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AUTHOR McCracken, J. David; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationships between high school curriculum (academic, general, and vocational) and students' occupational and educational aspirations in rural schools. The study was conducted in Ohio and then replicated in Southwest Georgia. In Ohio, 767 predominantly white rural senior students completed a questionnaire and the students' academic records were reviewed. In Georgia, 266 senior students completed the same questionnaire. The rural Ohio population was nearly all white, while the Southwest Georgia population was 73 percent black. In both sites, students in the academic curriculum: (1) had an underrepresentation of non-whites; (2) had a higher mean socioeconomic status (SES); (3) had the highest SES index scores for their desired and expected occupations; (4) were more confident about their occupational aspirations; and (5) were more likely to plan to further their education and pursue that education immediately after high school. In Ohio, a greater proportion of females were in the academic curriculum. A much higher percentage of Southwest Georgia than Ohio students felt their parents expected them to further their education. A much higher income was expected by rural students in Southwest Georgia than students in rural Ohio. Further research should focus on reasons for gender and ethnicity differences. Educators should consider the desirability of classifying students into specific programs. (KS)

HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND ASPIRATIONS OF STUDENTS IN OHIO AND SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

by
J. David McCracken

High School Curriculum and Aspirations of Students in Ohio and Southwest Georgia

J. David McCracken, Jeff D. T. Barcinas and Daniel Wims
Department of Agricultural Education

Students develop educational and occupational plans that build upon their backgrounds of experiences (Odell, 1988). The life experiences of secondary students have been determined in part by the families of which they are members, the communities in which they live, and the schools that they attend. These life experiences manifest themselves in the educational and occupational expectations of students (p. 17). Yang (1981) reported that the decision of rural youth to enter college was strongly influenced by the expectations of their parents. Lee (1984) advised that "parents, regardless of their racial background, need to be fully aware of their influence on the aspirations and expectations of young men and women" (p. 33).

Kotrlik and Harrison (1989) concluded that students perceive that their parents influence their career choice more than any other person, and the mother is more influential than the father. Most students also perceived that their parents, teachers and counselors were all encouraging college attendance after graduation from high school. Interest in the work, working conditions, salary/wages, and personal satisfaction were the leading factors considered by seniors when selecting a career (pp. 60-61).

Social class is closely related to occupation. Indeed, most students of social class behavior agree that as a single measure of the overall complex of class behavior, a scale of occupations is clearly the most efficient instrument to use. Managers and professionals tend to be upper class or upper middle class. Skilled workers, semiprofessionals, small proprietors, and white-collar workers most frequently are lower middle class. Semiskilled workers are frequently upper lower class, and those people who work only when they choose to do so are usually lower class. The higher the social class, the higher the income, education, material possessions, and status (Evans and Herr, 1978, pp. 119-120).

Evans and Herr (1978) identify factors associated with low occupational status that are readily modifiable by schools as: low educational attainment, low occupational skill and knowledge, low awareness of occupational opportunities, and little understanding of effects of absenteeism, productivity, promptness, etc. (p. 122). Low aspirations of parents for their children was listed as a factor modifiable to a certain extent by schools.

What extent does the school play in forming the aspirations of students? Miller (1974) contended that schools are occupationally prejudiced and thus may influence students in ways that may not be in their best interests.

Has occupational prejudice become a product of our educational system? Many educators at first thought would say that such an idea has little foundation . . . . Most educators have different value hierarchies than employees in the nonprofessional occupations . . . (and thus they) project prejudice toward nonprofessional occupations . . . . There has developed within the educational system a gradation of more and less favored occupations . . . . It seems reasonable to assume that occupational prejudice has been taught in the educational system, if for no other reason than the complete lack of any effort not to teach it (pp. 41-42).

Students whose "records" showed high grades or high socioeconomic status were most frequently assigned to college preparatory classes . . . . It seems likely that teachers play a role in assigning students on the basis of sex, grades, and socioeconomic status (Evans and Herr, 1978, pp. 218-219).

Barcinas (1989) concluded that urban students have higher educational and occupational aspirations than rural students. He also found that students enrolled in academic programs had higher educational and occupational aspirations than students enrolled in vocational and general curricula. Similar findings were reported by McCracken and Fails (1989); however, they reported that once students left high school, the difference in level of job aspirations between those who completed the academic and vocational curricula was less than it had been during high school.

