

# **An Analysis of Education-related Policies Regarding the Participation Potential of Homeschool Students in Agricultural Education and FFA**

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## **Abstract**

*The number of parents in the U.S. choosing to homeschool their children is steadily growing. With a strong demand for college graduates in food, agriculture and natural resources careers, there is an opportunity for homeschooled high school students to explore agricultural careers and develop entrepreneurship and leadership skills through Agricultural Education and FFA programs. The homeschool population has largely been an untapped market of potential participants for Agricultural Education and FFA programs. This is important because increasing access for all students, including non-traditional students, is an organizational goal for National FFA. Yet, few researchers have investigated current and potential intersections of school-based Agricultural Education, FFA participation, and homeschoolers. This study analyzed the potential of homeschool student participation in secondary agriculture programs, specifically school-based Agricultural Education and FFA, for all 50 states. Each state's potential with regards to homeschool student participation was determined by a qualitative policy analysis utilizing evaluation coding. States were delineated into categories based upon their part-time public school enrollment policies, homeschooling regulations, and FFA membership requirements as defined in state FFA constitutions. Current program participation pathways were defined as well as strategies for increasing homeschool student awareness of and access to Agricultural Education programs and FFA membership.*

**Keywords:** Agricultural Education, FFA, homeschool, policy

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## **Introduction**

School-based Agricultural Education (SBAE) programs are framed utilizing a three-component model of classroom instruction, FFA, and supervised agriculture experiences (SAE) (Croom, 2008; Phipps & Osborne, 1988). This philosophical Venn diagram targets the development of the entire student, including not only content knowledge and understanding, but also leadership

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and social skill development (Newcomb et al., 2004). Leadership and social skill development (aka, soft skills) can be broken down further into specifics such as teamwork, interpersonal communication, cooperation, conflict management, higher-order thinking skills, authentic self-evaluation and self-discipline, and learning through authentic instruction such as problem-based scenarios (Knobloch, 2003; Talbert et al., 2005). The three integrated SBAE program components (i.e., classroom instruction, FFA, and SAE) align with a foundational educational approach of experiential learning (Phipps & Osborne, 1988; Roberts, 2006).

As part of the three-component SBAE program model, FFA (aka, Future Farmers of America) was founded on the principle of developing leadership and interpersonal skills as an intracurricular activity (FFA History, 2015). Leadership development is important in a democratic society because there is a perpetual need for generations of new leaders (Ricketts et al., 2008). Additionally, in a global economy, leadership skills are a competitive advantage when seeking employment, as employers desire hiring leaders (Job Outlook 2013, 2012). In response to the evolving nature of agriculture and stakeholder demographics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, SBAE programs and accordingly FFA are broadening their content foci to appeal to a more diverse student population and increase enrollment by providing desirable leadership development opportunities to youth (Conroy & Kelsey, 2000; Frick et al., 1991; Kahler, 1988; Newcomb et al., 2004; Powell et al., 2008). One potential target population for SBAE and FFA is homeschool students, but the intersection of homeschool students and Agricultural Education is understudied and has not been mentioned in Agricultural Education publications in over a decade (Frick & Brennan, 1998; Mannebach, 1998; Walls et al., 2001) despite evidence in the media that homeschool students are participating in Agricultural Education programs and are active FFA members (Johnson, 2012; Massey, 2015).

Nationally, homeschool enrollment increased 62% from 2003 to 2012 (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016) and raw numbers of homeschool students may now exceed two million children (Clemmitt, 2014; Kunzman, 2005; Ray, 2011; Romanowski, 2001), resulting in an increasing number of homeschool families utilizing local public school resources as part of their parentally prescribed curricula (Planty et al., 2009). Homeschool students represent a potential growth audience for Agricultural Education and FFA (Frick & Brennan, 1998; Weik, 2015). School-based Agricultural Education programs and FFA have the opportunity to be more inclusive and address local community needs by providing potential program participation pathways to local homeschool students. Although research studies investigating the academic performance of homeschool students exhibit methodological flaws (Gaither & Kunzman, 2013), when cautiously interpreted, these studies can provide evidence that homeschool students may perform at least as well as demographically equivalent public school students (Ray, 1997, 2000, 2010). Additionally, homeschoolers typically have parents who are involved in their children's education (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Parental involvement and academic achievement are both valuable qualities for potential SBAE program and FFA chapter participants. Agricultural Education can appeal to home educators by emphasizing the fundamental programmatic philosophy of developing the student into a lifelong learner (Dailey et al., 2001). The goal of lifelong learning is compatible with the educational approach of many home educators, who want learning to occur in an integrated and sustaining way (Van Galen, 1991).

