

Congruence of Aspirations of Rural Youth With Expectations Held by Parents and School Staff

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This study explored the relationship of the aspirations of rural high school students with the expectations held by their parents and teachers. A sample of eleventh and twelfth grade students from 21 rural high schools in 21 states, along with their parents and teachers, revealed significant coefficients of concordance among the three groups' expectations for adulthood. While expectations for personal and economic success were highly prized, community-minded goals for civic responsibility were ascribed far less importance. Implications for rural schools and communities are discussed.

Introduction

With public attention given to attaining high standards, the clamor for high expectations for students rings loud. However, there remain these questions: What are high expectations? What is the focus of those high expectations—academic achievement, job/career attainment, financial success, personal happiness, social contribution? Who has these high expectations? Do parents, school staff, and students have the same high expectations? The purposes of this study were to provide insight for addressing these questions with emphasis on exploring if there is congruence among rural student aspirations and expectations of youth held by parents and school staff.

This study was conducted to identify the aspirations rural youth hold for themselves and to compare those aspirations with the expectations of parents and school staff. The study also looked beyond educational and occupational aspirations by exploring “quality of life” attributes valued by rural youth, their parents, and school staff, e.g. the importance of family and community to happiness in adulthood.

Examining expectations for rural students creates a window for exploring the role rural schools might play in preparing rural youth for life after high school. The belief that rural schools should prepare students to leave the community to pursue educational and career opportunities in

metropolitan areas is not uncommon (Haller & Monk, 1992). Those who hold this position fail to see the bleak future it offers for rural communities. A rural community's greatest asset is its youth. Haas (1992) maintains that community conditions interact with student imaginations as they realize their aspirations. When rural youth migrate from their hometowns, rural communities are deprived of talent and vitality that contribute to the development of a desirable future for these communities.

Survey data from a cluster sample of rural high school students, parents of high school students, and certified high school staff were used to test hypotheses on the tendency for congruence of youth aspirations with expectations of their parents and school staff. Six regional educational laboratories participated in collecting data from states within their regions for the cluster sample. The participating laboratories were Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, and Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Included in the cluster sample were 21 high schools selected from 21 states.

Literature Review

Whereas there is little research that examines for congruence of student aspirations with expectations of parents and school staff, a number of studies have examined educational or occupational aspirations of youth. There is research providing comparisons of aspirations of rural and metropolitan youth, while other studies have examined the factors that influence student aspirations.

Aspirations influence students' learning and how they prepare for their life choices (Walberg, 1989). Quaglia (1996) suggests that student aspirations are “the glue that holds the educational process together.” He goes on to advocate that aspirations go beyond students having goals and

This study was conducted by six of the regional educational laboratories—Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, and Southeastern Regional Vision for Education—as part of a collaborative network for rural education.

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ambition—aspirations provide insight to what students think and feel about themselves, their schools, and the roles they have within the school community.

Haller and Monk (1992) identify potentially conflicting implications for educational policies adopted by local school boards to prepare students' for their pathways to adulthood. If local boards believe the out-migration of rural youth to metropolitan areas is inevitable, they may feel more obligated to prepare students for metropolitan jobs. Other boards might interpret such actions as community suicide and attempt to counter out-migration by modifying curricula around rural living and local job markets. Haller and Monk found that curricular offerings and school size contribute only a minor impact on the out-migration of rural youth (p. 20). The primary determinants of youths' tendencies to leave home stem from individual traits of students in conjunction with structural aspects of their schools and communities—factors of isolation, intellectual levels, and to a lesser degree, ruralness. This is reinforced by Ovando's (1984) observations that rural youth in Alaska face "the dilemma of having very strong positive feelings for the community yet, also wanting a level of economic security that might force them to leave" (p. 26).

