This study focused on the perceived effectiveness of teacher preparation in the College of Education (COE) at Missouri State University, as seen by employers, mentors, and graduates of the program, as well as advisory board members, all of whom took part in focus group discussions. Graduates described their experiences and the information gleaned in classes, practicums and student teaching, as well as the relevance of their education for their current position. Employers, mentors, and advisory board members described their perceptions of the quality of Missouri State University COE student teachers and interns, as well as the graduates they employ or mentor and the strengths and weaknesses of these employees. All groups of participants emphasized the quality of the education programs at Missouri State University, and each identified areas for growth.

The report is divided into two major sections:

- a detailed description of the methodology, and
- an explanation of key findings, along with excerpts from focus group interviews that reflect and elucidate these findings.

The Methodology section explains the rationale and design of the focus group project and provides a more detailed description of participants and the questions asked of participants during focus groups. The Key Findings section summarizes and synthesizes data gleaned from the focus groups in two major areas. First is a distillation of the participants’ (graduates, mentors, employers, and advisory board members) views about the education and preparation of teachers by the COE. This section is also an explanation of the strengths that graduates identified in their preparation for teaching and employers identified in the preparation of the Missouri State graduates they employ.
Methodology

This section explains the methods used to elicit participants’ perceptions. Qualitative methods such as focus groups are “intended to provide researchers with means for collecting data that can be used to construct a descriptive account of the phenomena being investigated” (Dollar & Merrigan, 2002, p. 6). Qualitative approaches such as focus groups are particularly useful because they allow a researcher to uncover people’s subjective attitudes and experiences typically inaccessible through other means of research (Krueger & Casey, 2015). For example, an individual might indicate on a survey that she/he is very satisfied with the education received in the COE at Missouri State University. This is important to know; however, what the survey data does not provide is information about why and in what ways the individual was satisfied and how the education helped him/her to meet the challenges faced as a teacher. Focus groups also tap into subjective experiences and are an efficient way to collect large amounts of data that describe, compare, or explain a particular experience or social phenomenon because they allow participants to interact with one another and build on one another’s comments, and they allow the facilitator to probe for details.

Participants and Procedures

Focus groups were held during November/December 2017 and March 2018. A total of 6 focus groups were conducted. Groups ranged in size from 5 to 14 participants each and lasted from 1.7 hours to 2.15 hours, for a total of 11.5 hours. A total of 12 graduates of COE programs, 21 employers and mentors of COE graduates, and 14 advisory board members participated in the focus groups (n=47). Dinner was provided to participants. Focus groups were conducted in Springfield, Missouri, at Missouri State University’s Park Central Office Building. Each focus group was homogenous. At the conclusion of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix A, and a summary of participant demographics can be found in Appendix B.

An open-ended interview protocol was used to guide discussion and all focus groups were facilitated by the researcher (Dr. Charlene Berquist). Two major interview protocols (see Appendix C) guided the discussions with graduates, mentors, and employers. The interview protocol for advisory board members, which can be found in Appendix C, differed somewhat in wording given members’ unique experiences with students and COE programs. Informed-consent procedures were explained at the beginning of each focus group after participants received consent forms (see Appendix D). All focus-group discussions were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The anonymity of participants in the focus groups is protected in this report, and in some instances the use of “they” or “their” as the first person singular pronoun has been chosen to further protect the identity of participants and to illustrate how their statements are representative of many focus group participants.

Data Analysis

Focus group interview recordings were transcribed, resulting in 340 pages of data. Analysis of this data went through several phases. A preliminary analysis was conducted in order to get a general sense of the data and reflect on its meaning. Next, a more detailed analysis was performed and data were divided into segments or units that reflected specific topic areas identified in participant discourse as being most important in regards to teacher preparation. At the conclusion of this process a list of topics or key
findings was generated. Data within key findings were further analyzed to determine the different ways in which participants talked about these findings. These different perspectives are reflected in the bullets that accompany the key findings. Although all groups were analyzed for perceptual differences in regard to key findings, few major differences were found.

