

**Building *ALL* Three-legs to the Teacher Retention Stool**

**Kellie Enns**

Colorado State University  
1172 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1172  
(970) 491-0678  
[Kellie.Enns@colostate.edu](mailto:Kellie.Enns@colostate.edu)

**Jenny Bennett**

Colorado State University  
1172 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1172  
(970) 491-0678  
[Jennifer.Bennett@colostate.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Bennett@colostate.edu)

**Nathan Clark**

Colorado State University  
4492 East County Road 56  
Fort Collins, CO 80524  
(970) 491-3930  
[Nathan.Clark@colostate.edu](mailto:Nathan.Clark@colostate.edu)

**John Stahley**

Colorado State University – LTS Program  
4492 East County Road 56  
Fort Collins, CO 80524  
(970) 491-3930  
[johnstahley@gmail.com](mailto:johnstahley@gmail.com)

**Don Thorn**

Colorado FFA Foundation  
P.O. Box 1000  
Greeley, CO 80632  
719-829-4483  
[dthorn@coloradoffafoundation.org](mailto:dthorn@coloradoffafoundation.org)

## **Building *ALL* Three-legs to the Teacher Retention Stool**

### **Introduction**

Teaching, like all careers, comes with its fair share of obstacles which may lead to challenges in teacher recruitment and retention. Constant turn-over in the school system is detrimental for students, the school, but the teaching community. The unique structure of School Based Agricultural Education presents agriculture teachers with additional responsibilities not required of teachers in other content areas (Greiman, Walker & Birkenholtz, 2005). Failure to succeed in mastering the classroom, FFA, Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) and other program management duties can contribute to teacher frustration and isolation (Boone & Boone, 2007). Lack of consistent teacher preparation may also contribute to the decision to leave the profession (Cole, 1984). In Colorado many of the areas of concern for new agriculture educators include classroom instruction, student management, agriculture mechanics instruction/management, FFA leadership activities, FFA fundraising and budgeting, working with administrators and the community, and keeping student records/grades (J. J. Stahley, personal communication, June 27, 2019). Challenges within these areas may have the most impact on a teacher's decision leave the profession.

Over 50 percent of the agriculture teachers in Colorado are in their first three years teaching. The leadership team, Colorado Team Ag Ed, approached the teacher retention issue with a robust, innovate response: The Local Teacher Success (LTS) program. The LTS program initiated three main support systems for new teachers: New Teacher Bootcamp (NTB), professional development focused on needs of new teachers, and an LTS Mentor. The LTS Mentor, a newly retired agriculture teacher, provides on-sight visitation to address the needs of the teacher, while also working with local administration and community members to support the new hire. Like a stool with three legs, if any one of these inputs is sacrificed, there is less likelihood of teacher retention.

### **LTS Program Phases/Steps**

Much like the planning and building of a stool, the LTS program has similar steps: planning, building and evaluation. In the planning phase, Colorado Team Ag Ed meets and discusses priorities for the upcoming year utilizing data from previous years, both formal and anecdotal.

A list of professional development activities throughout the year are created, with specific detail and responsibilities assigned. At minimum, three state-wide professional development conferences are provided, based on the needs expressed or witnessed by Team Ag Ed; conferences may be regional, or state-wide meetings related to FFA, SAE and work-based learning, curriculum development or specific content training in pathways like agriculture mechanics. Professional development provided by Team Ag Ed, industry and experienced agriculture teachers to eliminate the perceived barriers of new teachers asking others for help. Additionally, the LTS Mentor offers specific “just in time” professional development using Zoom Meeting technology, offering procedural or informational assistance to new teachers bi-monthly.

In addition to the breadth of professional development offered, there is an intensive, week-long deep dive for new teachers, NTB, designed to provide an understanding of the processes and personnel in Colorado, specific due dates, and tips and tricks to make the first month of teaching

successful. Each member of Team Ag Ed participates in this event by helping to deliver content, coordinating housing, providing and cooking meals, and developing resources that teachers can take home.

After professional development planning is complete, funding resources were secured and the LTS personnel were hired. During NTB visit dates for all first-year teachers by the LTS mentor were established; first year teachers receive two on-site visits, second- and third-year teachers receive one with the option of additional should the local school district choose for additional support. Funding is secured for our program through the NAAE STAR Grant and private donations raised through the Colorado FFA Foundation, and post-secondary institutions.

Evaluation is done through quarterly face-to-face meetings of the LTS mentor and Colorado Team Ag Ed. During quarterly meetings the LTS Mentor reports out to the team, where priorities can be adjusted, and additional help can be provided, and the financial budget is reviewed.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

From July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019, there was significant impact from the LTS Program, including: over 40 teachers attended the NTB, 81 agricultural education program and new teacher visits were provided by LTS Mentor, traveling over 27,000 miles over 184 days. Many new teachers attended professional development offered throughout the academic year. There were 28 new teacher Zoom Meetings provided in the last year. The LTS program has shown significant improvements in teacher retention including: 93% of 1<sup>st</sup> year teachers signing their 2<sup>nd</sup> contract, 88% of 2<sup>nd</sup> year teachers signing their 3<sup>rd</sup> contract, 93% of 3<sup>rd</sup> year teachers signing their 4<sup>th</sup> contract.

### **Future/Advice to Others**

There has been significant success in the LTS program, with exceptional service being provided to new teachers in Colorado. The significant distances traveled have been challenging to accomplish; therefore, there are plans to expand the LTS personnel in the upcoming year. The LTS program allowed all the state leadership to provide support in one of the 'legs' of the program (professional development, NTB); while a bulk of the program visits were provided by the LTS mentor. The Team Ag Ed acknowledges that these are visits that could not have occurred prior to this program and show significant service to new teachers. Prior to the LTS Mentor being hired, only two of the three 'legs' were provided to new teachers and retention continued to be an issue. The balancing of all three of the LTS program 'legs' allows for a more comprehensive retention plan.

### **Cost and Resources**

There are significant costs to the LTS program. Currently the NTB costs \$4000 for housing, meals and supplies. The salary for the New Teacher Mentor is \$45,000 and \$9,800 for lodging, meals and mileage for the program visits. Additional resources are provided for other professional development activities, including in-kind costs, but they are not specific to the LTS program alone.

## References

Boone, H. N. Jr., & Boone, D. A. (2007). Why do agricultural education teachers continue to teach? A qualitative analysis. Proceedings of the American Association for Agricultural Education re- search conference, 34. Retrieved from <http://aaaeonline.org/uploads/allconferences/749007.Proceedings.doc>

Cole, L. (1984) "Oregon Vocational Agriculture Teacher Placement and Retention Factors." *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 25(3), doi:10.5032/jaatea.1984.03002.

Greiman, B. C., Walker, W. D., & Birkenholz, R. J. (2005). Influence of the organizational environment on the induction stage of teaching. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 46(3), 95–106. doi:10.5032/jae.2005.03095