

**Examining Career Technical Education Administrators' Support of School-Based
Agricultural Education Programs**

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Introduction

According to the National Agricultural Education, Supply and Demand Study, 605 school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers who taught in the 2018-2019 school year would not be returning to the classroom in 2019-2020; 28 states reported a loss of programs or positions with 70 positions lost, and 36 closed programs (Foster et al., 2020). Song et al. (2011) found that school administrators need to recognize the benefits of and foster a supportive learning environment for teachers to combat teacher turnover. Career Technical Education (CTE) programs require unique support compared to core curriculum classrooms as CTE programs have additional complexities such as facilities, career and technical student organizations (CTSOs), and Perkins Act funding. CTE administrators must remain aware of changes in education in general and business, industry, and labor market trends related to the programs they oversee. In addition, Florida SBAE teachers need support in industry certifications, land lab facilities, and finding businesses for students to complete placement supervised agricultural experiences (SAE). In Florida, there are CTE administrators on the state and school district levels; however, Florida does not have a certification/licensure requirement specific to CTE administration (Zirkle & Jeffery, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the leadership and technical practices of exemplar CTE administrators support SBAE programs in Florida. The overarching question for this study was: how do exemplar CTE administrators support SBAE teachers and programs? Knowing this will serve as a guide for others to support SBAE teachers.

Conceptual Framework

Parker's model of school effectiveness (2015) served as a guide for this case study; it was developed and tested on principals as school leaders to investigate principals' leadership practices' impact on a school's effectiveness. This model was operationalized to fit the concept that CTE administrators are the leaders of the CTE programs in their domain. For this study, we operationalized the theory of school effectiveness into three areas: (1) leadership practices that directly affect CTE culture, (2) CTE culture that directly affects CTE effectiveness, and (3) leadership practices affecting CTE effectiveness indirectly through CTE culture (Parker, 2015). These areas served as a guide for the interview guide and question creation.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative exemplar case study design (Bronk, 2012). The population explored in this study were CTE administrators on the district level in Florida who oversee agricultural education programs and directly contact SBAE teachers. Exemplar cases had the following characteristics: (a) have agriculture education at one or more schools in their district; (b) proactive in assisting teachers; (c) advocates for CTE and SBAE professionally and personally; (d) capable of operating local advisory committees of business officials and community educators; (e) have a thorough understanding of CTE program planning, development, and evaluation; (f) understanding of facilities and equipment needed to teach curriculum; (g) utilizes resources to help those coming from industry to become alternatively certified, and involved in CTE programming; (h) understanding of CTE curriculum including core-subject integration, and industry standards; (i) exhaustive understanding of certification offerings and CAPE funding; and (j) skilled in networking, relationship building and maintaining, creating/promoting vision, diverse leadership, communication, and personnel development (Clark & Cole, 2015; Fleck et al., 2019)

A panel of members who have (a) extensive knowledge of Florida agriculture education, (b) knowledge of school-based agriculture education systems and organization, and (c) prior work involving CTE administrators and supervisors identified four exemplar CTE

administrators. Three CTE administrators accepted and participated in one-on-one, hour-long, semi-structured interviews via Zoom. The interview guide consisted of four major areas; (a) leadership practices, (b) CTE culture, (c) CTE program effectiveness, and (d) support of SBAE teachers with industry certifications, curriculum, facilities, and SAE projects (Parker, 2015). Pseudonyms were assigned to all who were interviewed to ensure anonymity (Creswell, 2007).

The audio files were transcribed and initially read through before coding began (Creswell, 2014). Coding looked deductively to generate a description for exemplar CTE administrators and CTE culture of each case then inductively to find emerging themes in support types through both technical and leadership practices (Creswell, 2014).

Findings

Becky was consecutively in the classroom as an agriculture teacher for four years before moving to the district CTE office as a specialist and three years ago became the Supervisor of CTE, Community, and Business Partnerships. Emily was consecutively in the classroom teaching agriculture and science for ten years before accepting their current position at the district CTE office as the Teacher Resource Specialist & Trainer in Ag, Public Service, and Industrial. Lindsey was in the classroom for six years as a business, STEM, and dropout prevention teacher. They held multiple positions within school counseling/administration and different district-level positions before assuming their current position as the Assistant Director of CTE.

Several themes outlined by the conceptual framework emerged relating to leadership practices, program culture, and program effectiveness. Within leadership practices, there were themes of (a) establishing & maintaining a vision and goals focused on high levels of student achievement; (b) high expectations for all and continuous improvement; (c) monitoring teacher effectiveness; (e) community outreach & involvement; (f) allocation of human & fiscal resources; (g) self-efficacy; and (h) serves as a role model. Within program culture there were themes of (a) relationships and trust built with teachers; (b) visions & expectations; (c) continuous professional dialogue; (d) quality interactions; (e) commitment to continuous program improvement; and (f) organizational efficacy. Within program effectiveness, there were themes of (a) accountability performance and (b) student achievement.

Conclusions, Recommendations, Implications, & Impact

Becky, Emily, and Lindsey are servant leaders and have a passion for helping teachers help students. They want their students to be prepared for the workforce and do what they can to create opportunities and experiences for their CTE students. These three exemplar CTE administrators support SBAE teachers and programs by being proactive in support, listening to their teachers' needs while focusing on career preparation of the students.

Based on these findings and conclusions, we suggest furthering the research by (1) interviewing SBAE teachers to understand their perspective on how they feel supported or how they want to be supported by their CTE administrator(s); (2) asking the nominating panel why they nominated the interview CTE administrators; and (3) explore a diverse population of CTE administrators demographically, district size, and more than exemplar level persons. With these findings and conclusions, CTE administrators can evaluate their practices to examine how they are or can best support SBAE teachers. Professional development can also be created for CTE administrators to learn about and practice servant leadership skills.

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