

Workforce-Aligned Postsecondary Scholarship Programs

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Introduction

- In 2016, Kentucky set a statewide postsecondary educational achievement goal to “accelerate job creation, grow the economy, and expand our tax base.” (*KY Council 2016-2021 Strategic Agenda*)
- In 2018, Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship (WRKS) initiated to provide financial aid for students enrolled in targeted workforce-linked sub-baccalaureate degree programs.
- Workforce-aligned scholarship programs aim to create career pathways to high-wage, high-demand occupations, and to increase labor supply for industry needs.
- We investigate the costs, benefits, adoption, and contexts of workforce-aligned scholarship programs.

Findings

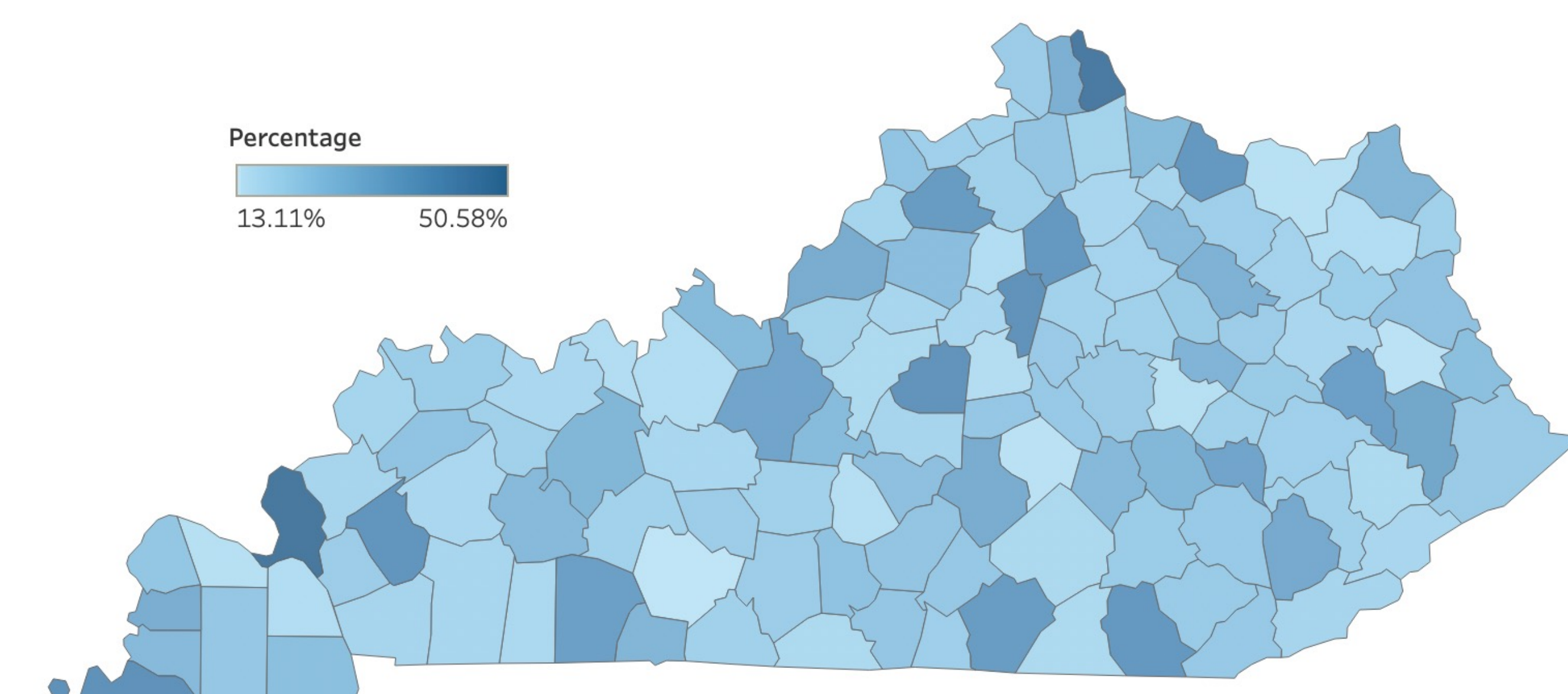
- The number of **WRKS recipients** and the total amount of **WRKS money disbursed** has **grown rapidly** since enactment, but **the program remains small** relative to other state grant programs
- **53%** of WRKS recipients come from **urban counties** and **23%** of recipients come from **suburban counties** another **24%** come from **rural counties**.
- Most WRKS recipients **complete credentials** with the most popular credential being **certificates**.