**Points of Explanation**

In order to assist the reader in understanding and appreciating the significance of the findings reported here, a brief discussion of several points is needed to contextualize the data.

- **Key findings.** Focus group interviews were rich with information from all participant groups. Everything said in interviews cannot be included in the summary discussion. In this report the researcher highlights those issues most often discussed by participants and those the researcher perceived as most strongly held by participants. It is important to note that the key findings identified and discussed in this document emerged in all focus groups. Additionally, there were high levels of agreement and significant consistency in how issues, when raised, were talked about among groups. In instances where an issue was raised but talked about differently by different groups, these differences in talk are explained in the narrative. The degree of consistency and agreement in regards to the key issues underscores the relevancy of the data generated and the strengths of the study’s conclusions. It is, however, important to remember the focus groups were conducted with a relatively small number (n=47) of participants in relationship to the number of overall graduates, mentors, and employers.

- **Participants identified strengths and opportunities for growth.** The key findings revealed the strengths of graduates and their preparation. In the discourse of key findings, participants also identified challenges inherent in the issue under discussion and often expanded their discussion to suggest areas of improvement and growth. It was also recognized in these discussions that adding additional expectations and experiences is balanced against the credit-hour constraints of a 4-year degree. One participant underscored this point when responding to the many suggestions for improvement by saying … *these are great ideas…all of them, but I am telling you nobody is gonna budge on adding credit hours.* This point was further emphasized by a graduate who reflected the observation of a number of participants, noting …*we have talked about so many wonderful ways to improve their experiences but you can’t ask people to go to college for 7 years for $34,000 a year in salary.*

- **Joint effort in educating and mentoring.** Participants in all groups emphasized that educating and mentoring teachers is a collaborative process that is not solely the responsibility of the COE. Employers and mentors particularly stressed this joint responsibility, which is captured in the words of a mentor talking about their role in educating pre-service teachers…*This is not just the university’s job, it is our responsibility as well to mentor and model and give them tools for their toolbox.* Included in this discussion was the recognition that not all knowledge and skills are best learned in the college classroom. As one graduate explained in talking about classroom management…*I thought I got it, that I understood, but it was not until I was actually
there and saw the dynamics that it made sense...you can read it in a book all day long but until you apply it to a real classroom it is just not as meaningful...so I think that authentic learning experience is key for me.

**Key Findings**

Analysis of focus group interview transcripts revealed a number of key findings related to participants’ viewpoints and questions asked. These findings included the following:

1. Preparation - quality of teacher preparation;
2. Diversity and Classroom Management - graduates’ understanding of and ability to adapt to diverse student populations and their effectiveness in classroom management;
3. Assessment - graduates’ understanding of assessment principles and their skill in applying assessment data in meaningful ways;
4. Curriculum - graduates’ understanding of curriculum development and application;
5. Technology - graduates’ knowledge of technology and their ability to use technology in ways that enhance learning and student success;
6. Communication - graduates’ ability to communicate effectively in a range of professional roles and responsibilities; and
7. Connection and Collaboration - collaboration, communication, and relationship building between the COE and schools and agencies

These findings are elaborated below. Discussion of each key finding begins with a list of the major themes reflected in focus group discussions about the finding, and a brief description of the findings along with excerpts from participant narratives about their perceptions and experiences. Excerpts from focus group discussions and the actual words used by participants are integrated into the report to provide the reader with a greater understanding and appreciation of the ways in which preparation is experienced, understood, and talked about by graduates, mentors, employers, and advisory board members.

