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Rural Education Research Digest

Hardré, P., Sullivan, D., & Crowson, H. (2009). Student Characteristics and Motivation in Rural High Schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 24(16).

Systematic research in rural schools is sparse, but needed. Rural students in remote areas have up to twice the national average dropout rate. The context of these rural schools is unique and many concepts related to motivation and achievement are not generalizable to rural schools without first addressing the role of local values and opportunities. Rural youth more often face a conflict between community needs and their personal goals and desires, and as such, have been shown to be less likely to pursue post-secondary education.

This study examined the influence of students' self-perceptions of competence, goal orientations, and environmental perceptions on motivation and intent to complete high school. Participants included 414 students in grades 9-12 in 10 rural public high schools in a Southwestern U.S. state. Participants completed a questionnaire that included the teacher support and peer support subscales of the *In My Classroom* questionnaire by Green and Miller (1996), the Approaches to Learning Questionnaire by Green and Miller (1996), the value subscale developed by Hardré & Reeve (2003), the contextualized version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998), the Activity-Feeling States Scale by Reeve & Sickenius (1994), the School Engagement and Effort Scale by Hardré, Crowson, Xie & Ly (2007), a three-item scale developed by Hardré and Reeve (2003) to assess intention to persist, and self-reported grade point average.

The final path model revealed a complex system of influences on rural high school student motivation. The authors also reported that motivation differed significantly by subject area in this sample, with math classes showing the lowest motivation levels.

The authors suggest that the findings from this study show the importance of teachers being sensitive to the unique differences among their students and how they relate to the values and needs prevalent in their rural community. The instrumentality and value of coursework may also be an important consideration for rural youth motivational patterns because they may value courses based on what opportunities are available in their community, and therefore

not exert effort in courses that they do not see as benefiting their future plans in their community. The authors suggest that rural educators may need to specifically educate students about how coursework can be helpful to achieve their career goals. Teachers should also encourage students' success, since perceived competence had such a strong influence on achievement in this sample.

