



CHANGE IN EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Summer 2010

Change in Educational Aspirations from 7th to 11th Grade

One main focus of the Rural Youth Education (RYE) Study is to better understand rural youth’s educational aspirations. RYE is the only study to date that closely examines how youth’s educational and other aspirations change over time. What are educational aspirations in early, middle and late adolescence? Are educational aspirations generally stable or do they change from early to late adolescence? What factors are related to change or stability in educational aspirations? Answers to these questions are important because they will identify how youth are thinking about their educational plans, and will highlight whether youth, family, peer and/or community factors are associated with educational aspirations. These questions are answered in this fact sheet using data from the sample of 513 youth who answered the RYE survey in the 7th, 9th and 11th grades. These students were in 7th grade in 2005 and in 11th grade in 2009. In each survey the students were asked: How far do you want to go in school? Answers ranged from not finishing high school to completing a college degree or higher. In the sections below we consider how the youth answered this question from the 7th to 11th grades, and some of the factors associated with change in these aspirations.

Career Aspirations in 7th Grade

- ◆ 67% of the students in the study aspire to professional or managerial careers

11th Grade

- ◆ 60% of the students in the study aspire to professional or managerial careers

These career aspirations will require students obtain more than a high school diploma.

How Far Do Rural Pennsylvania Students Want to Go in School?

Table 1 shows the educational aspirations of the RYE youth. When surveyed in 7th, 9th and 11th grades about two-thirds or more of students reported wanting to complete a college education or higher (67.8% in 7th grade, 72.7% in 9th grade and 68.4% in 11th grade). In contrast, many fewer wanted only a high school education, and in each survey, a smaller percentage reported this aspiration. For example, in the 7th grade 18.9% reported wanting to complete high school or less, which declined to 12.3% in the 9th grade and 10.7% in the 11th grade. Since the same individuals are included in each wave of the study, this decline is not due to students with less than high school aspirations dropping out of school. Finally, in the 7th grade, only 13.3% aspired to a 2 year college or vocational-technical education, but by the 11th grade nearly 21% reported this educational aspiration. These reports for each grade suggest that students have fairly stable educational aspirations from 7th to 11th grades.

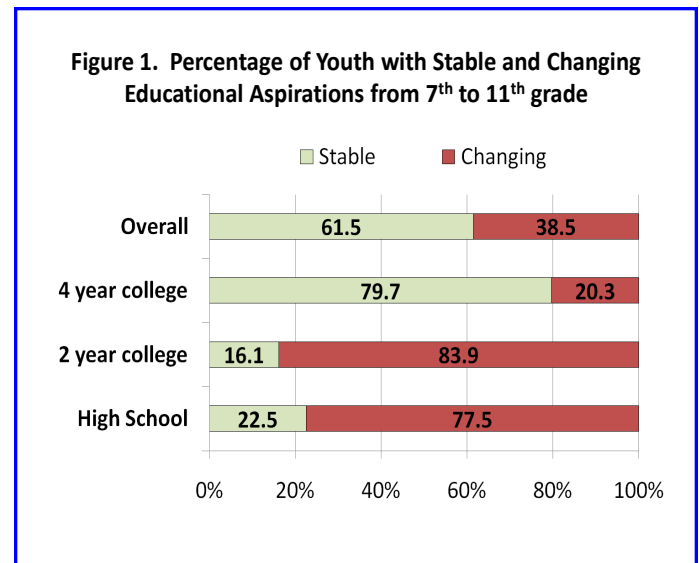
Table 1. Educational Aspirations in the 7th, 9th and 11th grades, RYE respondents (percent)

Educational Aspirations	7 th grade	9 th grade	11 th grade
High school or less	18.9%	12.3%	10.7%
2 year college or vocational technical	13.3	15.0	20.9
4 year college or more	67.8	72.7	68.4

Are the Educational Aspirations of Individual Youth Stable or Do They Change From 7th to 11th Grade?