It is important to emphasize that when a direct quote from a focus group participant is used, this was not a random choice. Quotes were selected that represent the views expressed by a majority of participants. So, while focus group participants may have stated their experiences and opinions in different words, the excerpt used to illustrate the point best represents the experiences expressed by many or nearly all participants. The value of these excerpts and narratives in understanding the experiences of participants is underscored by Lindlof (1995) who explained that “if we want to know how something is done and what it means [to people], we have to know how it is talked about” (p. 234).
Key Finding 1: Quality of Teacher Preparation

- Overall quality
- Increasing internships and practicum
- Changing student teaching schedule
- Year-long onsite teaching experiences

All participant narratives emphasized the quality of preparation graduates received in the COE at Missouri State University. Mentors, graduates, teachers, employers, and advisory board members alike all perceived Missouri State University to be a quality institution that was often described in narratives as being at the cutting edge of pedagogy and continually striving to create innovative programming that enhances teacher training. Nearly all groups described the education received in the COE as effective in preparing graduates, and employers felt the graduates they hired from Missouri State were well prepared and were at par or superior to students graduating from other institutions in the region. Many participants noted that MSU did a better job than other institutions of introducing and familiarizing students with current educational practices. As one principal explained...I have noticed for the last several years, students I have interviewed that graduated from Missouri State had more knowledge than others about things like standardized screening, effective collaboration, professional communities, and even state issues. Several emphasized that MSU graduates were learners and especially effective at self-reflection. Others described the passion and enthusiasm that graduates have brought to their schools and classrooms and characteristics that are often in contrast to graduates from elsewhere. The sentiments expressed by one mentor capture the feelings of many participants in this regard when they described the enthusiasm and passion of graduates of Missouri State and found that these characteristics invigorated older teachers and the overall culture of their building. The mentor concluded by saying, I have nothing but positive things to say about these graduates.... An employer responding to the question about preparation summarized the comments of many, explaining I mean very well...they are just very well prepared and they have a lot of practicum experience before they get to student teaching...and in the student teaching experience they get a lot of support from the university...Missouri State grads have a lot of confidence and in my experience when they leave they are really ready to have their own classroom. Positive impressions about preparation extended to comments by graduates who described their overall training and preparation for teaching as excellent and in most instances as supported and encouraged by the faculty throughout their education. Several graduates also indicated that once they were in teaching positions they felt more prepared than colleagues from other institutions. In addition to detailing the strengths of COE graduates, participants also identified areas where graduates needed greater and more effective preparation, and these are discussed in greater detail in other sections of this report.

Despite recognizing the quality education that students received in the COE, there was acknowledgement by students, mentors, and employers that certain aspects of teaching could not be fully understood and effective skills developed without the benefit of actual school experiences like practicums and internships. Throughout the narratives of participants it was also emphasized that preparing graduates is a joint responsibility of schools and the university and that mentors, supervising teachers, and others all play a central role in the quality preparation of teachers.
Narratives about preparation were also saturated with comments about how graduates could be better prepared to effectively navigate the challenges of teaching. Interviewees were in broad agreement that the more experiences they [pre-service teachers] have in actual school settings, the more prepared they will be. Many participants highlighted the importance of the early and extensive integration of students into internships, practicums, and classroom experiences as the foundation for strong teacher preparation. They suggested, as one principal did, that the most important things the COE could do to improve teacher education were to get students out into the schools as early as their sophomore year and to schedule student teaching in the fall semester. The issue of modifying when student teaching happens and the value of full-year onsite experiences permeated focus group discussions for all participants. Several participants indicated that fall student teaching allowed students to see how classrooms are set up and to understand how the positive culture of a classroom is created and how classroom management strategies are developed and reinforced early in classroom development.