Pollard, O'Hare, and Berg (1990) analyzed High School and Beyond data for factors that contribute to the probability of rural youth migrating 50 miles from their hometowns. They found community factors do play an important role in the out-migration of rural youth:

- As a community's per-capita income increased, the likelihood of youth out-migration from that community decreased.
- In contrast, increases in a community's per pupil high school expenditures increased the probability of out-migration among rural youth.
- The further rural youth lived from the nearest 4-year college, the more likely they were to move from their hometowns.
- Youth in rural Midwest and West were more likely to move than those in the South and Northeast. (p. vi)

Although rural youth were more likely to leave their hometowns than metropolitan youth, data were not available to indicate that rural youth necessarily moved to metropolitan areas (Pollard et al., 1990). However, the existence of out-migration implies three issues: their hometowns had few economic opportunities; they lacked faith in their hometowns' ability to provide favorable economic conditions, and rural youth were willing to look elsewhere for opportunities. If rural schools prepare students so their hopes and dreams are permeated with options—to remain in the com-

munity, to leave, or to return—rural communities stand to benefit.

While the differences are small, rural youth tend to have lower aspirations for postsecondary educational attainment, holding high-level professional jobs, and earning high salaries than do their metropolitan cohorts (Haas, 1992; Haller & Virkler, 1993; and McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). Various conditions are cited as explanation for these lower educational and occupational aspirations. Research documents the powerful relationship between socioeconomic status and educational outcomes. This condition transcends factors of rurality, isolation, or school size. However, the condition of poverty is greater in rural areas than elsewhere (O'Hare, 1988). Educational attainment level of parents influences student educational aspirations, and rural students are less likely to have a parent with a bachelor's degree than metropolitan students (Pollard et al., 1990). Interestingly, Pollard et al. found that differences for both educational and occupational aspirations were greater between rural youth who left and those who remained in their hometowns than were differences between rural youth and nonrural youth.

Rural youth do consider their future educational, career, and residential plans. Hektner (1995) found that rural youth are more likely to have conflicting aspirations than nonrural youth. Their feelings about the importance of living close to family come into conflict with their feelings about the importance of leaving for educational and career opportunities. Hektner explains that rural youth experience more difficulty in making plans because of their "perceived and actual necessity of leaving their communities in order to pursue their educational and/or career goals" (p. 11).

Methodology

To identify the aspirations youth hold for themselves, a survey instrument was developed by adapting selected items from High School and Beyond instruments and the Indiana Youth Poll. High School and Beyond is a longitudinal survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics of the U. S. Department of Education. The initial survey was conducted in 1980 with follow-up studies in 1982, 1984, and 1986. The Indiana Youth Poll is a project of the Indiana Youth Institute initially designed in 1989 to explore the doubts, hopes, and dreams that youth have for the future. Whereas the High School and Beyond instruments explore extensive details about parents' educational backgrounds, economic status, and type of employment, we desired an instrument that inquired explicitly about the plans and thoughts youth have for their future after high school.

Three survey instruments were developed and used for this study—one for students, one for parents, and one for

Table 1
Participating States and Number of Respondents

State	Students	Parents	Staff
Alabama	48	20	30
Alaska	43	—	32
Arkansas	134	32	4
Florida	22	11	6
Georgia	75	—	7
Idaho	50	16	7
Iowa	28	—	14
Louisiana	126	21	9
Michigan	56	10	9
Minnesota	203	136	38
Mississippi	64	34	10
Missouri	17	16	13
New Mexico	416	122	51
North Carolina	47	13	22
Ohio	61	19	6
Oregon	35	14	9
Tennessee	160	139	17
Texas	62	36	—
Virginia	490	90	51
Washington	50	28	23
West Virginia	168	32	25
Total	2355	789	383

school staff. Essentially, the three instruments differ only in that questions were appropriately worded for the respective respondents. Also, Spanish versions of the instruments were prepared and used in two schools where a significant number of respondents' first language was Spanish. Each instrument included the seven categories listed below:

1. Respondents were asked to indicate how important 21 attributes were to attaining goals after high school.
2. Respondents were asked to what extent 18 potential barriers might prevent students from getting the kind of work they would like.
3. Respondents were asked to indicate how important 22 performance characteristics were to students' future.
4. Respondents were asked to identify qualities essential to being a successful adult from a list of 13.
5. Respondents were asked to identify where student(s) would be living at age 30. Three options were provided: local area where they now live, somewhere else in the same state, or outside this state.

