Proximity to Private Schools:

A county-level analysis of how close Mississippi families are to current private school providers

February 2026

Executive Summary:

- **Significant geographic coverage**: Fifty-seven of Mississippi's 82 counties currently have one or more local private school providers. This demonstrates that a substantial portion of the state already benefits from accessible private education options.

- **Proximity for most residents**: Given Mississippi's population distribution, most residents live near at least one local private school provider, which enhances overall accessibility to educational alternatives.

- **Disparities in lower-income areas**: Counties with lower median incomes generally have fewer private schools. This suggests a link between income levels and the availability of private school choices - an irony, given that the core purpose of publicly funded education is to ensure quality education is not determined by a family's poverty or wealth. Universal school choice policies could therefore encourage greater private school expansion, innovation, and access in underserved or less-served regions.

Overall, these findings highlight the solid existing foundation of private educational options across Mississippi while revealing significant untapped potential if broader choice mechanisms—such as universal access—were implemented.

Key findings:

- **7 counties** (8.5% of total) show high private school density (>30 students per 1,000 residents). These counties typically feature established private school systems with multiple institutions and strong community support for private education.

- **19 counties** (23.2% of total) exhibit moderate density levels (15–30 students per 1,000 residents). These counties generally have at least one private school.

- **31 counties** (37.8% of total) have limited private school enrollment (<15 students per 1,000 residents). Lower density may reflect limited private school availability, geographical constraints, or a stronger community preference for public education systems.

- **Leading county**: Choctaw County demonstrates the highest density at 49 students per 1,000 residents, with approximately 400 students enrolled.
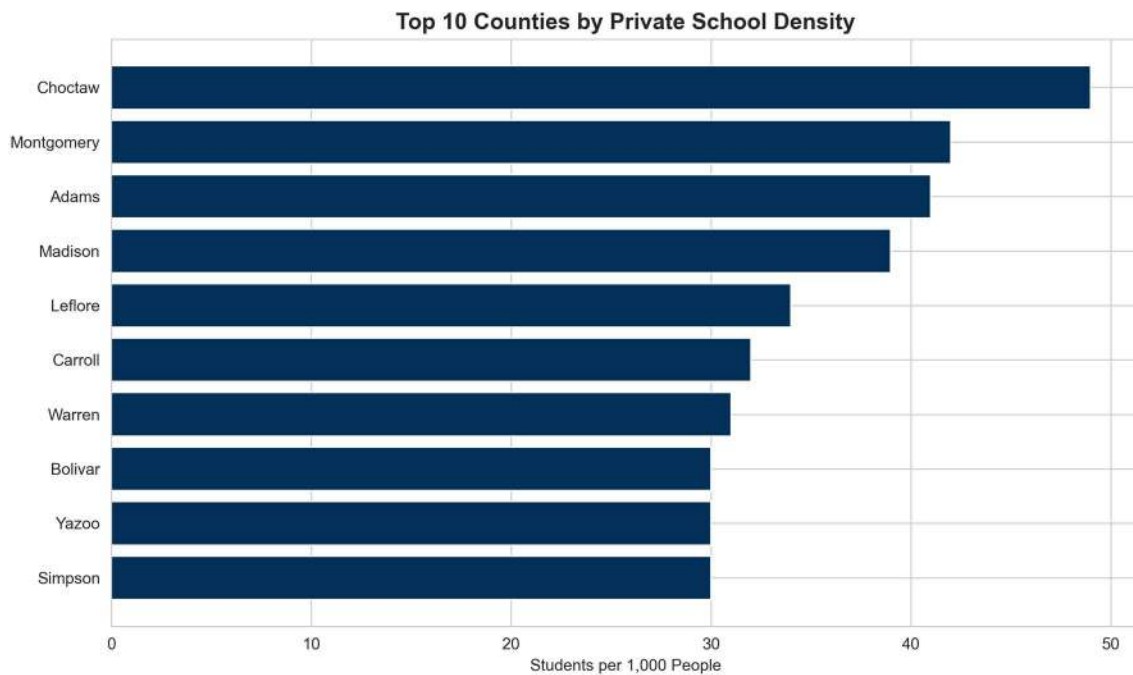
Statistical Overview:

The median density across all counties is 13 students per 1,000 residents, indicating substantial variation in private school utilization. Total private school enrollment across the state reaches 40,544 students, with an average of 711 students per county.[1] However, enrollment is not evenly distributed, with the top 10 counties accounting for a significant portion of total statewide enrollment and many counties do not have private schools at all.