High School Curriculum

"The history of education shows an uneasy relationship between general and vocational education" (Evans and Herr, 1978, p. 51). This

uneasy relationship has resulted in few genuinely comprehensive schools. Most schools have offered a college-preparatory or academic curriculum for the college-bound student, a vocational education curriculum for the student who desires to prepare for work, and a general curriculum for everyone else. Of the three, the general curriculum has received the most criticism.

The general curriculum in the secondary school has so little to commend it that it is sure to disappear. Both the vocational and the college preparatory curricula are expanding slowly, and this expansion comes at the expense of the general curriculum . . . . The general curriculum . . . has by far the lowest rate of college attendance by its graduates (Evans and Herr, 1978, p. 319).

Weber (1988) reported results which suggested:

the dropout rate for students in the general curriculum is significantly greater than the dropout rate for students in the vocational curriculum, which in turn is significantly greater than the dropout rate for students in the college preparatory curriculum; and the vocational curriculum is serving students whose family SES, academic achievement as of the 10th grade, and parents' education levels are all significantly lower than those of students in the other curricula. Also, the proportions of minority students served via the vocational curriculum is significantly greater than the proportions of minority students served in either the general or college-preparatory curricula (p. 44).

After analyzing two national data bases, Elliot (1988) concluded that rural individuals who completed higher proportions of vocational education were more likely to score lower on achievement tests and be from lower SES families than those graduates who completed lower proportions of vocational education. He also reported that rural public high school students believed that enrollment in vocational education would help them acquire jobs, yet not prevent them from attending college.

Stone (1988) reported that the variance in achievement in Grade 12 could not be explained by curriculum participation between Grades 10 and 12, when socioeconomic background characteristics and achievement in Grade 10 were controlled. Also, no influence of the curriculum on occupational aspirations was found.

Jyung (1989) found strong correlations between curriculum and educational aspirations (r=.55) and vocational aspirations (r=.51) for 10th graders. Even stronger associations were found for 12th graders (r=.63 and r=.71, respectively). No differences were found between urban and rural students on either career maturity or scholastic achievement.

Problem

Research has been consistent in reporting a relationship between socioeconomic background factors and aspirations. A relationship has also been shown between socioeconomic background factors and high school curriculum. Students from a higher SES background are more likely to enroll in the academic curriculum. Students from a lower SES background are more likely to enroll in the vocational or general curricula. The relationship between high school curriculum and aspirations has been less clear, but one would expect that students in the academic curriculum would have higher aspirations than students in the general or vocational curricula. Educational and occupational aspirations may be viewed as two different constructs. Several variables might be used to obtain a more complete measure of each construct. For the purposes of this study, level of job expectations, level of job aspirations, expected income, surety of employment, and age of occupational choice were considered to be measures of occupational aspirations. Plans for advanced education, type of advanced education planned, and when advanced education would begin were considered to be measures of educational aspirations. The major purpose of this research was to describe the relationships between high school curriculum (academic, general, and vocational) and students' occupational and educational aspirations. A secondary purpose was to explore the relationships between student background factors and choice of high school curriculum.

Objectives

The studies were conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Is student choice of high school curriculum related to gender, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, education level of parents, parental expectation for student to pursue advanced education, parental discussions with students about advanced education, and grade point average?
2. Is student choice of high school curriculum related to job expectations, job aspirations, expected income, surety of employment, and grade level at which occupational choice was made?
3. Is student choice of high school curriculum related to plans for advanced education, type of advanced education planned, and when advanced education would begin?

Two replications were conducted using similar procedures. Ohio rural schools was the population for the first study. A second study was conducted with rural schools in Southwest Georgia.

Replication #1, Rural Students in Ohio

Methods and Data Source

Data Source

The definition used in Ohio was that rural schools were located in counties with less than 40,000 population and outside a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. Also, the average enrollment per grade level at the secondary level was not to exceed 125 students. Seventy-one rural high schools were in the frame. Cluster sampling was used. Ten schools were randomly drawn. All schools agreed to participate. The sample consisted of all of the seniors in the high school class of 1989.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was adapted from the work of Odell (1986). Content validity was established by a panel of experts consisting of university faculty members, school administrators, and former high school teachers. Pilot testing for suitability and reliability was conducted with students in schools not included in the sample. The test-retest reliability coefficient was .84.

