

**Beyond the Classroom: Secondary School Agriscience Educator Perceptions of Secondary Administration**

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### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Perceptions of Supportive Administration in Agriculture Education**

Supportive and reliable administration have been identified as a contributing factor in the satisfaction of teachers of secondary agricultural education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate Alabama secondary school agriscience teacher's perceptions of supportive school administrators. Administrators manage the daily operations of school, oversee curricula development and implementation (Starrett, 2003), maintain a robust disciplinary program, evaluate certified and paraprofessional staff and foster a positive social environment. Robinson, et al. (2012) reported "understanding the perceptions of the principal regarding the agriculture program and its teacher(s) is important because the principal's perceptions influence whether or not an agricultural education program exists" (p. 152). Cantrell et al. (2004) stated that content area knowledge was reported to be the characteristic most preferred by administrators when hiring an agriculture teacher.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded using Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Organizational support theory (1986) suggests that the employee perceives the extent which the organization supports them and their work as an important marker within their work life. Eisenberger et al. (1986) reported that considering how employees tend to personify organizations, the actions of the agents within the organization toward the employee, and how these actions effect the perceived support of the employee. For employees to feel supported by the organization they would anticipate the same support as they receive within social relationships. Those who are more social tend to respond positively to the amount of organizational support received. Kurtessis et al. (2017) reported a positive relationship between increased performance and perceived organizational support on behalf of the employee.

#### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate secondary school agriscience teacher perceptions of supportive secondary administration. To better understand these perceptions two research questions guided this investigation: (1) what characteristics do supportive administrators demonstrate for classroom and FFA success, and (2) what are your perceptions of building positive relationships with administration? This research study aligns closely with research priority three of the American Association of Agriculture Education's research area, question two: "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?" (Stripling & Ricketts, 2016, p. 31).

#### **Methods**

Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to frame this qualitative study. Grounded theory is characterized by constant adjustment based on analysis of the data in order to construct a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and is useful when attempting to understand novel issues which have not been investigated thoroughly (Saldaña, 2013). Five semi-structured interview questions were developed based on prior research, expert panel suggestions, and content expert analysis. Design and validation of the semi-structured research questions were confirmed through the use of content area experts: current secondary agriculture educators, graduate students and university faculty. Potential study participants were identified from a publicly available list of practicing agriculture teachers in Alabama. Consideration for inclusion in the study included being a member of NAAE and previous participation in studies conducted by Auburn University Agriscience Education. Participants ( $n = 10$ ) were contacted electronically to explain the research and risks associated with the study. Participants were assigned a date, time,

pseudonym, and contacted by telephone for up to two hours. Data were coded for organization of findings and theme development. Open coding as a part of qualitative data analysis was used as a constant comparative method to discover the potential for consistent themes within the data. Independent analysis of participant comments were evaluated and organized using each of the two research questions producing 36 unique codes across 214 coded objects. Trustworthiness of participant comments was accomplished using member check. Coding was reconciled between three researchers using inductive processes between codes and coded objects. A total of 22 reconciled codes were synthesized into six emergent themes.

### **Findings**

Analysis of the 22 coded themes were generated into six emerging themes across the research questions of this study for organizing respondent data. The emergent themes describe secondary school agriscience teacher's perceptions of supportive administrators. Emerging themes included: administrative awareness of local agricultural education program, agriscience education teacher relationships with administration, teacher perceptions of in-classroom administrative support, teacher perceptions of out-of-classroom program support, and perceptions of measured administrative involvement. The participants presented a positive affect during the interviews regarding their role as a teacher. [Janice], an agriscience education teacher with 9 years of experience stated "[A supportive administrator is] someone who will say good morning. Someone who will come into your classroom just to see what you have going on. Not to critique or say "hey, what are you doing?" or "you're not doing this correctly. The findings support that teachers may view their principal as a high-quality administrator while not enjoying their personality as an individual. Participants noted the administrator having an awareness of the agricultural education program and its place within the community creates a zone which allows teachers to be able to discuss items with administrators without the having to explain superfluous pieces. Participants were inclined to discuss that a supportive administration was one which allowed them to do their job well. Teachers expressed the differences between classroom support and out of classroom (FFA) activities as equally important to classroom instruction. This perception reinforced the role administrators have in classroom expectations and support for the larger program.

### **Conclusions**

Research question one addressed teachers' perceptions of their administration as an agriscience education teacher. Findings indicated that agriscience teachers who remained in the classroom felt supported by their administration. The perception of administrative support is supported within Eisenberger et al. (1986) Organizational Support Theory. Administrative support enabled participants to teach the content necessary and was vital to the teacher's perception of classroom instructional objectives. Participants reported feelings of support and security while others were more apprehensive regarding administrative interactions. Research question two investigated perceptions of building positive relationships with administration? Participants reported administrative support contributed to choosing to remain in the classroom. Lack of FFA support was found to be detrimental to the satisfaction of agriculture teachers. If administrators do not feel FFA and SAE are the most important areas of an agriscience education program, why is this the area that the teachers appear to care equally about? Further studies should be conducted as to the role of administrators in secondary agriscience education teacher longevity. A survey of administrators should be conducted as to their perceptions of agriscience educators within their district and their local agriscience education program. This will allow researchers to evaluate the perceptions of the teachers in conjunction with feelings of administrators.

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