Visualizations & Analysis

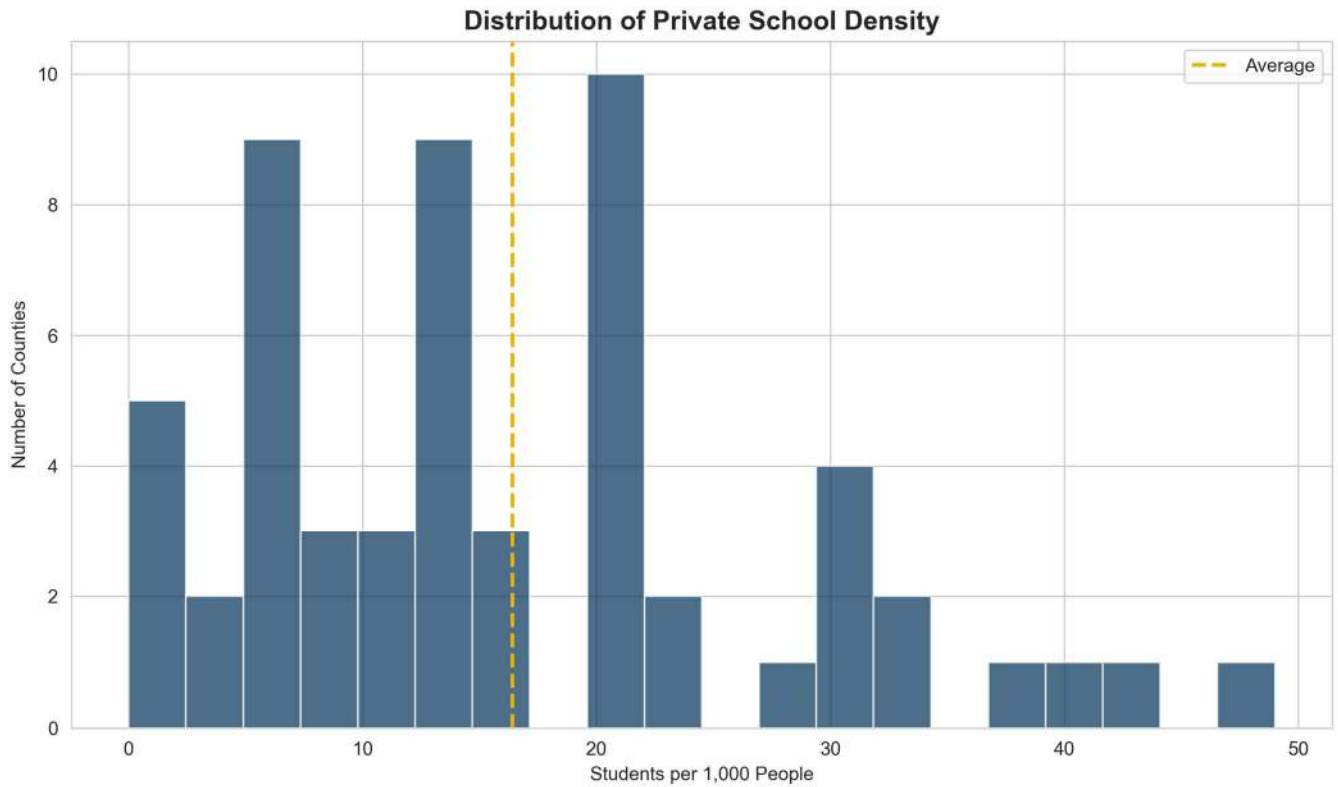### Figure 1: Top 10 Counties by Private School Density

This chart identifies the top 10 counties with the highest private school density rates. These leading counties demonstrate strong private school presence relative to their population sizes.

