

Poster Type: Innovative Idea

Teachers Helping Teachers: First-year Agriscience Teacher Local, After-school Meetings

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Introduction / Need for the Innovation

According to Greiman (2010), "...the first two or three years after licensure are the most influential in developing the knowledge and skills, effectiveness, and efficacy of a teacher" (p.183). In his phases of first-year teacher attitudes toward teaching, Moir (1990) suggested that first-year teachers go from anticipation, to survival, and into disillusionment within the first two months of teaching. Based on a comprehensive review of research, Day and Gu (2014) concluded that the difference rising or declining efficacy for teachers in the first three years of teaching is primarily due to administrative support and interactions with other teachers. Personal resilience is critical in responding to the everyday challenges in teaching, and a key dimension of personal resilience is the strength of connections with others (Hoopes, 2017).

How it Works / Methodology

A key component of new agriscience teacher development efforts in Florida was nine after-school meetings held in the fall 2018 semester at selected locations around the state. These meetings were designed as resource-sharing, problem-solving, and networking meetings for first-year agriscience teachers and were held from 4:30 to 6:30 pm, usually at the school of one of the new teachers. Host schools were primarily chosen for their geographical centrality to new teachers in the area, with the goal of no teacher driving more than one hour to get to the host school. One or more teacher education faculty members from the University of Florida attended each of the after-school meetings, and they were joined by an experienced agriscience teacher from the local area. Including a respected, well-networked, and accomplished agriscience teacher made these meetings highly valuable to the new teachers. In a few cases, the experienced teacher hosted the new teacher meeting, but in most cases, the meeting was held at the school of a new teacher, and the experienced teacher traveled to that site. The agenda at these meetings included introductions and a quick tour of the agriscience program at the host school, sharing of problems and concerns, and collective problem solving and sharing of ideas and resources, including curriculum resources. This free-flowing exchange was structured around selected concerns and challenges identified by the new teachers, going from one topic to the next until the group was ready to move to the next topic. The dates and locations of all meetings were shared statewide, which allowed teachers to participate at another location, if they had a conflict with the meeting in their area.

In Florida, a comprehensive system for identifying and sharing information on agriscience teacher vacancies and hires was lacking. Thus, a multifaceted effort included contacting all county CTE directors and county Ag Ed coordinators, where available, to request information on new agriscience teacher hires. An initial and two follow-up inquiries were sent to all CTE directors and county Ag Ed coordinators from June through August. This strategy not only yielded a large number of new teacher names and contact information, it also provided an opportunity to ask CTE directors to support the participation of these new agriscience teachers in a variety of new teacher development activities, including their participation in local, after-school meetings scheduled around the state specifically for new agriscience teachers. Numerous CTE directors indicated their enthusiastic support of these efforts. All evidence indicated that the resulting list of nearly 60 first-year agriscience teachers in the state was complete and accurate. A large majority of these new teachers held a temporary teaching certificate.

Results to Date / Implications

The first round of 10 local, after-school new agriscience teacher meetings was held in fall 2017. The number of attendees at each meeting ranged from 1 to 10, with three to four new teachers attending most of these meetings. A University of Florida faculty member and experienced agriscience teacher attended each meeting. Initially, the meetings were scheduled from 4:00 to 7:00 pm, with refreshments during the meeting and dinner afterward for those who could attend. However, the 4:00 pm start time did not allow enough time for some teachers to arrive on time. Thus, the last five meetings were adjusted to run from 4:30 to 6:30 pm. New teachers, teacher educator(s), and the experienced teacher sat in a circle as new teachers shared their challenges, which were captured on the whiteboard in the room, and a lively problem-solving discussion ensued. The teacher education faculty member kept notes on the challenges raised and the ideas and strategies discussed and often shared additional information via email after the meeting. Notes from prior meetings were used to anticipate the concerns shared at future meetings and to develop additional activities to support new teachers. A second round of local, after-school meetings was held in fall 2018 for the first-year agriscience teachers in the 2018-19 school year. Nine such meetings were held, following the format used in 2017, with three to six teachers attending most of the meetings. In addition, the first-year teachers from the previous year were invited to participate in the 2018 after-school meetings, and some of those teachers participated. Another significant outcome of these meetings was the new teacher network that began to develop. Teachers shared contact and program information and left the meetings feeling very supported and much less isolated.

Future Plans / Advice to Others

Plans are to continue these after-school new teacher meetings in fall 2019. These will again be arranged in convenient geographical locations, based on the location of the new teachers that year, and include a university faculty member and experienced agriscience teacher at each meeting. The meetings will again be scheduled for two hours, and the start time will be 4:30 or 5:00 pm, depending on the dismissal time for the schools in that target area. Suggestions to others include the following: (1) prompt experienced teachers beforehand with a probable list of concerns, so they can arrive better prepared to share ideas and resources; (2) arrive at the meetings with ideas and resources to address anticipated challenges; (3) list the unduplicated concerns of the new teachers on the board to keep the discussion on track; (4) proactively facilitate the discussion for maximum efficiency and value; (5) summarize the strategies identified before moving to the next challenge; (6) share a summary list of strategies identified and resources shared with all new teachers in the state at the conclusion of the series of local teacher meetings; and (7) to assist new teachers in problem solving and networking, visit as many new teachers as possible at their school when traveling to the new teacher meetings.

Costs / Resources Needed

The only costs associated with this activity are the time and travel of the university faculty member, plus a small amount of funds for snacks and beverages at each meeting. All new teachers drove to the meetings in either a county vehicle or their personal vehicle. Depending on return travel time and other commitments, the university faculty member bought dinner for the experienced teacher as a token of thanks for his/her attendance at the meeting. In addition, a significant amount of time was needed in identifying all new agriscience teachers in the state, scheduling the meetings, and confirming the host schools and experienced teachers.

References

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