Year-long teaching experiences were also identified by nearly all participants as being the gold standard in preparing teachers. The COE was praised for being on the cutting edge of this movement and for partnering with area schools in creating year-long onsite teaching experiences. Participants across all focus groups described the year-long internship as being an extremely important strategy in preparing teachers, noting as one graduate explained …so, my senior year I was in the school setting for an entire year, which was the best thing in the whole entire world. I would like to think that eventually that will become the norm because it was that beneficial. This graduate went on to say that …I feel like my first-year teaching was radically different because of this experience. Another student, describing additional benefits of the experience, reflected the sentiments of graduates, mentors, and employers when they explained that…one of the positives of the year-long internship for me was that I got to see from the very first day to the very last day. So, I got to see how my collaborating teacher set up classroom expectations, and procedures and the class-building that took place prior to moving into content. I got to see the planning stages from day one all the way through. The impact of year-long experiences were noted by mentors and employers who all emphasized the qualitative difference between preparedness of students with these experiences versus those completing traditional student teaching. Additionally, many participants who employed graduates indicated they were much more likely to hire students with year-long experiences because the challenges with first-year teachers were virtually eliminated with these students. This reaction was reflected in the comments of a principal who said …we have been a part of the MSU internship model for the last 3 years and I have hired 4 from that…compared to teachers I’ve hired who have just done the typical semester long there is definitely a difference and their first year is ten times better.

Key Finding 2: Diversity and Classroom Management

- Diversity preparation
- Range of diversity issues and challenges
- Differentiation
- Classroom management
- Strategies for preparing graduates for diversity
The discussion of preparing teachers for the diversity encountered in schools was wide ranging and focused on behavioral challenges, special education issues, and family structure, as well as cultural, ethnic, racial, and economic disparities. Participant narratives also included talk about classroom management challenges and suggested strategies that could be undertaken, particularly related to practicums and internships, to increase graduates’ awareness of the types of diversity they may encounter and better prepare them for managing diversity challenges. The majority of participants across groups believed the COE provided graduates with a solid foundation in understanding and addressing multiple forms of diversity in the classroom, a point underscored by one interviewee familiar with the curriculum who noted they believed that diversity in one form or another was addressed in nearly every class. Participant narratives further emphasized the COE’s strength at instilling graduates with an awareness of and appreciation for racial and ethnic diversity, a challenge that many acknowledged was particularly difficult given the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the region.

Despite emphasizing the positive aspects of graduates’ preparation to deal with diversity and diversity challenges, interviewees emphasized the enormity of diversity issues encountered in today’s schools and the difficulty in fully preparing students to address these issues. There was widespread agreement with the comments of one mentor who suggested that differences in student populations are so extensive that it… it’s impossible to prepare graduates to deal with what they’ll find. For that reason, many participants argued that no student will be fully prepared for the eventuality of all the diversity issues he or she may encounter. This point was made in every focus group in different ways, but the essence is distilled by a graduate who said simply, I was shocked …I thought I was prepared but I was not at all. Another graduate agreed, explaining that they …were not ready for all of the different types of people I was going to experience and I had no idea how to handle that. Another graduate explained how one’s personal background may be an impediment to understanding diversity and how their classes addressed diversity in relatively limited ways, stating…I come from a very blessed background so it’s very hard to imagine what family problems look like and how that affects kids’ learning….So, I don’t know how you would teach future teachers about teaching those kids…but I don’t think that was addressed in our classes—it was mostly disability stuff and some racial. Many mentors and employers noted that one way to better prepare graduates is to simply help them understand that they will encounter far more diversity than they may expect. As one mentor emphasized, you can’t prepare them for everything and we do not expect them to come with a full toolbox, but they need to have some idea of how many challenges there are.