Top 10 Counties by Private School Density

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[1] This is for the 57 counties that have private schools. Schools that have zero private schools are omitted for the purposes of average calculation.
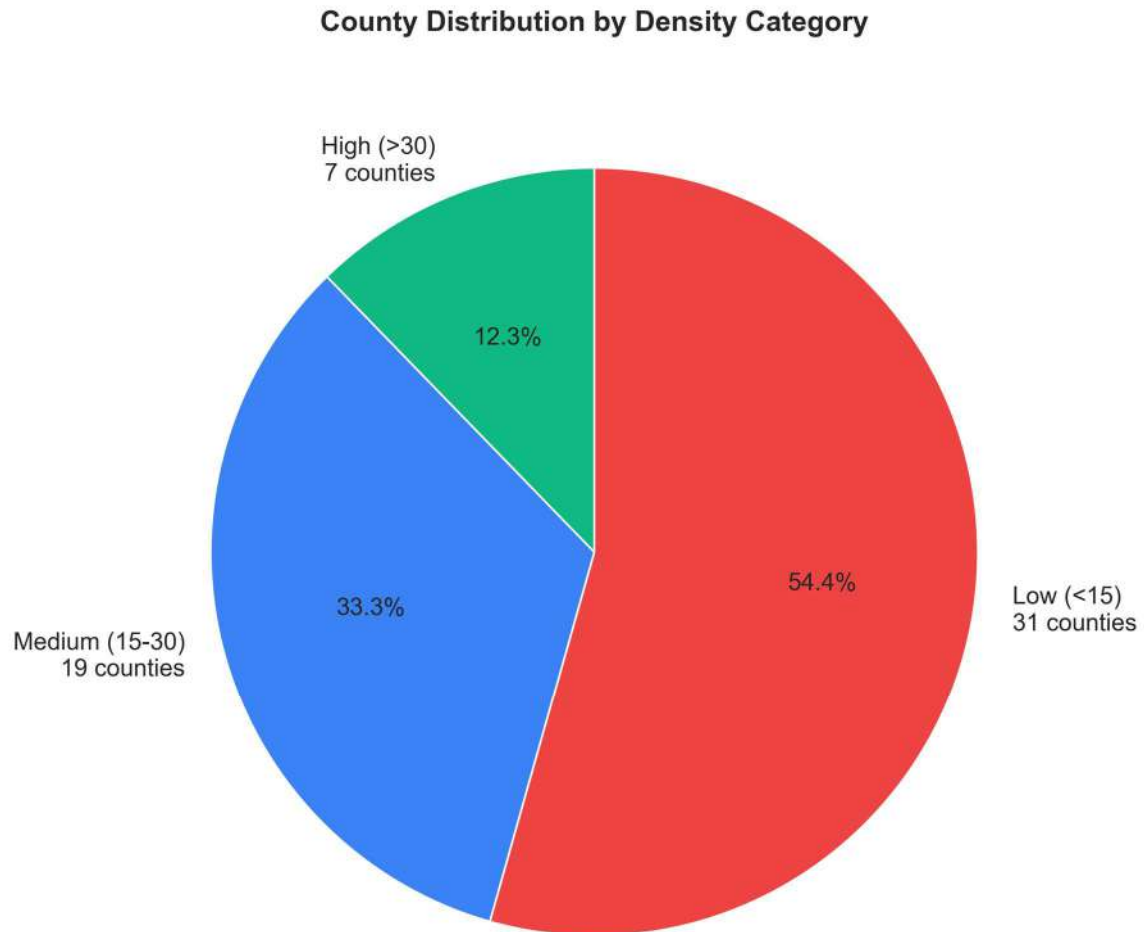
Figure 2: County-Level Density Distribution Across Mississippi

