

**Administrator Experience: Closing the Gap between School-Based Agricultural Education
and Administration**

Kimura A. Yamamoto
One Grand Avenue
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
805.258.2716
kayamamo@calpoly.edu

Sandra Dale
379 12th Street
Fortuna, CA 95540
707.672.2248
sdale@fuhsdistrict.net

Erin K. Gorter
One Grand Avenue
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
805.756.5362
ekthomps@calpoly.edu

Administrator Experience: Closing the Gap between School-Based Agricultural Education and Administration

Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

The success of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs depends on an intricate web of relationships—none of which are more vital than the relationship between the agricultural educator and their administration. The American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) national research agenda seeks to find ways to support teachers in all phases of their career (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016), and administration plays a role in this support mechanism. Many SBAE teachers contribute a significant part of their job satisfaction to a supportive and understanding school administration (Rice, LaVergne, & Gartin, 2011). Smith and Myers (2012) reported the existence of an SBAE program is highly influenced by the principal's perceptions about the agriculture education program. Additionally, administrators are tasked with hiring the teachers of SBAE for their program. Without a complete understanding of all the facets of SBAE programming, it is very difficult to hire the best candidate to ensure a successful program.

Administration also plays a part in teacher retention. Many agricultural educators cite lack of administrative support and understanding as a significant reason why they chose to leave the profession (Boone & Boone, 2007; Castillo & Cano, 1999; Kelsey, 2006; Walker, Garton, & Kitchel, 2004). Rice et al. (2011) recommended, to improve SBAE teacher job satisfaction and retention, administrators need a better understanding of the teachers' role. A recent study analyzing agricultural teacher attrition reflected, "As several participants inferred their administrators did not understand agricultural education, a recommendation would be to develop a regional or state program for administrators to showcase opportunities and impact of agricultural education and FFA" (Solomonson, 2017, p. 66). To tackle this, the *Administrator Experience* was created as an event for administrators of schools with SBAE programs, held concurrently with the State FFA Leadership Conference. The importance of administrative understanding and appreciation of SBAE programs and roles of the teacher cannot be understated. The *Administrator Experience* serves as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between SBAE and program administration on a local and state level.

How It Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

This event was designed with four phases: 1) Planning, 2) Recruitment, 3) Implementation, and 4) Evaluation. Planning was conducted by a program director under a state professional development contract. This director solicited topics from members of the SBAE profession, created recruitment materials, and handled all room scheduling and conference logistics. As the event was held in conjunction with the State FFA Leadership Conference, communication with the Assistant State FFA Advisor was also crucial. The recruitment for the event was done via the California program listserv, which also has access to program administrator emails.

When implemented, the conference began mid-day on a Friday during the State FFA Leadership Conference and ended the following day at noon. The formal program consisted of various presentations with state leaders in agricultural education, state elected education officials, and specialists in agriculture pathway programming. Informal sessions included meals with agriculture program alumni and other agriculture teachers, attendance in State FFA Leadership

Conference sessions, and serving as proficiency award interview judges. A complete program of events will be provided with the poster. After the event, evaluation was performed in the form of an email survey soliciting feedback on the value of sessions and highlights for participants.

Results to date/implications

A pilot event, offered to administrators from the North Coast region during 2017, resulted in 14 participants. During the 2018 and 2019 years, the event was open statewide and served 43 administrators per year. Overall results of the event, as reported in most recent evaluations ($N = 24$), were favorable. When asked “How satisfied were you with the event overall?” Likert-scale ratings (1 = not satisfied and 5 = very satisfied) indicated a *Mode* of 5 ($M = 4.58, SD = .50$). There is room to improve in terms of relevancy, as when prompted, “How relevant and helpful do you think it was for your position and school?” the *Mode* was 4 ($M = 4.2, SD = .58$). A component of the *Administrator Experience* consistently marked “very relevant” on evaluations was the scoring of student proficiency award interviews. Additionally, when given the opportunity to identify key take-away moments from the conference, one participant said, “Supporting Ag teachers is important and understanding all that they do” while another responded “I never really thought about how much ag is part of our everyday lives and we need to recruit people to work in that field.” The implications of the event have extended beyond sheer support of SBAE programs and serve as a catalyst for general support of agriculture as an industry by secondary administrators.

Future plans/advice to others

California will continue to offer the *Administrator Experience* as a complement to its State FFA Leadership Conference. The event provides opportunity for administrators to interact with other administrators in schools with SBAE programs, SBAE teachers, program alumni, and state agricultural education consultants. Additionally, administrators are able to witness their students participate in competitive events and see their leadership development.

Advice to other states includes capitalizing on what is already offered at existing State FFA Leadership Conferences. Engaging administrators in positive, immersive opportunities where they can be active participants rather than bystanders is necessary. Facilitating the interaction of administrators, students, and teachers from SBAE programs has served as a powerful mechanism for garnering support of local programs, agriculture, and agricultural education statewide.

Costs/resources needed

This project was facilitated by the program director of a statewide professional development contract serving SBAE in California. The program director charged a registration fee of \$150 per administrator. This fee covered meals; one meal voucher for use with conference food vendors, one catered breakfast, and one boxed lunch. Guest speakers were those already in attendance at the conference and required no additional fees. The meeting room was in use by the FFA state conference and available at no additional charge. Audiovisual equipment was provided, at no cost, by the host institution of the program director. Additional resources needed would be access to SBAE alumni and teachers, already in attendance at the conference, for the catered breakfast event. Although the program director offered to cover hotel rooms for participants, no one took advantage of the offer. For the 2019 conference, which served 43 administrators, the total cost was \$6,450, which was covered by the participant registration fees. The cost for the program director was absorbed by the statewide professional development contract.

References

- Boone, H. N., & Boone, D. A. (2007). Problems faced by high school agricultural education teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 48*(2), 36-45. doi:10.5032/jae.2007.02036
- Castillo, J. X., & Cano, J. (1999). A comparative analysis of Ohio agriculture teachers' level of job satisfaction. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 40*(4), 67-79. doi:10.5032/jae.1999.04067
- Kelsey, K. D. (2006). Teacher attrition among women in secondary agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 47*(3), 117-129. doi:10.5032/jae.2006.03117
- Rice, J. E., LaVergne, D. D., & Gartin, S. A. (2011). Agricultural teacher perceptions of school components as motivational factors to continue teaching and demotivational factors to discontinue teaching. *Journal of Career and Technical Education, 26*(2), 105-115. doi:10.21061/jcte.v26i2.529
- Roberts, T. G., Harder, A., & Brashears, M. T. (Eds). (2016). *American Association for Agricultural Education national research agenda: 2016-2020*. Gainesville, FL: Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.
- Smith, A. G., & Myers, B. E. (2012). Perceptions of Florida secondary school principals toward agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 53*(3), 154–165. doi:10.5032/jae.2012.03154
- Solomonson, Jay. (2017). *Determining why agricultural educators are leaving the profession and how to increase the retention rate* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7225&context=etd>
- Walker, W. D., Garton, B. L., & Kitchel, T. J. (2004). Job satisfaction and retention of secondary agriculture teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 45*(2), 28-38. doi:10.5032/jae.2004.02028