

# Rural Youth Education Project Third Wave

August 2010

## Preface

In 2004, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania contracted with Pennsylvania State University researchers to begin a longitudinal study of rural Pennsylvania school students to understand their educational and career aspirations and the factors influencing their aspirations. 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 approximately every other year, beginning in 2004 and continuing through 2011. This report briefly describes the procedures used for the third wave of data collection, completed in 2008-2009, and the results from a sample of Pennsylvania's rural 11th grade youth and youth who are 3 years out of high school.

As this is the third wave of data collection, key findings for Waves 1 through 3 only are addressed in this report.

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.

The results from the entire longitudinal study 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 2011 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 3 data, which are detailed here, have provided the researchers with an opportunity to examine change over time. The full benefits of this longitudinal study, however, will be realized when the last wave of data is collected in 2011 and analyzed by the researchers.

## Process

The study is following two cohorts of rural youth who were in the 7th and 11th grades in Wave 1, in 9th grade and 1 year past high school in Wave 2, and, most recently, in 11th grade and 3 years past high school in Wave 3.

The goal of Wave 3 was to collect data from the 1,536 students who participated in Wave 1, and to follow the younger cohort students added in Wave 2 through the additions of two new schools.

In Wave 3, 1,057 younger cohort students were surveyed. Of these, 513 participated in all three waves of the study, and 857 participated in Waves 2 and 3.

Of the original 692 respondents in the older cohort in Wave 1, roughly 35 percent, or 244, responded to the survey in Wave 3. Of these, 147 completed the survey in all three waves.

This study, sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, is being conducted by Diane K. McLaughlin, Ph.D., and Mary Ann Demi, Ph.D. candidate, the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at Pennsylvania State University, and Anastasia R. Snyder, Ph.D., the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Ohio State University.

<b>Table 1: Wave 3 Younger Cohort (11th Grade) Data on Future Educational, Occupational and Residential Aspirations, and Attitudes about Their Community</b>			
	<b>Cross-sectional (Wave 3 only); N=1,057 weighted</b>	<b>Panel 1 to 3 (responded in Waves 1, 2 and 3); N=513 un-weighted</b>	<b>Panel 2 to 3 (responded Waves 2 &amp; 3); N=857 weighted</b>
<b>Educational Aspirations</b> - percentage who aspire to:			
High school or less	11	11	12
Vo-technical training or 2-year college	22	21	23
4-year college or more	67	68	65
<b>Occupational Aspirations</b> - percentage who aspire to:			
Professional or managerial	59	59	58
Service or technical	12	11	12
Labor and production	11	14	12
Other	19	16	18
<b>Residential Aspirations</b> - percentage who aspire to live in:			
Rural Pennsylvania	27 <sup>1</sup>	32	29
Urban Pennsylvania	11	10	11
Outside Pennsylvania	34	30	34
Don't know	27	27	26
<b>Attitudes about Current Community</b>			
How much do you like living in the town where you currently live? (percentage reporting 'a lot')	29	32	29
percentage reporting 'a lot' or 'some'	68	71	67
<b>Attitudes about Community</b> - percentage who agree or strongly agree that:			
This area is a good place to raise a family	82	85	83
I would have to move away to get the job I want	58	53	57
I will need to move away to get the education I want	59	58	58
I could get a good job in this area when I'm an adult	53	57	52
There are enough jobs in this area for the people who want them	39 <sup>1</sup>	45	40
I would stay in this area if I could get the job I want	63	65	64
I would be more inclined to stay in my hometown if starting my own business were an option	43	43	43
I want to move away from this area for a while, but would like to move back when I have a family	44	44	44

The value for the cross section is significantly different from that for the Wave 1 to 3 panel.

Currently, the researchers are conducting sample retention activities, which began in the fall of 2009. The actual data collection for the fourth and final wave is planned for spring 2011.

In the results that follow, youth who participated in multiple waves are identified as the “panel sample.” Youth who responded to Wave 3 only are identified as the “cross-sectional sample.”

The younger cohort (11th grade) was surveyed in school and the older cohort was surveyed by mail, Internet, and phone.

## Findings

### Younger Cohort

- The majority of the younger cohort youth want to go to college for four or more years and enter professional or managerial occupations. These aspirations have remained consistent across Waves 1, 2 and 3.
- About one-third of the younger cohort in the panel sample in Waves 2 and 3 want to live outside of rural Pennsylvania at age 30 and a slightly smaller percentage want to live in rural Pennsylvania.