The academic records of the students were used to obtain grade point averages. Grade point averages were verified by the school principals.

Data Collection

Data were collected during the months of March through May 1989. An introductory letter was mailed to each principal in the schools which had agreed to participate. A telephone call was then made to discuss the study, data collection procedures, instruments, and the principal's questions. A second telephone call was used to schedule a personal visit with a designated contact person. The personal visit was made by the researcher to deliver the questionnaires, provide parental permission forms, give instructions for recording student grade point averages and leave a mailing package for the return of the completed instruments. Five hundred twenty-nine of the 767 Ohio rural senior students from the 10 schools provided signed parental permission forms and completed the questionnaires for a 69 percent response rate.

Control of Errors

A number of errors normally associated with descriptive survey research were considered. Content validity and test-retest reliability were established to control measurement error. Sampling error can result when a sample is not representative of the population. Random selection of the rural schools and use of the population of senior high school students from each of the schools yielded a 95 percent probability of sampling estimates within plus or minus 3.5 percent of the population values. Frame and selection errors were controlled through use of a published directory of schools and use of all senior students on the class lists of the selected schools. All schools in the frame had an equal probability of being selected. The chief source of error was non-response error. Because of the need to secure parental permission forms, a higher rate could not be obtained within the resources allocated to the project. The reader should be cautioned that some bias in findings may result because 31 percent of the sample failed to respond.

Data Analysis

Data were described using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. One-way analysis of variance with post-hoc analysis on interval data and chi-square on nominal data were used to discover significant differences between academic, general and vocational students on other variables.

Results

Background Characteristics

A higher percentage of females (59 percent) were in the academic curriculum than males (Table 1). However, a higher percentage of males (69 percent) were in the general curriculum than females. An equal percentage of males and females were enrolled in the vocational curriculum. Most of the sample was white. The percentage of whites in the various curricula (Table 1) were: academic, 97 percent; general, 89 percent; and vocational, 94 percent. Non-whites were more likely to be enrolled in the general education curriculum.

The occupations reported for fathers and mothers were assigned a socioeconomic status (SES) index level developed by Stevens and Cho (1985). Values from zero (low status) through 96 (high status) were assigned to occupations. Mean SES scores for students in the various curricula (Table 1) were: academic, 35; general, 26; and vocational, 25. Post hoc analysis reveal that the values for the general and vocational groups did not differ from each other, but both were significantly different on SES from students enrolled in the academic curriculum. Students in the academic curriculum were also significantly higher in grade point average (2.97) than students in the general (2.13) and vocational (2.29) curricula.

There was a small, but statistically significant, difference among the three groups in mother's educational level (Table 1). Only 15 percent of the students in the general curriculum had mothers with more than a high school education, while 27 percent of the vocational curriculum students and 33 percent of the academic curriculum students had mothers with more than a high school education. However, the educational level of the fathers showed a different pattern (Table 1). Only 16.5 percent of the vocational curriculum students

Table 1. High School Curriculum and Background Characteristics of Rural Twelfth-Grade Students in Ohio (n=529)

Background Characteristics	Curriculum			
	Academic (n=307)	General (n=121)	Vocational (n=98)	prob.
Gender				
Female	59.0%	31.4%	50.0%	$p<.05$[1]
Male	41.0%	68.6%	50.0%	
Ethnic Background				
White	97.4%	89.2%	93.9%	$p<.05$[1]
Non-White	2.6%	10.8%	6.1%	
Socioeconomic Status				
mean	34.58	26.08[a]	24.85[a]	$p<.05$[2]
s.d.	9.63	13.58	13.79	
Grade Point Avg.				
mean	2.97	2.13[a]	2.29[a]	$p<.05$[1]
s.d.	0.58	0.55	0.62	
Mother's Education				
Less than High School	4.2%	12.6%	9.3%	$p<.05$[1]
High School	58.6%	58.8%	56.7%	
Business/Tech. School	11.7%	5.9%	15.5%	
Jr./Two-Year College	6.5%	3.4%	5.2%	
Four-Year College	12.1%	3.4%	3.1%	
Advanced Degree	2.9%	2.5%	3.1%	
Do Not Know	3.9%	13.4%	7.2%	
Father's Education				
Less than High School	9.1%	16.7%	24.7%	$p<.05$[1]
High School	53.4%	49.2%	47.4%	
Business/Tech. School	9.8%	10.0%	4.1%	
Jr./Two-Year College	6.2%	7.5%	3.1%	
Four-Year College	13.0%	2.5%	7.2%	
Advanced Degree	5.2%	2.5%	2.1%	
Do Not Know	3.3%	11.7%	711.3%	
Parental Expectation				
Yes	81.8%	34.2%	27.6%	$p<.05$[1]
No	11.1%	37.5%	40.8%	
Not Sure	7.2%	28.3%	31.6%	
Parental Discussions				
None	1.6%	13.3%	10.2%	$p<.05$[1]
Very Little	6.8%	13.3%	21.4%	
Some	47.6%	50.0%	46.9%	
A Great Deal	44.0%	23.3%	21.4%	

