

RESEARCH

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Brief

August 2019

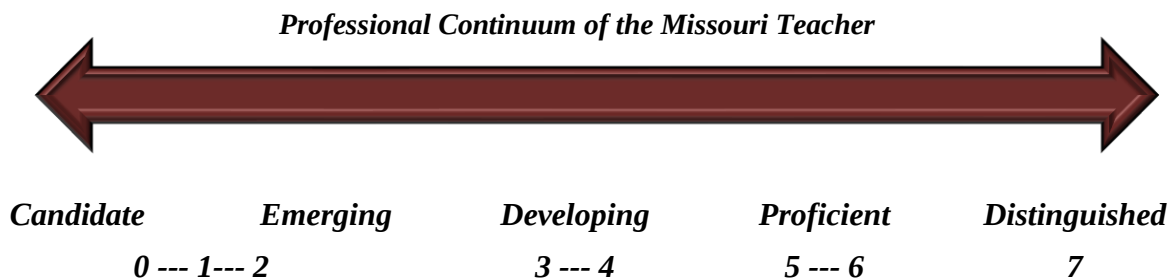
Vicki Schmitt, Ph.D.
Sara Tipton Ed.S.

Missouri State University Internship Academy: Preparing “Classroom-Ready” Teacher Education Graduates

For decades, educators, researchers, and policy makers have discussed how to improve education and identify factors that impact student learning. Repeatedly, teachers have emerged as having a remarkable impact on student success in the classroom. Teachers are in control of the design of the learning environment, the structure and plan of the learning activities, the climate in the classroom, and the instructional strategies implemented, all which directly impact student achievement (Hartford, 2010; Chong, 2014). Emphasizing the importance of high-quality teachers, it has been said, “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 19).

The measurable impact effective teachers have on student learning is notable as students demonstrate more educational progress when taught by effective teachers rather than ineffective teachers (Brophy, 2001; Al Shannag, Tairab, Dodeen, & Abdel-Fattah, 2013). Placing students with teachers who are consistently effective is necessary if all students are going to be afforded opportunities for success. Following this, improving the education system and teacher quality depends on improving the quality of teacher preparation programs. The demand for high-quality teachers means a demand for high-quality teacher education (Chong, 2014).

Using the 7pt scale encouraged by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education teachers in public school districts are evaluated annually based on their growth along a continuum of “candidate” to “distinguished” educator. These summative evaluations require that the score reported must reflect some indication of the teacher’s impact on student learning.



Preparation Matters

During spring 2015, a group of local school district stakeholders and university administrators began the development of an internship academy to replace the traditional student-teaching model in elementary education programs. In its inaugural year, 25 university students were placed in three area school districts for a “year-long” co-teaching experience. Over the next several years, additional school districts requested participation and the program grew to include both elementary and early childhood interns working in school districts across the state. To date, more than eighty graduates of the MSU Internship Academy (IA) are working in Missouri school districts (Cohorts 2015-2016 through 2017-2018). Yet, the question of how effective this approach has been must be addressed. Does a year-long internship better prepare teacher education graduates for day one in the classroom?

