REL Appalachia Ask-A-REL Response

College and Career Readiness, Family and Community Engagement, Rural
June 2017

Question:

What research is available about communication strategies that help rural students and their families understand the potential benefits of going to college and postsecondary education and training programs and are associated with (or impact) college-going behavior?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about communication strategies that help rural students and their families understand the potential benefits of postsecondary education and influence their behavior. Ask-A-REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask-A-REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for research reports and descriptive study articles on communication strategies with rural students and their families. We were unable to find any rigorous research to answer your specific question, but we have provided relevant information including research on factors that support or hinder postsecondary aspirations and expectations among rural students. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist.

Research References

Alleman, N. F., & Holly, L. N. (2013). Multiple points of contact: Promoting rural postsecondary preparation through school-community partnerships. *Rural Educator*, *34*(2). Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1013120

From the abstract: "Formal and informal partnerships between rural schools and their communities can provide a wide range of supports for all students, but particularly those from low-income families. In this analysis of six small rural school districts in Virginia we show how the broad participation of community groups and individuals supports academic

achievement as well as preparation and aspirations for postsecondary education. Results demonstrate that school-community partnerships provide multiple points of contact for students that buttress the efforts of school personnel by extended educational opportunities outside the classroom and by meeting the needs of low-income students when parents and teachers are unable to do so."

Byun, S. Y., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J., & Hutchins, B. C. (2012). The role of social capital in educational aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociology*, *77*(3), 355–379. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3769688/

From the abstract: "Drawing on a recent national survey of rural high school students, this study investigated the relationship between social capital and educational aspirations of rural youth. Results showed that various process features of family and school social capital were important to predict rural youth's educational aspirations beyond sociodemographic background. In particular, parents' and teachers' educational expectations for their child and student, respectively, were positively related to educational aspirations of rural youth. In addition, discussion with parents about college was positively related to educational aspirations of rural youth. On the other hand, there was little evidence to suggest that number of siblings and school proportions of students on free lunch and minority students are related to educational aspirations of rural youth, after controlling for the other variables. The authors highlight unique features of rural families, schools, and communities that may combine to explain the complexity of the role of social capital in shaping educational aspirations of rural youth."

Hutchins, B. C., Meece, J. L., Byun, S. Y., & Farmer, T. W. (2012). Planning for the future: An investigation of work-bound rural youth. *Rural Educator*, *33*(2), 7–19. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ987616

From the abstract: "The purpose of this study was to explore the postsecondary educational and occupational expectations of work-bound rural youth. Three groups of work-bound youth were identified (work-bound, work-bound with future educational plans, and work-bound but unsure/undecided about postsecondary education), and each group was compared to college-bound rural youth using results from a recent national investigation of the educational and occupational aspirations of rural youth. Results indicated that the majority of rural youth in this study planned to continue their education after high school (56%), followed by 34% who planned to work and further their education. Results of logistic regression analysis indicated that family characteristics and students' schooling experiences were the strongest predictors of work-bound status. Work-bound youth were more likely to report greater family economic hardship, lower parental expectations for completing college, and more negative schooling experiences than college-bound rural youth."

King, S. B. (2012). Increasing college-going rate, parent involvement, and community participation in rural communities. *Rural Educator*, *33*(2), 20–26. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ987617

From the abstract: "This study examined the perceptions of leaders of grant-supported projects aimed at increasing the college-going rate of high school students in rural Appalachian counties in Mississippi to determine which factors they felt most influenced the college-going rate, parental participation in school activities, and community participation. Analysis of the leaders' responses to questions related to these items showed that college visits and ACT preparation workshops were perceived as having the greatest impact on increasing the college-going rate at the schools. No one factor was perceived as having the least impact on increasing the college-going rate at the schools. Factors influencing parental and community participation included events and workshops for parents, especially those which involved community members as mentors."

