

**Will the first through five years please stand up? Quantifying Western Region SBAE
teacher experience**

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Introduction

“Stand up if you have one to five years of teaching experience,” is a common request during a conference meal event. We can picture it: Dozens of early-career teachers from a state, region, or even across the United States, sheepishly rise. The exercise continues until there is an accounting of the room in terms of teaching experience. Unfortunately, this is the only quantification that exists for years of teaching experience nationally. While significant efforts have gone into quantifying demographic characteristics of teachers across disciplines (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014) and within agricultural education (National Supply and Demand Study: Smith, Lawver, & Foster, 2018), additional measures and reporting are necessary.

Across the education profession, it has been difficult for us to quantify and report years of experience beyond the state level. Further research may enable us to address retention, professional development, and potential interventions to aid in successful mid-career changes. National cross-disciplinary data (NCES) account for teacher experience based on 1-3 years, 4-9 years, 10-19 years, and more than 20 years of teaching experience (Goldring, et al., 2014). A similar accounting system in agricultural education would provide a comparison allowing us to connect agricultural education to a broader profession in terms of trends and initiatives. Tracking teachers also lends professional advantage in providing solutions around issues of retention, professional development, and successful mid-career changes. This study begins the process of quantifying teacher experience within secondary school based agricultural education (SBAE) at the regional level.

Conceptual Framework

Kini and Podolsky (2016) offer four positive outcomes of teacher experience relative to student achievement and teacher effectiveness. More experienced teachers tend to demonstrate improved student outcomes. Students of more experienced teachers likely perform better on measures outside of test scores (school attendance, disciplinary offenses, time spent reading, and time spent completing homework). Teachers realize greater effectiveness gains as they gain experience in a grade level, subject, or district. In turn, more experienced teachers also share the aforementioned benefits with their colleagues, schools, and students (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). With these tenets in mind, quantifying SBAE teacher experience beyond the state level assists in national efforts toward student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

This work aligns with AAAE Research Priority 3, Question 2: “What methods, models, and practices are effective in recruiting agricultural leadership, education, and communication practitioners (teachers, extension agents, etc.) and supporting their success at all stages of their careers?” (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016).

Methodology

This research uses data collected by State FFA Staff, Departments of Education, and Local Program Success Team Specialists in FFA Region I (Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii). While data collection varies by state, most teachers self-report to their respective state specialist. Data include current practitioners during the 2016-2017 school year. Post-secondary data were removed from the dataset to ensure accurate representation of secondary years of experience within SBAE. State data is reported as a composite for the region. The intent of the research is not to compare states, but to utilize descriptive statistics to move toward a better understanding regarding teacher experience within secondary SBAE. It is important to note that while California makes up

approximately 47% of the dataset it does not sway the average years of experience. That is, mean years of experience changed by less than 0.1% with the inclusion of California data.

Results

The dataset included 1,904 teachers in eleven states. Sixty-four teachers (3%) did not have a record of total years of teaching experience ($n = 1,840$). Mean years teaching across the sample was 11 years ($SD = 9.5$ years). Over half of teachers (51%) in Region I have eight or fewer years of teaching experience.

Early career teachers (1-3 years) comprised 27% ($n = 505$) of the sample. Teachers with 4-9 years of experience accounted for 28% of the sample ($n = 498$). Twenty-seven percent of teachers in Region I had 10-19 years of experience ($n = 499$). Teachers with more than 20 years of experience made up 18% of the sample. Three states had higher than average (>50%) populations of early career (1-3 year) teachers. Across states, most teachers (50-70%) had 1-9 years of teaching experience. One state was an exception, with the greatest frequency of teachers in the experience range of 10-19 years.

Conclusions

Corroborating anecdotal evidence, secondary SBAE in Region I is indeed a young profession. Comparatively, secondary SBAE in Region I has a substantially higher percentage of early career teachers compared to national teacher data across disciplines. Nationally, early career teachers account for 12% of the teaching force, 4-9 year teachers account for 27%, 36% are 10-19 year teachers, and 25% of teachers nationally have more than 20 years of teaching experience (Goldring, et al., 2014).

SBAE is in a unique position relative to the years of teaching experience among its workforce. Efforts regarding recruitment and retention have received significant attention within SBAE reflective of such a position. However, a step back to examine the experience demographic of secondary SBAE allows greater direction in these efforts. A better understanding of the experience demographic within secondary SBAE will only enhance outcomes of retaining experienced teachers toward improved student results and teacher effectiveness.

Implications

Region I accounts for approximately 15% of SBAE teachers nationally. Additional work is necessary to corroborate secondary SBAE teacher experience as a national demographic. With 15% more early-career teachers in Region I compared to the national cross-disciplinary average (27% in Region I compared to 12% nationally) and 7% fewer late career teachers (18% in Region I with 20 or more years of experience compared to 25% nationally), additional efforts should continue to support teacher retention.

Additionally, while several mentoring programs exist for early career teachers (1-3 years), and even early mid-career teachers (4-9 years), teachers in the 10-19 year demographic receive little attention. SBAE in Region I is comprised of 27% of teachers in the 10-19 year experience bracket. Continued efforts to reach out to this experience demographic regarding their needs and experiences are necessary. Furthermore, these teachers bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the profession in addition to the teaching effectiveness they have developed through experience. As such, we must recognize these teachers for the many benefits they provide to SBAE. While we ask the first through fifth years to stand, we cannot discount the other career stages in the process.

References

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