Beyond simple awareness, one of the most challenging aspects of diversity, and one that graduates felt least prepared to handle, was the process and extent of differentiation. Students expressed that while they understood what differentiation was and felt prepared to differentiate in limited ways and in certain circumstances, they did not feel prepared for the extent of differentiation that was required in many classrooms. As one graduate explained of their preparation…I remember having to go through, like, if your student is autistic here is something you can do, or if you have a student who is blind here is what you do, but we did not hear a lot about differentiating with the kid who is homeless—how do I reach him? Why should he care? Or like ELL, like at Central we have all the ELL students in the district so I am teaching a literature course to a Vietnamese student who understands zero English—what is appropriate to do? Another recent graduate described having 12 separate IEP’s in one classroom while still another described having 8 kids out of 14 in one class that were special education. These were not isolated examples, and the challenges and implications are captured by one first year graduate who describe their
situation in this way: It’s not differentiating for one student, it’s differentiating for every single student in this class…and it’s my first year and I have nobody…it’s just me and then the managing behaviors and differentiation, the modifications, the workload it puts on me as a classroom teacher, it’s incredible. I didn’t realize…I never thought the experience would be like this.

Most participants recognized the difficulty in fully preparing graduates to deal with diversity before they actually experienced the situation. The words of one mentor expressed the thoughts of a number of participants when they suggested…I don't know if there is a way to prepare you for how much differentiation you are going to have to do without actually doing it. Also acknowledged was the fact that the challenge of preparing graduates for the scope of diversity in the contemporary classroom is not unique to Missouri State. As one principal explained in regard to the ability of graduates to handle diversity issues related to poverty and family structure…it’s not just Missouri State’s graduates, but I really felt like no matter what institution they came to us from, there is a weakness all around in understanding the culture of poverty and family challenges and understanding what their expectations are as a classroom teacher of this child and this family.

While participants emphasized the impossibility of preparing graduates for every aspect of diversity they might encounter, participants in nearly every group suggested similar approaches to addressing some of the issues identified above. Many felt that classroom management was a critical element. Several employers and mentors emphasized that one of the greatest weaknesses of graduates is they do not have good training and skills in classroom management and many believed, as one mentor suggested, that students need to have a full class in classroom management strategies. Many others argued that special education, behavioral issues, poverty, ELL, and the implications of diverse family structures on learning were important and pervasive enough in classrooms and agency work to warrant more emphasis being placed on these aspects of diversity and the differentiation required in the preparation of graduates. It was noted by many, particularly graduates, that it would be useful to have clearer and more focused experiences and to learn concrete strategies for working with a wide range of diverse populations. Interviewees across all groups also argued for more diverse placements during internships, practicums, and student teaching to provide graduates with a more realistic understanding of and experience with diverse populations.

Key Finding 3: Assessment

- Formative and summative assessment
- Pre and Post tests
- Data application

The focus group discussion of assessment revealed wide-spread agreement that students are aware of the importance and necessity of classroom assessment. Participants indicated that students have a good working knowledge of the basics of both formative and summative assessment and are able develop pre-test and post-test questions and assessments.
Despite the strengths in understanding the basics of assessment noted for COE graduates, there was a feeling on the part of nearly every group that assessment in schools has changed. Teachers and mentors noted that in years past one could rely on textbooks and readers that supplied a variety of assessments, including end-of-chapter questions, thought problems, and test questions. Most participants noted this is no longer the case, and that most schools and districts are not operating with these types of pre-existing assessments.

Some participants questioned whether the University understands the changing face of assessment and whether those changes are being integrated into how assessment is taught. Participants noted that while students have a solid understanding of the need for assessment and basic skills in preparing assessments, there is still a gap in understanding what to do with assessment data and how assessment results drive instruction. This gap was explained by an employer and reflected comments in nearly all groups: My concern is the link between assessment and instruction. So if they gave that pre-assessment and they realized that the class didn’t understand fractions, and then I need to start with what is a fraction? And, then once I have taught for a few days I might give them a formative assessment and I’m gonna realize that this handful has it so I’m ready to push them in a small group versus this other group of students who are still struggling and what am I gonna do with them. So I think that many lack the knowledge not of what assessment is but they lack that knowledge of how to use it developing instruction.

Another concern noted by many participants, including graduates, was that teachers are not being prepared for the amount of existing data about students they will receive and how to use that data in assessing student needs and connecting this data to instruction. Additionally, participants reported that teachers are not prepared to understand standards and how standards need to match assignments and grade cards.

