

INDUCTION: A TIME TO PREPARE, PRACTICE AND PERSEVERE

“I teach because I love the kids and want them to learn and be prepared to lead our country!”

Spend time with any of our national leaders in agricultural education and they will tell you the number one challenge facing agricultural education is the current and expanding shortage of highly qualified and effective teachers. The timing of this phenomena is occurring when many programs and the FFA are experiencing record-breaking enrollments and memberships, and the profession is seeking to promote and support the establishment of hundreds of new programs across the USA.

William Camp and other agricultural education researchers have maintained a record of the supply and demand of teachers over the past several decades. Noticeable shortfalls of teachers have existed for years according to the data. While shortages have existed for some time, what are the factors that seem to be contributing to the shortfalls? The shortages are influenced by the “graying” and retirement of our current cadre of teachers, high demand and better compensation packages from employers outside of education, insufficient numbers of pre-service teaching graduates, and, in some areas, lower than desired retention rates of early-career agricultural education teachers.

What are strategies that may be effective in keeping quality teachers in every program? Ask many of our leaders and agricultural education and you will likely receive a variety of answers. One common response has been to initiate and/or update induction programs that meet the unique needs of agricultural education teachers.

Teacher induction is usually regarded as the aggregate of experiences teachers live through from the time they sign their first teaching contract until they are comfortably established as a professional teacher (Camp & Heath, 1988). Though the amount of time varies for each teacher, the induction process occurs over the first five or six years of teaching. Well-designed teacher induction programs assist successful entry into teaching when they include the four following provisions: (a) ongoing personal support; (b) assessment and feedback on teaching performance and progress including provisions for self assessment and reflection; (c) continuing education opportunities that address current needs while building upon and enriching preservice education; and (d) positive socialization into the profession. (Report of the Commission on the Education of Teachers into the 21st Century, 1991). Teacher competence, teacher performance, and teacher effectiveness are three concepts that are central to teacher induction (Mager, 1992).

Induction programs are school and/or discipline-sponsored programs designed for entry-level teachers. School district-sponsored induction programs are quite common across the country,

currently over 50% of teachers report enrollment in such programs. Induction programs seek to retain effective professional teachers through use of a variety of support, assistance, and professional development program strategies. One core element of effective induction program is the use of mentors.

Evidence from comprehensive program evaluations suggests that some high quality comprehensive district-wide induction programs do, indeed, increase teacher retention and effectiveness. Yet, discipline or area-specific induction programs that address the unique challenges presented by integrated student organizations and work-based learning programs, such as the induction programs currently being offered by agricultural education in some states, are believed to be worth the effort. Educators in other countries concur (Britton and Paine, 2005)