

# WORKING WITH SCHOOL PARTNERS

*Ideally, your administrators, guidance counselors and school board members are personable, visionary, committed leaders who support, promote and defend your program throughout the school system and community. But even if reality is far from this ideal, it is vital to your program and your career that you develop and maintain effective relationships with these decision makers.*

## STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. Request a meeting with your administrator (Principal or CTE Director) to discuss the vision and goals for the ag program. During this meeting be sure to discuss the benefits of an ag program and the impact that it can have for the students and school community.
2. Engage administrators as allies by recognizing their priorities and participating on their “school team.”
3. Plan ways to work through challenges in communicating with administrators. Target their areas of particular interest and/or concern and clarify ways your program addresses these. Observe their preferred communication styles. Provide frequent, targeted, positive communications that cultivate administrators’ support.
4. Make sure you take accountability seriously. Provide the information administrators need to understand and endorse the value of your program.
5. Involve administrators, guidance counselors and school board members in program and FFA events.

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# ENGAGE ADMINISTRATORS AS ALLIES

*It is important to keep administrators as allies to your program. Below are items that can help keep administrators on your side.*

- Know your job and do it well.
- Be enthusiastic about your job.
- Keep administrators informed of your plans; they like to know what you are doing. Share your successes as well.
- Give administrators a monthly calendar.
- Make your department an integral part of the school.
- Put major events on your school's calendar and attend some of the general school events as well as events put on by other clubs.
- Be willing to serve on school committees beyond agriculture department needs.
- Be an effective public relations contact for the entire school.
- Be willing to go beyond the call of duty.
- Volunteer to help in any way you can if you have the required abilities.
- Involve your administrators in FFA chapter activities, such as presenting awards or giving an opening speech at the FFA banquet, or participating in home or agribusiness visits or on field trips. Ask them to accompany your chapter to the state and national conventions.
- Share articles and letters printed in National FFA materials that illustrate other administrators' reasons for supporting agricultural education and a local FFA chapter.
- Involve your administrators in advisory committee work. Keep them informed of committee activities and ask them to help select the members.
- Give your administrators credit and praise. Look for ways to improve negative situations.
- Be open to constructive criticism and use it to evaluate your program and performance.
- Seek advice on matters you believe deserve administrative input.
- Remember that you and your administration are in the business of education. A united front is more successful than a divided approach.
- Communicate early and often with your administration. You can circumvent many problems if you clearly communicate with your administration.
- Always let your administration know what is going on in your classroom and program. They want to know the good, the bad, and the ugly.
- Invite your administration to your chapter banquet.

*Source: J. Mundt, personal communication*

# DATA COLLECTION

*Agricultural education programs and education in general, are expected to account for results produced with public monies and students' time. The results of your agriculture program are, indeed, everybody's business. Enrollments and budgets will be determined, in part, by whether others perceive your program as having a strong and positive influence on students, the school and the community.*

You can support your administrator, and enhance your relationship with him or her, through careful stewardship of the school's educational goals as well as its funds. Track, record, and share information that documents —

- student success in areas that the school considers important—citizenship, career awareness, leadership, academic achievements, etc.;
- graduate placement and career advancement;
- relevance of program (instruction, SAEs and FFA) to current community and industry needs;
- implementation of learning activities that fit students' needs and current educational theory;
- accurate budgeting and careful budget tracking and analysis;
- careful and timely completion of administrative paperwork.

# ADVOCATING WITH COUNSELORS

*School counselors are an important link between students and your program, since they often have a great deal of influence over which courses students select. Be sure to advocate the benefits of your program with the counselors.*

You may find that counselors' experience with agricultural education, if any, does not reflect the realities of today's programs. Begin by exploring their current knowledge level. Then identify what counselors want from your program, highlight program and chapter activities that deliver these benefits, and involve counselors with your program so they develop first-hand awareness.

Here are important messages to emphasize and steps to take when working with counselors.

- Communicate the graduation requirements that your courses fulfill.
- Make sure the counselors understand prerequisites for your class, why you have them, and why it is important to follow them.
- Demonstrate how your program provides school-to-career transition activities, including work-based learning (SAEs) and business-school partnerships (advisory committee).
- Focus on career opportunities available in agriculture.
- Organizations provide an impressive overview of careers.
- Clearly communicate the mission of agricultural education and FFA.
- Highlight scholarship opportunities available to FFA members and agriculture students. Make sure your counselor is aware of all scholarships awarded to your students.
- Volunteer for school committees or activities that deal with student academic and career planning and scheduling.
- Make sure you are involved in school-to-career programs such as serving as a job-readiness advisor to a small group of students.
- Ask counselors to join you on visitations to students' supervised agricultural experience (SAE) sites in businesses or home enterprises.
- Involve counselors as evaluators of a leadership skills event at the chapter or district level.
- Invite counselors to accompany the FFA chapter to the State or National FFA Convention.
- Invite counselors to your chapter banquet.
- Invite counselors to be a part of your advisory board.

# ADVOCATING WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD OF EDUCATION

The school board provides philosophical direction for the district's educational approach and determines funding for its programs, including agricultural education. School board members serve as the community's fiscal watchdogs over the use of public monies to provide the best possible educational experiences.

To nurture support from the school board, incorporate the following activities and approaches into your plan for each year.

- Make sure to follow district policies on communicating with school board members. If you are unsure of the policy ask.
- Attend school board meetings and ask FFA and FFA Alumni members to join you.
- Present annual or semi-annual reports of your program's activities at school board meetings at your administrators request. Have students and advisory committee members (or other industry supporters) make the presentation.
- Get to know school board members professionally. Create an open dialogue about what they want the agricultural education program to provide. Explain exactly how you provide students with those experiences, skills and attitudes.
- Invite board members to chapter events and FFA conventions. (They will usually attend athletic events.) This is an opportunity for them to show their support for other students and their learning activities.
- Train your students to be goodwill ambassadors for the school as well as the agricultural education program and FFA chapter.
- Invite school board members to your chapter banquet.
- Invite school board members to be a part of your advisory board.