Molefe, A., Burke, M. R., Collins, N., Sparks, D., & Hoyer, K. (2017). *Postsecondary education expectations and attainment of rural and nonrural students* (REL 2017–257). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED573020

From the abstract: "Prior research shows that rural students' education expectations and aspirations, as well as their postsecondary enrollment and persistence rates, tend to be lower than those of nonrural students. However, much of that prior research may not apply to today's students because it uses old data or focuses on individual states or purposive samples. Meanwhile, recent policy initiatives at both the national and state levels have emphasized increasing college-going rates. Moreover, because of the rise in online learning options, high school students have more opportunities to take college preparatory courses and pursue college education without leaving home. The Rural Research Alliance partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest to examine more recent postsecondary education expectations, attainment, and realization of expectations of rural and nonrural grade 10 students in the REL Midwest Region and the rest of the nation. The study also examined the reasons that rural and nonrural students in the REL Midwest Region reported for not expecting to pursue postsecondary education. It used the most recently released data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, which surveyed a nationally representative sample of grade 10 students in 2002 and then administered follow-up surveys of the same individuals in 2004, 2006, and 2012, eight years after expected high school graduation. The study used data from 2002 and 2012. It aims to support policymakers and other stakeholders in the REL Midwest states by informing policy recommendations for improving postsecondary attainment among rural students in the region. Key findings include: (1) Approximately 90 percent of both rural and nonrural grade 10 students in REL Midwest Region states in 2002 expected to attend college, but the percentage who expected to attain a master's degree or higher was higher among nonrural students than among rural students; (2) The reason that both rural and nonrural students reported most frequently for not expecting to pursue postsecondary education was financial concerns; (3) Rural and nonrural students had similar levels of postsecondary educational attainment by 2012; (4) Almost two-thirds of both rural and nonrural students had fallen short of their grade 10 postsecondary education expectations by 2012; and (5)

Student characteristics, and to a lesser degree family characteristics and teacher expectations, rather than school locale, accounted for much of the variation in education expectations and attainment. The following are appended: (1) Literature review; (2) Data and methodology; and (3) Additional findings."

San Antonio, D. M. (2016). The complex decision-making processes of rural emerging adults: Counseling beyond dualism. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *91*(2), 246-269. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1099161

From the abstract: "Rural adolescents approach the transition out of high school with individual concerns about making an emotionally or financially expensive "mistake," family concerns about young people leaving home, and national and local concerns about declining rural economies and out-migration. The literature concerning this topic considers factors that influence youth aspirations in rural areas, such as economic barriers, the way higher education is valued, and perceptions of rural places as lacking in opportunity. However, there has been little study of the myriad interpersonal, emotional, and self-identity inputs that are part of the decision-making processes of rural emerging adults, and little is known about how the aspirations of rural youth play out over time. This article, based on the findings of a qualitative longitudinal study, considers the way rural emerging adults weighed options, understood constraints and opportunities, and took action on behalf of their aspirations to make something meaningful of their lives. Research participants were engaged in a process of decision making that was multifaceted, nuanced, and purposeful, and the results of the research made it clear that we need to think beyond the dualisms of staying or leaving, college or not. Counselors must be prepared to "stay complex" and help rural emerging adults anticipate ecological transitions, find coping mechanisms, and cut through binaries to explore alternative pathways, creative identities, and multiple meanings of success."

Note. Full article access is not available on ERIC, but this abstract is included due to its relevance to the Ask-A-REL question.

Tieken, M. C. (2016). College talk and the rural economy: Shaping the educational aspirations of rural, first-generation students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *91*(2), 203–223. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1099159

From the abstract: "The college-going rates of rural students lag behind those of more urban students, a gap likely due, in part, to rural students' lower educational aspirations. These lower aspirations appear to be tied to the dilemma that higher education presents for many rural students: whether to remain in their rural home, working in traditional trades and industries that do not require a college degree, or to leave in pursuit of an education that is often the first step toward an adult life lived away. This study seeks to better understand this dilemma by examining the messages that rural, first-generation students receive about the value of higher education. Drawing upon interviews and observations, it shows that high school guidance counselors, college admissions officials, and the staff of community-based college aspirations organizations adopt a strikingly consistent message: they cite struggling rural economies in their argument for the necessity of a practical degree

for all students, one that can be easily leveraged into a career. Despite noting broad parental support for this message, many participants also describe continued resistance from some rural families, a perception that may heighten the dilemma of rural college-going for students."