National Context

- A national trend has emerged in workforce-aligned scholarship programs.
- 22 states have workforce-aligned scholarship programs.
- Community college enrollment declined nearly 25% from Fall 2010 to Fall 2019 (*Digest of Education Statistics 2021*).
- Enrollment in public 2-year institutions fell nearly 13% due to the COVID pandemic from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 (*Digest of Education Statistics 2021*).
- While enrollment fell across all age groups, the largest drop was for students aged 18-24 years old (*Fink, 2023*).

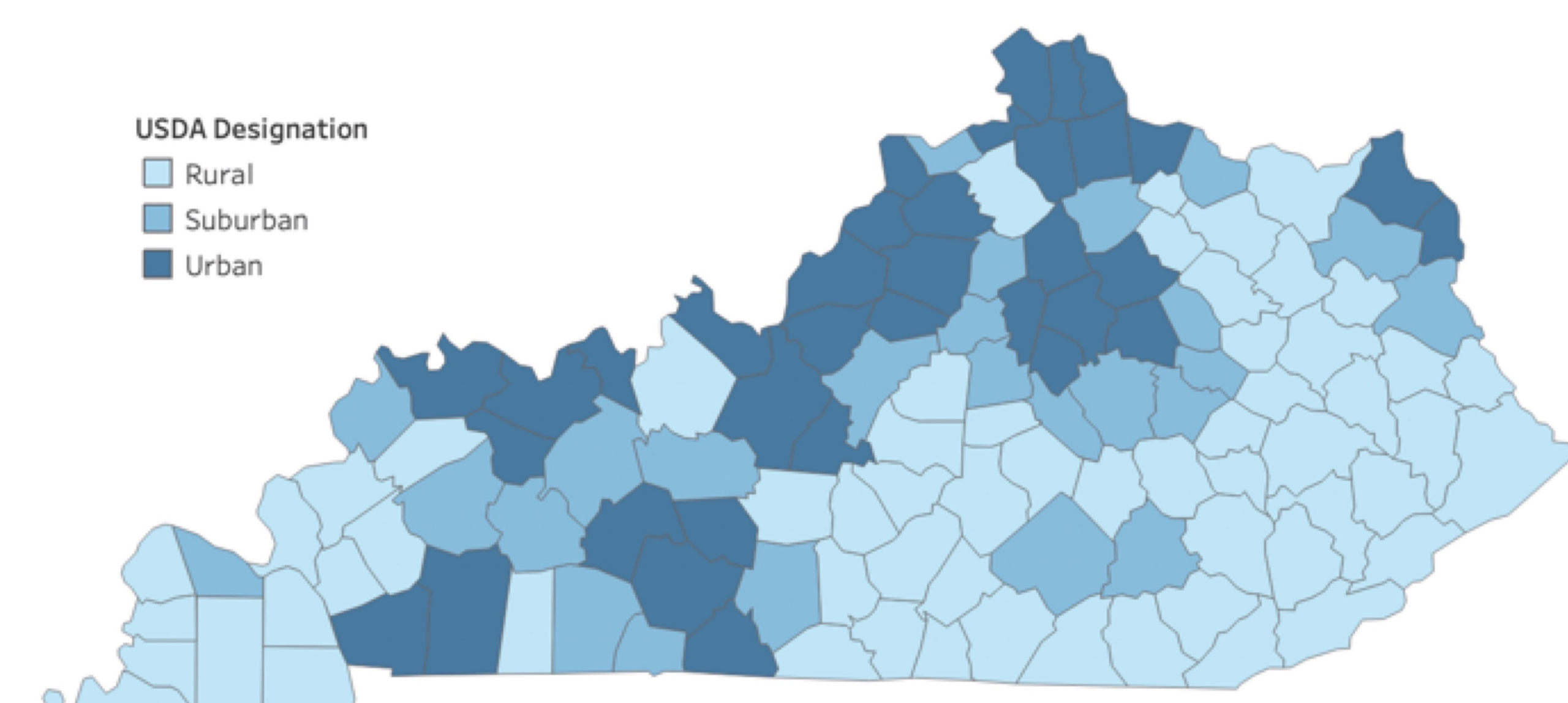
Local Context: Participation Across Urban, Suburban, Rural

