

**Right Work, Right People:
Exploring Working Genius as a Lens for SBAE Recruitment and Retention**

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Introduction

Persistent shortages of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers indicate that explanations of attrition, such as workload, compensation, and policy constraints, are insufficient to explain the difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers (Estep et al., 2024). Although research in SBAE has demonstrated relationships among personality type, learning style, and teaching approach, these studies focus largely on instructional preferences rather than sustained professional engagement or career longevity (Cano & Garton, 1994). Assessments such as the Myers-Briggs, DiSC, and StrengthsFinder are based solely on personality traits and provide little indication of their relation to productivity. “MBTI describes your personality preferences — the ‘noun’ of who you are. Working Genius identifies the activities you love — the ‘verb’ of what you do” (Lencioni, 2025, 0:40). The Working Genius (WG) Assessment from Table Group is based on 80% productivity and 20% personality (Table Group, Inc., 2021); it is the first of its kind to assess the joy and energy one feels while performing work. The WG identifies six Geniuses (Wonder, Invention Discernment, Galvanizing, Enablement, and Tenacity) of work. Upon taking an assessment, each person is assigned two *geniuses*, indicating where they experience joy and energy. Additionally, the assessment identifies two *competencies*, indicating talent without derived joy and energy, and two *frustrations*.

The PERMA framework conceptualizes flourishing through positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, which collectively buffer stress and support sustained quality of life (Fitzsimons et al., 2025). Instead of defining well-being as the absence of stress, PERMA emphasizes resources that enable individuals to thrive by fostering joy, optimism, and satisfaction in their work. These elements could buffer stress and promote a better quality of life. Within teacher education contexts, these elements have been shown to enhance resilience, morale, and persistence despite demanding professional conditions (Fitzsimons et al., 2025). Teachers’ positive emotions at work were the strongest predictor of job satisfaction and were directly associated with teacher retention, suggesting that daily experiences of joy and energy are central to career sustainability (Dreer, 2024).

Methodology

The Minnesota Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Teacher Induction Program (TIP) provides a learning community to support new teacher development. The cohort meets in-person and virtually throughout the year. The TIP cohort also includes instructional coaches (experienced or retired SBAE teachers) who provide guidance and mentoring to the teachers. The TIP cohort includes 30 teachers and 12 instructional coaches for the 2025-2026 year.

Beginning teachers and instructional coaches were invited to complete the WG assessment prior to meeting in January 2026. During the in-person conference meeting, they participated in a three-hour WG professional development session. This session included an introduction to the concept of the WG to help each participant understand the stages of work, how joy and energy are derived from work, and how the pairing of their two geniuses affects their productivity related to what they crave from those around them and how others see them.

Results

The Minnesota Teacher Induction Program (TIP) used the WG to assess the genius pairings (i.e., the combination of each person's geniuses) of 20 first-year SBAE teachers (67% of the TIP cohort) and 5 TIP instructional coaches (42%), all retired SBAE teachers with long careers. WG results indicated that the Enablement–Tenacity (ET) pairing was present in 42% of participants. Enablement appeared in 73% of profiles across all participants, while Galvanizing and Tenacity each appeared in 53% of profiles. Among instructional coaches, four of five have an ET pairing; the fifth coach's pairing was Enablement, and Wonder with Tenacity were their competencies.

Across the 15 possible WG pairings, ET has an expected likelihood of 15.95% based on national Working Genius distribution data (The Table Group, 2021). The substantially higher prevalence of ET observed in this sample suggests a non-random concentration of this pairing among SBAE teachers and mentors participating in the Teacher Induction Program. In addition, Discernment, Galvanizing, and Invention emerged most frequently as frustration indicators. These frustrations represent areas of work in which participants reported minimal joy or energy, potentially signaling misalignment between daily professional demands and individual work preferences.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings suggest that the Enablement–Tenacity pairing may be disproportionately represented among SBAE teachers and instructional coaches, raising questions about the relationship between person–work fit and career longevity in SBAE. Given the nature of SBAE programs, the ET pairing may align well with the core demands of the profession.

The frequent identification of Discernment, Galvanizing, and Invention as frustration indicators further suggests that certain SBAE responsibilities may be experienced as energetically draining for many teachers. These misalignments may contribute to stress or burnout if not adequately supported through mentoring and professional development experiences. Collectively, these findings are preliminary evidence that WG pairings may offer insight beyond traditional personality measures in understanding SBAE teacher retention and career sustainability.

Future Research

Future research should examine the relationship between WG pairings and SBAE teacher outcomes using larger samples to determine whether the observed concentration of the ET pairing persists across contexts. Longitudinal designs are needed to explore whether specific WG profiles predict teacher retention, job satisfaction, or burnout over time.

Additional research should explore how frustration indicators relate to job demands and whether mentoring or professional development interventions mitigate the negative effects of misaligned work responsibilities. Comparative studies between early-career teachers, veteran teachers, and those who exit the profession may further clarify whether WG profiles differ by career trajectory.

Finally, integrating WG data with established well-being and retention frameworks, such as PERMA, may strengthen theoretical understanding of how joy, energy, and productivity interact to support long-term sustainability in SBAE careers.

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