6. Respondents were asked to identify how clear student(s) plans are for adult life relative to five topics—postsecondary education, kind of job/career, whether or not to have a family, where student(s) will live, and level of community involvement.
7. Respondents were asked to describe students' views about the community where they now live, selecting from three options—as good as anywhere else, preference to live in a larger community, or preference to live in a smaller community.

Using collected survey data, three major hypotheses were tested for each of seven categories:

1. Expectations held by parents of rural youth tend to conform with aspirations that youth hold for themselves.
2. Expectations held by school staff for rural youth tend to conform with aspirations that youth hold for themselves.
3. Expectations held by parents of rural youth tend to conform with expectations held by youth's school staff.

The cluster sample used for the study consisted of 2355 students, 789 parents, and 383 certified high school staff from 21 rural high schools in 21 states. The rural high schools ranged in size from 75 to 1000 students, with an average of 361. This average is somewhat larger than the national median of rural high school enrollment of 310 (Stern, 1984). The small sample was restricted to one rural high school per state per participating regional educational laboratory. Initial contact with selected rural school districts was made with school superintendents to request their districts' participation in the study. School districts were asked to distribute and collect the parent and school staff surveys. High school principals in these districts were asked to administer and collect surveys for their junior and senior students. Table 1 identifies the number of respondents for each respective state.

It is estimated that the return rates for the 21 schools was 71% for students, 23% for parents, and 67% for teachers. Thus, care should be taken in generalizing these results across rural schools and respondent groups for the nation as a whole.

Kendall's coefficient of concordance (ω) was used to determine the consistency among the rankings of the mean ratings among the respondent groups to test the hypotheses. Chi-square (χ^2) was subsequently used to determine if overall differences in these ratings were likely due to chance.

Table 2

Mean Ratings (in Rank Order) of the Importance of Factors for Attaining Postsecondary Personal Goals Where 1 = Very Important and 3 = Not Important

Item	Student	Parent	Staff
a Being dependable	1.143	1.023	1.018
k Having the ability to make decisions	1.147	1.090	1.173
b Having the ability to follow directions	1.160	1.056	1.034
c Being willing to learn new skills	1.185	1.116	1.110
r Being honest and demonstrating integrity	1.205	1.053	1.047
s Demonstrating respect for others	1.220	1.078	1.065
e Having the ability to get along with others	1.283	1.125	1.139
n Having the ability to problem solve	1.345	1.150	1.131
l Having the ability to make changes	1.346	1.228	1.292
h Having the ability to be organized	1.347	1.189	1.272
d Being punctual	1.348	1.115	1.089
m Being neat in appearance	1.370	1.220	1.524
f Having a good attendance record	1.381	1.144	1.123
i Being proficient with basic English skills	1.386	1.166	1.149
g Being proficient with basic math skills	1.425	1.166	1.214
q Being proficient with basic computer knowledge and skills	1.459	1.286	1.436
j Having the ability to accept criticism	1.579	1.293	1.283
p Being on task every minute	1.586	1.652	1.805
o Being willing to do jobs others dislike	1.639	1.564	1.707
u Being well prepared in the arts and sciences	1.745	1.594	1.695
t Having bilingual abilities	1.808	1.827	2.213

Results

Students, parents, and staff were first asked to rate the importance of 21 factors to the attainment of the students' postsecondary goals. Table 2 summarizes the mean ratings of each group in descending rank order of perceived importance. The rank order of placement by the three respondent groups had a statistically significant coefficient of concordance ($+ .90, p < .001$). Table 9 provides a summary of all coefficients. The three respondent groups placed the most importance upon personal qualities and less importance upon specific areas of academic proficiency. Chi-square analyses did not reveal that the three groups overall ratings were significantly different. However, teachers rated decision making less important than either students or parents. Students rated the ability to make changes more important than either their parents or teachers.