Traditionally, SBAE programs and FFA chapters have been exclusively accessible to students enrolled in and attending on a full-time basis public schools that offer such programs (Croom, 2008; Talbert et al., 2005). Despite potential barriers, some SBAE programs have expanded to include the surrounding homeschooling community. Alaska and North Carolina are examples of states that have a developed model that provide homeschool students with Agricultural Education and FFA membership. This is accomplished by offering state-approved Agricultural

Education curricula to home educators and separate homeschool FFA chapters (Massey, 2015; Teacher Directories, n.d.). A documented example of homeschool students participating in Agricultural Education and FFA programs via another pathway in other states is through part-time public school enrollment and membership in the public school FFA chapter (Brown, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Kittle, 2011; Weik, 2015).

The National FFA research agenda for 2013-2018 identified a top priority for the organization being accessibility and inclusiveness of FFA and that it is “imperative that barriers be removed in order to engage all young people enrolled in agricultural education in the National FFA Organization’s mission of developing premier leadership, personal growth, and career success” (Crutchfield, 2013, p. 1). Expanding program access is important because previous research has shown that FFA achieves its leadership development principle and can be a valuable program for adolescent development. There is value even if those benefits are self-perceived leadership development (Rutherford et al., 2002) or as broad as satisfying the needs of program participants (Reis & Kahler, 1997), such as providing a sense of belonging (Croom & Flowers, 2001). FFA membership also offers an application of life skills, such as public speaking, personal responsibility, and self-discipline, in addition to leadership development opportunities (Croom, 2008; Dailey et al., 2001). The development of youth leadership adheres to the holistic and authentic nature of Agricultural Education, and is an approach that appeals to many home educators (Van Galen, 1991).

One key to understanding Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access and knowing how to expand access and market to more potential program participants and members in the future is by identifying and interpreting relevant current policies acting as gatekeepers. However, no studies were found that identify and summarize relevant state-level education policies regarding homeschool students’ part-time enrollment in public schools, state-level homeschooling regulations, and state FFA constitution membership language.

### Conceptual Framework

The study was conceptually framed around three state-level policies (see Figure 1): (1) Part-time public school enrollment eligibility, (2) homeschooling regulations, and (3) membership requirement language in state FFA constitutions. First, there are three types of part-time public school enrollment policies based on current compiled data sources (Current Homeschool Law, 2016) and confirmed by consulting cited legislation: (1) Access to part-time public school enrollment mandated at the state level, (2) part-time public school enrollment prohibited at the state level, or (3) power delegation by states to local school districts that define their own part-time public school enrollment policy. Second, four categories of state homeschooling were defined based on a combination of definitions from the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) (Smith & Farris, 2016) and the Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE) (Current Homeschool Law, 2016): (1) High regulation, (2) moderate regulation, (3) low regulation, and (4) no notice required. In the same way data accuracy for the first policy was reaffirmed, state homeschooling regulation policies compiled by the HSLDA and CRHE databases were confirmed by consulting cited legislation. Finally, four categories of membership requirement language were defined based on current state FFA constitution language: (1) Required enrollment in SBAE course and SAE, (2) required enrollment in SBAE course or SAE, (3) either of the previous statements with a clause allowing for private or homeschool chapters and/or members, and (4) unique membership requirement language not seen in more than one state.

The conceptual framework of Agricultural Education and FFA program participation potential for homeschool students in each state was a function of the three policies around which

this study was framed. Therefore, depending on current policy within each state, the policy that was most relevant to Agricultural Education and FFA program participation potential may be different. However, in general, because of currently observed program participation pathways, it was conceptualized that the most important “gatekeeper” policy is part-time public school enrollment eligibility, followed by homeschooling regulations, and finally state FFA constitution membership eligibility language.

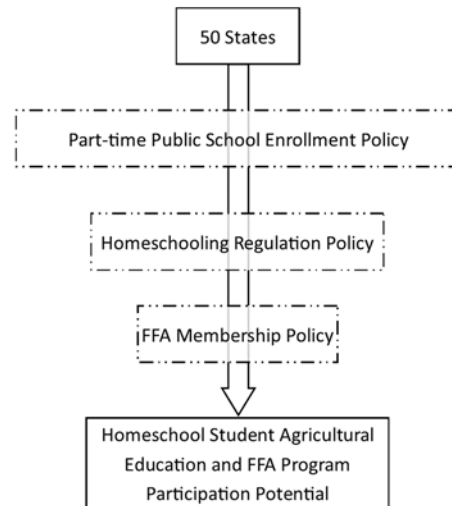


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Agricultural Education and FFA program participation potential being filtered through the lenses of national, state, and local policies.

The history of homeschooling in the United States informs how current policy regarding both part-time public school enrollment and homeschooling regulations came into existence, but an exhaustive historical description was beyond the scope of this study (see Gaither, 2008 for an excellent summary). For the purposes of this policy analysis and the conceptual framework, the most important piece of history was that the United States Supreme Court has never directly addressed homeschooling, but rather acknowledges the rights of both parents to determine the education of their children and states to regulate schooling (Kunzman, 2012). The result was a menagerie of part-time public school enrollment eligibility and homeschooling regulations in each state which made those two policies a fundamentally necessary part of the analysis framework.

