Piscataquis & N. Somerset Counties (ME)

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RURAL YOUTH FUTURES: PISCATAQUIS & N. SOMERSET COUNTIES, MAINE

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: Piscataquis and north Somerset Counties in Maine and Coos County in Oregon. 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.

**APPRAOCH**

With permission from school principals, students at 5 schools in Piscataquis and N. Somerset Counties in Maine were given a link to an anonymous, electronic survey between February and May, 2019. Participation was voluntary. The schools had a combined 666 students enrolled during 2018–2019, 578 of which took the survey for a participation rate of 87%. 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](http://ewp.uoregon.edu/RuralYouth).

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

Describe the family structure you live with:

- 53% 2-parent, biological parents
- 16% 2-parent, step family
- 10% Single parent, mom
- 10% Single parent, dad
- 9% Don't know

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

- Mom, dad, or guardian:
  - 11% Did not finish high school
  - 25% Went to school, don't know how far
  - 9% Graduated from college or more
  - 34% Retired
  - 5% Does not have a job
  - 16% Not working now, but looking for a job

- Second mom, dad, or guardian:
  - 7% Did not finish high school
  - 21% Went to school, don't know how far
  - 12% Graduated from college or more
  - 26% Retired
  - 5% Does not have a job
  - 29% Not working now, but looking for a job

Do your parents or guardians work for pay?

- Mom, dad, or guardian:
  - 66% Yes, one full-time job
  - 7% Yes, one part-time job
  - 7% Yes, multiple jobs
  - 9% Not working now, but looking for a job
  - 2% Retired
  - 10% Don't know or NA

- Second mom, dad, or guardian:
  - 46% Yes, one full-time job
  - 7% Yes, one part-time job
  - 7% Yes, multiple jobs
  - 8% Not working now, but looking for a job
  - 2% Retired
  - 27% Don't know or NA
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 Piscataquis and North Somerset 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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like school</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get bullied by others at school</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am usually bored at school</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>a) Want</th>
<th>b) Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-year community college/trade school</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year college/university</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate, master’s, or law program</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. program or medical school</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- It costs too much (36%)
- I’m not smart enough (20%)
- I don’t have good enough grades (17%)
- I need to work after school (17%)
- I’d need to move away to go to school (12%)

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

- Sports team (56%)
- After-school or summer program (29%)
- Band or orchestra (29%)
- Community service or volunteering (28%)
- Attend community events (27%)

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

- 0 hours
- 1-2 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 5-6 hours
- 7-9 hours
- 10 or more hours
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: 68%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 19%
  - Disagree: 11%
  - Don’t know: 2%

- **I care about my community:**
  - Agree: 75%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 10%
  - Disagree: 6%
  - Don’t know: 1%

- **I feel like I am part of my community:**
  - Agree: 59%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 25%
  - Disagree: 12%
  - Don’t know: 3%

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

- **MORE jobs & improving economy:** 13%
- **SAME # of jobs & same economy:** 28%
- **FEWER jobs & declining economy:** 28%
- **Don’t know:** 32%

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

- **Want:**
  - Same or nearby town as now: 31%
  - Other rural area in Oregon: 12%
  - A city in Oregon: 13%
  - Rural area in another state: 13%
  - City in another state: 16%
  - Another country: 18%
- **Expect:**
  - Same or nearby town as now: 35%
  - Somewhere else rural (not in a city) Oregon: 16%
  - A city in Maine: 10%
  - Other rural area in Maine: 17%
  - Another country: 35%

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

- **People not having enough money**: 55%
- **Not enough things to do in town**: 55%
- **Not enough jobs**: 50%
- **Lack of public transportation**: 47%
- **Drug or alcohol abuse**: 45%
- **People moving away**: 42%
- **Not enough healthcare or doctors**: 39%
- **Poor school quality**: 33%
- **Not enough affordable or good housing**: 30%
- **Not enough outdoor activities**: 28%
- **Crime**: 17%
- **Homelessness**: 16%

**TOP 5 WISHES**

1. **More indoor recreation (hockey rinks, gyms)** (60%)
2. **More shops and retail stores** (57%)
3. **More restaurants** (55%)
4. **More outdoor recreation** (44%)
5. **More medical care and hospitals** (42%)
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?

Would you want to work in one of the following industries in this county?

![Word cloud showing various professions with different sizes and colors indicating frequency of mention by students.]

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 (24%)
- I don’t know the right people (22%)
- The job isn’t available here (14%)
- I’m not smart enough (13%)
- I don’t have enough good grades in school (13%)

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

**TOP 5 TRAINING NEEDS**

- Training in hands-on skills (45%)
- Education or college advice (40%)
- Job advice (36%)
- Help with job applications (26%)
- Help staying organized (26%)

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

- Fishing/ice fishing: 58%
- Visiting the beach: 57%
- Camping: 55%
- Canoeing or kayaking: 51%
- Hiking: 51%
- ATV riding: 48%
- Snowmobiling: 43%
- Hunting: 40%
- Wildlife viewing: 31%
- Sking or snowboarding: 30%

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

- 73% of students said they can be themselves in the outdoors here
- 59% of students said they feel safe in the outdoors here

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: Mindy Crandall, Oregon State University.

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