**Retention Beyond the Compulsory Years: What Makes a Difference for Students?**

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**Abstract**

This paper reports on sets of results generated through a survey of 3986 Tasmanian students in rural and outer regional government schools, across Years 5 to 12, related to student retention in education beyond the compulsory years. The purpose of the survey was twofold: (a) to obtain baseline data for a three-year Australian Research Council project and (b) to add to findings over the past 20 years on students’ attitudes to schooling and aspirations for education past the compulsory years. A factor analysis resulted in seven factors, including aspiration, support of teachers and parents, and ability in English and mathematics. A consideration of difference for the factors in relation to gender, region of residence, the schools’ Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, and student absence from school, found differences were greatest in relation to absenteeism. Differences were explored for the factors across the three levels of schooling: primary, secondary, and senior secondary/college, where perceptions of teacher support, English ability, and aspirations, were found to be lowest at the secondary level. A parsimonious regression analysis suggested parent support, teacher support, and perceived English ability predicted the greatest meaningful proportion of variance for students’ aspiration.

**Keywords**

Aspiration, attendance, gender differences, rural schooling, school year levels, student retention, students