

**Class is in Session! Implementing a Mock School Day for Agricultural Education
Preservice Teachers**

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Introduction

Over the past several years in our teacher preparation program, current and past preservice teachers described the rude awakening they received when beginning their student teaching experiences with ideas like, “I wasn’t prepared to teach full-time” or “The longest I ever taught at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was 20 minutes, which isn’t how teaching actually is.” As a teacher preparation team, we asked ourselves what it would take to provide a realistic and applicable experience to increase teacher self-efficacy and foster resilience, a passion for teaching, a love for learning, and honesty about what preservice teachers are really preparing for.

These collaborative and problem-solving discussions brought about the idea of a six-period mock school day hosted on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) campus. We believed this idea would provide an example of what Bandura (1986) coined as a master experience, “the strongest potential developer of self-efficacy” (McKim & Velez, 2017, p. 173). Further, our goal was to provide our preservice teachers with a positive early field experience, priming them to step out of the role of a student and into one of a teacher for their upcoming student teaching experience and beyond (Aiken & Day, 1999; Knobloch, 2001; Retallick & Miller, 2007).

How It Works

We hosted Husker High School Day on April 29, 2024, on the UNL campus, including nearly 200 individuals. Twenty preservice teachers delivered classroom instruction to 90 local high school students, and 35 ALEC Department underclassmen participated in the mock school day as students. We recruited ten current and retired school administrators, agriculture teachers, and Nebraska Department of Education staff members to observe each preservice teacher, facilitating their learning experiences. At the end of the school day, administrators met with each preservice teacher for 30 minutes to provide constructive feedback and instructional coaching.

Preparation for this mock school day began in August 2023, eight months before the event. We reserved 11 classroom spaces in the UNL East Campus Union. We utilized Microsoft Excel to develop a master schedule for everyone involved. The final master schedule consisted of six periods; however, we split the fourth period into three “shifts” (class, study hall, and lunch) to accommodate cafeteria space constraints. Each high school and underclassmen student had a unique class schedule, like any high school. We also designed the schedule with experiences such as teaching back-to-back periods and teaching the “next day” of a lesson since these are not often possible for preservice teachers while participating in their early field experiences. We randomly assigned students to classrooms for each period and generated class rosters for taking attendance.

Results and Implications

Our mock school day was successful, and we accomplished our goals, as evidenced by one Lincoln Northeast High School (LNE) administrator praising our event, “This gets at something you can’t do in someone else’s classroom. They have to take ownership of the environment for themselves.” Preservice teachers facilitated learning experiences in their classroom environment focused on mousetrap race cars, garden irrigation, plumbing pipe durability, rafter layout, and many other topics. In follow-up discussions, the LNE students

stated that their “Teachers were interactive” and “The [content] we learned was interesting.” These high school freshmen and sophomores also completed a brief survey responding to the question, “*How much did you learn from this teacher’s lesson(s),*” using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *None at All*, 2 = *Some*, 3 = *A Fair Amount*, 4 = *A Lot*). Results from this survey indicated students learned *A Fair Amount*, with a mean of 3.07 (range of $M = 2.27$ to $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.33$).

The acting administrators also provided feedback and evaluated the preservice teachers using a modified classroom observation form from a local school district. Criteria in this form included a set of five standards, including (a) planning and preparation, (b) instruction, (c) learning environment, (d) assessment and grading, and (e) professionalism. Administrators assigned numerical scores for these standards and their sub-standards and provided in-depth feedback in a written notes section. For the numerical scores, administrators ranked preservice teachers using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *Not Observed*, 1 = *Beginning*, 2 = *Developing*, 3 = *Applying*, 4 = *Innovating*). Our preservice teachers scored the highest on the professionalism standard ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.33$) while scoring the lowest on the assessment and grading standard ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.95$).

Future Plans and Advice to Others

We are excited to expand and improve the next Husker High School Day, scheduled for April 23, 2025. Based on the feedback we received from our preservice teachers, we have prioritized improvements by increasing each period’s time and the number of periods each preservice teacher teaches. To accomplish these goals, we look to more than double the number of classroom spaces to 24, which will require twice as many administrators and classroom students. This goal is realistic and attainable by collaborating with other UNL departments on campus and recruiting additional current agriculture and other CTE teachers as administrators (and their students).

We have several suggestions to support those looking to replicate our event. First, planning and organization were critical to our event’s success. We began preparing for Husker High School Day in August 2023, eight months before the event. This event was only possible because of the efforts of a graduate assistant. Therefore, the capacity to organize and facilitate this event must be a consideration. Second, funding classroom supplies and materials, lunch, and ice cream were essential for our preservice teachers to facilitate their unique learning experiences and to secure the local high school students and “administrators” attendance. Lastly, more time in teacher preparation program courses to fully reflect and process the experience should be planned. We did not account for the quantity of time our preservice teachers craved to talk through and reflect on their experiences.

Costs and Resources Needed

Financial and personnel resources were critical to our mock school day’s success. To support this experience financially, we used \$600 toward the classroom materials and supplies stipends; nearly \$1,800 was on event “infrastructure,” such as refreshments, guest parking passes, walkie-talkies, classroom kits, and storage; and approximately \$3,000 for all participants’ lunch and end-of-the-day ice cream. The CASNR Dean’s Office funded the cost of lunch and ice cream for everyone involved. Personnel-wise, Husker High School Day comprised a portion of one graduate student’s assistantship duties for the academic year as they planned, prepared, and coordinated the event with support from two undergraduate student workers, funded by ALEC, who contributed nearly 30 hours of work.

References

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