

Exploring factors that influence post-secondary enrollment in rural communities

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BACKGROUND

There are several factors that influence the rates of enrollment of rural youth in post-secondary programs. Research has revealed that parental education, college preparatory track courses and experiences, and teacher expectations predicted students' college attendance (Byun, Meece, & Agger, 2017). Economic struggles, occupational aspirations, and social changes in rural economics have influenced a notable difference in educational and occupational ambitions of rural high school students (Byun, Meece, & Agger, 2017). Perceptions of positive parent approval of attending college as well as direct guidance from parents can also effect post-secondary enrollment (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010; Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011). Several quantitative studies have examined rural students' school experiences and post-secondary aspirations and provide the foundation for this study. However, there is still limited research on student aspirations and the causes of students choosing not to enroll in post-secondary programs (Meece, Hutchins, Byun, Farmer, Irvin & Weiss, 2013) and few qualitative studies presenting both student and teacher perspectives.

PURPOSE

- Explore the lived experience of rural high school students and the influence of economic and social factors on their post-secondary aspirations.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) Describe students' post-graduation aspirations
- (2) Examine the influence of high school faculty, community members, immediate family, and economic resources on student's perceptions of enrolling in higher education
- (3) Describe students' knowledge of college readiness programs and opportunities

METHODS

- Qualitative case study that employed the methods of one-on-one interviews and document review at a rural high school in southeastern Ohio
- Purposive sample of 10 juniors and seniors
- Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method

REFERENCES
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FINDINGS

- Students need additional support when it comes to seeking a college degree.
- Out of the students interviewed, half had teachers who encouraged them to seek a college degree.
- Few students said that their teachers would answer questions that they had about college or discuss seeking a college degree with them.
- Teachers discussed needing more resources to aid their students in encouraging them to seek higher education.
- Out of the students interviewed, half stated that their community supports students' aspirations to attend college.

Objective 1

"I did think about going to college. . . . I don't like school. I do well, but like, it's just not for me. My sister goes to college, and she tells me . . . it is a lot different than high school. I got accepted into colleges, but I didn't want to go."

"After high school, I plan . . . to become a power lineman because that's what my family has done for a bit."

Objective 2

"I think, they see it as a good steppingstone, but sometimes they think of [college] as just an unnecessary debt. I feel like I hear that a lot from other kids. . . . That's why [students] don't want to [attend college]."

"None of [my immediate family] really went to college. Jobs are hard to get if you don't get an education, and they want me to succeed and be able to provide for myself instead of relying on others."

Objective 3

"I've heard of it [FAFSA], but I don't know what it is."

"Our school provided us with some [scholarships], and then I looked online. It's hard to find scholarships, though."

DISCUSSION

Objective 1

- Most students interviewed want to attend college which, may indicate positive attitudes toward this option.
- Two out of the three students who did not enjoy class are not planning on attending college, showing a relationship between liking their high school courses and attending college.
- Most of the teachers stated that they do an excellent job of supporting students in seeking a college which, may suggest why most students interviewed wanted to attend college

Objective 2

- Each student's immediate family wants them to attend college and most planed to apply.
- A few students stated that their greatest concern about attending college surround financial issues indicating this as a constraint.
- Most students find the high school guidance counselors helpful in preparing for college.

Objective 3

- Several students participate in the College Credit Plus (CCP) program which saves money on tuition and prepares them for college courses.

IMPLICATIONS

- Encourage community members to help students feel supported.
- More information on student aid needs to be presented to high school students and lead conversations that surround college-going culture.
- Rural high schools need to help explain to parents and students the variety of post-secondary options, including technical school and two-year degrees.
- Future studies should analyze what drives students to seek higher education and why they want to obtain a degree.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to thank New Lexington High School and its staff, faculty, and students who participated in our study.



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