

Educational Barriers of Rural Adolescents

Adolescents today have some of the highest educational aspirations of any generation. Rural youth are no exception. Today, more rural youth aspire to continue their education after high school than ever before. Although such rise in ambitions among rural youth is encouraging, these youth may face a number of challenges in reaching their postsecondary goals. An important goal of the Rural High School Aspirations Study was to examine the barriers preventing rural youth from furthering their education after high school. Students as well as teachers were asked to share their perceptions of educational barriers.

Key Findings

The student survey included several items to assess the perceived impact of several educational barriers. Examples of items included family responsibilities, poor academic performance, and lack of financial support. Less than one third of the students reported barriers that would significantly impact their postsecondary attainment. The three most significant barriers were getting married, needing to help support the family, and not wanting to leave friends. African American and Hispanic/Latino students reported the most barriers to continuing their education. Also, students who experienced greater economic hardship, had parents with lower levels of education, and were in the lower grades reported more barriers. The educational barriers perceived by teachers were similar to those reported by students. The teacher survey indicated that the three most significant barriers for students were getting married, having to support the family, and having to move away from the area. However, according to the teachers, fewer than 10% of the students in the study experienced any of the educational barriers mentioned in the survey.

What This Tells Us

Results of this work identified several educational barriers for rural youth. Perceptions of barriers are central to educational attainment because they can prevent young people from pursuing aspirations and interests. Our results suggest rural schools should take steps to address students' concerns, particularly barriers associated with marriage and leaving family and friends to further their education. In addition, rural schools should identify those students who may want to continue their education, but who experience family economic hardship. Schools are in a unique position to promote postsecondary education, but schools must do so in a way that addresses many of the hardships that students face. Rural schools may accomplish this by helping students in need identify and apply for scholarships, grants, or financial aid. Also, schools can help students address perceived barriers by promoting postsecondary educational opportunities such as distance education, community college, or four-year colleges closer to the home. Because educational and vocational aspirations are often linked, rural youth also need access to career training and development opportunities that enable them to maintain connections to their rural communities.

The Institute of Education Sciences offers a research-based practice guide for educators to help students navigate the transition to postsecondary education. The reference is listed below.

References

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