Note. Test of significance: 1=chi-square, 2=One-way ANOVA.
Missing cases=3.
[a]Groups do not differ significantly.

had fathers with more than a high school education while 34 percent of the academic curriculum students and 22.5 percent of the general curriculum students had fathers with some education beyond high school.

A large majority (82 percent) of the academic curriculum students knew their parents expected them to further their education beyond high school (Table 1), but only 34 percent of the general curriculum and 28 percent of the vocational curriculum students had parents with such expectations. It was also apparent that students in the academic curriculum (92 percent) had discussed their educational plans with their parents (Table 1) more than students in other curricula (73 percent, general, and 68 percent, vocational).

Aspirations

SES index scores (Stevens and Cho, 1985) were used to compare students in the various curricula on their occupational choices. Two variables were measured. The first, job expectations, was the variable measuring the occupations the students actually thought they would enter. The second, job aspirations, was the variable measuring the occupations the students wanted to enter. Expectations and aspirations differed the most for students in the vocational curriculum (Table 2). For students in the academic curriculum, job expectation scores averaged 62 and job aspiration scores averaged 63. For students in the general curriculum, the mean expectation score was 45 and the mean aspiration score was 52. Vocational curriculum students had a mean expectation score of 38 and a mean aspiration score of 48. Business was the most popular choice for an area of advanced study by students in all three curricula.

An annual income over $25,000 in their chosen career was expected by 32 percent of the academic program students (Table 2), 28 percent of the general program students, and 12 percent of the vocational program students. A higher percentage of academic program students (66 percent) were sure of finding employment in their chosen career than vocational program students (55 percent). Vocational program students made their career choice at a slightly younger age than academic program students.

The percentage of students in the three curricula planning advanced education (Table 2) were: academic, 93 percent; general, 45 percent; and vocational, 47 percent. A junior or technical college was the choice of 55 percent of the vocational students (Table 2), 48 percent of the general students, and 23 percent of the academic students. Students in the academic curriculum were more likely to begin their advanced education immediately after high school (Table 2).

Replication #2, Rural Students in Southwest Georgia

Methods and Data Source

Data Source

The definition of rural schools used for the study conducted in Southwest Georgia was the same as the one used in Ohio, with one exception. Because the schools in Georgia were often in districts having two or three counties, schools were still considered to be rural if the average class size was 200 or less, rather than the 125 or less criterion used in Ohio. Information was collected from the Georgia Department of Education to identify the schools meeting the criteria. Nineteen rural high schools in 26 counties were listed as the frame. Five schools and five alternates were randomly drawn. Two schools did not agree to participate so two alternate schools were used. The sample consisted of the seniors in the class of 1989 in the five schools.

Instrumentation

The same questionnaire was used as in the study of Ohio rural students. It was pilot tested in a school in Georgia that was in the population but not the sample. The test-retest percent of agreement reliability coefficient was .81. Grade point averages were not used because the schools in the study did not use a consistent grading system.

Data Collection

Data were collected in the Spring of 1989. The researcher visited each of the schools. The questionnaires were administered in classes by either the researcher, the school counselor, or homeroom teachers. The five schools had 330 senior students in the class of 1989. A total of 266 returned parental permission forms and completed the questionnaires for a 83.5 percent response rate.

Control of Errors and Data Analysis

Errors normally associated with survey research of this nature were controlled in the Georgia study in a manner similar to the Ohio study. For this sample there was a 95 percent probability of sampling estimates within plus or minus 5 percent of the population values. Data were analyzed using the same procedures as in the Ohio study.

