

Council Task Force - National Curriculum Framework

The National Council for Agricultural Education has undertaken a new project that will be of particular interest to those of you working with secondary Ag Ed programs. Gene Bottoms, the Senior Vice President of the Southern Regional Education Board and founding director of the High Schools That Work initiative, contacted Larry Case about a new curriculum model developed by a group called Project Lead the Way (PLTW). Dr. Case then invited their management team to meet with The Council last October.

Project Lead The Way is a pre-engineering program first developed in the 1980s and now offered in middle and secondary schools in 45 states and the District of Columbia. The goal of the program is to increase the number of students entering and completing engineering programs in college, and the data demonstrate stunning success in both areas. PLTW grew out of a technology education perspective and aligns very well with our views about education in the secondary schools. Some of these features include:

- foundation courses followed by specialization courses,
- a capstone course requirement,
- active learning strategies and investigative labs - highly experiential in nature,
- strong industry connections, and
- a heavy emphasis/integration of core academics in the curriculum.

The Council was very intrigued by the PLTW model and its possible parallels in agricultural education, (e.g., a high level program to prepare scientists for the Ag industry), and a team of about 10 people traveled to New York in December to observe a program firsthand and get more information on the PLTW model. As a result of this very positive visit, the Council recently appointed a 16-member National Curriculum Framework Task Force charged with systematically evaluating the potential of PLTW and formulating an action plan. This group will meet in Indianapolis in late July. There is a general feeling among the task force members that this approach has the potential to become a new, national curriculum model that could allow us to reach new audiences and stimulate significant expansion in agricultural education programs and enrollments.

If you have ideas or concerns about developing a PLTW parallel for agricultural education, please let me know. (I'm the lone university faculty member on the task force.) The task force chair is Joel Larsen, Ag Ed supervisor in Minnesota. The task force will be working over the summer and will likely present recommendations to The Council for consideration at its October meeting. You can find more information on Project Lead The Way by visiting its website.

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