Respondents were next asked to rate the extent to which 18 factors were barriers to acquiring the student's desired work. Table 3 summarizes the mean ratings of each group in descending rank order of perceived influence. Again, the rank order of placement by the three respondent groups had a statistically significant coefficient of concordance ($+ .76, p < .01$). The three respondent groups viewed economic and educational factors as the most common barriers, while gender, parental, racial, and geographic discrimina-

tion issues were considered to be least important. Chi-square analyses of the overall ratings by the three groups were not statistically significant. More teachers considered lack of motivation to succeed and not wanting to work hard as barriers, than did the students and their parents.

The third section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rate the importance of 22 factors for the students' future (see Table 4). Again, the three groups consistently ranked these factors, as shown by a significant coefficient of concordance ($+ .79, p < .001$). The groups agreed that career success, economic security, health, and balanced family life were of greatest concern, while family, community and geographic connectedness were of far less importance. There was significant disagreement ($\chi^2 = 60.1, p < .05$) among the three groups on the perceived importance of several factors. In particular, more students placed a premium on being successful in their career, than did their parents and teachers. Further, by far fewer teachers and parents rated giving children better opportunities as important, than did students.

Next, respondents identified from a list of 13 items, those considered to be essential for successful adulthood as shown in Table 5. Students, parents, and teachers quite consistently ranked these factors, providing a statistically significant coefficient of concordance ($+ .82, p < .01$). A secure, satisfying job, good health, happy family, financial

Table 3

Mean Ratings (in Rank Order) of the Extent to Which Factors Pose Barriers to Desired Career Where 1 = A Large Extent and 3 = Not At All

Item	Student	Parent	Staff	
a	Lack of money for education	1.790	1.769	1.786
h	Don't get high enough grades	2.048	2.258	1.796
l	Lack of jobs/bad economy	2.068	2.001	1.942
i	Lack of knowledge about career possibilities	2.080	2.162	1.825
j	Don't have the necessary skills	2.136	2.229	1.509
n	Not knowing the right people	2.165	2.182	2.123
c	Lack of transportation	2.189	2.331	2.154
m	Job I want doesn't pay enough	2.198	2.264	2.018
g	Didn't take the right courses in high school	2.199	2.326	1.880
e	Family or home responsibilities	2.225	2.545	1.842
b	No college or place to get training near home	2.237	2.260	2.205
f	Not enough motivation to succeed	2.244	2.339	1.287
k	Lack of intelligence	2.282	2.539	2.055
o	Not wanting to work hard	2.316	2.418	1.383
p	Living in a rural place	2.317	2.375	2.163
q	Racism	2.421	2.576	2.412
d	Parents-family disapprove	2.436	2.627	2.058
r	Sexism	2.447	2.563	2.389

Table 4

Mean Ratings (in Rank Order) of the Importance of Factors to Personal Future Where 1 = Very Important and 3 = Not Important