Figure 1: Share of Adults 25 or Older with Some College But No Degree By County



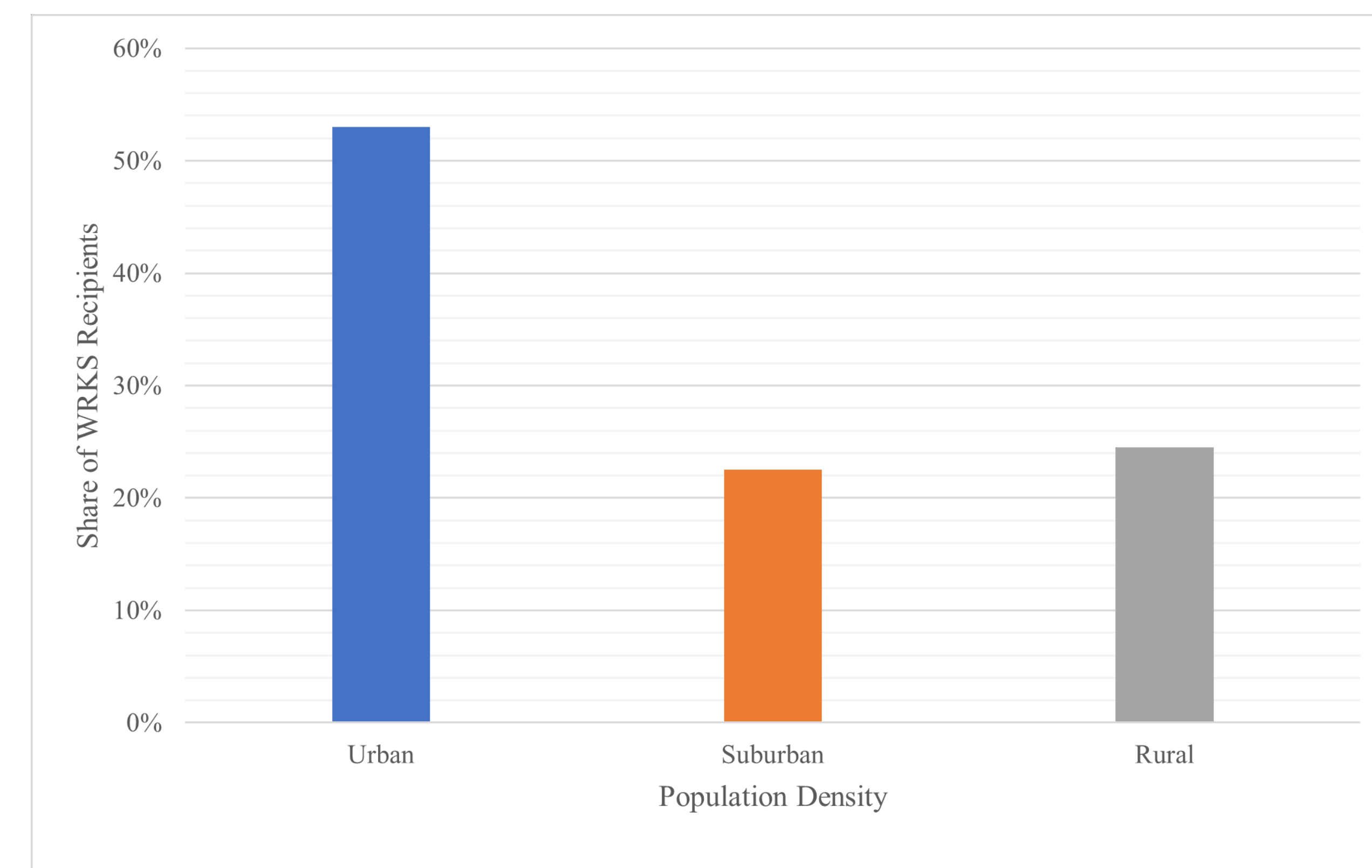
Note: This is the percentage of Kentucky residents that have completed some level of postsecondary coursework but have not obtained a degree.