The third piece of this policy analysis framework was state FFA constitution language regarding membership eligibility requirements. In 1950 and 1998, the U.S. Congress granted the FFA a Federal Charter based on Public Laws 81-740 and 105-225, respectively (National FFA Organization, 2015). These public laws state that FFA is an integral part of public instruction in agriculture and the federal charter “provides the foundation that makes FFA an integral part of the 3-Component Model of School-Based Agricultural Education” (National FFA Organization, n.d., n.p.). According to the National FFA Constitution (2012), a student (grades 7-12) must be enrolled in a secondary Agricultural Education program to be eligible as an active member in the FFA. The National FFA Constitution states, “to become an active member and retain membership, a student must: While in school, be enrolled in at least one agricultural education course during the school year and/or follow a planned course of study; either course must include a supervised agricultural experience program, the objective of which is preparation for an agricultural career” (p. 3). Moreover, a state FFA constitution cannot conflict with the National FFA Constitution to be considered in good standing with the National FFA Organization, and “the National FFA Board of Directors shall have the power to suspend the charter of any state association which violates the

National FFA Constitution and Bylaws” (National FFA Organization, 2012, p. 2). As each state FFA association navigates inclusiveness and accessibility to increase membership, there can be tension in how policy language of the National FFA Constitution is interpreted.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe education-related policies regarding the participation potential of homeschool students in the Agricultural Education and FFA program for each of the 50 states.

### **Methods & Procedures**

A qualitative policy analysis using evaluation coding (Saldaña, 2013) examined three specific educational policies (e.g., part-time public school attendance; homeschooling regulations; and state FFA constitution membership language) in all 50 states in order to determine how current policy could impact Agricultural Education and FFA program participation potential for homeschool students. Although Agricultural Education and FFA chapters exist in U.S. territories as well, this study was restricted to the 50 states due to the unique nature and history of homeschooling laws and legal precedents in territories.

An iterative process for analyzing policies was implemented in three phases. Phase one was identifying and compiling data for the three targeted state policies while conducting a preliminary analysis. Policies were selected for inclusion in this study based upon reading the research literature regarding homeschooling as an education option and its relationship with the surrounding educational community, particularly with regards to public school intracurricular and extracurricular programs (e.g., Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Additionally, news stories regarding homeschool student participation in Agricultural Education and FFA (e.g., Brown, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Kittle, 2011; Weik, 2015) were analyzed and policies identified that contribute to program access in those cases. States with similar or identical language were grouped together with regards to each policy. State part-time public school attendance policy and homeschooling regulation policy was identified by consulting the HSLDA and CRHE websites (Current Homeschool Law, 2016; Smith & Farris, 2016) and confirmed by finding referenced legislative citations in the public record. All state FFA constitutions were found either in an online public archive on the state’s FFA association website, or obtained via electronic communication with national or state-level FFA leadership.

Phase two involved the development of a rubric (see Table 1) based upon differences observed within each of the three policies at the state level and assigning relative potential access values to each piece of policy data. This included the accessibility of part-time public school enrollment, extent of homeschooling regulations, and potential inclusiveness of state FFA constitution membership language for each state.

Table 1

*Policy analysis rubric*

Policy	Coding descriptions			
Part-time public school enrollment	State-level precedent preventing part-time public school attendance (0 points)	Part-time public school attendance policy set by individual districts (1 point)	Part-time public school attendance access required at state level (2 points)	
State homeschool regulation	High homeschooling regulation (1 point): State requires parents to send notification or achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation, plus other requirements (e.g., curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, or home visits by state officials)	Moderate homeschooling regulation (2 points): State requires parents to send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress	Low homeschooling regulation (3 points): State requires parental notification only	No homeschooling regulation (4 points): No requirement parents to initiate any contact
State FFA constitution membership language	Members must be enrolled in Agricultural Education course <u>and</u> SAE (1 point)	Members must be enrolled in Agricultural Education course <u>or</u> SAE (2 points)	Private school FFA chapters allowed (1 point)	Homeschool chapters allowed (1 point)

Part-time public school enrollment policies were assigned values based upon their restriction or lack thereof on access to part-time public school enrollment for homeschool students. The assigning of numerical point values based on a policy analysis was to create an easily referenced access index for the purposes of this study. Current policy mandating access statewide to part-time public school enrollment was assigned a numerical value of 2 (highest possible access) on the policy assessment rubric. Current policy that allows individual school districts to determine access to part-time public school enrollment was assigned a numerical value of 1 (may or may not be able to access) on the policy assessment rubric. Current policy prohibiting part-time public school enrollment statewide was assigned a numerical value of 0 (not able to access) on the policy assessment rubric.

