

**Urban Neighbors and Neighborhoods: Professional Development
for School-Based Agricultural Educators**

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Introduction

One of the core research values for the American Association for Agricultural Education is “Ensuring Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging,” suggesting that a diverse and sustainable workforce is essential for the agricultural industry (AAAE, 2023). Essential in developing that workforce is school-based agricultural education and its teachers. A national shortage of school-based agricultural educators has existed for the past several years with a shortfall of 606 unfilled vacancies in 2022 (Foster et al., 2023). Warner and Washburn (2009) reported that urban agricultural educators expressed major concerns about parents’ lack of understanding about agriculture and agricultural careers, ineffective parental communications, and lack of parental involvement. A previous professional development interest assessment for urban school-based agricultural educators administered by Williams (2023) revealed strong interest in the topic, *Working effectively in urban settings*. As a result, a professional development workshop, *Getting to Know Your Urban Neighbors and Neighborhoods* was developed and delivered at the state summer conference for school-based agricultural educators.

Steps/Phases

A panel of four early-career school-based agricultural educators was organized by a professor from Texas A&M University-Commerce for the purpose of planning, organizing, and presenting this workshop. Each of the panel members taught in large, urban high school with predominantly minority student enrollment in their classes. The panel participated in two planning sessions via Zoom with follow-up emails to confirm the style, direction, and content of the workshop. A pre-workshop meeting to finalize plans was held prior to the presentation, and a follow-up/reflection meeting was held the day after the presentation.

The presentation consisted of the following phases:

- (1) Welcome and introduction by the moderator;
- (2) Personal introduction and overview of the campus program, student demographics, and neighborhood where each panelist taught along with a short synopsis of engagement opportunities for their students;
- (3) The final panelist who had just transitioned to administration also described some district-wide scenarios and opportunities since many urban agricultural education programs have multiple campuses in the same district;
- (4) Guiding *turn and talk* prompts for discussion among pairs or small groups in the audience
 - a. *Teachers should treat all students the same regardless of class, gender, or race.*
 - b. *What are some barriers at your school that prevent students from joining FFA?*
 - c. *How often do you plan or adapt curriculum based on your current environment?*
- (5) Reporting out of discussion groups to audience, and
- (6) Questions from audience directed to panelists.

Results to Date and Implications

This workshop at the Summer Professional Development Conference of the Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas competed with 10 other workshops held at the same time. A total of 158 participants attended and completed the evaluation questionnaire. Two questions were asked. Question #1, “Would you attend another workshop conducted by the presenter(s)?” resulted in 99% responding with “Yes.” Question #2, “Would you recommend this workshop to a peer?” resulted in 98% responding with “Yes.” There were also eight individual comments, all positive, included in evaluation results.

A follow-up/reflection meeting was held with the moderator and three of the panelists the day after the presentation. Each of the three panelists indicated a high level of satisfaction with their involvement as well as the overall attendance and participation level of the audience. Each expressed a new degree of confidence about presenting to their professional peers and indicated interest in proposing another workshop for the same conference for the following year.

Participants in the workshop were introduced to strategies for increasing student, parental, and community engagement in agriculture and FFA activities in urban settings. They may use some of those strategies in their school and community. As the number of programs and students in school-based agricultural education increases, so will the demand for teachers. To fill that demand, we must recruit prospective teachers from urban programs and communities. We must also prepare our students from rural backgrounds for the possibility of teaching in urban schools. Early field experiences that include observation and participation in urban programs may foster or strengthen consideration of that possibility.

Future Plans

The idea of *getting to know your urban neighbors and neighborhoods* has been integrated into additional informal discussions with inservice and preservice school-based agricultural educators. It also served as a key theme in the development of a recently funded grant proposal for a university-public school partnership between the university and three urban school-based agricultural education programs. Inversely, university teacher educators in other areas of secondary educator preparation have expressed a possible need for a similar workshop or seminar for preservice educators from urban areas who may wish to work in rural areas.

Costs and Resources Needed

Since planning and preparation for this workshop was done virtually, and all panelists and the moderator were already planning to attend the conference, there was no additional expense for developing and presenting this professional development. Each of the panelists contributed 3-5 hours of planning time prior to the presentation. There was a cost of for the follow-up reflection luncheon of the panelists and moderator was the only cash expenditure.

References

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