This histogram illustrates the distribution of density values across all Mississippi counties. The average density line provides context for comparing individual counties to the statewide norm.
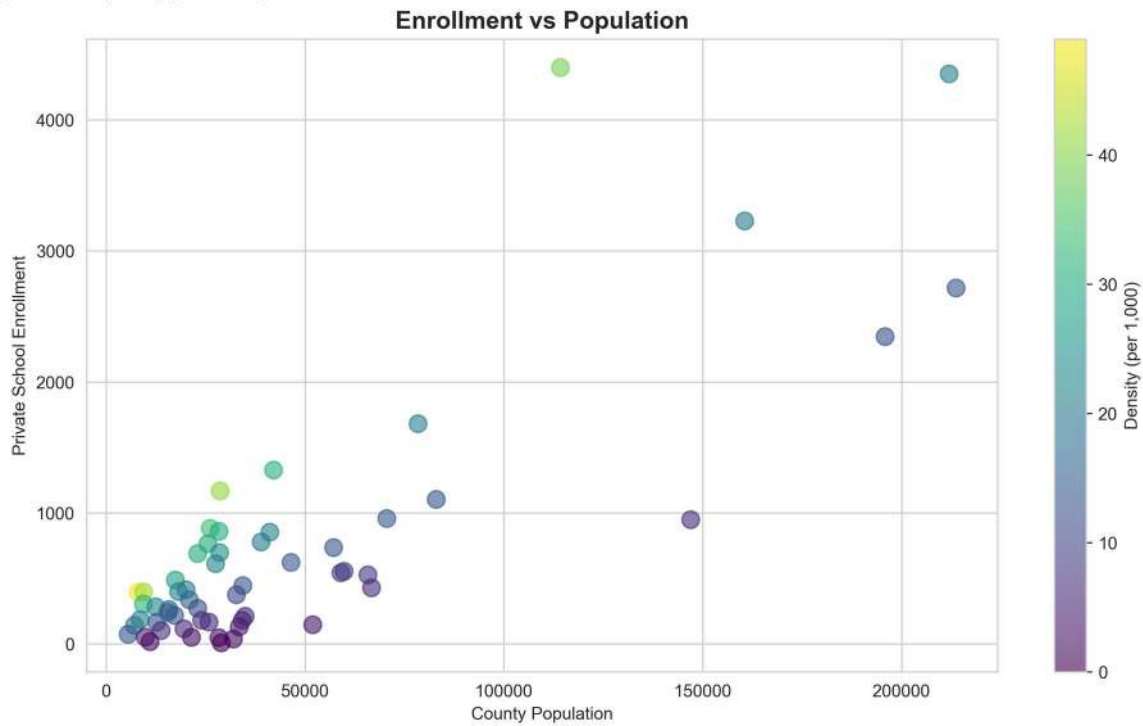
This pie chart shows how Mississippi counties are distributed across three density categories: high (>30), medium (15-30), and low (<15 students per 1,000 residents).
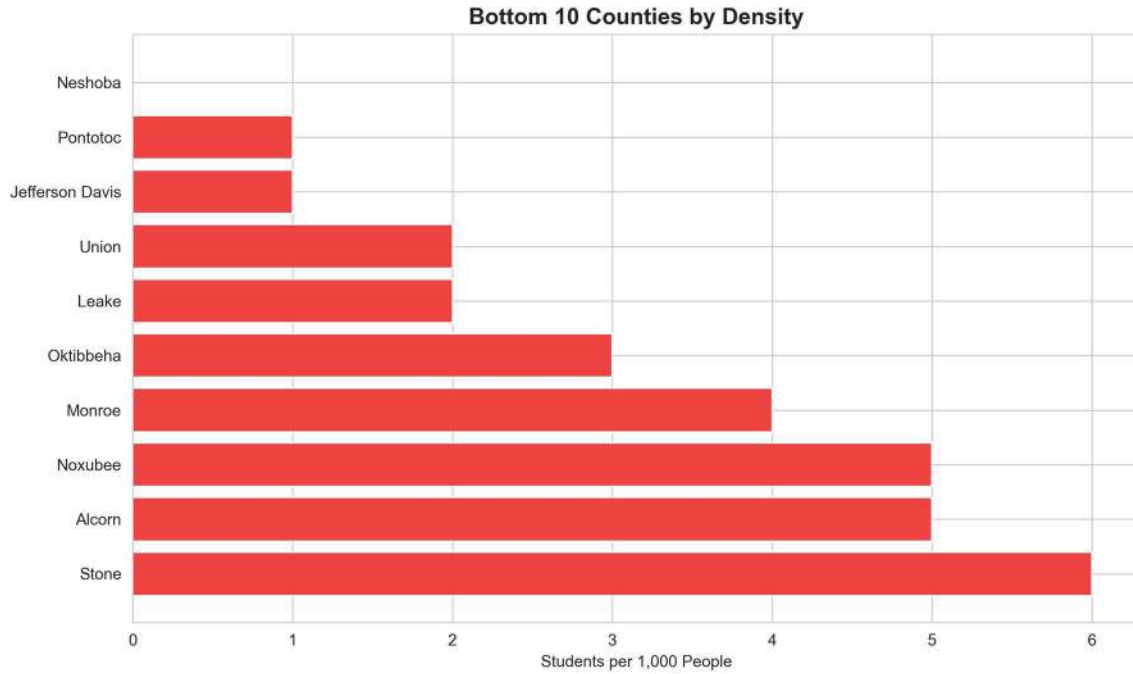