Results

Background Characteristics

In Southwest Georgia, there was no relationship between gender and curriculum of enrollment (Table 3). The senior class of 1989 contained more females (54 percent) than males (46 percent). Most of the sample

Table 2. High School Curriculum and Aspirations of Rural Twelfth-Grade Students in Ohio (n=529)

Aspirations	Curriculum: Academic (n=307)	General (n=121)	Vocational (n=98)	prob.
Job Expectations				
mean	62.38	44.75	38.13	$p<.05^2$
s.d	18.02	21.12	17.32	
Job Aspirations				
mean	63.29	51.66[a]	48.30[a]	$p<.05^2$
s.d.	17.65	21.07	22.93	
Income Expected				
Less than $15,000	8.2%	20.2%	28.9%	$p<.05^1$
$15,000-$19,999	31.1%	27.7%	34.0%	
$20,000-$24,999	28.5%	24.4%	24.7%	
$25,000-$29,999	15.7%	14.3%	4.1%	
$30,000-$34,999	9.5%	7.6%	5.2%	
Over $35,000	6.9%	5.9%	3.1%	
Employment Surety				
Completely Sure	16.9%	19.3%	15.3%	$p<.05^1$
Very Sure	49.8%	41.2%	39.8%	
Not Sure	30.3%	37.0%	40.8%	
Very Unsure	2.3%	2.5%	2.0%	
Completely Unsure	0.7%	0.0%	2.0%	
When Occupational Choice Was Made				
Have Not Decided	3.9%	7.6%	8.2%	$p<.05^1$
Prior to Sixth Grade	3.9%	5.0%	1.0%	
Seventh or Eighth	5.9%	5.0%	9.2%	
Ninth or Tenth	21.5%	22.7%	29.6%	
Eleventh or Twelfth	64.8%	59.7%	52.0%	
Plans for Advanced Education				
Definitely Will Attend	77.2%	25.0%	16.3%	$p<.05^1$
Likely to Attend	16.0%	20.0%	30.6%	
Not Sure	4.9%	34.2%	23.5%	
Not Likely to Attend	1.0%	13.3%	17.3%	
Definitely Will Not Attend	1.0%	7.5%	12.2%	
Type of Advanced Education Planned				
Junior College	6.5%	4.2%	2.0%	$p<.05^1$
Technical College	16.9%	44.2%	53.1%	
Four-Year University	69.4%	24.2%	6.1%	
Do Not Know	5.9%	15.0%	19.4%	
Don't Plan to Attend	1.3%	12.5%	19.4%	
When Advanced Education Would Begin				
After High School	84.0%	33.3%	26.5%	$p<.05^1$
After Military Service	5.5%	10.8%	1.0%	
After Working Few Years	4.9%	16.7%	19.4%	
No Definite Plans	4.6%	26.7%	35.7%	
Don't Plan to Attend	1.0%	12.5%	17.3%	

Note. Test of significance: 1=chi-square 2=One-way ANOVA.
Missing cases=3.
[a]Groups do not differ significantly.

was black (Table 3). The percentage of non-whites in the various curricula were: academic, 66 percent; general, 84 percent; and vocational, 79 percent. Non-whites were more likely to be enrolled in the general curriculum.

Mean SES scores for students in the various curricula (Table 3) were: academic, 31; general, 25; and vocational, 20. Post hoc analysis revealed that the general and vocational groups did not differ from each other, but both were significantly different on SES score from students in the academic curriculum.

Differences among the students in the three curricula were not significant on educational level of mother (Table 3). The percentages of fathers having more than a high school education by curricula were: academic, 33 percent; general, 19 percent; and vocational, 22 percent. Fathers of students in the academic curriculum had a higher level of education than the fathers of students in the other curricula (Table 3).