Homeschooling regulation policies were assigned numerical values based upon their perceived restriction on parental decision making. No current homeschooling regulation was assigned a numerical value of 4 (unlimited homeschool program flexibility) on the policy assessment rubric. Current policy requiring only parental notification of educational authorities was assigned a numerical value of 3 (high homeschool program flexibility) on the policy assessment rubric. Current policy requiring parental notification of educational authorities plus another requirement such as test score reporting or professional progress evaluations was assigned a numerical value of 2 (moderate homeschool program flexibility) on the policy assessment rubric.

Policy requiring parental notification, professional evaluation, test scores, plus additional regulations such as curriculum approval by the state was assigned a numerical value of 1 (low homeschool program flexibility) on the policy assessment rubric.

State FFA constitution membership policies were assigned numerical values based upon the potential interpretations of membership requirement language and potential impact on FFA membership eligibility. Membership language identical to the National FFA Constitution (be enrolled in at least one agricultural education course during the school year and/or follow a planned course of study; either course must include a supervised agricultural experience program) was assigned a numerical value of 2 (higher flexibility of membership requirement interpretation) on the policy assessment rubric. Membership language requiring enrollment in an agricultural education course without the “or follow a planned course of study” clause was assigned a numerical value of 1 (lower flexibility of membership requirement interpretation) on the policy assessment rubric. Unique membership clauses were dealt with on an individual basis through reflexive dialogue that determined their perceived potential impact on FFA membership accessibility. Any clause explicitly allowing private school FFA members and chapters was given a numerical value of 1 (allows for greater flexibility of membership requirement interpretation). Any clause explicitly allowing homeschool FFA members and chapters was also given a numerical value of 1 (allows for greater flexibility of membership requirement interpretation).

Phase three was a document analysis going back through all policy data (legislative documents, legal precedent documents, and state FFA constitutions) on a state-by-state basis and analyzing and interpreting the potential impact current policies could have on homeschool student Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access. During this phase a raw score for each state was calculated indicating potential Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access for homeschool students. Scores were calculated by combining the rubric scores for each of the three policies. Rubric scores for each policy were equally weighted in the overall potential access score calculation and were used as a starting point for determining the potential homeschool student Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access. There were three states (MD, OK, & TX) where special circumstances required a re-evaluation and re-ranking of potential access level based upon existing scenarios of potential homeschool student Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access and not based entirely on raw policy rubric scores.

Reflexivity of the researcher resulted in potential biases in policy interpretations being monitored throughout the study. Upon completion of the evaluative data analysis and interpretation process, differences in state policies resulted in multiple potential models of Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access. Credibility, dependability, and confirmability were established using iterative questioning, negative case analysis, frequent debriefing sessions, peer scrutiny of the research project, direct quotes from documents, detailed and transparent operational field notes, triangulation, admission of researcher’s beliefs and assumptions, recognition of limitations, audit trail, and reflexive journaling (Shenton, 2004).

## **Results**

### **Part-time Public School Enrollment Policy**

Analysis of state part-time public school enrollment policy resulted in three categories being defined. First, there were four states (HI, MD, NY, OK) that currently prohibit students from enrolling in a public school on a part-time basis. This policy was identified as being the most limiting to potential Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access models for

homeschool students. Second, there were 14 states (AK, ID, IL, IA, ME, MA, MI, NE, NV, NH, UT, VT, WA, WI) that currently require that all schools provide access to students that wish to enroll in a public school on a part-time basis. This policy was identified as being the least limiting to potential Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access models for homeschool students. There were 32 states (AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IN, KS, KY, LA, MN, MS, MO, MT, NJ, NM, NC, ND, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, WV, WY) that have a policy that falls between being the most limiting and the least limiting to potential Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access models for homeschool students. These states do not determine access to part-time public school enrollment at the state legislative level, but rather give the power for that decision to individual school districts.

### **Homeschooling Regulation Policy**

Four regulatory policy categories emerged from analyzing state homeschooling regulations. Categories were informed by but not identical to HSLDA defined state regulation criteria (None, Low, Moderate, High). State homeschooling regulations were determined by querying the HSLDA maintained database of current homeschool law and confirmed by consulting cited legislative or legal documentation in the public record. Ten states (AK, CT, ID, IL, IN, MI, MO, NJ, OK, TX) do not require homeschool families provide any notification to local or state education authorities of their intent to homeschool. Iowa is a unique case being that there are different designations for homeschool families resulting in different accessibility to resources based upon the homeschooling designation chosen by the parent. If the “independent private instruction” homeschooling designation is chosen, there are no notification, parent qualification, instruction time, bookkeeping, or assessment requirements. This would put Iowa in this first defined category of homeschooling regulation states, but homeschoolers that choose the “independent private instruction” designation forfeit their eligibility to enroll part-time in public schools. If the “competent private instruction” designation is chosen, annual notice is required as well as the supervision of a certified teacher who will record and monitor academic progress. While being more regulated, selecting the designation of “competent private instruction” results in the homeschooled student being eligible to enroll part-time in public schools, which is currently utilized in multiple states as a model of Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access for homeschool students (e.g., Brown, 2015; Johnson, 2012; Kittle, 2011; Weik, 2015).

