

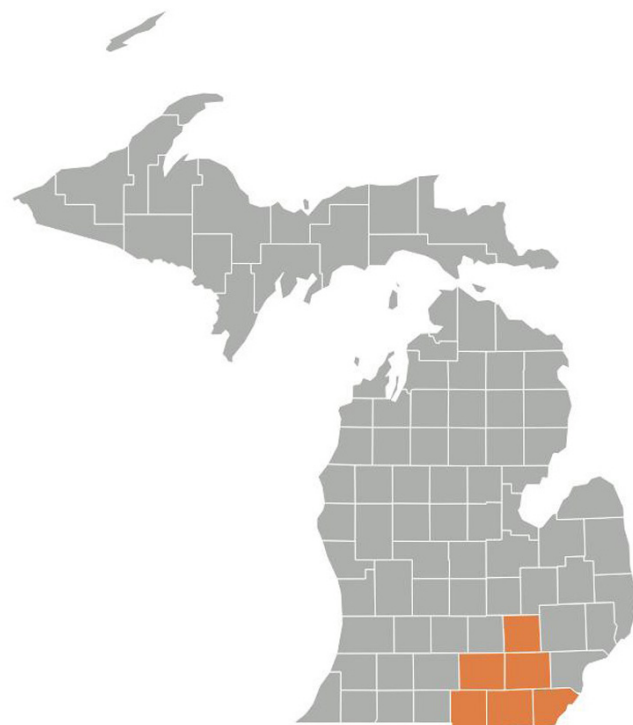
Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: Southeast Region

The Southeast Region includes: Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, and Washtenaw counties. Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

Transportation Costs and Educational Barriers in Southeast Michigan's Rural Counties

The Southeast Region is one of the strongest in the state on poverty and well-being indicators. It has the highest median household income of any region in the state at \$80,988, a poverty rate of 10.7%, below the state average of 13.4%, and a rate of households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) of 35.3%, compared to the state's 39.7%. These regional strengths, however, are not universal. The region's favorable indicators are driven largely by Washtenaw and Livingston counties, and their strength masks considerably more difficult conditions in the most rural counties of Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee, and Monroe counties. Hillsdale faces the most acute conditions, with the lowest median income and the lowest postsecondary enrollment rate in the region. Economic conditions in these counties mean that a large share of working households face cost burdens that regional averages do not capture.

Low postsecondary enrollment rates in Hillsdale County and the region's other rural counties limit the higher-wage employment opportunities available to residents. In Washtenaw County, 69.2% of students enroll in some form of postsecondary education after high school, including 52.1% at four-year colleges or universities.¹ In Hillsdale County, just 43.8% of students enroll in any postsecondary program, with only 25.2% attending a four-year institution, the lowest four-year enrollment rate in the Southeast Region.² Jackson County's postsecondary enrollment rate



	State	Region
Population	10,077,761	1,025,289
Median Household Income	\$72,336	\$80,988
Children in Poverty	17.7%	11.2%
Population in Poverty	13.4%	10.7%
ALICE	26.3%	24.4%
ALICE + Poverty	39.7%	35.3%
Households Receiving Food Stamps / SNAP	13.5%	9.2%
Housing Cost Burdened	32.7%	32.2%
Adults Without Insurance	7.1%	5.4%
Single- Parent Households	30.6%	25.0%

of 46.1%, Lenawee County's rate of 48.1%, and Monroe County's rate of 48.2% are all below the postsecondary enrollment rates of the more prosperous Washtenaw and Livingston counties.³ Hillsdale County's largest employment sectors are manufacturing and educational services, both of which offer limited upward mobility for workers without postsecondary credentials.⁴ Rural counties like Hillsdale struggle to attract and retain higher-wage employers due to a lack of credentialed workers. With few higher-wage jobs nearby, residents must travel long distances for work, driving up transportation costs and compounding the financial hardship already created by low wages.

Addressing financial hardship in the Southeast Region's rural counties requires investment in postsecondary access and workforce development where credential attainment is lowest. Some efforts are already underway. The [Hillsdale Area Career Center](#) offers career and technical education programs to high school juniors and seniors across all eight Hillsdale County school districts, providing a foundation for expanding credential attainment in the county. [In Lenawee County, the JC/LISD Academy](#) partners with all 11 public school districts to enable high school students to earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree simultaneously, at no cost to students or families. In Jackson County, Jackson College offers dual enrollment options under Michigan's Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act and recently received a [Reconnect Community Action Grant from MiLEAP to expand postsecondary access for adult learners](#), part of an \$8.1 million statewide investment in educational attainment. [Monroe County Community College](#) serves as the primary postsecondary institution for Monroe County residents, though expanded outreach and dual-enrollment pathways remain opportunities.

Building on these efforts and better connecting students and workers across the four rural counties to programs like Michigan Reconnect could improve credential attainment where the gap between current enrollment and regional benchmarks is largest. Higher credential attainment raises the floor for local wages, attracts higher-paying employers, and reduces the need for residents to travel long distances for work, thereby lowering transportation costs. The barriers are real: a limited local tax base means these counties cannot address these challenges without external support. Hillsdale County and the region's other rural counties face conditions that the regional average does not capture, and addressing them will require targeted investment in education, infrastructure, and job creation.

References

- 1 College Enrollment by High School. MiSchool Data, Michigan Department of Education, 2025. <https://www.mischooldata.org/college-enrollment-by-hs/>
- 2 *Ibid*
- 3 *Ibid*
- 4 QCEW Searchable Databases, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/cew/data.htm>