

Features of an Operating Induction Program

There are numerous criteria used to create and then compare induction programs. A description and summary of the participants and programming of an ongoing induction program and its annual calendar of activities is provided to provide an initial sense of the elements and activities that have worked in Minnesota.

A Description of the Minnesota Agricultural Education Teacher Induction Program (TIP): 1999-2004

The Minnesota Agricultural Education Teacher Induction Program (TIP) was initiated in 1999 as a strategy to reduce attrition rates, assist entry-level teachers in becoming socialized into the teaching profession, and to enhance teacher effectiveness. The TIP has provided support and assistance to over 109 teachers in the past 5 years. The TIP has experienced on-going support and success as a result of supportive partners and interested entry-level agricultural education teachers (ELTs). The program features numerous activities and personnel that acquaint the ELTs with the profession. The senior mentors, TIP program staff, and partners purposefully assist the agricultural education ELTs in becoming acculturated to the teaching profession in their local schools and regions of the state. The remainder of this section will provide a brief overview about the participants and partners, entry-level teachers, senior mentors, in-school mentors, area agricultural teacher mentors, school administrators, funding, tip activities, mentoring activities, and workshops.

Participants and Partners

The Minnesota Agricultural Education Teacher Induction Program (TIP) features entry-level and returning Agricultural Education teachers, senior mentors, practicing area mentors, local in-school mentors, administrators, university faculty and staff. Coordinated efforts from the partners have provided alternate forms of assistance and support to the Entry-Level Teachers (ELT).

Entry-Level Teachers

A total of 109 entry-level and returning Agricultural Education teachers in six cohorts have been enrolled in the TIP from the fall of 1999 through the fall of 2004. Forty-three percent of the beginning teachers were female. The cohorts were 100% Caucasian and 54% were unmarried, and the average age of teachers in TIP was 26 years. Six percent had completed a Master of Education or Master of Science degree at the time of their participation, while the remainder, 94%, had earned a Bachelor of Arts or Sciences degree.

Most teachers (88%) taught in comprehensive high schools. A few teachers (17%) also worked in middle schools or junior high schools, and six percent worked in a vocational high school. The 86 schools of the beginning teachers participating in the TIP ranged from small to very large in terms of their student population. Twenty-four percent of the teachers taught in very small schools with a student population of less than 250 students. Thirty-two percent taught in schools with a student population of 250-500 and 33% of the teachers taught in schools with a large (500-999) student body. Only eight percent of the schools had a student population of 1000 to 2000 and 6% were very large with more than 2,000 students in the school.

Senior Mentors

The cornerstone of the TIP has been the establishment of supportive relationships between ELT's and senior mentors. The senior mentors were chosen based upon their extensive and documented successful teaching experience, continued interest in supporting Agricultural Education, reputations as effective clinical staff, and their ability to spend the time necessary to foster supportive relationships with ELT's. The cohort of mentors included retired Agricultural Education teachers, University of Minnesota faculty, and University of Minnesota graduate students in Agricultural

In-School Mentors or Guides

ELT's contact a teacher in their school to serve as their local support person. Although most of the schools (72%) assigned a mentor, only 29% of the mentors were Agricultural Education teachers. Local mentors were helpful in orienting new teachers to the culture of the local school and community as well as the organizational, social, and physical structures of the school. When local mentors were not Agricultural Education teachers, their support was usually limited to helping teachers understand general school policies and procedures. Local guides or mentors without an agricultural education background have been less likely to address specific needs in the areas of Agricultural Education program management, curriculum development, and management of the FFA student organization.

Area Agricultural Teacher Mentors

ELT's select an area mentor from a pool of practicing teachers in their area after receiving recommendations from their senior mentor and/or establishing relationships when attending common professional and/or FFA activities. The commonly assisted the ELTs by agreeing to provide support and assistance during the school year.

School Administrators

Activities involving school administrators have focused on program awareness and evaluation. Administrators have support TIP by providing substitute teachers so that ELT's can attend the three professional development workshops. Administrators from schools also met with the senior mentors to discuss the progress of the ELT and explore strategies for enhancing their teaching effectiveness and satisfaction with the initial year of teaching. Many administrators completed program evaluations. The results have been used to improve program content and delivery.

State Organizations and Agencies

The University of Minnesota's College of Education & Human Development has supported the TIP through faculty and staff located in the Division of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Education (AFEE). The Division of AFEE located in the Department of Work, Community and Family of Education. Richard Joerger has been program director since 1999. Brad Greiman became the Associate Director in 2004. There have been six Program Coordinators responsible for day-to-day program operation since the start of the program. Representatives from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators (MAAE), the Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC), and the Minnesota FFA actively support TIP. They have been active participants in workshops for beginning teachers. MAAE has provided financial support in the form of a partial scholarship for TIP teachers to take a graduate-level course related to the

first year of teaching. MAAE also sponsors an annual welcome luncheon for ELTs during the MAAE Summer Conference.