Note. Full article access is not available on ERIC, but this abstract is included due to its relevance to the Ask-A-REL question.

Wright, C. J. (2012). Becoming to remain: Community college students and postsecondary pursuits in central Appalachia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *27*(6). Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/27-6.pdf

From the abstract: "Using data gathered from students attending Southeast Community and Technical College in Harlan County, Kentucky, this article discusses how a commitment to place informs and shapes rural students' decisions around post-secondary education, career, and residence. Though some students connected advanced education with rural outmigration, other students discussed their post-secondary training in relation to local contexts, connecting their education to improved quality of life, both for their families and their rural communities. Their narratives regarding the purpose and application of higher education in Central Appalachia add to the continuing discussion of rural students' rationales to stay or leave their home communities, and by what means they achieve these ends. While some students applied their advanced degrees towards transfer out of the area, others used their degrees towards local transformative ends. By highlighting Labaree's (1997) conception of the citizenry ends of education, this study complicates Corbett (2007) and other studies that attach advanced degree attainment with rural outmigration."

Additional Organizations to Consult

Center on Rural Education and Communities: http://ed.psu.edu/crec

*From the website: "*The Center on Rural Education and Communities (CREC) conducts and supports both research and outreach activities that address rural education and community-related issues in Pennsylvania, the nation, and the world. CREC serves as an interdisciplinary focal point for these activities, connecting scholars and graduate students across the College of Education and the University more broadly. As an initiative supported by both the College of Education and Penn State's Children Youth & Families Consortium, the Center forges networks and connections between Penn State-based scholars and graduate students, helping to develop and enhance a variety of research initiatives and outreach activities. The Center also houses the *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, a peer-reviewed scholarly journal which publishes original pieces of scholarly research of demonstrable relevance to educational and community-related issues within rural settings."

One of CREC's current initiatives is Rural High School Student Aspirations & College Success for Rural Youth: http://ed.psu.edu/crec/research/rural-high-school-student-aspirations-college-success-for-rural-youth

Additional Ask-A-REL Responses to Consult

Ask-A-REL Midwest at American Institutes for Research. (2015). *Dual enrollment in rural settings*. Retrieved from
http://www.relmidwest.org/sites/default/files/RDR2015_3_DualEnrollment.pdf

Ask-A-REL Northeast & Islands at EDC. (2015). *Do online courses and/or blended learning models help prepare rural students for college?* Retrieved from http://www.relnei.org/wp-content/referencedocs/RELNEI_RD0317_Online_Courses_Rural_Students_College_Readiness.pdf

Ask-A-REL Southeast at Florida State University, Florida Center for Reading Research. (2015). *What research is available on strategies for improving parent and community engagement in schools? Are there differences in rural and urban settings?* Retrieved from http://rel-se.fcrr.org/_/ask-a-rels/3-15/Ask%20A%20REL%20Strategies%20for%20improving%20parent%20and%20community%20engagement%20in%20schools.pdf

Ask-A-REL Southeast at Florida State University, Florida Center for Reading Research. (2016). *Is there a difference in students from rural areas and urban areas and their self-directed learning or motivation to continue learning?* Retrieved from http://rel-se.fsu.edu/_/ask-a-rels/03-16/Ask%20A%20REL%20Rural%20vs%20Urban%20Student%20Motivation.pdf

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Rural AND college OR post secondary OR training
- Rural college postsecondary training
- Rural student college aspiration
- Rural parent college aspiration
- Rural student college
- Rural youth academic OR postsecondary aspiration
- Rural famil* OR parent AND postsecondary education OR expectation
- Rural famil* OR parent AND college

Note. Using the following search strings: Rural AND college AND "communication strategies"; Rural AND college AND "communication"; Student* AND/OR families AND communicat* AND rural AND college OR postsecondary OR training program; Students AND/OR families AND "communication strategies" AND rural AND college OR post secondary, did not yield any empirical evidence about the topic.

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last five years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Search priorities of reference sources: Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on June 2, 2017. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.