ABSTRACT: Students’ Engagement in School-Based Agricultural Education: a correlational research study of rural and urban Florida schools

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Examinations of increased leadership participation of females in FFA has risen the question, “Where are the boys?”. Not only is this a question to be asked about FFA leadership participation, but agriculture education participation as well. In other studies, when recorded by their teachers, girls show higher levels engagement, and higher levels of academic performance than their male counterparts. Differences in drive for achievement between boys and girls is extensive and show that girls are typically more motivated than boys in school. Engagement has been determined to work within the structure of motivation. At the same time, understanding student engagement requires measuring several motivating factors.

The Student Engagement Instrument was used to determine levels of engagement of Florida high school students in School Based Agriculture Education Programs. Levels of engagement were scored on constructs shown to be contributing factors to the psychological and cognitive engagement of students. This study was conducted in six schools across the State of Florida to assess the engagement of students in rural and urban programs, that of boys in urban and boys in rural programs, and to determine any correlations between the students’ psychological and cognitive engagement. The results of the study show similar levels of student engagement between rural and urban students, between that of girls and boys, and a high level of correlation of rural students between their perceived Control/Relevance of School Work and Future Aspirations and Goals. Factors showing high correlation are being examined further. This is necessary in order to provide suggestions for teachers in the classroom. Opportunities for implementation include determining motivational factors for specific students within the program, and incorporating recruitment strategies for students outside of the program. Further research student engagement in agricultural education includes implementation of study on a larger scale, and looking at correlations on a deeper level.