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 County 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.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

- **Describe the family structure you live with:**
  - 2-parent, biological parents: 49%
  - 2-parent, step family: 20%
  - Single parent, mom: 15%
  - Single parent, dad: 11%
  - Choose not to respond: 3%
  - Don’t know/choose not to answer: 3%

- **What level of education did your parents or guardians, whom you live with, complete?**
  - Did not finish high school: 17%
  - Went to college, didn’t graduate: 22%
  - Finished high school: 14%
  - Graduated from college or more: 33%
  - Don’t know or NA: 4%

- **Do your parents or guardians work for pay?**
  - Yes, one full-time job: 73%
  - Yes, one part-time job: 7%
  - Yes, multiple jobs: 6%
  - Does not have a job: 2%
  - Retired: 11%
  - Not working now, but looking for a job: 4%
  - Don’t know or NA: 5%
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, 30% Disagree, 3% Don't know
- I get bullied by others at school: 14% Agree, 21% Neither agree nor disagree, 61% Disagree, 4% Don't know
- I am usually bored at school: 64% Agree, 21% Neither agree nor disagree, 13% Disagree, 3% Don't know

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

TOP 5 BARRIERS

1. It costs too much (45%)
2. I’m not smart enough (24%)
3. I don’t have good enough grades (24%)
4. I’d need to move away to go to school (23%)
5. I need to work after school (15%)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Want</th>
<th>Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year community college/trade school</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college/university</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate, master’s, or law program</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. program or medical school</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

TOP 5 ACTIVITIES

1. Sports team (45%)
2. Attend community events (25%)
3. Other school clubs (science/math, computer, debate, foreign language, etc.) (24%)
4. Community service or volunteering (24%)
5. Art or dance (22%)

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

- 0 hours: 18%
- 1-2 hours: 16%
- 3-4 hours: 20%
- 5-6 hours: 11%
- 7-9 hours: 11%
- 10 or more hours: 23%
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: 40%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 33%
  - Disagree: 23%
  - Don’t know: 2%

- **I care about my community:**
  - Agree: 69%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 20%
  - Disagree: 9%
  - Don’t know: 2%

- **I feel like I am part of my community:**
  - Agree: 41%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 33%
  - Disagree: 22%
  - Don’t know: 4%

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

**TOP 5 WISHES**

- **More shops and retail stores (65%)**
- **More liquefied natural gas or pipeline development (63%)**
- **More indoor recreation (60%)**
- **More restaurants (52%)**
- **More arts and culture (52%)**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Want</th>
<th>Marshfield High School responses</th>
<th>All Coos County responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same or nearby town as now</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other rural area in Oregon</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city in Oregon</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area in another state</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City in another state</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another country</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expect</th>
<th>Want</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same or nearby town as now</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other rural area in Oregon</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city in Oregon</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area in another state</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City in another state</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another country</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Marshfield High School “yes” responses</th>
<th>All Coos County “yes” responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug or alcohol abuse</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not having enough money</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough things to do in town</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough affordable or good housing</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough jobs</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor school quality</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of public transportation</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough outdoor activities</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough healthcare or doctors</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People moving away</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
YOUTH PROGRAMMING

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.

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.

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 (32%)
- I don’t know the right people (26%)
- I don’t have the necessary skills (16%)
- There aren’t enough jobs in that field (15%)
- I’m not smart enough (14%)

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

**TOP 5 TRAINING NEEDS**

- Training in hands-on skills (49%)
- Education or college advice (45%)
- Job advice (42%)
- Help with job applications (35%)
- Interviewing skills (29%)

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

- Visiting the beach: 64%
- Camping: 56%
- Hiking: 53%
- Fishing: 39%
- Wildlife viewing: 31%
- ATV riding: 28%
- Canoeing or kayaking: 27%
- Clamming/crabbing: 22%
- Hunting: 19%
- Skateboarding: 18%

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

- They can be themselves in the outdoors here: 67% of students said
- The outdoors here is the best place to do the things they enjoy: 53% of students said

The Rural Youth Futures project is funded by USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture grant #2017-67023-26240. Project partners include: University of Maine, the University of Oregon’s Ecosystem Workforce Program, Coos Watershed Association (Oregon), the Appalachian Mountain Club (Maine), and Oregon State University. Header photo credit: Alexa Carleton, Coos Watershed Association.

For more information on the project, contact Mindy Crandall, Oregon State University, mindy.crandall@oregonstate.edu.