RURAL YOUTH FUTURES: COOS COUNTY, OREGON

Survey Results • Summer 2020

As rural communities face changes in local economies, populations, and workforce needs, what does the next generation of residents and workers value and want? That question was the motivation for the Rural Youth Futures project. Researchers and extension agents from several universities joined forces with local non-profits to find out what middle and high schoolers think in two forest-dependent regions: Coos County in Oregon and Piscataquis/Northern Somerset Counties in Maine. This is one in a series of fact sheets designed to present summary information to each participating school and county about the perceptions and aspirations of local youth.

Approach

With permission from school principals, students at 7 schools in Coos County were given a link to an anonymous, electronic survey between January and May in 2019. Participation was voluntary. The schools had a combined 2,902 students enrolled during 2018–2019, 1,332 of which took the survey for a participation rate of 46%. Every question was optional, so the number of responses varies by question. Fact sheets for all schools and each county are available online at: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/RuralYouth.

Demographics

Describe the family structure you live with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category that best describes you:</th>
<th>2-parent, biological parents</th>
<th>2-parent, step family</th>
<th>Single parent, mom</th>
<th>Single parent, dad</th>
<th>Don't know or NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom, dad, or guardian:</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second mom, dad, or guardian:</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What level of education did your parents or guardians, whom you live with, complete?

| Mom, dad, or guardian:          | 12%                           | 26%                  | 12%               | 29%               | 4%              | 16%              |

Do your parents or guardians work for pay?

| Mom, dad, or guardian:          | 71%                           | 6%                   | 8%                | 5%                | 3%              | 3%               |

School changes from moving in past 5 years:

| Born in Coos County:            | 3 or more (10%)               | 2 (9%)               | 1 (20%)           | None (52%)        |

Perception of family finances:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than enough for food &amp; bills (27%)</th>
<th>Enough for food &amp; bills (27%)</th>
<th>Not enough for food &amp; bills (14%)</th>
<th>Don't know or choose not to answer (28%)</th>
<th>Yes (84%)</th>
<th>No (14%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Schools in rural communities are critical. They bring families together, support civic interaction, and foster workforce development. Schools also influence youth aspirations for future education. To learn more about these things in Coos County schools, we asked students to tell us about their school experience and future goals, what they felt were barriers to those goals, and the extracurricular activities they participated in.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?

- I like school: 41% Agree, 26% Neither agree nor disagree, 31% Disagree, 2% Don’t know
- I get bullied by others at school: 13% Agree, 22% Neither agree nor disagree, 62% Disagree, 4% Don’t know
- I am usually bored at school: 58% Agree, 25% Neither agree nor disagree, 15% Disagree, 2% Don’t know

What is the highest level of education that you a) want, and b) expect to complete?

- a) Want
  - High school: 16%
  - 2-year community college/trade school: 32%
  - 4-year college/university: 18%
  - Graduate, master’s, or law program: 18%
  - Ph.D. program or medical school: 16%
- b) Expect
  - High school: 31%
  - 2-year community college/trade school: 18%
  - 4-year college/university: 18%
  - Graduate, master’s, or law program: 29%
  - Ph.D. program or medical school: 31%

What could prevent you from going as far in school as you would like?

- It costs too much (46%)
- I don’t have good enough grades (25%)
- I need to work after school (22%)
- I’m not smart enough (21%)
- I’d need to move away to go to school (13%)

Which of the following activities have you participated in the last year?

- Sports team (51%)
- Community service or volunteering (32%)
- Attend community events (31%)
- Art or dance (23%)
- After-school or summer program (22%)

On average, how many hours per week do you spend participating in all the above activities combined?