- In the cross-sectional sample from Wave 3 only, roughly 80 percent of the younger cohort students like their community “a lot” or “some,” and agree that their community is a good place to raise a family. However, they are not as optimistic about the economic prospects in their community as about 58 percent feel they will have to move to get the job they want and 59 percent feel they will have to move to get the education they want.

<b>Table 2. Older Cohort Educational, Occupational and Residential Aspirations Three Years Past High School (unweighted data)</b>			
	<b>Cross-Sectional (Wave 3 only) N=244</b>	<b>Panel (Waves 1 to 2) N=316</b>	<b>Panel (Waves 1 to 3) N=147</b>
<b>Educational Aspirations</b> - percentage who aspire to:			
High school or less	4	3	2
Vocational-technical or 2 year college	18	22	4
4 year college or more	79	76	84
Don't know	-	-	-
<b>Occupational Aspirations</b> - percentage who aspire to:			
Professional and managerial	67	62	71
Service and technical	16	7	16
Labor and production	5	3	2
Other	12	26	11
<b>Residential Aspirations</b> - percentage who aspire to:			
Rural Pennsylvania	44	31	46
Urban Pennsylvania	14	9	12
Outside Pennsylvania	38	35	37
Don't know	4	26	5
<b>Current Residence</b> - percentage living in same community as 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	55	-	51

- From the Wave 3 cross-sectional sample, about 63 percent of students said they would stay in the community if they could get the job they wanted. About 43 percent would be more likely to stay in their community if they could start their own business. About 44 percent would like to move away for awhile but then return when they have a family.
- Youth who have aspirations to remain in the rural community have a more positive outlook on and more positive attitudes about their community overall, but have somewhat lower educational and career aspirations.
- Family plays a key role in encouraging higher educational aspirations. Strong parental support for higher educational goals, being in a two-parent family, being from a family that has adequate financial resources, having more educated parents, having parents that work full time, and having parents that volunteer in the community or at school all are

associated with higher educational aspirations of the younger cohort.

- Youth who keep their parents informed of where they are and whom they are with have higher educational aspirations than youth who more frequently go out without their parents' knowledge or who spend time with friends at their own home or a friend's home without an adult present.
- When examining change in aspirations of individuals in the younger cohort, the panel analysis indicates that residential aspirations are the least stable over time, educational aspirations are the most stable and occupational aspirations fall in the middle.

**Older Cohort**

- A majority of the older cohort is enrolled in post-secondary school 3 years past high school graduation. About 56 percent of these young adults combine school and work.
- Relatively few youth in the older

cohort feel they are ready for marriage. Instead, more than 80 percent indicate they would need to complete school, get a job and have money saved before starting a family.

- In general, the actual educational, work and residential experiences of the older cohort panel sample show they are mostly on-track to achieve their educational goals. The majority of those with college aspirations are in college, and even some of those without college aspirations are attending college.
- An analysis of change over time in the aspirations of the older cohort reveals mostly stable educational aspirations, with just over 80 percent having no change over the three waves of the study. One-third of the sample with initially lower educational aspirations had changed them to college or more by Wave 3, while 6 percent with college or more aspirations in Wave 1 had aspirations of less than

college in Wave 3. Occupational aspirations were less stable with just over half reporting no change in their occupational plans across all three waves. Residential aspirations were similar to occupational aspirations in their stability. Again, just over half of the older cohort panel had the same residential aspirations in all three waves of the study. Twice as many of those in the older cohort shifted their aspirations to wanting to live in rural Pennsylvania at age 30, than not wanting to live in rural Pennsylvania at that age. By Wave 3 there is evidence of a slight shift in the panel sample toward a preference for living in rural Pennsylvania by age 30. Reasons for this shift will require further analysis and study, but it is nevertheless a bit of good news for some rural Pennsylvania communities concerned about losing their youth.

- Overall, the results indicate that, even though the older cohort youth are out of high school, they continue to make slight changes in their educational, occupational and residential aspirations.

### **Final Wave Policy Considerations**

The researchers will offer policy considerations relevant for shaping youth educational, occupational and residential aspirations and that would contribute to improving youth attainment of their aspirations after the final wave of the study is completed.

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