Table 3. High School Curriculum and Background Characteristics of Rural Twelfth-Grade Students in Southwest Georgia (n=267)

Background Characteristics	Curriculum: Academic (n=101)	General (n=89)	Vocational (n=76)	prob.
Gender				
Female	55.4%	51.1%	54.7%	$p>.05$[1]
Male	44.6%	48.9%	45.3%	
Ethnic Background				
White	33.7%	15.7%	21.1%	$p<.05$[1]
Non-White	66.3%	84.3%	78.9%	
Socioeconomic Status				
mean	30.88	24.75[a]	19.79[a]	$p<.05$[2]
s.d.	17.5	14.38	11.52	
Mother's Education				
Less than High School	9.9%	13.8%	22.4%	$p>.05$[1]
High School	56.4%	63.2%	63.2%	
Busine.. Tech. School	9.9%	5.7%	6.6%	
Jr./Two-Year College	11.9%	6.9%	3.9%	
Four-Year College	6.9%	3.4%	3.9%	
Advanced Degree	5.0%	6.9%	0.0%	
Father's Education				
Less than High School	20.8%	19.8%	29.7%	$p<.05$[1]
High School	46.5%	61.6%	48.6%	
Business/Tech. School	5.9%	5.8%	17.6%	
Jr./Two-Year College	6.9%	3.5%	1.4%	
Four-Year College	13.9%	5.8%	2.7%	
Advanced Degree	5.9%	3.5%	0.0%	
Parental Expectation				
Yes	90.1%	65.2%	56.6%	$p<.05$[1]
No	1.0%	9.0%	14.5%	
Not Sure	8.9%	25.8%	28.9%	
Parental Discussions				
None	1.0%	3.4%	2.6%	$p<.05$[1]
Very Little	8.9%	28.1%	14.5%	
Some	32.7%	39.3%	56.6%	
A Great Deal	57.4%	29.2%	26.3%	

Note. Test of significance: 1=chi-square 2=One-way ANOVA.
Missing case=1.
[a]Groups do not differ significantly.

Nearly all (90 percent) of the academic curriculum students knew their parents expected them to further their education beyond high school (Table 3). Most of the parents of students in the general (65 percent) and vocational (57 percent) curricula also had parents who wanted them to continue their education. The percentage of students in the academic curriculum that had discussed their educational plans with their parents (Table 3) was 90 percent. This was compared with 68 percent in the general curriculum and 83 percent in the vocational curriculum.

Aspirations

Students in the academic curriculum aspired to jobs having a mean SES index score of 58 (Table 4). They expected to obtain jobs having a mean score of 57. Students in the general curriculum aspired to jobs having a mean SES index score of 44. They expected to obtain jobs having a mean score of 39. Students in the vocational curriculum aspired to jobs having a mean score of 43, but expected to obtain jobs averaging 39 on the SES scale. Academic curriculum students were significantly different than the other two groups of students on both aspirations and expectations.

An annual income over $25,000 in their chosen career (Table 4) was expected by 44 percent of the academic program students, 38 percent of the general curriculum students, and 53 percent of the vocational program students. Differences among the three groups were not statistically significant. The groups also did not differ on how sure they were of finding employment in their chosen career or the grade level at which a firm career choice was made.

The percentage of students in the three curricula planning advanced education (Table 4) were: academic, 96 percent; general, 72 percent; and vocational, 71 percent. A junior or technical college (Table 4) was the choice of 59 percent of the vocational students, 48 percent of the general students, and 28 percent of the academic students. Only about one-third of the general and vocational students planned to continue their education immediately after high school (Table 4), but 78 percent of the academic students expected to begin further education immediately.

Discussion of Results

Background Characteristics

Gender and Ethnicity

In Ohio, a greater proportion of females were in the academic curriculum than males. Males were more likely to be in the general curriculum than females. In Southwest Georgia, there was no relationship between gender and the curriculum of the students.

A large difference in ethnicity was noted between the samples used for the two studies. The rural Ohio population was nearly all white. The rural Southwest Georgia public school population was 80 percent black and the senior class was 73 percent black. Non-white students in Ohio were under-represented in the academic curriculum and over-represented in the general curriculum. The same finding held true in the Southwest Georgia study.

Parent SES and Education

The mean SES scores were higher in both studies for students in the academic curriculum than for students in the general and vocational curricula. Family SES scores were slightly higher for the Ohio rural sample of students than for the Southwest Georgia sample of students.

Little difference was noted between the two samples in the average educational level of the mothers of senior students. In Ohio, mothers of vocational curriculum students had a higher educational level than mothers of students in the general curriculum. In Southwest Georgia, mothers of general curriculum students had a higher educational level than mothers of students in the vocational curriculum.

Little difference was also noted between the educational level of the fathers of students in the academic curriculum in the two samples. Fathers of vocational program students in Southwest Georgia had a higher educational level than the comparable group in Ohio. Fathers of general program students in Ohio had a higher educational level than the comparable group in Southwest Georgia.

