

Principal Professional Development at Florida FFA Convention and Expo

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Introduction

The success of a school-based agricultural education (SBAE) program can be improved with a positive and collaborative relationship with the administrative team at that school. High school principals' attitudes affect factors that influence school climate and school achievement (Rayfield & Wilson, 2009). According to Robinson (2011), leaders require the constant integration of policy connection to practice with achievable goals, so that action informs planning as well as planning informing action. Administrators are the leaders in school settings. As leaders, they are tasked with developing policies. These policies guide the goals for the school. If administrators are not aware of the needs or processes of a SBAE program, integration is much more difficult. Positive relationships help align the goals of the administrator and the agriculture teacher to meet the needs of students.

Principals tend to have a positive attitude toward SBAE and agriculture teachers and the achievements of their students (Smith & Myers, 2012). Student achievement was also linked to funding decisions in these situations. Smith and Myers (2012) also suggested representative agriculture educators from model programs should attend conferences so principals can see the benefits of agricultural education on students. According to Easterly et al. (2023), leadership practices of principals support the culture of exemplary SBAE programs. Professional development and educational opportunities focused on agricultural education programs should be made available for principals to learn more about the value of SBAE (Easterly et al., 2023; Rayfield & Wilson, 2009; Smith & Myers, 2012). Principals found increasing their knowledge of SBAE programs aided in the development of trust-focused relationships with the agriculture teachers.

Constraints on time and resources present barriers to developing relationships between administrators of various levels and SBAE agriculture educators. Providing a professional development event at a state level FFA event for administrators to attend eliminates one of these barriers while providing an opportunity for collaborative efforts. The two objectives of the professional development were to find common alignment with SBAE and their goals for the school and to implement strategies for supporting SBAE programs. If administrators attend professional development about agriculture education programs, they can see where goals align and create supportive policies.

How it Works

Agriculture educators received an email from the Florida list-serve inviting their administrators to attend the professional development during Florida FFA Convention. Administrators usually attend state convention with the agriculture educator to help chaperone students or to allow them to experience a state level FFA event. Providing a professional development designed specifically for principals and administrators at this event will allow these leaders to learn more about FFA and SBAE as well as interact with other leaders to collaborate working models in excellent programs around the state. This professional development was a two-hour, one-time session offered during the convention by Agriculture Education Faculty from the University of Florida. Agenda items for discussion included: major goals of agriculture education, Roberts and Ball (2009) conceptual model for agricultural subject matter as a content and context for teaching by focusing on the goals of SBAE, three circle model of agriculture education, other factors

(hands-on instruction, connection with a meaningful adult, practical application of concepts learned in other courses, leadership and other non-technical skills), group discussions (alignment between school and agricultural education, how agriculture education can help students accomplish goals, what can principals do to support these programs) and industry certification discussions (purpose of industry certifications, part of the agriculture education program without limiting other parts of the program).

Results to Date

To date, 32 administrators have participated in the professional development offered for principals at the Florida FFA Convention and Expo. Following the professional development, participants were asked to reflect on their training and offer feedback. This feedback was generally positive and included the following comments captured, “It gave me an opportunity to share and learn from others in the field” as well as “I loved the panel with the principals and ag teachers sharing what worked for them.” This professional development has been delivered for the past three years, 2021, 2022 and 2023. Over the three years, the administrators’ knowledge of SBAE programs, where to find support resources and how to support agriculture educators has increased. Offering this professional development has allowed administrators of all levels to better understand SBAE programs and the duties of agriculture educators.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

The participants of the previous two years suggested hosting breakout rooms for deeper discussion in smaller groups. This could facilitate the needs of different types of administrators attending this professional development such as high school and middle school principals and assistant principals, CTE directors, and college and career specialists. Another suggestion from the administrators’ feedback was to visit a model school to see parts of programs such as animal housing and welding.

This workshop will continue to be offered in conjunction with the Florida FFA Convention. We hope to provide differentiated professional development to administrators with various experience levels related to agricultural education. We would also like to share resources with other state associations who would benefit from hosting similar workshops. The biggest benefit to other states wanting to offer a professional development similar to this would be to invite a wide range of types of administrators. There are usually several levels of supervisors that oversee SBAE programs but many of them may not have experience or may not completely understand what all the moving parts of a program entails. Giving administrators a space to learn and interact with others would be beneficial for a first year professional development.

Resources Needed

Professional development opportunities can be created and delivered at little to no monetary cost. If a program has funding for hard materials like handouts, poster paper, writing utensils, and refreshments for participants, these are some examples of support resources that can be included in this professional development.

The major input for this activity is time and energy to develop the agenda and discussion topics. Organizing a panel of agriculture educators and their administrators is another input for the resources that can be used. Previously there have been 2-3 facilitators required for this professional development.

References

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