Funding

Program expenses are grouped into three categories. Expenses include personnel costs, office supplies and cost of preparing instructional materials and facility rental for workshops. Personnel costs consist of salaries for the associate director and coordinator, per diem and mileage costs for senior mentors. The MAAE has offered a scholarship to cover part of the tuition for a credit-bearing graduate-level course offered to the ELT's. Funding for the program has come from the University of Minnesota's Division of Agricultural, Food, & Environmental Education (College of Education & Human Development and College of Agriculture, Food, & Environmental Sciences), Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators and the Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council.

TIP Activities

TIP offers a wide variety of professional development activities for the ELT'S. Supporting new teachers with experienced senior mentors provides moral and professional support. Workshop presenters provide "just-in-time" skills and strategies that are critical to teacher success. Workshops are also an excellent opportunity for formal and informal networking to occur among peers, mentors, and other education professionals. A variety of assessments are administered to the ELT's. Results of the assessments provide valuable information to TIP project personnel that guide program improvement. (See program agendas),

Mentoring Activities

Senior mentors receive training in various aspects of the mentoring process during a one-day summer workshop as well as TIP staff meetings held in October and January. The event is conducted by Richard Joerger and Brad Greiman from the University of Minnesota, College of Education & Human Development before the mentors' first contact with the ELT's. At this time they also receive resource materials to support their mentoring efforts. Mentors agree to make three to five in-school visits during the nine month academic school year. Senior mentors attend and actively participate in the three workshops held with beginning Agricultural Education teachers. The senior mentors are annually assigned from one to six beginning teachers. Although mentors do observe teachers in their classrooms, their primary efforts are supportive in nature. The senior mentors also meet with administrators to help foster good working relationships between teachers and administrators, and to encourage support of Agricultural Education programs and activities in the school.

Professional Development Workshops

A total of four workshops for beginning teachers are conducted throughout the year for the purpose of developing programming to meet the needs of beginning Agricultural Education teachers. Workshops are held in July or August, late September or October, January, and May or early June each year. The topics covered during workshops provide information to teachers that allow them to improve instruction, become better FFA chapter advisors, connect with their local and state-wide educational community, and benefit from becoming active members of their professional teaching association. Workshops also provide ELT's with the opportunity to connect professionally with other teachers, MDE

state staff, and University of Minnesota staff. These networking experiences can provide immediate and long-term benefit to the ELTs. Senior mentors are also actively involved in teacher workshops throughout the year.

The ELT's involved in TIP also benefit by receiving instructional resources during workshops. They are given a "Beginning Teacher Handbook" which is a collection of useful resources on a variety of educational subjects. The handbook includes the "Guide to Local Program Success", collections of Internet curriculum resources, and a directory of Agricultural Education teachers and organizations in the state. The ELT's are also provided with CD-ROMs containing instructional guides and related instructional materials. New and veteran teachers also share ideas and instructional materials at workshops, which greatly increases the store of knowledge and resources available to beginning teachers.

Minnesota Annual Program of Teacher Induction Program Activities

A successful induction program must feature purposeful individual interactions throughout the first 4-6 months of the induction phase. Psychosocial needs of the ELTs are very high as are the needs for ready access to, and assistance in acquiring instructional materials. The ELTs need to know that other professionals including peer teachers, other entry-level teachers, senior mentors, teacher association leaders, teacher educators, local administrators, and their family members are there with them as they transition from college into the profession of teaching! Weekly communications from the program coordinator maintain contact with the ELTs even though they are often too engaged to respond. Creation of an electronic listserv open only to ELTs and the program coordinator allows for free sharing of instructional resources, joys and frustration of teaching, as well a means for general exchange of ideas.

As the year academic progresses, changes in the psychosocial needs, attitudinal perspectives, and readiness for professional development of the ELTs occur. Program leaders and mentors need to monitor these changes through a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures. It is quite advisable to provide reflections and action steps for each in-school mentoring visit. Programming throughout the year needs to address current experiences as well as prepare the novices for upcoming changes as well as events within the profession (CDEs, conventions, end-of-year testing, registration strategies, etc.). Combined with input from program mentors, leaders, participants and the coordinator, as well as information gathered from the literature and professional development activities, program directors need to change programming each year to reflect the unique needs of each cohort of ELTs.

The following calendar provides a listing of major activities of the Minnesota program.

Table 3
Annual Calendar of Teacher Induction Program of Activities

Date	Activity	Location
July	New Teacher Breakfast – MAAE Conference	Moorhead
July	Minnesota Ag Ed New Teachers Conference (Panels of early career teachers who are deeply engaged in teaching share ideas and answer questions about instruction, student behavioral management, partnerships, FFA, SAE, and program planning)	U of MN, St. Paul
August	Senior Mentor visit (#1)	High School
September	Senior Mentor visit (#2)	High School
October	Fall TIP Seminar/Fall Ag Ed Invitational (All participants, senior mentors, staff, and guest speakers meet for 3 hours to address current challenges and successes.)	U of MN, St. Paul
October	Senior Mentor visit (#3)	High School
November	Senior Mentor visit (#4)	High School
December	Senior Mentor visit (#5 - as necessary)	High School
January	Winter TIP Seminar/Ag Tech Conference	St. Cloud
February	Senior Mentor visit (#5/6 – as necessary)	High School
June	End of Year Seminar (reflection, review, & evaluation)	UM