

**Moving Toward More Sustainable Funding: A Local Model for Supporting Induction Programs**

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### **The Need for Appropriate Induction and Mentoring**

The field of induction and mentoring research is growing, and within agricultural education satisfaction and retention are topics that are coming to the forefront of the research conversation (Blackburn & Robinson, 2008; Burris, Kitchel, Greiman, & Torres, 2006; Delay & Washburn, 2013;). Concurrently, the California Agricultural Teachers' Association (CATA) has been examining the needs of the agricultural teaching profession in the state through the Vision 2030 program. Mentoring was identified as a key area of need for further development. In addition to the CATA's focus on mentoring, the 2015 budget cycle of the California State Legislature required the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) to review standards for mandatory teacher induction programs (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015a). The legislature further asked the commission to evaluate burdens within approved programs and pinpoint any opportunities to reform beginning teacher induction. This request came on the heels of an influential report (Koppich et al., 2013), which outlined the vast inequities among programs across the state for early career teachers. While the mandate for induction programs is present, there is obvious interest from stakeholders to make them relevant and meaningful. Thus, creating an opportunity to develop more adept programs to fit the needs of novice agricultural educators.

### **How it Works - The structure of the California Agricultural Teachers' Induction Program (CATIP)**

The State of California mandates all teachers complete a 2-year induction program in order to 'clear'—for permanent teaching licensure—their teaching license. Induction programs are required to be approved through the CCTC in two primary ways: 1) through a post-secondary institution, or 2) through association with a Local Education Agency (LEA) (CCTC, 2015b). An induction program was formed specifically for California agricultural educators through the CATA and a LEA. The formal Memorandum of Understanding between the two parent organizations outlines programmatic, financial, and administrative obligations; forming CATIP. The CATIP serves induction-level agriculture teachers in their first and second years of induction who desire an alternative program customized to their needs.

The California Agricultural Teachers' Induction Program is guided by state standards and other needs of early career agriculture teachers. Mentors are paired with induction-level teachers to achieve these objectives. Mentors are ideally located within a one county radius, have expressed a desire to be a mentor, have undergone program training, and have completed a minimum of five years of secondary classroom teaching. The mentoring dyad is required to meet weekly to converse about issues relevant to the novice teacher, and to coordinate plans for professional growth based on licensure examination results. Documentation is amenable to meet the conversational needs of the mentoring dyad (i.e. live, email, phone), and is examined for validity by one of 6 different regional program facilitators—who are practicing agriculture teachers. Plans for professional growth are not limited to classroom-based practices and can consist of needs identified—via teacher preparation program and/or licensure examination—in the areas of classroom, supervised agricultural experience (SAE) projects, and/or National FFA Organization participation. These growth activities are monitored by the mentor and regional facilitator, and biannual observations are conducted by the mentor. Additionally, all induction-level teachers are

required to attend a minimum of 8 professional development events coordinated specifically for agricultural educators through their two-year tenure in the program.

The CATIP is administered through a state-wide coordinator, CATA staff, and LEA liaisons. Monthly administrative meetings are held between all stakeholders (i.e. coordinator, administrative assistants, LEA liaisons, and region facilitators). Additionally, the coordinator attends monthly teacher educator meetings to ensure meaningful positioning of program elements to support teacher preparation programs.

### **Costs - Financial Structure**

The funding model for this program is the most unique facet for comparison to any other early career teacher induction program. A majority of state-run agriculture education induction programs are funded through university budgets (Franklin & Molina, 2012). However, funding for this program is derived from an annual charge to the novice teacher's school district to enroll their induction-level teacher candidate. School districts are invoiced by the LEA, and the CATA invoices the LEA in accordance to an agreed budget, which is approved by consortium administration early in the fiscal year. Invoices are billed at two points during the academic year. Program expenses are allocated into 3 major categories: 32% for CATA contractor compensation (i.e. coordinator, assistant, facilitators), 48% for conferences and programs, and 20% for travel and other LEA administrative costs.

### **Results and Implications**

To date the program has served 43 different teaching candidates between 31 school districts and has graduated an initial class of 14 early career agriculture teachers. All major teacher preparation institutions in the state are represented, having candidates elect to participate in the program and pursue contractual agreements within their home school districts. Preliminary data suggests that induction-level teachers are more satisfied ( $M = 2.60$ ) their mentors have content area knowledge about the subjects they teach when compared to other induction level candidates ( $M = 1.40$ ) who are not a part of CATIP. Induction-level teachers further express appreciation that they can count program development work they would be doing regularly to meet standards that align well with industry sector norms and standards for the teaching profession.

### **Future Plans and Recommendations**

In our inaugural year, we have learned many things about formalizing an induction program that suits the needs of induction-level agricultural teachers. We see there is room for growth in evolving more meaningful content and developing our learning management system to be more user friendly. While we are structuring these changes into our future plans, the implications for other states interested in following a similar model vary. The CATIP was developed based on the structure of the California education system which allowed for this entrepreneurial venture. Therefore, it is recommended that considerations for adapting this program in different states need to be made. Specifically, 1) Is there a passionate agriculture teacher, or staff at an agricultural teachers' association (e.g. NAAE) within the state to spearhead this effort; 2) Are there good collaborative relationships between state staff, teacher preparation programs, and secondary agricultural educator organizations, and 3) Does the state offer an education funding structure that could be leveraged specifically for agriculture teacher induction and mentoring? Positive response to these areas would suggest the most opportunity for an easy transition to this induction model.

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