual last year, many students did not have access to wifi. To succeed they needed to have access to the materials that other students had. When we returned to school in person, many students (for various legitimate reasons) chose to stay home and learn virtual. They needed textbooks, but many students did not have transportation. I ended up driving to students' houses on my own time so that they would have what they needed to be successful. Many of these students are underprivileged and part of our small minority demographic. By not making their materials accessible, we were merely contributing to stereotypes and statistics.

## **MS Social Studies Teacher, Southeastern PA**

Discussions about equity cannot take place until there is adequate training and recognition of the impact of unconscious bias in education. Unfortunately, it's an awkward subject for many. However, it's the starting point for any discussion about achieving equity in our schools.

## **Elementary School Teacher, Central PA**

Schools are community hubs that require broad support to ensure that our students have even a chance at an equitable education. We need funding that goes beyond "education" to social workers, to food insecurity, housing, counselors. So many things beyond teaching every single day impact equity.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected urban responses

## **HS Social Studies Teacher, Central PA**

I wish policy makers knew the pushback we face in our local community when trying to create an atmosphere of learning focused on equity for all students. I have been outspoken about the base causes of inequity in classroom discussions, and I have had parents call in to administration. They express concern about what I am teaching to their children, and question if it is part of the curriculum. If members of the community do not understand equity (and the lack thereof), or refuse to acknowledge the issues and the problems that exist, or do not wish to attempt to bring about more equity, then we will not be able to tackle issues of inequity in our communities or schools.

## **HS Visual Arts Teacher, Philadelphia**

What we can do as educators to promote equity will never actually achieve equity. I cannot personally make sure each student has everything they need for true access to equal opportunity. Equity in education can't be achieved if students don't have stable housing, good food, the same economic/caretaking responsibilities, access to health/mental health care, absence of racial trauma ect.

I would like a higher minimum wage, universal health care, free daycare, expansion of welfare, more funding for schools, ect. rather than more professional development focused on a problem that I can't solve.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected rural responses

## **Elementary Teacher, Northeastern PA**

At a recent faculty meeting our principal put together a list of examples of students who have experienced terrible trauma caused by abuse, family incarceration, poverty, family drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, and/or other out-of-school factors. He asked teachers to read the examples and determine which were our students this year. All were. Most teachers had no idea the scope of the problem in our school of 250 students. This drove teachers to have conversations about changing practices to better support all students and being more trauma informed as a school. It led to meaningful change and more equitable practices.

## **Intermediate Teacher, Southwestern PA**

Teachers need more education on how to correctly interact with students of differing ethnicities and religions as well as those students who are struggling with gender identity. I also feel that teachers need resources on these subjects to help diversify our curricula.

## **Middle School Teacher, Central PA**

The pandemic revealed challenges rural districts face when home internet access is unavailable or unreliable for many families (including staff members). In some cases, this issue is related to socioeconomic status, but many times it is an infrastructure problem, as reliable internet service is simply unavailable in all locations.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected suburban responses

## **MS English Teacher, Northeastern PA**

Everyone needs to be involved in the equity process - all stakeholders need to be aware and involved in order for any program to be successful.

## **HS STEM Teacher, Southeastern PA**

My district is now holding professional development to say they are focused on equity, but there has been little going on in the 4 years I have worked here to actually promote equity compared to my previous districts. Many administrators and staff do not wholeheartedly believe in equity and that is demonstrated in the things they say and do outside of PD. Improving in this area will require a shift in mindset and attitude.

## **HS Performing Arts Teacher, Southeastern PA**

I know many teachers feel like they can't talk to their students openly because they're afraid they won't say the "right" thing. The answer to this isn't to force teachers to re-learn the right words to say, but to allow THEM the space to explore the root causes of the differences in outcome and give THEM the safe space they need to explore how to reach kids where they're at. When teachers feel safe and supported instead of blamed, they are free to take the risks and have the conversations that make a true difference in their students' lives. Parents, teachers, students, & administrators need to see each other as being on the same team. Right now, I'm not sure that's the case.



# What do you wish those making educational decisions at the state level knew about educational equity and professional development?

Selected urban responses

## **K-12 ELL Teacher, Southwestern PA**

Standardized testing, in some circumstances, does little to enhance educational equity, We have some students who haven't eaten for days, and come to school only because they know they will be fed at least two meals. We have students who have endured unspeakable injustices and trauma who leave home in the mornings simply to come to school for a "safe haven." We can't challenge kids and encourage them to find success in the classroom (or on standardized assessments) when they are in "survival mode."

So many kids have so much happening in their lives outside of school that they cannot even recall basic information. Unfortunately, that means that they can never get to a place, confidently, where they can analyze, apply, or create because they haven't been taught the very basic skills at home. We have to look at educational policies not only from a school-wide, or district-wide, or even statewide perspective, but also from a community-wide system. Because our students are funneled into the school from the surrounding community, education can't prosper in that community if the majority of the general public is starved of basic needs and resources.



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# About the Pennsylvania Teachers Advisory Committee (PTAC)

## **Mission:**

**To ensure essential decisions  
that impact students  
are informed by expert teachers**

**PTAC is a non-profit organization. Members are active K-12 classroom teachers who have been recognized for teaching excellence at the state, national, and/or international level representing every region of the state and every subject area. To learn more and apply for membership, visit our website.**

## **Contact Information**

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