Fifteen states (AL, AZ, AR, CA, DE, KS, KY, MS, MT, NE, NV, NM, UT, WI, WY) have a low level of homeschooling regulation, only requiring that parents notify education authorities of their intent to homeschool. The education authority required to be notified varies by state and could be either the local school district or the state department of education.

Twenty states (CO, FL, GA, HI, IA, LA, ME, MD, MN, NH, NC, ND, OH, OR, SC, SD, TN, VA, WA, WV) have a moderate level of homeschooling regulation. States in this category have a wide variety of required paperwork including notification, test scores, and/or student progress reports. States may or may not have intervention procedures in place for homeschooled students making unsatisfactory progress and may offer exceptions to assessments for special needs or other considerations. As described, Iowa is a unique case, but is included in the moderate homeschooling regulation policy category due to part-time public school enrollment eligibility requiring a homeschooling designation with more regulations.

Five states (MA, NY, PA, RI, VT) have a high level of homeschooling regulation. States in this category have thorough assessment requirements for homeschool students in addition to notification and monitoring of student progress.



### State FFA Constitution Membership Policy

Analyzing state FFA constitution membership policy resulted in two distinct categories of potential FFA membership access for homeschool students based specifically on membership requirement language, as well as two clauses that explicitly expand potential FFA membership access to non-traditional FFA audiences. The first type of FFA membership requirement language states that the member must be enrolled in at least one approved Agricultural Education course each year **and** maintain a supervised agricultural experience. This wording was identified as being the least potentially inclusive. Ten states (HI, IN, KY, MO, NV, SC, SD, UT, VT, WA) have this or a similar wording of membership language in their state FFA constitution.

The second type of membership requirement language states that the member must be enrolled in at least one Agricultural Education course each year **and/or** follow a planned course of study with either including a supervised agricultural experience. This wording was determined to be more inclusive due to the “planned course of study” phrase, which gives more lenience to local FFA advisors allowing them to determine the course of study that qualifies potential FFA members. Thirty-nine states (AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, DE, FL, GA, ID, IL, IA, KS, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MT, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, TN, TX, VA, WV, WI, WY) have this or a similar wording of membership language in their state FFA constitution.

The first membership clause for non-public school students observed in state FFA constitutions allows private schools to form FFA chapters and gives potential FFA membership access to private school students. Five states (AL, AK, NC, OR, TX) either explicitly state in their state FFA constitution that private school chapters are allowed, or have a means of providing membership access to private school students. Alabama allows FFA chapters in private schools if the teacher is a state certified Agricultural Education teacher. Alaska includes secondary agricultural and natural resource programs at both charter and private schools as qualifying students for FFA membership. North Carolina does not explicitly mention private school chapters in its state FFA constitution, but there are clearly stated requirements that allow private school chapters to be chartered (Forrest, 2001). Oregon allows private schools to charter FFA chapters if they meet and maintain program approval with state officials and renew that status every three years. Texas explicitly mentions charter and private school students as potential members in its state FFA constitution.

The second membership clause for non-public school students provides homeschool students with potential FFA membership eligibility. Three states (AK, LA, NC) explicitly mention homeschool students in their state FFA constitution. Alaska allows homeschool FFA chapters to be formed and there exists one such chapter in the state with multiple sub-chapters (Massey, 2015). Louisiana added a clause to their state FFA constitution in 2011 that mentions homeschool students, stated to be an attempt to increase enrollment. What is mentioned in the clause is a year-long partnership between the homeschool parent and the Agricultural Education teacher, and does not currently provide the opportunity to form homeschool FFA chapters. North Carolina has the most robust program to provide program access to homeschool students, allowing for the charter of homeschool FFA chapters, but does not include a clause defining membership requirements for homeschool students in their state FFA constitution. Rather, North Carolina maintains this information on their state FFA website.

### **Potential Homeschool Student Agricultural Education Program and FFA Membership Access**

Based upon the numerical values assigned during analyses of three current policies using the developed rubric, each state was assigned a composite score that resulted in a determination of their potential homeschool student Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access (see Table 2). The potential access level value is theoretical and it is important to note that this is based upon current policy only and other factors may also influence what models of Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access are available to homeschool students. Although two states (AK and NC) do have explicit provisions for homeschool student Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access (e.g., Massey, 2015), whether or not homeschool students have access by a similar or a completely different model differs depending on the state. Homeschoolers interested in Agricultural Education are often dealt with on a case-by-case basis as seen in evidence of homeschool student participation in states without explicitly defined models for Agricultural Education program and FFA membership access (e.g., Johnson, 2012).

