

**Teacher Leadership: An Analysis of Secondary Teachers' Perspectives on Enhancing  
Advocacy Efforts for Agricultural Education**

**Authors**

**Morgan Richardson Gilley**

Louisiana State University, LA 70803

225-337-3703

[mcric165@lsu.edu](mailto:mcric165@lsu.edu)

**Baylee Jankowski**

Louisiana State University, LA 70803

225-337-3703

[mcric165@lsu.edu](mailto:mcric165@lsu.edu)

[bjanko2@lsu.edu](mailto:bjanko2@lsu.edu)

**Richie Roberts, Ph.D.**

Louisiana State University, LA 70803

336-314-7191

[roberts3@lsu.edu](mailto:roberts3@lsu.edu)

**Dr. Kristin S. Stair, Ph.D.**

Louisiana State University, LA 70803

919-649-7019

[kstair@lsu.edu](mailto:kstair@lsu.edu)

**Cade LeJeune**

Louisiana State University AgCenter, LA 70803

225-578-5749

[cekejeune@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:cekejeune@agcenter.lsu.edu)

**J. Joey Blackburn, Ph.D.**

Louisiana State University, LA 70803

573-220-8881

[jjblackburn@lsu.edu](mailto:jjblackburn@lsu.edu)

## **Teacher Leadership: An Analysis of Secondary Teachers' Perspectives on Enhancing Advocacy Efforts for Agricultural Education**

### **Introduction**

Individuals who are agriculturally literate can observe and communicate, to some extent, how agriculture affects the economy, environment and natural resources, and society (Frick et al. 1991). With the rise of urbanization and the decline of individuals being directly involved in agriculture, fewer U.S. citizens are agriculturally literate. However, individuals should be able to make informed and educated decisions about agriculture (Kovar & Ball, 2013). One way this can be achieved is by ensuring that agriculture teachers become leaders in their schools and communities. In response, LeJeune and Roberts (2020) called for a greater understanding of how secondary agricultural education teachers can step forward, lead beyond their classrooms, and advocate for agricultural education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We grounded this investigation in Bond's (2011) theory of teacher leadership. Through this lens, teachers use both political and non-political processes to improve the quality of life for individuals in a given context. As such, teacher leadership is viewed as a developmental process by which individuals mature regarding their motives, skills, and values. Through this growth, a greater understanding of how power imbalances can mediate progress can be achieved and, perhaps, change can be advanced. Therefore, effective teacher leaders not only serve as role models for students in their classrooms, but they also *advocate* for positive change at local, state, and national levels (Bond, 2016). In the current investigation, we used this theory to examine how teacher leadership manifested in secondary agricultural education.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study sought to describe secondary teachers' views on how teacher leadership and advocacy efforts could be enhanced for Louisiana agricultural education. A key assumption of the study was that if the majority of decision-makers do not understand the importance of agricultural education, then the likelihood of them addressing the issue in the future was unlikely. Therefore, the study aligned with the American Association for Agricultural Education's National Research Priority 7: *Addressing Complex Problems* (Andenero et al., 2016). One research question framed the investigation: *In what ways could the advocacy efforts of secondary agricultural education teachers in Louisiana be improved?*

### **Methods and Data Sources**

We framed this investigation as an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To ensure rigor, we also embedded Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) standards for rigor throughout the investigation: (a) dependability, (b) confirmability, (c) credibility, (d) and transferability. Our primary source of data was written narrative responses from 113 participants, including 61 females and 52 males. However, we also triangulated our findings using: (a) demographic questionnaires, (b) quantitative instruments assessing participants' perspectives on advocacy using a Likert-type scale, and (c) other supporting documents. To analyze the data, we used Saldaña's (2016) coding strategies, which facilitated our use of the following first cycle coding approaches: (1) *in vivo*, (2) descriptive, and (3) values. Then, we used axial coding to reduce the

data into categories and interpret our emergent findings through Bond's (2011) theory of teacher leadership. Through this process of analysis and data reduction, the findings of the investigation emerged through four themes.

### **Findings**

Four distinct themes emerged from an analysis regarding the improvements that secondary agricultural education teachers desired to better advocate for agricultural education: (1) increased political involvement, (2) need for more training and resources, (3) lack of organization and communication, and (4) frustration with fellow teachers. In the first theme, the participants suggested that more focus should be placed on political involvement. For example, the teachers called for "more open talk to legislators" (Participant #7) and being "more involved in the legislative process" (Participant #14). Further, Participant #65 stated that agricultural educators "need to be more connected with their elected officials." Overall, a connection to and communication with the relevant legislators was an important focal point mentioned by many of the secondary agricultural education teachers. In regard to training and resources, the second theme, the participants discussed the need for additional "knowledge" and "training" on advocacy because many of them felt unprepared to have critical conversations with elected officials. Participant #98 explained: "...today's new Ag Teacher is intimidated or does not know how to reach out to these elected [officials] for help."

In addition to needing more training and resources, participants felt that there was an overall lack of organization and communication within the agricultural education community. They felt that a more organized, focused, and proactive professional organization would help them be better prepared to advocate for their profession and students. Many participants also expressed that their concerns went unheard and that "they (the professional organization) simply want my money and not my opinion" (Participant #87). The final theme focused on the participants' frustrations with fellow educators in the agricultural education community. Many of the attitudes emerging from our analysis involved negative views of other educators. Some of the participants felt that their fellow educators "don't do their job" (Participant #6) and should "be more positive" (Participant #38). Further, Participant #45 stated: "we will do a much better job being an advocate by remaining positive about how the issues can be resolved." Overall, the attitudes held by these participants appeared to stem from a lack of communication between educators.

### **Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations/Impact on the Profession**

This investigation provided greater insight into secondary agricultural education teachers' perspectives on teacher leadership and advocacy. We conclude that participants desired improvement in the following areas to better advocate for agricultural education: (1) increased political involvement, (2) more training and resources, (3) lack of organization and communication, and (4) frustration with fellow educators. Moving forward, we recommend that future research explore ways to address these concerns. Further, additional research should also be conducted to examine how secondary agricultural education teachers can better communicate the importance of the profession to decision-makers at the local, state, and national levels.

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