Figure 2: Urban, Rural, and Suburban Counties Across Kentucky



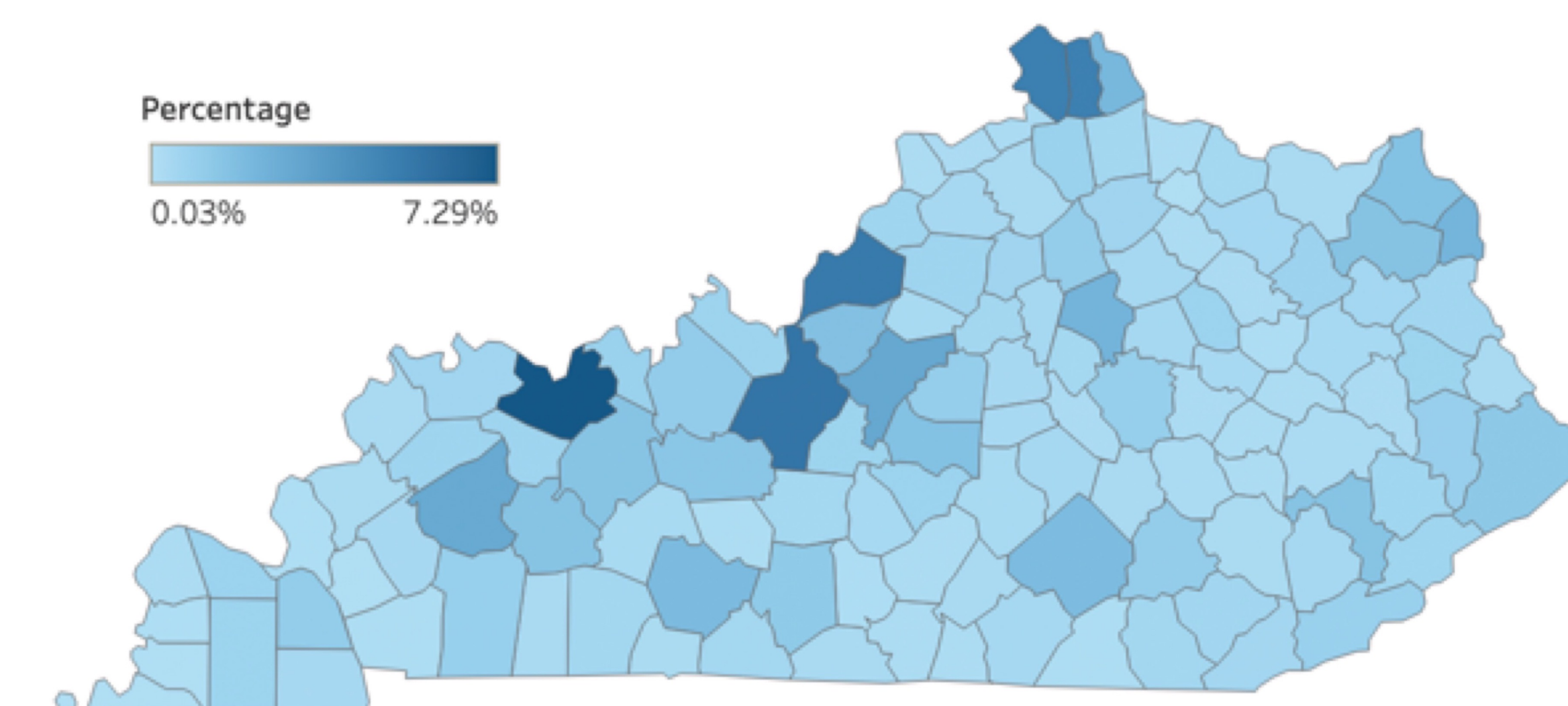
Source: 2013 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. Notes: Rural, suburban, and urban designations are defined using the USDA continuum codes based on county population and adjacency to a metropolitan area. USDA provides nine designations, and these are categorized into urban, rural, and suburban categories based on population.