Five states (AK, ID, IL, MI, NC) currently have high potential access (8 points or above using policy rubric) to Agricultural Education programs and FFA membership for homeschool students. These states have very favorable policies in place that should provide homeschool students access to Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility. Alaska and North Carolina have homeschool FFA chapters that provide an obvious pathway for FFA membership. Idaho, Illinois, and Michigan currently have state-level policy in place that grants part-time public school enrollment access to homeschool students, thus allowing for the most commonly observed Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility model outside of states that have an explicit separate model for homeschool students. Alaska, Idaho, Illinois, and Michigan also do not have regulations regarding homeschooling, thus allowing parents to potentially incorporate an Agricultural Education course into their students' plan of study without consulting with local or state officials to ensure the course would count towards subjects required by current policy, as would potentially be the case were they in a state with a higher level of homeschooling regulation.

Twenty-three states (AL, AZ, AR, CA, CT, DE, IN, IA, KS, LA, ME, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, TX, UT, WI, WY) have moderate potential access (6 or 7 points using policy rubric) to Agricultural Education programs and FFA membership for homeschool students. These states have favorable policies in place, but should consult policy to determine a locally informed access model for homeschool student Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility. Local determination is required due to current state policy that determines part-time public school enrollment access at either the district level (in AL, AZ, AR, CA, CT, DE, KS, LA, ME, MS, MO, MT, NJ, NM, TX, WY) or the local level (in IN). Other states in this category (IA, NE, NH, NV, UT, WI) have policy in place that requires access for homeschool students to part-time public school enrollment, but have a higher level of homeschooling regulation. With a higher level of homeschooling regulation in place, there could be required subjects that limit the flexibility of homeschool parents desiring to incorporate Agricultural Education into their curriculum.

Eighteen states (CO, FL, GA, KY, MA, MN, ND, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, VT, VA, WA, WV) have low potential access (4 or 5 points using policy rubric) to Agricultural Education programs and FFA membership for homeschool students. These states will need to consult policy to determine an access model for homeschool student Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility and may require policy changes. Fifteen states in the "low potential access" category (CO, FL, GA, MN, ND, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, VT, VA, WV) have policy

in place that determines part-time public school enrollment access at the district level coupled with a higher level of homeschooling regulation. Two states in the “low potential access” category (MA, WA) have policy in place that requires access for homeschool students to part-time public school enrollment, but have an even higher level of homeschooling regulation than states in the “moderate access” category. One state in the “low potential access” category (KY) determines part-time public school enrollment access for homeschool students at the district level and has a low level of homeschooling regulation, but has a unique and ambiguous membership clause in its state FFA constitution, therefore potentially restricting FFA membership eligibility.

Four states (HI, MD, NY, OK) have no potential access (3 or fewer points using policy rubric) to Agricultural Education programs and FFA membership for homeschool students and will need to change policy to provide access opportunities. All four states prohibit part-time public school enrollment statewide therefore preventing access to the most commonly observed model of Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility for homeschool students. Additionally, none of the four states have explicit provisions in their state FFA constitution membership clauses allowing for either private or home school FFA members or chapters. Three of the four states (HI, MD, NY) also have a moderate or high level of homeschooling regulation and as mentioned earlier, with a higher level of homeschooling regulation in place, there could be required subjects that limit the flexibility of homeschool parents wanting to incorporate Agricultural Education into their curriculum.

Table 2

*State Policy Analysis and Potential Homeschool Student Agricultural Education Program and FFA Membership Eligibility Access*

State	Part-time Public School Enrollment	Homeschooling Regulation	State FFA Membership Clause	Current Potential Access Level
Alabama	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Alaska	State required	None	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	High
Arizona	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Arkansas	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or SAE	Moderate
California	District determined	Low	Regularly enrolled	Moderate
Colorado	District determined	Moderate	Regularly enrolled and majority vote	Low
Connecticut	District determined	None	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Delaware	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Florida	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled	Low
Georgia	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled	Low
Hawaii	State prohibited	Moderate	Enrolled or SAE	None
Idaho	State required	None	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	High
Illinois	State required	None	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	High
Indiana	School determined	None	Enrolled and SAE	Moderate

Table 2 (continued)

*State Policy Analysis and Potential Homeschool Student Agricultural Education Program and FFA Membership Eligibility Access*

State	Part-time Public School Enrollment	Homeschooling Regulation	State FFA Membership Clause	Current Potential Access Level
Iowa	State required (depends on homeschool setup)	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Kansas	District determined	Low	Enrolled or SAE	Moderate
Kentucky	District determined	Low	Enrolled and attend	Low
Louisiana	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Maine	District determined (“unreasonable” denial prohibited by state)	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
State	Part-time Public School Enrollment	Homeschooling Regulation	State FFA Membership Clause	Current Potential Access Level
Maryland	State prohibited	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	None
Massachusetts	State required	High	Enrolled and/or SAE	Low
Michigan	State required	None	Enrolled or SAE	High
Minnesota	District determined	High	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Mississippi	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Missouri	District determined	None	Enrolled and SAE	Moderate
Montana	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate

Table 2 (continued)

*State Policy Analysis and Potential Homeschool Student Agricultural Education Program and FFA Membership Eligibility Access*

State	Part-time Public School Enrollment	Homeschooling Regulation	State FFA Membership Clause	Current Potential Access Level
Nebraska	State required	Low	Enrolled and/or SAE	Moderate
Nevada	State required	Low	Enrolled and SAE	Moderate
New Hampshire	State required	Moderate	Enrolled and SAE	Moderate
New Jersey	District determined	None	Enrolled and/or SAE	Moderate
New Mexico	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
New York	State prohibited	High	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	None
North Carolina	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	High
North Dakota	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Ohio	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Oklahoma	State prohibited	None	Under age 23 and enrolled	None
Oregon	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Pennsylvania	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Rhode Island	District determined	High	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low

Table 2 (continued)

*State Policy Analysis and Potential Homeschool Student Agricultural Education Program and FFA Membership Eligibility Access*

State	Part-time Public School Enrollment	Homeschooling Regulation	State FFA Membership Clause	Current Potential Access Level
South Carolina	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
South Dakota	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled or SAE and majority vote	Low
Tennessee	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and majority vote	Low
Texas	District determined	None	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate
Utah	State required	Low	Enrolled and SAE	Moderate
Vermont	State required	Moderate	Enrolled	Low
Virginia	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Washington	State required	Moderate	Enrolled and SAE	Low
West Virginia	District determined	Moderate	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Low
Wisconsin	State required	Low	Enrolled and/or SAE	Moderate
Wyoming	District determined	Low	Enrolled and/or planned course of study, SAE	Moderate

## Implications

Homeschool student Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility models are complicated and not universal. Models available to homeschool students in each state are determined by current policy and can vary from enrolling in a local public school part-time, to completing an online Agricultural Education course, or even completing an SAE as an approved course, all potentially resulting in FFA membership eligibility, given that state's FFA constitutional language and policy landscape.

### FFA Membership Language

An implication from this policy analysis is that there may be ambiguity regarding what activities are required to qualify a student for FFA membership and how inclusive membership language is in state FFA constitutions. Subtle variations of wording occur among the first grouping of state FFA constitutions (least potentially inclusive language) including in Indiana, where the FFA “member must be enrolled in at least one approved course each year and maintain a supervised agricultural experience.” The level that course approval must come from is not defined. Kentucky also has a subtle difference that states the FFA “member must be enrolled in at least one agricultural education class each year and attend that class when it is taught.” The Indiana FFA membership language could be interpreted that the supervised agricultural experience *is* the approved course that qualifies a student for FFA membership, thus not requiring the student to physically attend a course in the FFA chapter's home school. In contrast, the Kentucky FFA membership language appears to explicitly state that the qualifying course must be attended, thereby requiring the student to be physically in the public school of the FFA chapter.

Ambiguity also appears in the second grouping of state FFA constitutions (most potentially inclusive language) including in Tennessee, where “any student regularly enrolled in agriculture education is entitled to become an active member upon receiving a majority vote of the members present at any chapter meeting.” The Tennessee FFA membership language could be interpreted such that a student could join *any* FFA chapter, so long as they meet the enrollment requirement at *some* school and are voted into membership status by the current FFA members in that chapter. Wisconsin has a different wording that states the FFA “member must be enrolled in at least one Agriculture Education course during the school year and/or follow a planned course of study for an agricultural occupation (including a supervised agricultural experience program).” The Wisconsin FFA membership language more explicitly states the implied membership pathway from the Indiana FFA membership language, that a supervised agricultural experience *could* count as an approved course of study qualifying the student for FFA chapter membership.

Increasing potential FFA membership access and membership moving forward should warrant a reexamination of current FFA membership language in state FFA constitutions. Clarity in interpreting FFA membership clauses would help potential FFA members and local Agricultural Education teachers acting as FFA advisors have a clearer understanding of various pathways to meet active FFA membership requirements. If specific curricular requirements can be met under current policy and are met, FFA membership access should be provided. However, another implication of this policy analysis is that many current FFA members may not be meeting all requirements of being an agriculture student. Previous research shows that supervised agricultural experiences (SAE) are an underutilized component of the three-circle model of Agricultural Education (Lewis et al., 2012; Talbert & Balschweid, 2004), yet there are many states that have completion of an SAE as a requirement for FFA membership eligibility. State FFA constitutions and their language are the public face for FFA program access, and upon analyzing the membership clauses there appears to be a need for reform. The first step in empowering local Agricultural



Education teachers acting as FFA chapter advisors to grow their programs and expand access is to provide them with easily interpretable inclusive FFA membership language.