Because we asked about educational aspirations in each survey, it is possible to show how educational aspirations of individuals in the RYE study changed over time. Do most have the same educational aspirations in 7th, 9th and 11th grades or do their aspirations change over time? Figure 1 shows both stability and change in educational aspirations overall, and also by youth's 7th grade educational aspirations. As shown in the top bar, 61.5% of all RYE youth reported the same educational aspirations in the 7th, 9th and 11th grades. But, the stability of educational aspirations differs depending on the 7th grade educational aspirations reported.

For example, 79.7% of those reporting college educational aspirations in the 7th grade held this aspiration through the 11th grade. Among youth who reported high school education or less in 7th grade, only 22.5% continued to hold high school or less educational aspirations in 11th grade. Educational aspirations were least stable among youth who wanted vocational-technical or two-year college degrees in 7th grade. Only 16.1% of these youth had those same educational aspirations in 11th grade. Thus, we can conclude that, in general, a higher percentage of youth who reported higher educational aspirations in early adolescence held these aspirations through late adolescence. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of those with lower educational aspirations in early adolescence changed those aspirations, typically to more educational attainment, by late adolescence.



What Factors Are Related to Stability or Change in Educational Aspirations?

RYE also studies youth's future plans, such as where youth say they want to live as adults (reported in the last Fact Sheet) and what type of work they want to do as an adult. These other factors are expected to be related to educational aspirations and the stability in educational aspirations as youth move from 7th to 11th grade. When we examined stability in educational aspirations, we found they were related to occupational plans, residential aspirations, parent's encouragement to attend college and youth's own sense of their future. We find that stability in educational aspirations is related to youth's ideas about other plans and feelings that they reported when in the 7th grade. Specifically,

- ◆ Aspiring to professional occupations in the 7th grade is associated with more stable educational aspirations from 7th to 11th grades.
- ◆ Aspiring to stay and live in their rural communities as adults in the 7th grade is associated with less stable educational aspirations from 7th to 11th grades.
- ◆ Youth who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they have plans for their future in the 7th grade are over twice as likely to have stable educational aspirations compared to those who report not having plans for their future.

When we consider stability and change in educational aspirations from early to late adolescence, the general story emerging from the RYE project is that many rural youth form their educational aspirations in early adolescence (by 7th grade); that these aspirations are stable for just over sixty percent of these youth, but are especially stable for those with educational aspirations for four years of college or more. Stability in educational aspirations is associated with other important life aspirations and perceptions.

What's Next for the RYE Study?

We hope you've enjoyed reading about some key findings from the RYE study. We will be contacting you with another fact sheet and request to update your contact information in early Fall of 2010. **IF YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION CHANGES BEFORE THEN, PLEASE LET US KNOW BY RETURNING THE POSTAGE PAID CARD.** We will be asking those who participated in the RYE study to once again share experiences with us in Spring 2011. In this fourth wave of data collection, the focus for the younger cohort is shifting from aspirations to how the RYE youth are doing in achieving their aspirations and any changes in their lives. Most of those in the Younger Cohort will have graduated from high school and made decisions about attaining additional schooling, joining the workforce, combining school and work, and/or starting families. The full RYE sample will range from 1 to 5 years out of high school and we are very interested to find out what everyone is doing. To read fact sheets for the Older and Younger Cohorts, please go to the RYE web site <http://rye.aers.psu.edu> and select 'Fact Sheets.'

Thank you for your participation! We appreciate the time you take to fill out the surveys and look forward to contacting you again in 2011 for the fourth wave! As always, please do not hesitate to contact the

If there are topics you would like to see covered in future Fact Sheets, please send an email to Diane McLaughlin at dkk@psu.edu or call 814-863-8626.

Rural Youth Education Study

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More information about the RYE Study can be found at the following website:

<http://rye.aers.psu.edu>

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Rural Youth Education Study

See Inside for Information Regarding:

The RYE Study

Change in Student Educational Aspirations

Factors That Promote Stability in Educational Aspirations

Study Contact Information

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