County Distribution by Density Category

Figure 4: County Enrollment vs Population Relationship

This scatter plot examines the relationship between county population size and private school enrollment, with color intensity indicating density levels. Larger populations generally support higher absolute enrollment numbers.
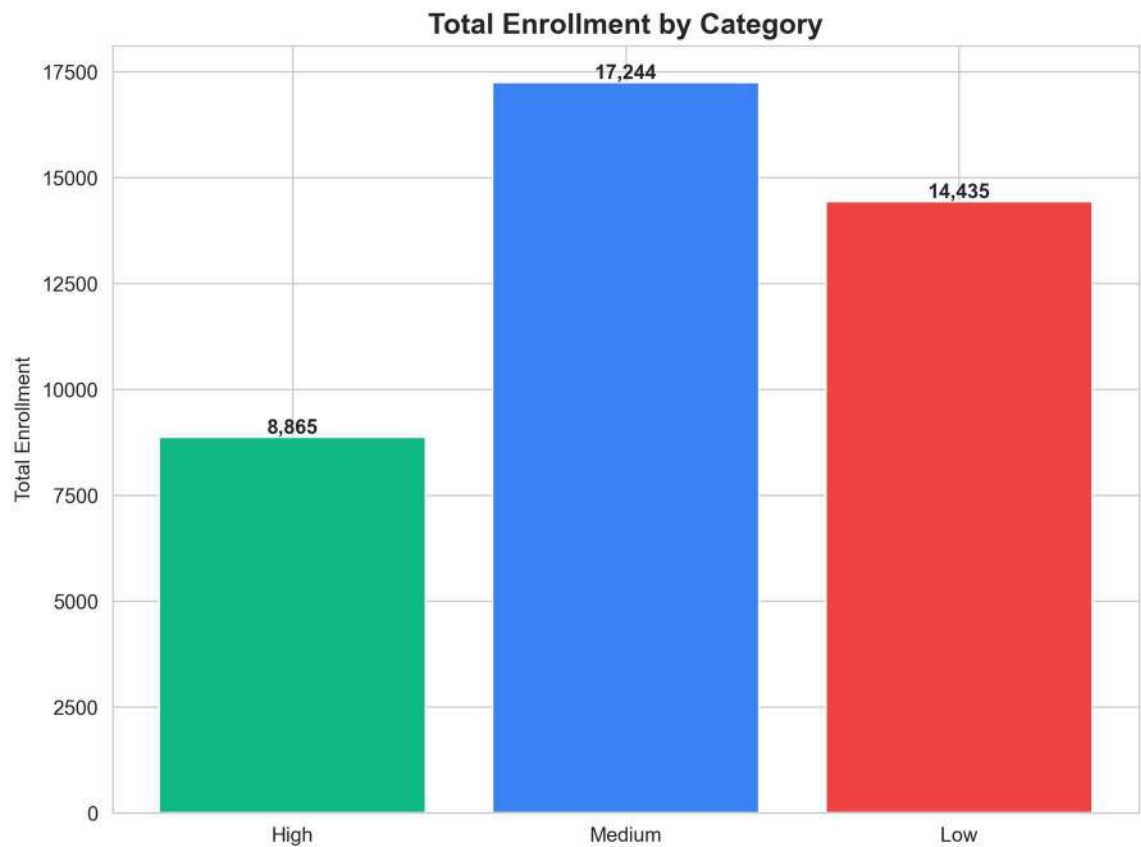

Enrollment vs Population

Figure 5: Counties with Lowest Private School Density

This chart highlights the 10 counties with the lowest private school density, which may indicate limited private school infrastructure.

