

## Focus Groups Fall 2019 Update

Results from the summer 2019 focus group were reviewed by the CAEP Coordinating Team (CCT) to assess question/answer integrity and pull themes.

During fall 2019, two additional focus groups were held; one for initial program and one for advanced programs. The initial program focus group had N(5) participants and the advanced program focus group had N(11) participants. CAEP CCT noted powerful information from the summer mixed major focus group and found the answers valuable. In addition, the fall results were just as impactful.

The CAEP CCT had planned on individual programs taking over the responsibility for their own program focus groups this fall but due to the limited time, the CAEP CCT invited participants and implemented the groups. Invitations came from the Office of Teacher and Administrator Certification and were sent to all candidates who had completed programs within the last three years. It is the belief of the CAEP CCT that focus group participation will increase when programs offer their own focus groups as they will have a higher level of familiarity with the program faculty.

The CAEP CCT reviewed and pulled themes from the focus groups held this fall. Advanced level focus group data is included below.

## Focus Groups Fall 2019 Update—Advanced Programs

Advanced Programs Focus Group

November 9, 2019

Attendees: N=10 (3 SPED Admin, 2 Reading Specialist, 4 Principal, 1 Central Office)

Focus Group Questions:

**Note:** The numbers in front of the comments below are the numbers given to the focus group participants.

1. Discuss the strengths of your WMU Teacher Education Program.

**Summary:** Attendees felt strengths of their WMU Teacher Education Program included programs being practical to the work they are currently doing and completing their programs made them more marketable, availability of coursework in programs (i.e., online, hybrid, and at regional locations) made it more flexible and faster to complete, and coursework was rigorous and encouraged growth.

1 graduated in 2000, at that time the program was very good. The program parallel what I do. 7 special ed and principalship was marketable for me.

11 just got masters in literacy studies. Loved working with the reading library working with students in the community and teacher candidates. No problem passing the state exam 6 able to complete quickly in 18 months, had a couple classes in battle creek and online was helpful to make it work

5 pleased that most instructors had experience in classroom and leadership. Completed program in a reasonable amount of time with work obligations

1 went back for ed leadership, liked the choice of classes, like the hybrid classes

12 masters in ed leadership and special education. Special ed masters was applied while working, very rigorous and grew a lot. Ed leadership the flexibility of the program while working, especially the internship part was my job.

9 doctoral program, every project was to make your program better.

3 edd program, lived out of town, it helped to get to know other people in the field. Like the flexibility of the program

2 agree with 11. Enjoy working with the students in reading center and take it back to the classroom. Apply all my learning even in the regular classroom

10 agree with everyone. Excited about the conversation in the courses and shared with her staff. Encouraged other teachers to continue their education.

2. Discuss the weaknesses of your WMU Teacher Education Program.

**Summary:** Weakness discussed included lack of program (Admin) knowledge for mental health and behavior, lack of preparation on dealing with trauma, not enough preparation on working with paraprofessionals, GRSP, and the unions. Also discussed was the feeling that there needs to be more focus on lobbying, marketing (to attract good teachers and interns), more intent on teaching current issues, and dealing with homelessness and low SES (how to support the needs of students dealing with this).

6 on the admin program, behavior is escalating, mental health and behavior are a struggle. The admin degree did not prepare how to help. Need more research on mental health and behavior

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- 10 agree with 6, have students with trauma and have to do their own research on having a trauma sensitive environment. I go back to research to guide me because education hasn't guided us. Working on more of a juvenile justice program than education support
- 12 agree with what has been said. Most days I am all roles in the building, had a lot of road blocks getting outside services and needing support for trauma. Trying to restore and teach, not pulling from my admin degree, more my special ed degree as principal.
- 12 not taught to work with paraprofessionals only teachers, would like to see more of working with paraprofessionals
- 1 agree with 12, not prepared as interim principles. Not prepared with all the different rolls. Including paraprofessionals, GRSP, and union.
- 1 Many different types of report for state requirement
- 9 a lot of hard level requirements. Taught about funding, but not lobbying, not addressed was contract negotiations. Reports required in school. Need to learn about the reports and how to manage them.
- 7 agree with 9, a marketing piece is needed to attract teachers, having good interns turn into your teachers.
- 5 I feel like I am being taught out of a kit and not out of the real demands that are evolving and continue to evolve
- 10 there was not a lot of conversation about urban education and SES issues, even with WMU being in Kalamazoo. How to support families with the promise. Not instructors had that experience and instruction for it
- 8 the homeless population in Kalamazoo, not addressed in undergrad or grad program. That conversation needs to be done and how it affects the student and it comes into the classroom

### 3. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your Clinical Experience (fieldwork) while at WMU.

**Summary:** Strengths of clinical experiences included being able to shadow a principal in the building (it provided real world experience), incorporating the internship at their current job, literacy was a great tool, and the project on integrity was a good experience. Weaknesses pointed out were not having the resources at WMU more available to the community and the lack of opportunities to connect with the community.

- 8 allowed to shadow principal in building, great example, learned more about the human aspect of the job from him than the classroom. Finding the right mentors to guide people
- 11 the literacy was a great tool, how to tie the program into the local schools.
- 10 why not have resources at Western, literacy reading lab, more available to the community
- 10 create opportunities to connect with the community
- 5 nice to do internship as my job, it was a formality, I did nothing different
- 12 agree with 5, a positive to continue my job, but kept doing what I was doing. I better/different mentor would have created a new experience.
- 9 experience was to select a project to make a change in the school, based on integrity, no one over looked the project. Did enjoy the project, presented it to the professor

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4. If a perspective student asked you about your WMU experiences in teacher education how would you respond.