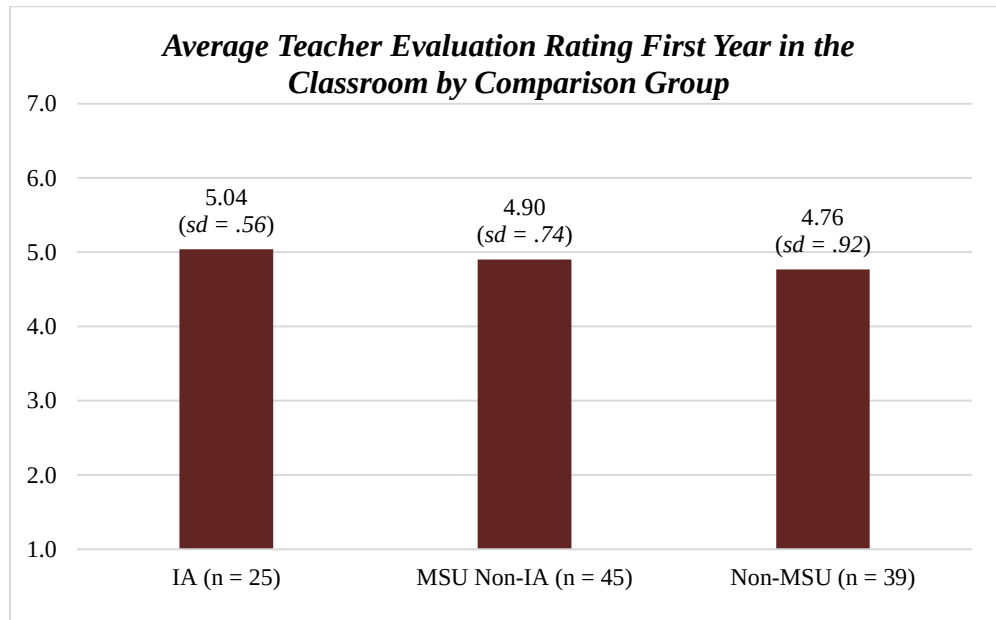
	<i>Interns</i>	<i>Districts</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Certification</i>
2015-2016	25	3	7	Elementary 1-6
2016-2017	29	4	8	Elementary 1-6
2017-2018	26	4	8	Elementary 1-6 Early Childhood
2018-2019	51	7	12	Elementary 1-6 Early Childhood

MSU researchers identified 31 school districts across the state that have hired graduates of the Internship Academy. Superintendents of these districts were contacted in spring 2019 to request participation in a data collection effort to examine the overall first-year teacher evaluation ratings of graduates compared to their colleagues who took part in a more traditional student-teaching model. Traditional program graduates were categorized as either MSU or non-MSU allowing researchers to determine if differences exist among MSU graduates participating in the year-long internship versus a more traditional route. In addition, comparisons among MSU and non-MSU graduates were examined. A total of 109 teacher evaluation overall rating scores were shared with researchers. It is important to note that only data on the first three cohorts of interns have been collected at this time as districts are sharing year-end teacher evaluation scores that reflect the first year of teachers. Those interns who have not yet completed their first year of teaching (2018-2019 cohort) are not included in this analysis but should be added at the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year.

	<i>2016-2017</i>	<i>2017-2018</i>	<i>2018-2019</i>	<i>Total</i>
IA	7	13	5	25
Non-IA	9	20	16	45
Other	11	14	14	39
Total	27	47	35	109

First Year Performance

As reported in a previous study (Schmitt & Kleinsmith, 2018), teachers entering their first year of teaching tend to be scored by principals within the “Developing” to “Proficient” category according to the state’s evaluation system. Teachers who were prepared by the MSU Internship Academy ($n = 25$) tended to score higher than their MSU peers who followed a more traditional path ($n = 45$), and they scored higher than non-MSU ($n = 39$) graduates [MSU-IA = 5.04 (.57); MSU Non-IA = 4.90 (.74); Non-MSU = 4.76 (.92)]. While these differences were not found to be significant ($F_{(2,104)} = .955, p > .05$), increasing the sample in spring 2020 with the most recent 2019 IA cohort should help to address this issue.



Problems & Limitations

While these data are promising in terms of outcomes, there are several limitations that must be addressed. First, the sampling methods employed did not include randomization which may impact the generalizability of these results to future cohorts of students. In addition, researchers found that school districts utilize both different models as well as different types of scales in the evaluation of their teachers. The reliability of the data provided are assumed based on the state’s recommendation that all evaluation models must demonstrate reliable scoring. There is also no way to know which institutions comprise the comparison group of other IHEs which makes it difficult to know if the various institutions within this group are evenly distributed across districts.