Parental Expectations

A much higher percentage of Southwest Georgia than Ohio students felt their parents expected them to continue their education beyond high school. Only about one-third of the Ohio students in the general and vocational curricula thought that their parents expected them to further their education. However, about 60 percent of the parents of Southwest Georgia students in general and vocational curricula expected their children to further their education. Further research is needed to determine if education is viewed more favorably in Georgia than in Ohio as a means of advancing economically. Little difference between the two samples was noted in whether parents had discussed their expectations with their children.

Aspirations

Occupational Aspirations

The academic curriculum students in both samples had the highest SES index scores for their desired and

Table 4. High School Curriculum and Aspirations of Rural Twelfth-Grade Students in Southwest Georgia (n=267)

Aspirations	Curriculum: Academic (n=101)	General (n=89)	Vocational (n=76)	prob.
Job Expectations				
mean	56.58	39.12[a]	38.97[a]	$p<.05$[2]
s.d	19.32	19.95	21.84	
Job Aspirations				
mean	58.34	43.71[a]	43.16[a]	$p<.05$[2]
s.d	19.81	21.94	22.14	
Income Expected				
Less than $15,000	10.0%	5.7%	12.2%	$p>.05$[1]
$15,000-$19,999	28.0%	37.5%	25.7%	
$20,000-$24,999	18.0%	19.3%	9.5%	
$25,000-$29,999	21.0%	13.6%	21.6%	
$30,000-$34,999	13.0%	14.8%	21.6%	
Over $35,000	10.0%	9.1%	9.5%	
Employment Surety				
Completely Sure	18.8%	21.3%	26.3%	$p>.05$[1]
Very Sure	59.4%	46.1%	46.1%	
Not Sure	18.8%	32.6%	27.6%	
Very Unsure	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Completely Unsure	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Grade Occupations Was Made				
Have Not Decided	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	$p>.05$[1]
Prior to Sixth Grade	3.0%	2.3%	5.3%	
Seventh or Eighth	4.0%	2.3%	9.2%	
Ninth or Tenth	25.7%	23.9%	30.3%	
Eleventh or Twelfth	67.3%	71.6%	55.3%	
Plans for Advanced Education				
Definitely Will Attend	84.2%	44.9%	39.5%	$p<.05$[1]
Likely to Attend	11.9%	27.0%	31.6%	
Not Sure	3.0%	24.7%	21.1%	
Not Likely to Attend	0.0%	2.2%	5.3%	
Definitely Will Not Attend	1.0%	1.1%	2.6%	
Type of Advanced Education Planned				
Junior College	17.8%	15.7%	19.7%	$p<.05$[1]
Technical College	10.9%	22.5%	38.2%	
Four-Year University	60.4%	23.6%	5.3%	
Do Not Know	6.9%	19.1%	17.1%	
Don't Plan to Attend	4.0%	19.1%	19.7%	
When Advanced Education Would Begin				
After High School	78.2%	29.5%	31.6%	$p<.05$[1]
After Military Service	11.9%	11.4%	11.8%	
After Working Few Years	3.0%	5.7%	10.5%	
No Definite Plans	4.0%	34.1%	22.4%	
Don't Plan to Attend	3.0%	19.3%	23.7%	

Note. Test of significance: 1=chi-square 2=One-way ANOVA.
Missing cases=1.
[a]Groups do not differ significantly.

expected occupations, when compared to students in the other curricula. Students in the general and vocational curricula in both samples held similar occupational aspirations.

Income expectations were quite different for the two samples. A much higher income was expected by rural students in Southwest Georgia than students in rural Ohio. The expectations of Ohio students were probably more realistic in view of the actual salary levels of the desired occupations. Over one-half of the students in the vocational curriculum in the Georgia sample expected incomes above $25,000; only 12 percent of the students in the vocational curriculum in the Ohio sample had such expectations.

In both samples the academic curriculum students were more confident of their occupational aspirations being realized than were students in general and vocational education. Students in Southwest Georgia were more confident of achieving their occupational goals than were students in rural Ohio. Ohio students may have possessed a more realistic view of the employment marketplace than the students in rural Southwest Georgia.

Little difference was found between the two samples in the grade level at which students made their occupational choice. In both samples, the vocational curriculum students made their choice at a slightly younger age.