Figure 3: WRKS Recipients by USDA 2013 Rural-Urban Status



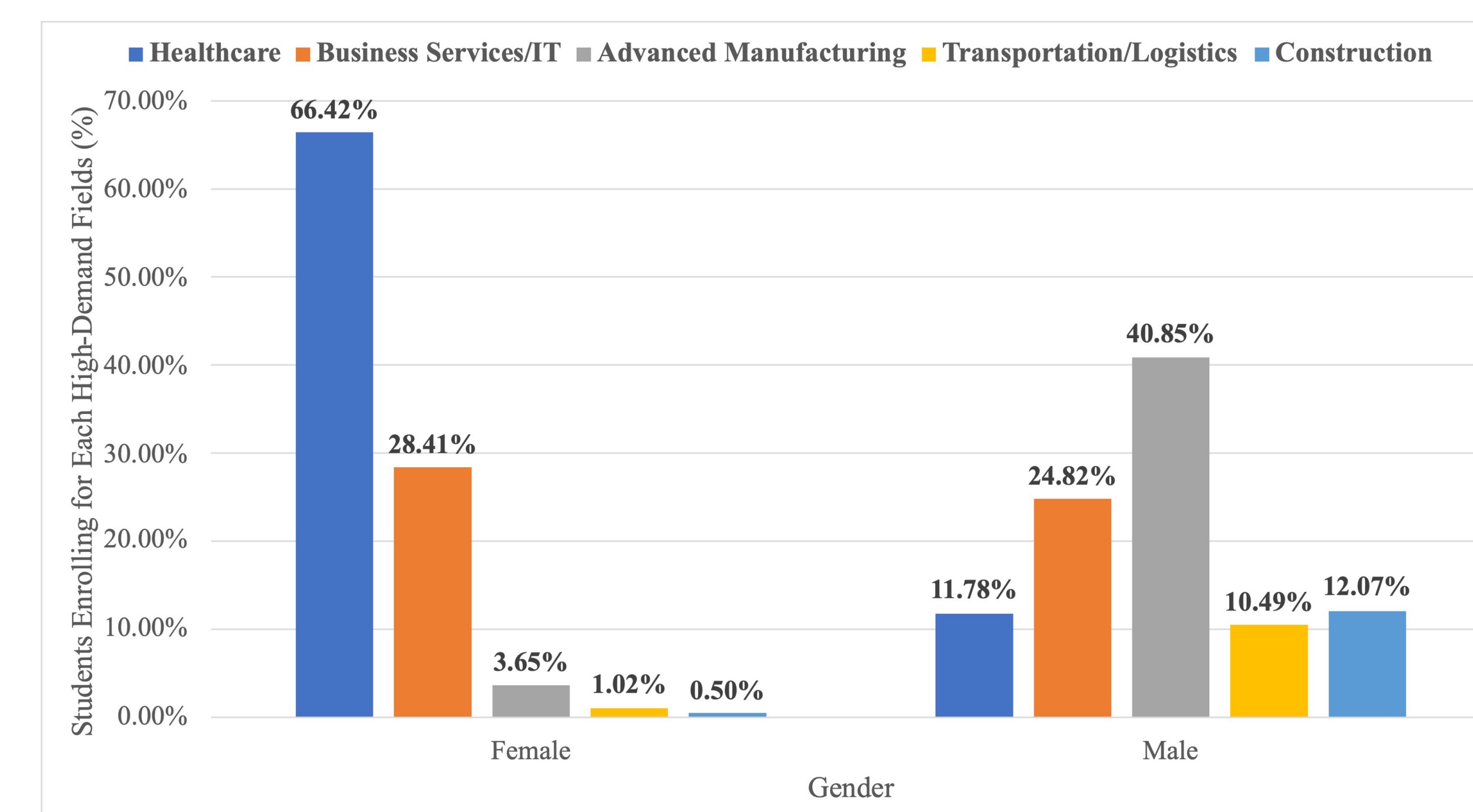
Note: Recipients were categorized as Rural, Suburban, and Urban based on the USDA's 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. County of residence is collected from the student's initial application and can change over time if the student has applied for more than one program.

Figure 4: WRKS Participation Rates by County (2018-2021)



Source: Financial Aid data provided by Kentucky's Council for Postsecondary Education. Notes: Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship participation is aggregated from the 2017-2018 through 2020-2021 academic years. The percentage is calculated by dividing the total number of recipients for each county by the entire WRKS state-wide participation.

Figure 5: Major Enrollment in High-Demand Fields by Gender



Note: The data was taken from Kentucky Postsecondary Education Data System (KPEDS) Enrollments data. We calculated proportion of students enrolling for majors in the five high-demand fields by gender on a major-level using the six-digit CIP codes.

Summary and Next Steps

- We examine the characteristics of those who participate in WRKS program along with their credential accumulation with a focus on geographic and demographic variation.
- In the future, we will study labor market outcome and mobility patterns for WRKS participants.

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