

Senate Bill 801: Agricultural Education Legislation in Action

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Introduction

One of the major employers in the United States are career paths that fall within the agriculture-based industries (Knobloch, 2008). Though the basic functioning of our society relies on agriculture, there is a severe lack of knowledge and literacy and a deficiency of informed decision-making (Sprayberry et al., 2026). Research indicates that students begin deciding on their desired career paths in primary and intermediate school (Wyss et al., 2012). For many years, educators have suggested that agricultural education curriculum should be implemented into elementary school curriculum (Knobloch & Martin, 2002). However, elementary teachers have indicated that students do not comprehend where their food comes from nor how it impacts their lives on a daily basis (Trexler et al., 2000).

Incorporating agricultural education into elementary-level curriculum provides a route for developing agricultural knowledge in youth and sparks interest in careers based in agriculture prior to secondary school (Peake, 2020; Plunkert et al., 2026). The National Research Council recommends that all students should obtain some degree of instruction relating to agriculture starting in kindergarten or first grade, continuing through twelfth grade (Frick et al., 1991; NRC, 1988). Although elementary teachers have voiced interest in acquiring and using free-of-charge and standards-meeting resources to teach agriculture in their classrooms, curriculum and training do not exist for them to effectively do so (Clark et al., 2023; Gill et al., 2025; Helm et al., 2025; Ozturk & Forsythe, 2024; Plunkert et al., 2026; Simmermeyer et al., 2023). Developing a curriculum that elementary teachers can use to teach agriculture in their classrooms confidently is crucial to advocate for and encourage adoption.

How it Works

Senate Bill 801 (SB801) was proposed in response to the widespread agricultural illiteracy among youth, with the intention of promoting growth in society's understanding of agriculture. SB801 required the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to collaborate with the Department of Agriculture and other nonprofits with subject-matter expertise to develop an agricultural education curriculum for elementary education. Additionally, the TEA was tasked with creating a list of programs approved by both the agency and the State Board of Education, made available to elementary schools at no cost to the district or open-enrollment charter school.

Although several states have developed some program or legislation in response to the disconnect from agriculture, Texas sets itself apart in several aspects of its elementary agriculture program. The largest factor to consider is that Texas has direct collaboration between the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), and specialized non-profit organizations. The architecture of the curriculum in some states focuses on school gardens and/or animal care, where Texas organized its curriculum around three strict economic and environmental sectors: agriculture and natural resources; food, fiber, and fuel; and agriculture past and present. Texas offers this curriculum and its associated resources for zero cost so teachers and their administration do not have to stress about securing additional funding to adopt the programs.

An abundance of educators are hesitant to adopt agriculture into their elementary classrooms due to the immense pressure coming from state standardized testing and full daily

schedules. Many states require schools to hire a specified instructor to teach agriculture at the elementary level, where Texas built its program so that any traditional core subject educator can execute it. Additionally, a study done by Steinkamp (2024) revealed that standardized testing scores in Georgia were higher at schools where Elementary Agricultural Education (EAE) is offered compared to the scores of those schools that do not offer EAE. These results and statistics can be used as encouragement for Texas to adopt EAE by using the data to illustrate how integrating agriculture topics can help students apply real-world examples to what they're learning and increase testing scores rather than taking away from test preparation time.

Results to Date

The governor signed SB801 on June 14, 2021, and it took effect on September 1, 2021. Adhering to the new legislation, the TEA has created and now supplies an agriculture education program for elementary educators to use, which is offered free of charge. The learning objectives that are embedded in the elementary agriculture education program are aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills that support learning experiences within core subject classrooms. Three themes were identified and used to organize elementary agriculture education programs: agriculture and natural resources, food, fiber, and fuel, and agriculture past and present. Additional resources have been made available such as access to high school agriculture, food, and natural resources teachers and local extension agents.

Future Plans

Following this legislation, a four-phase project will be completed. Phase one will be conducting a synthesis of literature focusing on elementary agriculture education and agricultural literacy. Phase two will be completing a comparative study with other states that have well-established elementary agricultural programs to identify the most effective way to incorporate the content into elementary programs. Phase three will be analyzing the results of the comparative study and developing a professional development opportunity for the identified route of implementation, whether that be training the elementary teachers or training elementary agriculture specialists. The fourth and final phase will be hosting the professional development mentioned in phase three, conducting an evaluation, and sending out the pilot group to begin implementing agriculture education into elementary programs. After this, reviews will be done on the success of the program to identify changes needing to be made within the professional development and amending as needs change.

Costs

The implementation of SB801 requirements may cause opportunity costs to occur. Alternative instructional opportunities may be redirected when attention is focused on agriculture education curriculum. Teachers may also have to dedicate time to enriching themselves in the curriculum available, requiring them to reallocate time away from other things. Resource costs will also need to be considered for any curriculum that requires equipment or supplies that are not readily available. With the proposed professional development above, teachers and districts should consider costs associated with attending the professional development or training and hiring elementary agriculture education specialists.

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