Educational Aspirations

The two samples were similar in that nearly all of the students in the academic curriculum planned to advance their education beyond high school. A much higher percentage of students in the general and vocational curricula in the Georgia sample, however, planned on further education. Over 71 percent of the vocational curriculum students in the Georgia sample planned on further education, but only 47 percent of the comparable group in Ohio planned to continue their education. Nearly 72 percent of the general program students in Georgia planned to go to some type of college but only 45 percent of the general curriculum students in Ohio expected to advance their education.

The junior or community college was a more popular option in Georgia than Ohio (Tables 2 and 4). The technical institute was a more popular option in Ohio than Georgia. This finding may simply reflect the availability of the two types of institutions in the two states.

The two samples were very similar in their plans for when further education would begin. About 80 percent of the academic students expected to begin further education immediately after high school, but most students in the other two curricula expected to delay continuing their education.

Recommendations

Gender and Ethnicity

In Ohio a higher percentage of females enrolled in the academic curriculum than males. A higher percentage of males enrolled in the general curriculum. Further study is warranted to discover the reasons for this phenomenon. The senior class in Southwest Georgia contained a higher percentage of females than males. Also, the percentage of non-white students in the senior class was lower than in the school as a whole. A greater proportion of non-white males, compared to non-white females and white males and females, appear to be dropping out of school prior to their senior year of enrollment. Further research is recommended to ascertain the reasons for these results so corrective action can be taken.

Non-white students in both studies appeared to be under-represented in the academic curriculum and over-represented in the general curriculum. It is recommended that rural schools in both states implement strategies to encourage non-white enrollment in the academic curriculum and provide special assistance as needed to enable the students to succeed in the program.

The disparity between the two states in the ethnic composition of the schools may result in students from both states being deprived of the opportunity to associate with students of differing cultural backgrounds. Schools should consider implementing multicultural experiences as a part of their curricula.

SES and Educational Level

These findings were consistent with prior research in that students from lower SES families tended to enroll in either vocational or general curricula and students from higher SES families tended to enroll in the academic curriculum. Researchers should investigate the sociological impact of separating students into curricula based upon SES. Schools should consider ways to encourage students from upper SES strata to enroll in some vocational education, and also ways to encourage students from lower SES strata to strengthen their education in the academic areas.

Parental Expectations

Even though Southwest Georgia parents possessed lower SES index scores than those in Ohio, they were more likely to encourage their children to pursue further education. Parents in Southwest Georgia may view education more favorably as a means of advancing economically than parents in Ohio. It is recommended that attitudes concerning education be examined further to determine reasons for the differences in findings between the two states.

Occupational Aspirations

Income aspirations for the Southwest Georgia sample appear to be unrealistically high. There appeared to be a naiveté concerning the employment marketplace. Schools should consider providing additional opportunities for students to explore career information and educational requirements for entering and advancing in various occupations.

Educational Aspirations

Nearly two-thirds of the vocational curriculum students in Southwest Georgia planned to advance their education beyond high school, but only about one-half of the comparable Ohio sample had similar intentions. Education beyond high school may be of more necessity in rural Southwest Georgia for employment in desirable occupations than in Ohio. Perhaps Ohio students are not being challenged to continue their education. The high school vocational programs may differ between the states to the extent that additional education may be viewed as more needed in order to obtain work in one state as opposed to the other. The difference might be due to the type of advanced education that is available. In Georgia, students tended to choose junior or community colleges to advance their education. In Ohio, technical institutes were more popular. Obviously, these phenomena would be fruitful areas for further study.

High School Curriculum

Educators need to consider whether specific educational programs are in the best interest of students in the United States. Should students be classifiable as academic, general, and vocational? Is academic preparation not desirable for all students? Should all students not receive some vocational education? Is general education without a purpose?

One of the first ways to make vocational and general education everyday partners is to establish instructional programs which point out to students that instruction in every class is relevant to what they are now learning and will be relevant in their lives ahead. Since we do not want to tell students an untruth, we need to make sure that all education really is relevant (Evans and Herr, 1978, p. 53).

Researchers may be able to collect and interpret data that will impact on the decisions to be made about what the high school curriculum should be like. Such research information should add rationality to the arguments of philosophers and politicians as they discuss the desirable qualities of secondary education for the 21st century.

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