**Summary:** When asked how they would respond to a perspective student about their WMU teacher education experience attendees said they would definitely recommend the special education programs and felt prepared by the special education program. Additionally, they also recommend the educational leadership program as professors views were broad. Additionally, some felt that the online experience wasn't authentic and felt face-to-face was much better. Finally, they would want others to know that there are limitations to the program (like any program) so research what you want.

6 did advise student to go to WMU for special education undergrad, not the experience with grad.

3 definitely recommend the special education program. Felt well prepared plus need special education teachers, lots of opportunities

1 would recommend special education at WMU, is a well established intuition

7 would agree with 1, if it was online don't make the connections and conversations with other educators.

8 would recommend the education leadership, professors view were broad, teaching what they believe take what you can and nurtures your views. The online was not authentic just something to do, check it off the list.

5 online experience is not near as good face to face instruction, I would recommend the program, but know there are limitations. I am qualified, but it does not prepare me for everything that happened yesterday.

9 wherever you go, there will be shortcomings, need to research what you want. Western was good for me, its close and can do research in your own classroom

3 combination of professors, some had strength in professional and experience

12 agree with 5, I appreciated my instructors, did give me practical information

12 agree with 9, there are going to be pitfalls, need to find out what you what and need

12 would definitely recommend Western, whatever you put in you are going to get out

5. Discuss the most important knowledge, skills, and disposition that you believe are necessary for a successful K-12 teacher and/or administrator.

**Summary:** Attendees were asked what the most important knowledge, skills, and disposition they believe are necessary for a successful K-12 teacher and/or administrator and feedback included emotional intelligence, building relationships with staff, students, and families, transparency, being student-centered, having energy and consistency with expectations, resiliency, understanding that you are not the expert at everything, being curious and collaborative, also encouraging collaboration in staff, and be open to change (pilot programs, allow staff to be open and serve students, etc.).

3 what makes or breaks first year administrators is emotional intelligence

12 relationships are important to be good administrators with staff, students, families. Need to model good relationships for buy in

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1 agree with 12, transparency is important. If its about control and power you lost. Its about the student.

energy, if you have energy and consistency with expectations, stop talking about just do it

5 resiliency, can be lonely and relentless. It can be hard to see the results immediately

12 recognizing that you are not an expert in everything

9 about the same thing, also being curious and collaborative. Confidence needed to move forward

10 encouraging participants to be collaborative with each other as administrators, education is fluid and keeps changing so one brain doesn't work. Pilot programs for new ideas. Allow the staff to be open and serve the needs of the students.

6. What were the strengths of the instructor/professor of your favorite class in Teacher Education at WMU?

**Summary:** In your favorite WMU class, what were the strengths of the instructor/professor: holding students to a high standard, being able to use professors as resource, professors creating new projects, encouraging teachers to be leaders, and being able to make learning come alive.

Professors held me to a high standard. Didn't care that I was athlete, expectation was high.

6 Professors, use her as a resource and support, very powerful

Doc Advisor helped me get to the finish line with the dissertation

9 doc advisor, held expectations for students and herself

11 in literacy, the professors are creating new projects and supporting their students

6 to be in a position to point out to teachers that they can be a leader. The professors encourage students to be leaders

8 Professor's help high expectations for his students

One specific advisor, loved the way she made learning come alive. Was able to apply what I learned in class in own environment

10 agree with 2, one professor made everything her laboratory, creating learning station at the juvenile center. Modeled in the community how to create a learning environment

7. Discuss the frustrations you had when working with the WMU Teacher Education Unit (Advising, faculty, scheduling, student support, graduate school, etc.)

**Summary:** When asked about frustrations, attendees mentioned that certain paperwork processes were not as efficient as they could (i.e., dissertation approval process). An example given was paperwork got lost once it went through the process. Additionally, expense of tuition was very high, parking was difficult, and course availability could be problematic (example: had to be put on a waiting list).

3 to get all the paperwork signed and dissertation approval, need signatures. No systematic way to get those signatures when a working. Paper work was lost once completed.

5 very expensive, tuition cost is not covered by pay increase

1 parking

9 not enough sections for courses needed, waiting for one course and put on a wait list

8. **(Question only for initial preparation)** N/A

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9. Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

**Summary:** When asked for additional thoughts, they shared that there was a need to focus on diversity at the university and in every program, there needs to be more focus on trauma and whole child, and more training in IEP and REED writing. Additionally, it was shared that some of these changes need to be expedited as they are important right now.

10 focus on diversity in the university, offer the diversity in every program

12 focus on social emotional learning and trauma, focus on whole child not just academics

5 never found a teacher candidate to teach new teachers how to work with the whole child

1 agree with 5

6 agree with 5 plus add IEP and REED writing

3 agree with 6 on IEP writing

9 having the conversation now to make the changes. Some of these changes need to be expedited. They are important now.

### **Common Themes:**

**Strengths:** Relationships with professors, flexibility of courses in programs, allowing internships to be integrated in their current employment, and growth was encouraged in programs.

**Weaknesses:** Not enough preparation in dealing with trauma and behavioral issues, lack of preparation in dealing with other staff (i.e., paraprofessionals, GRSP, and the unions), needs to be more focus on diversity at the university, and more energy on how to deal with students who live in low SES or are homeless.