Bottom 10 Counties by Density

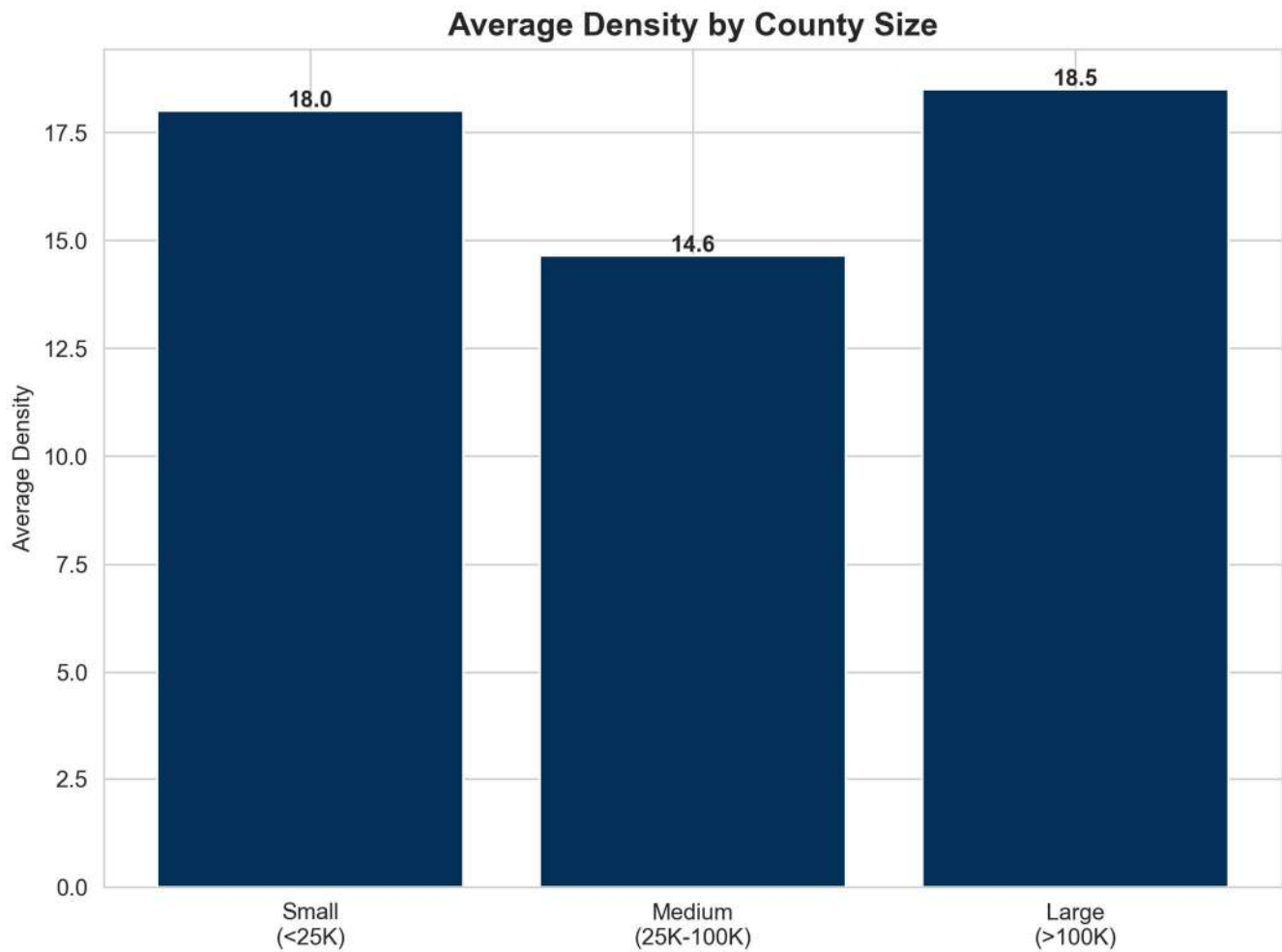## Figure 6: Total Private School Enrollment by Density Category