Item	Student	Parent	Staff	
o	Being successful in my job/career	1.112	1.179	1.357
m	Being able to support myself comfortably	1.134	1.129	1.265
q	Being able to find steady work	1.142	1.121	1.232
e	Staying healthy	1.143	1.096	1.247
f	Managing finances	1.176	1.118	1.259
n	Balancing work and home responsibilities	1.210	1.178	1.310
r	Being able to give my children better opportunities than I've had	1.215	1.449	1.677
i	Trying to do the right thing	1.220	1.149	1.339
g	Maintaining good friendships	1.248	1.264	1.462
h	Enjoying leisure time	1.324	1.385	1.511
c	Maintaining a long-term, spousal relationship	1.331	1.272	1.474
b	Finding the right person to marry and having a happy family	1.353	1.369	1.466
d	Raising children	1.444	1.440	1.515
a	Running a household	1.498	1.463	1.499
p	Having lots of money	1.550	1.924	2.140
u	Working to correct social and economic ills	1.841	1.880	2.040
k	Providing volunteer service in the community	1.870	1.818	2.005
j	Being involved in public affairs (voting, working for a candidate for public office or a political party)	1.887	1.905	1.989
s	Living close to parents and relatives	1.926	1.929	2.190
v	Staying connected to the land (being a steward of the environment)	1.945	1.912	2.016
l	Being a leader in my community	1.952	1.930	2.130
t	Getting away from this area of the country	2.073	2.382	2.406

Table 5
Percent Indicating (in Rank Order) Factors Considered as Important for Successful Adulthood

Item		Student	Parent	Staff
a	Having a job that I like	97.1	96.4	88.2
j	Having good health	94.8	95.0	92.9
i	Having a happy family life	94.0	95.0	95.3
b	Having a job that pays well	92.1	76.9	47.0
l	Achieving personal goals	92.0	90.8	87.9
c	Having a job that provides long-term employment security	91.2	86.8	77.4
f	Being content and satisfied where I live	89.8	90.0	84.8
g	Having enough money for leisure time activities	87.1	74.4	56.2
h	Having time to pursue interests outside of my work	87.0	83.2	74.8
d	Having close friends	83.0	81.2	72.2
m	Having a spiritually fulfilling life	81.7	89.9	80.3
k	Being flexible to change my lifestyle (new job, new community, new relationships)	75.1	82.2	83.5
e	Contributing to the community where I live	56.6	67.6	65.6

independence, and personal fulfillment define the rural American dream. Community service, flexible lifestyle and spiritual fulfillment fell at the bottom of the list for success. Overall significant differences among the groups were not found. A well paying job was rated as being more important by students, than by parents and teachers.

Respondents rated the certainty with which students had made plans for the future in various areas, as shown in Table 6. Students and parents were in total agreement in their ranking of these areas (Kendall's $\omega = +.77$). Students were most certain of their plans for continuing education, career options and family goals. They were considered by all to be less clear of their future locale and degree of community involvement.

Finally, respondents were queried concerning the students' current and likely future locale. Significantly more students and their parents ($\chi^2 = 14.7, p < .01$) valued current locale than did teachers (see Table 7). Few of any groups viewed students as having a desire to live in a smaller

community. As to the predicted future locale of the students (see Table 8), teachers were twice as likely to predict that students would remain in their local community than students. Students were most likely to predict their residence to be outside the state, while parents predicted that they would live elsewhere within the state. This low degree of concordance was reflected by statistically significant Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 39.2, p < .001$).

Discussion

Rural youth aspire to lead a successful and fulfilling adulthood. These views are consistently shared by their parents and teachers. In spite of the emphasis policymakers have given to the importance of academic performance, all three groups consider personal qualities to be far more important to future success. Factors of rural isolation, limited educational opportunity, and discrimination were not considered to be the most common barriers to a desired

Table 6
Mean Rating (in Rank Order of the Clarity of Students' Plans for Adulthood, Where 1 = "Very Definite" and 5 = "Haven't Thought About It")

Item		Student	Parent	Staff
a	Whether or not I continue my education after high school	1.685	1.580	2.320
b	The kind of job/career I want as an adult	1.914	2.115	2.749
c	Whether or not I will have a family	1.972	2.368	2.481
d	Where I will live	2.543	2.832	2.812
e	The level of involvement I will have in my community	3.079	3.170	3.706

