

Rural Youth Education Project Second Wave

July 2009

Preface

In 2004, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania contracted with Pennsylvania State University to begin a longitudinal study of rural Pennsylvania school students to understand their educational and career aspirations and the factors influencing their aspirations, whether their plans change as they age and if they attain their goals. The main research questions of the study are:

- What are the educational and occupational aspirations and attainment of rural Pennsylvania students?
- What forces influence educational and occupational aspirations and attainment?
- How do these aspirations change over time and what influences those changes?
- How does educational and career attainment shape decisions about where youth decide to live and their quality of life?

In its entirety, this study is designed to include four waves of data collection, conducted every other year, beginning in 2004 and continuing through 2010. This report briefly describes the procedures used for the second wave of data collection, completed in 2006-2007, and the results from a sample of Pennsylvania's rural 9th grade youth and youth who are 1 year out of high school. As this is only the second wave of data collection, key findings for Waves 1 and 2 only are addressed in this document.

Results from this study will contribute to the understanding of the educational, career and residential choices of rural youth, how these are related, and how they are influenced by family, schools and communities. This information may be used in developing effective state and local policies that aim to promote youth educational aspirations and achievement, and, at the same time, promote viable rural communities where youth want to live as adults.

Introduction

The Rural Youth Education Study is a longitudinal study of two cohorts of rural youth that began in 2004 and will continue to 2010 to collect a total of four waves of data. The study was motivated by the outmigration of youth and young adults from rural areas of Pennsylvania, as the loss of this population from rural Pennsylvania is viewed as a serious problem for the future viability of rural areas and small towns.

The main goal of the study is to understand the future educational, career and residential aspirations of Pennsylvania's rural youth, how these aspirations change over time, and what factors are associated with youth aspirations and their ultimate attainment of those aspirations. Wave 2 data, which is detailed here, has provided the researchers with the first opportunity to examine change over time. The full benefits of this longitudinal prospective study, however, will be realized when subsequent waves of data are collected from the original sample of 1,536 youth surveyed in 2004.

Process

The study design follows two cohorts of rural youth who were in the 7th and 11th grades in Wave 1 and, most recently, in 9th grade and 1 year past high school at Wave 2.

Wave 2 collected survey data from 1,492 rural youth (1,094 in 9th grade and 378 youth who are 1 year out of high school). Of these youth, 946 participated in Wave 1 of the study (625 in 9th grade and 321 who were 1 year out of high school).

In the results detailed below, youth who participated in both Wave 1 and Wave 2 are identified as the "*panel sample*." Youth who responded to Wave 2 only are identified as the "*cross-sectional sample*."

The younger cohort (9th grade) was surveyed in school and the older cohort was surveyed by mail, Internet, and phone.

Key Findings

Younger Cohort

- Between Wave 1 and Wave 2, there was an increase in the educational aspirations of the younger cohort, as more aspired to pursue vo-technical training or attend a 2-year or 4-year college.

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Table 1. Wave 2 Future Educational, Occupational and Residential Aspirations, and Attitudes about Community of the Younger Cohort–9th Grade (weighted data)

	Cross-sectional (Wave 2 only) N=1,094	Panel (responded in Wave 1 and Wave 2) N=625
Educational Aspirations - percentage who aspire to:		
High school or less	15.0%	15.2%
Vo-technical training or 2-year college	17.4	17.7
4-year college or more	67.6	67.1
Occupational Aspirations - percentage who aspire to:		
Professional or managerial	49.1	48.3
Service or technical	19.0	20.0
Labor and production	10.5	9.9
Other	21.4	21.8
Residential Aspirations - percentage who aspire to live in:		
Rural Pennsylvania	28.6	35.0
Urban Pennsylvania	9.0	7.5
Outside Pennsylvania	36.0	35.7
Don't know	26.4	21.8
Attitudes about Community - percentage who agree or strongly agree that:		
This area is a good place to raise a family	79.6	81.1
I could get a good job in this area when I'm an adult	54.0	57.9
There are enough jobs in this area for the people who want them	40.6	44.6
I would have to move away to get the job I want	58.2	55.2
I will need to move away to get the education I want	65.6	67.0
How much do you like living in the town where you currently live? (percentage who report 'a lot' or 'some')	72.5	72.8
How much do you like living in the town where you currently live? (percentage who report 'a lot')	32	48.3

There was also relative stability in the residential and occupational aspirations of the younger cohort.