### **Program Participation Models**

Multiple potential models of Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility for homeschool students exist, with some models currently being implemented. The fundamental philosophy of the three-circle Agricultural Education model remains an underlying tenet of all the models. That is, all the observed or potential models exhibit a “classroom instruction” component, an SAE component, and an FFA component. State leaders in Agricultural Education and FFA wishing to increase their outreach to the homeschooling community can consult the following potential options for models keeping in mind that the current policy landscape within their state determines which models are even a possibility.

The first of the three circles in the Agricultural Education model that would need to be addressed with regards to the potential of homeschool student program participation is classroom instruction. There are multiple possibilities for homeschool students to complete classroom instruction, some of which are currently implemented, while others could be implemented if they are deemed acceptable.

In states where part-time public school enrollment is possible, homeschool students attending courses in the Agricultural Education classroom at the local public school is the simple model of program participation and FFA membership eligibility. However, in states where the authority to determine part-time public school enrollment access lies with individual school districts, a patchwork of districts with and without this access could be confusing to both local Agricultural Education teachers and homeschool parents. Future work exists in exploring this possibility, which includes contacting districts statewide to determine their current local policy regarding part-time enrollment access. Additionally, for districts that allow part-time enrollment, it should be ascertained whether they allow homeschool students that reside in other school districts to enroll part-time in public schools within their district. An understandable objection to this type of policy is the possibility of one school or district “stacking the deck” for their FFA career development event (CDE) teams. Taking this idea to its logical conclusion would result in a consolidation of talented students on to one team by having students from a wider geographical area all become eligible for membership in one FFA chapter by having those students claim they are being “homeschooled” without any actual intention of doing so. While this is a logical concern, the potential benefits of allowing access to legitimately homeschooled students in districts where part-time public school enrollment is allowed while adjacent districts do not allow part-time enrollment would have to be weighed to discern if there are any questionable practices taking place, although actual questionable practices such as the described scenario should be rare. Any “stacking” of CDE teams whether through this potential loophole or any other questionable practices goes against the fundamental philosophies of Agricultural Education and FFA and not considered representative of what would happen should legitimately interested homeschool students be provided with a model of Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility.

Another potential model of Agricultural Education program participation for homeschool students regarding classroom instruction is online instruction. Online Agricultural Education courses do exist (Shipman, 2016a), but policy questions would need to be addressed for this to be an option for homeschool students that would result in FFA membership eligibility (Shipman, 2016b). Online courses are produced and hosted in one state following current educational policy by a teacher certified in that state, but if the course is completed by a student in a state that does

not have reciprocal teaching certification with the state of origin for the course, a question would be if the instruction still counted as being taught by a certified Agricultural Education teacher.

A third potential program model of classroom instruction for homeschool students exists—an Agricultural Education curriculum taught by the homeschool parent. This is currently available in North Carolina and Alaska which have an explicitly defined model of Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility for homeschool students, but is not a widespread phenomenon. States looking to pursue this avenue of classroom instruction would have to determine if a singular approved curriculum is the only option for a homeschool parent, or if any curriculum regarding agriculture broadly defined would be acceptable.

The second of the three circles in the Agricultural Education model that would need to be addressed with regards to the potential of homeschool student Agricultural Education program participation is the SAE component. Once again, multiple possibilities exist, some which are utilized and others that could be implemented if they are deemed acceptable.

The first potential model for homeschool students wanting to complete an SAE in order to have a complete Agricultural Education experience is for the local Agricultural Education teacher to directly oversee the SAE. If the homeschool student is enrolled part-time at the teacher's school and a member of the school's FFA chapter, this is a logical model for SAE completion.

However, another possibility is that the “classroom instruction” component is not taking place at the local public school, either occurring online or being taught by the homeschool parent. In this scenario, a possible model would be a collaboration between the local Agricultural Education teacher and the homeschool parent in order to ensure the SAE adheres to standards. In either scenario, it is possible that the SAE could make the homeschool student eligible for FFA membership by being classified as a “course of study” depending on the membership language in the state FFA constitution.

The final circle in the agricultural education model that would need to be addressed with regards to the potential of homeschool student Agricultural Education program participation is FFA membership. One model seen in Alaska and North Carolina and mentioned earlier explicitly defines separate homeschool FFA chapters for homeschool students existing alongside traditional FFA chapters. Homeschool student FFA chapters make the most sense and are observed in a scenario such as North Carolina where the students are not completing their “classroom instruction” component through part-time public school enrollment. As mentioned previously, if the homeschool student is enrolled part-time at a public school, then a commonly observed model is homeschool student participation in the local school FFA chapter. Additional possible participation models exist too, including homeschool students competing independently without chapter affiliation, and virtual online FFA chapters.

Although policy analyses revealed part of the picture regarding accessibility of models for homeschool student participation in Agricultural Education and FFA, further research is needed to more clearly determine the accessibility and feasibility of models in each state. Future work exploring the acceptability of different Agricultural Education program participation and FFA membership eligibility models by eliciting opinions from state- and local-level Agricultural Education and FFA leaders is underway, and aims to add further context to the data garnered from this study.

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