

Elementary Agricultural Education Teacher Extended Day and Extended Year

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Introduction

Georgia piloted formalized Elementary Agricultural Education (EAE) in the Georgia Department of Education under Career and Technical Education in 2017 and established a permanent program in 2022 (House Bill 1303, 2022). There are currently 60 EAE programs in the state, following current trends, growth of EAE program is expected in 2024.

One challenge in quantifying the number of EAE Teachers is that it is sometimes difficult to identify which teachers are EAE Teachers, and which non-EAE Teachers who only integrate some agriculture in their elementary education classes. Identifying EAE Teachers is confounded by Georgia's Ag in the Classroom teachers who may or may not self-identify as EAE Teachers. Finally, EAE programs are school based and funded at the school level. Georgia Middle (MS) and High School (HS) Agriculture teachers receive extended day/extended year funds, and a contract is signed between the school and the Georgia DOE that designates who the MS or HS Agriculture Teacher(s) is/are; no such mechanism exist for EAE Teachers. EAE programs have not officially adopted the three-ring model of MS and HS agricultural education described by Croom (2008).

Aside from the difficulty in identifying EAE Teachers there are practical reasons why EAE Teachers have expressed interest in extended day and extended year contracts. Like their MS and HS counterparts many EAE Teachers have animals housed at the school, gardens, greenhouses that require attention, community engagement activities, professional development opportunities, etc. that they would like to perform outside of their 'regular' school year and school day contract.

The purpose of this research is to systematically examine EAE Teachers perceptions regarding extended day and extended year activities.

Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959). According to this theory, there are certain factors in the workplace that cause job satisfaction (motivators) and other factors that prevent dissatisfaction (hygiene factors). Related to EAE Teachers many of them want to work additional hours however, sustained uncompensated work leads to job dissatisfaction and teacher attrition (Madigan, 2021).

Methodology

The researchers conducted a simple descriptive study utilizing all EAE Teachers in Georgia as the sampling frame. All EAE teachers were contacted using multiple methods, including workshops, email, and phone calls. They were invited to participate in a study by completing a Qualtrics survey. The survey was designed to collect information about: 1. How many days they would prefer to work in the summer, 2. How many hours they spend on work related activities outside of their current teaching contract, 3. Which activities on the Georgia Agriculture Teacher Program of Work EAE Teachers would be willing to perform, 4. Which FFA activities would EAE Teachers be interested in participating in (only FFA activities that aligned with EAE standards were considered).

Results

The first question posed to the participants was “If given the option to have ‘extended year’ days (additional days in the summer) beyond your ‘regular’ 9-month contract, how many days would you prefer?” Thirty-three teachers responded with a mean response of 12.82 days (SD 9.70). The Responses ranged from 0 days (minimum, n=5) to 40 days (maximum, n=2). Participants were next asked how many additional hours they need beyond their ‘regular’ 9-month contract to complete tasks associated with managing an EAE program. Teacher responses are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Additional Hours EAE Teachers Reported They Need Beyond their Regular Contract Each Year

	n	M	SD	Frequency of Responses in Hours						
				0	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	> 50
Feed/care for animals at school	22	34.7	36.0	1	9	2	3	0	2	6
Feed/care for plants/garden at school	30	25.2	24.9	1	9	10	4	1	2	4
Assist students with leadership/citizenship training	20	16.4	22.2	1	13	2	2	1	0	1

The researcher provided groupings and frequency responses to clarity in interpreting the data that is not captured in the Mean score. There is a wide variance in responses and a dichotomy in the data between teachers who need less than 30 hours and those who need more than 40 hours.

Implications

EAE Teachers reported a desire to have extended day contracts through the summer months. The Mean response was 12.82 days, however the wide range in participant responses indicates that while some teachers would like to work the minimum of zero days each summer, other teachers reported wanting to work 40 days each summer. There was also a wide distribution in participant responses regarding number of hours needed beyond the regular contract each year, with a bimodal distribution indicating some EAE teachers tend to not work beyond their regular contract at all or they work far beyond their regular contract.

The variability in EAE teacher responses may be caused by a multitude of factors. More research is needed to investigate the variability in EAE teacher time commitments, however, anecdotally the researcher proposes the following possible reasons:

1. A significant minority of EAE Teachers are parents who left teaching MS and HS agriculture in pursuit of a career in Agricultural Education that has a lower time commitment. EAE Teachers may have other commitments and desire a lower time commitment at work.
2. EAE programs in Georgia are school based which has resulted in variability in animals, plants, and facilities in each program. Teachers with minimal resources at their school may simply have no need for extended day and extended year contracts.

These findings suggest that an individualized approach to extended day and extended year contracts for EAE Teachers is most appropriate; a one-size fits all approach is not appropriate. Not all EAE Teachers want or need extended day and extended year contracts.

References

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