Table 7
View of Students' Current Locale

Item	Student	Parent	Staff
a Living here is as good as anywhere else	47.7%	56.5%	35.3%
b I would rather live in a larger community	47.0%	38.9%	63.9%
c I would rather live in a smaller community	5.3%	4.5%	0.8%

Table 8
Expected Locale of Student at Age 30

Item	Student	Parent	Staff
c Outside this state	45.5%	30.2%	8.6%
b Somewhere else in this state	31.8%	43.7%	42.4%
a In the local area where I live now	22.7%	26.1%	49.1%

Table 9
Concordance Among Student, Parent, and Teacher Rankings of Aspirations

	Kendall's ω	<i>p</i>
Factors for Attaining Personal Goals	+ .90	< .001
Factors Posing Barriers to Desired Career	+ .76	< .01
Factors Important to Personal Future	+ .79	< .001
Factors Essential for Successful Adulthood	+ .82	< .01
Clarity of Students Plans	+ .77	< .05

career. Economic constraints, however, topped the list, both in financing continuing education and poor economic opportunity. Fewer teachers are apparently aware of the constraints students and parents associate with financing postsecondary education and overcoming poor school performance. Further, teachers viewed student motivation and effort as the most important bases for success.

Neither the conventional wisdom of rural youth connections to the local family, community, and the land appear to be contradicted by the study. Nor does the alternative expectation that most students desire to escape from the local milieu appear to be commonly held. These were found at the bottom of the list of qualities defining adult success. Community activism and leadership are not areas to which many are expected to aspire.

Rural youth, their parents, and teachers speak of their future career and educational plans with relative certainty. They are less certain, however, about where they will eventually live or their degree of community involvement. If rural communities are hinging their future on the leadership and activism of local youth, it is not reflected in the perceptions of rural students, parents, and teachers.

Finally, teachers hold substantially different views about the value of the local community. While teachers are more likely to believe that students would prefer to live somewhere else, they also are more likely to believe that students will not move away from the area in the future. In this regard, teachers' expectations may be more limiting than those of students and parents who value their community but also recognize their probable mobility.

This study has much to do with the concept of community. Sergiovanni (1994) speaks of the four common bonds which can form among individuals to create a collective, sustained community sentiment. "In time, communities by kinship, of place, and of mind become communities of memory." Further, he asserts that such communities are transformed into "a tightly knit web of meaningful relationships." Conventional wisdom asserts that a major advantage of rural settings is the value of highly personal relationships with family, the land, community values and traditions. Yet, factors associated with such community ties—community leadership, stewardship, family connections, civic affairs, social responsibility, voluntary service, close friendships, and other community contributions—all

ranked in the bottom half of factors considered important for successful adulthood. Not only was this true among the ideals of the majority of the rural young adults which were surveyed, but also for the expectations of more seasoned, mature parents, and teachers. It would appear that personal career and economic success have overshadowed more selfless concern for the common benefit of the community. Civic mindedness does not stand out as central to the "American dream." Apparently rural youth have bought into the material achievements of the faceless, placeless metropolitan aura of superficiality.

It's ironic that Sergiovanni's (1994) article is concerned with organizing schools as communities. He asserts that schools would need to be transformed "into several small schools rarely exceeding 300 or so students. The importance of creating sustained relationships would require that students and teachers stay together for longer periods of time . . . organizing themselves into small and probably multiaged families." His ideal of creating school "communities by kinship and of place," by "ideas and relationships" would appear to be describing small, rural schools. Yet, the survey results suggest that teachers may buy into the value of the local rural community even less than do the students and their parents. Far fewer teachers voiced a preference for the rural community in which they taught, but expected that the rural students would most likely continue to live there in adulthood. Maybe school size and classroom relationships are insufficient for promoting greater rural community connections. Recent trends toward community-based educational activities, such as school-to-work, service learning, and place-based education may well help to reinforce "community mindedness." However, teachers will likewise need to be better prepared to value and encourage community-based learning. Conscious attention to involving school personnel in rural community affairs may help to garner those "communities of kinship and place" of which Sergiovanni spoke.