- 0 hours: 16%
- 1-2 hours: 17%
- 3-4 hours: 19%
- 5-6 hours: 14%
- 7-9 hours: 11%
- 10 or more hours: 24%
Increasing the number of young people and working families is a critical issue in many rural towns. Natural amenities and attachment to community can retain young people or attract in-migration. We asked students to tell us about their community to better understand what the community has to offer. We also asked them where they want to live in the future to see if there’s an interest in living in these places among young people.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your community:

- This is a good place to grow up:
  - Agree: 53%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 28%
  - Disagree: 16%
  - Don’t know: 3%

- I care about my community:
  - Agree: 71%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 19%
  - Disagree: 8%
  - Don’t know: 2%

- I feel like I am part of my community:
  - Agree: 48%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 30%
  - Disagree: 18%
  - Don’t know: 3%

Where do you see your community in the future in terms of jobs and the economy?

- MORE jobs & improving economy: 21%
- SAME # of jobs & same economy: 28%
- FEWER jobs & declining economy: 22%
- Don’t know: 30%

Where do you want to live and expect to live when you are 30 years old?

Want
- Same or nearby town as now: 23%
- Other rural area in Oregon: 10%
- City in Oregon: 22%
- Rural area in another state: 6%
- City in another state: 24%
- Another country: 15%

Expect
- Same or nearby town as now: 30%
- Somewhere else rural (not in a city) Oregon: 13%
- City in Oregon: 25%
- Rural area in another state: 8%
- City in another state: 20%
- Another country: 5%

What would you like to see more of in your community?

**TOP 5 WISHES**

- More shops and retail stores (64%)
- More indoor recreation (60%)
- More restaurants (58%)
- More outdoor recreation (47%)
- More arts and culture (46%)

Do you think the following are important problems facing your community?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Respondents that selected “yes”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug or alcohol abuse</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough things to do in town</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not having enough money</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough jobs</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not enough affordable or good housing</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of public transportation</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor school quality</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People moving away</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough outdoor activities</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough healthcare or doctors</td>
<td>33%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Youth today are the community’s future labor force. How prepared they feel, and how willing they are to work in local industries, influences their success in the workforce. We asked students to tell us about their career plans, including what barriers they may face and what training support they need. Because the outdoors is so important to our community, we also asked them about outdoor recreation activities that they participated in.

For this question, students could type in any answer to the question of what their dream job would be. We wanted to get a sense of their ideal career aspirations. All responses were entered into a program that generated this word cloud, where the larger and darker an entry is, the more times it was mentioned by students. Some students didn’t name a particular job, but described in general what they hoped they’d be doing.

Do you think the following things will prevent you from getting the job you want?

**TOP 5 BARRIERS**

- I don’t have enough money to get the education I need (30%)
- I don’t know the right people (24%)
- I don’t have enough good grades in school (16%)
- There aren’t enough jobs in that field (14%)
- I don’t have the necessary skills (14%)

What would be your dream job when you are 30?

For this question, students could type in any answer to the question of what their dream job would be. We wanted to get a sense of their ideal career aspirations. All responses were entered into a program that generated this word cloud, where the larger and darker an entry is, the more times it was mentioned by students. Some students didn’t name a particular job, but described in general what they hoped they’d be doing.

What sort of help would you like preparing for a job?

**TOP 5 TRAINING NEEDS**

- Training in hands-on skills (48%)
- Education or college advice (44%)
- Job advice (40%)
- Help with job applications (35%)
- Interviewing skills (30%)

Would you want to work in one of the following industries in Coos County?

- Education: 29% Yes, 55% No, 16% Don’t know
- Industrial: 27% Yes, 58% No, 13% Don’t know
- Medical: 45% Yes, 40% No, 15% Don’t know
- Outdoor-based: 35% Yes, 51% No, 13% Don’t know
- Service: 23% Yes, 56% No, 18% Don’t know

Which of the following outdoor recreation activities have you done in the last year? (top ten):

- Visiting the beach: 60%
- Camping: 57%
- Hiking: 51%
- Fishing: 37%
- Wildlife viewing: 33%
- ATV riding: 32%
- Canoeing or kayaking: 29%
- Clamming/crabbing: 26%
- Hunting: 25%
- Golfing or frisbee disc golf: 18%

What percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with statements about their attachment to the outdoors (top two):

- 71% of students said they can be themselves in the outdoors here
- 52% of students said they feel happiest when in the outdoors here

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