This comparison shows total private school enrollment aggregated by density category, revealing how enrollment volume correlates with density classification.
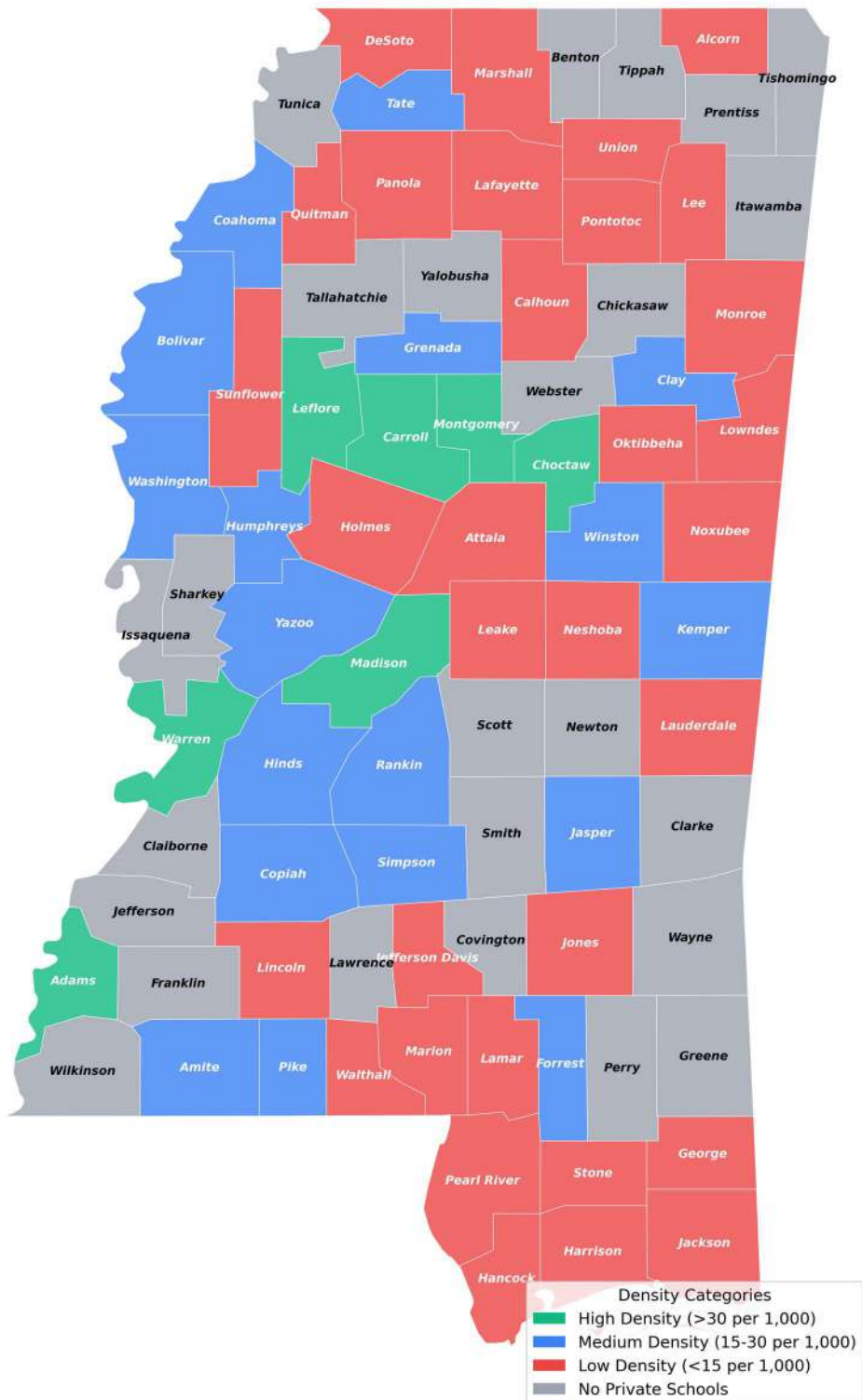

Total Enrollment by Category

Figure 7: Average Density by County Population Size

This analysis groups counties by population size (small <25K, medium 25K-100K, large >100K) and displays average density for each group, showing patterns related to county size.

Average Density by County Size

Figure 8: Mississippi County Private School Density Map

This map visualization displays all Mississippi counties color-coded by density category (green=high, blue=medium, red=low), providing a geographical perspective on private school distribution patterns.

Figure 9: Mississippi County Private School Density Map

Mississippi counties are colored by an alignment score (1-10) that multiplies normalized per capita income by normalized private school density. Green counties (high scores) have both high income and high enrollment, red counties (low scores) have both low income and low enrollment, while orange counties show mismatches between wealth and private school attendance.