The concept of community plays out in another way. If shared values and being of "like mind" are measures of community, then our rural students, parents, and teachers are most certainly a community. The consistency among the survey responses of the three rural groups is noteworthy. How was such congruence among the expectations of these groups achieved? In an era of accommodating diverse values and ideals, rural citizens seem to be together in their goals for adulthood. This solidarity of goals is an enviable strength for these schools and communities. Further, the emphasis upon the value of personal qualities as very important to future success and the relative lack of emphasis given to potential inequities in opportunity reinforce the rural ideal of personal resolve, self-determination, and self-sufficiency.

Rural students and their parents for the most part seem resigned to the notion that their fortunes will be sought else-

where. This is nothing new. William Shakespeare observed that, "Such wind as scatters young men through the world to seek their fortunes further than at home, where small experience grows." If *where* fortunes will be sought is fuzzy, then just *how* these fortunes will be achieved seems even less clear. Teachers were more concerned with students' willingness to work hard and motivation to succeed as potential barriers to student aspirations. Academic proficiency did not top the list of important factors for attaining post-secondary personal goals. Yet, hopefully school experiences do help guide students in the actions to be taken to achieve these goals, be they career choices, options for continuing education, or more general lifestyle decisions. Expectations about goals are much sharper than expectations about the steps to get there.

Implications

Rural youth, with the support of their families and teachers, are making clear choices about their livelihood. Plans have been made about continuing their postsecondary education, yet they have substantial fears about their own academic and financial limitations in pursuing those dreams.

Plans have been made for pursuing a career, yet they have fears about their own abilities and awareness of career choices along with the limited economic opportunities and the vast distances associated with the countryside. While they value their own local community, they expect to live somewhere else. These findings echo the uncertainty of growing up rural—will I be smart enough; will I have the skills to succeed; will I know the right people when I leave this place for distant, unknown opportunity? The results suggest that in subtle and not so subtle ways, we are inviting our children to leave, to become nomads.

Rural communities concerned with long-term sustainability and survival see youth as their future. Yet, the importance of community leadership and activism, interpersonal connectedness, and stewardship of place are not attributes to which rural youth are expected to, nor do they aspire. While a premium is placed upon personal character, it is not being invested in the local community. Community ventures to instill this community mindedness in youth would seem a worthwhile investment. Rural youth have learned the importance of personal achievement, but may also benefit from an understanding of "selfless acts."

There are several implications for rural schools and communities. First, these schools, families, and communities can take pride in the strong values which they have imparted to their youth. The great consistency among expectations and aspirations is noteworthy. Second, students need additional learning experiences to make more informed, conscious choices about their future locale. Possibly through greater engagement in community-based

activities, they can gain an appreciation of potential opportunities for continuing a rural livelihood. Practical steps can be taken to implement the school factors which impact student aspirations noted by Quaglia (1996). Avenues can also be sought for reinforcing the community connections of rural teachers to gain a greater sense of the context in which rural students thrive.

Finally, as we seek to achieve the nation's educational goals, we should be reminded of the findings of *First Things First* (Public Agenda, 1994), that "eighty-eight percent of Americans say that emphasizing habits such as being on time, and being dependable and disciplined would make a great deal of difference in how much students learn." Rural youth not only understand, but subscribe to, the expectations of their parents and teachers that character counts.

Among the implications drawn from the current study which warrant further investigation is the differences that might be found among the urban counterparts of these students, parents, and teachers. Is there a similar degree of concordance in metropolitan settings? Further, the study design did not lend itself to additional analyses of gender, ethnic, economic, or regional differences. Finally, it is possible that the degree of teacher "connectedness" may influence her expectations for rural youth. Studies of differences in expectations of rural teachers associated with duration of tenure in the local school, degree of involvement in community activities, and other indices of community ties would be well worth pursuing.

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