- About 33 percent of 9th graders in the panel sample reported wanting to live in rural Pennsylvania as an adult, versus living in urban Pennsylvania, an area outside of Pennsylvania, or not knowing where they wanted to live. Also, more than 66 percent wanted to attend college.
- When the same individuals are compared from Wave 1 to Wave 2 (panel data), their educational

aspirations were fairly stable. When aspirations did change, a larger percentage increased, rather than decreased, their educational aspirations from Wave 1 to Wave 2.

- Occupational aspirations changed between Waves 1 and 2, indicating that the younger cohort is not settled on their occupational aspirations at this point in their lives.
- Using the panel data, just over 50 percent of the youth had the same occupational aspirations in Wave 1 as Wave 2. Of those who did change,

the majority seemed to shift their occupational aspirations to jobs that are typically not associated with higher wages and benefits, such as service and technical and labor and production jobs rather than professional and managerial jobs.

- Despite continuing positive attitudes about their local community, more than 50 percent of 9th graders indicated that they will need to move away to pursue educational and career goals.
- Youth with aspirations to live in

Table 2. Older Cohort Educational, Occupational and Residential Aspirations, and Attitudes about Community 1 Year Past High School (weighted data)

	Cross-Sectional (Wave 2 only) N=372	Panel (responded to Wave 1 and Wave 2) N=316
Educational Aspirations - percentage who aspire to:		
High school or less	2.4	2.6
Vo-technical or 2 year college	21.3	21.6
4 year college or more	76.3	75.8
Occupational Aspirations - percentage who aspire to:		
Professional and managerial	61.7	61.7
Service and technical	7.5	8.6
Labor and production	3.8	3.3
Other	27.0	26.4
Residential Aspirations - percentage who aspire to:		
Rural Pennsylvania	30.3	30.7
Urban Pennsylvania	9.9	8.6
Outside Pennsylvania	33.5	35.1
Don't know	26.2	25.6
Attitudes about Community - percentage who agree or strongly agree that:		
This area is a good place to raise a family	86.3	86.3
I could get a good job in this area when I'm an adult	49.9	48.8
There are enough jobs in this area for the people who want them	41.5	39.6
I would have to move away to get the job I want	58.4	59.0
I will need to move away to get the education I want	55.9	58.1
How much do you like living in the town where you currently live? (percentage who report 'a lot' or 'some')	73.5	71.9
How much do you like living in the town where you currently live? (percentage who report 'a lot')	33.6	31.9

rural Pennsylvania have lower educational and career aspirations, but more positive attitudes about their local communities.

Older Cohort

- Educational aspirations increased between Wave 1 and Wave 2. Occupational aspirations shifted toward managerial and professional jobs instead of service and technical and labor and production jobs. The older cohort experienced a slight

shift toward aspirations to live in rural Pennsylvania in adulthood.

- Among youth who responded in both waves, almost 75 percent had the same educational aspirations in both waves. For those with changed aspirations, almost twice as many raised as lowered their educational aspirations from Wave 1 to Wave 2.
- About half of the older cohort in the panel had no change in their occupational aspirations from Wave 1 to Wave 2. More than 20 percent of

those who did change occupational aspirations chose the professional or managerial category rather than the service and technical or labor and production categories.

- Just over half of the panel respondents had the same residential aspirations in Wave 1 as Wave 2. Among those who changed their residential aspirations, slightly more preferred rural Pennsylvania in Wave 2 than left that category between Wave 1 and Wave 2.

- The older cohort is very attracted to their local community, but believe they need to move away to achieve educational and career goals.
- There are no significant differences in educational or occupational aspirations by residential aspirations for the older cohort. Among those that aspire to live in rural Pennsylvania, however, there is evidence for more optimism about future job prospects in their local community, and a higher percentage report liking their local community.
- More than 66 percent of the older cohort had not left their home community at Wave 2. Nearly 75 percent are engaged in some post-secondary education, and more than 60 percent are “on track” to attain their educational goals identified in Wave 1.
- More than 60 percent of the older cohort who were enrolled in school – which includes vo-technical training, 2-year college and 4 year-college – at Wave 2 also are employed.

The researchers will offer policy recommendations relevant for shaping youth educational, occupational and residential aspirations and that would contribute to improving youth attainment of their aspirations as additional waves of the study are completed.

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