**Key Finding 4: Curriculum Development**

- Understanding the curriculum development process
- Relevance of lesson plans to real world classroom
- Flexibility in adapting curriculum to district and school approaches and classroom needs

The overarching conclusion expressed in participant narratives was that pre-service teachers were well versed in how to create lesson plans and spent considerable time engaged in the curriculum development process. One mentor explained that they had met with several interns the previous week, all of whom had spent almost three months writing a lesson and unit plan. As they and others described the curriculum development understanding and skills that most students bring to practicums, internships, and student teaching, nearly all noted that the curriculum development process followed in university classes provided the students with strong skills in developing curriculum, but did not prepare them for how lesson plans are done in actual classrooms.

Participants in nearly every group agreed that curriculum and lesson planning at the university was an unrealistic process and disconnected from the real world and public education. A graduate identifying
one of the implications of teaching lesson planning in this way echoed the sentiments of many, explaining that students are spending so much time writing in the Madeline Hunter lesson plan format they’re forgetting the intricate pieces of making the connection for students to the lesson they’re teaching. A principal further underscored the concern, explaining that graduates don’t come to us knowing how to write lesson plans that work for the real-world classroom. Participants noted that extensive lesson plans do not fit the rhythm and structure of curriculum development and planning in the real world of schools. While curriculum development varies among schools, in most districts teachers have about 30 minutes to teach a lesson, depending on what time of the day you’re in. Another participant further elaborated, reflecting the observations of many, explaining that lesson topics are integrated and everything in schools is workshop-based so the large developed lesson plan doesn’t fit what most districts are doing. Lessons in varying subjects are often interconnected, and there may be extensive collaboration as teachers in these different subjects work together to develop lesson plans. This integrated format varies greatly from how students are taught curriculum development in a vacuum as a solitary process. Additionally, students are unprepared for how the expectations for curriculum development may vary by school in terms of the level of detail expected in lesson plans and whether the plans are submitted in advance or not.

Participants noted that the implications of the type of curriculum-development training graduates receive is that they go into on-site experiences with a very limited understanding of how curriculum is developed in actual classrooms, and they lack the ability to adapt their knowledge and skills in curriculum development to the varied settings of individual schools. Students walk into classrooms having experienced curriculum-development as an individual, independent, and discipline-specific process, and they anticipate being able to use extensive, detailed lesson plans in the classroom. As a result they are often uncomfortable collaborating with a team of other teachers to co-create lesson plans, are more rigid in their approach to lesson-planning, and are less flexible adapting their lesson plans in the classroom when a lesson does not go as they anticipated.

**Key Finding 5: Technology**

- Technology skills and awareness
- Using technology that is student-centered
- Keeping abreast of changes in technology

Based on the data from all focus groups, it is clear that Missouri State education graduates come into the classroom with a good understanding of technology and an ability to use technology to accomplish their administrative work and effectively integrate technology into their teaching. Participants shared many examples of how students and graduates have come into school and agency settings and brought with them new technology skills and information or assisted in implementing existing technologies in useful ways. One interviewee captured the experiences shared by many participants when they stated...I think there is definitely a sense that new teachers coming out are more willing to learn and they are more open to technology and they have more of a foundation... much more information and knowledge and ideas about technology...So they bring, I mean they bring new ideas for all of us and they say, have you seen this? Have you thought about using this in this way?
While graduates were described as skilled in using technology, participants raised several areas of concern about technology preparedness that are worth noting. These concerns centered primarily on how prepared graduates are to use a range of technology in the classroom in support of student learning and, in light of the rapidly changing nature of technology, their skill in accessing and utilizing different technology tools. Several interviewees indicated that many pre-service teachers have been trained in using specific technologies like smartboards, which are now less in use than they were previously. There was a sense on the part of many that students need to have a greater understanding of the range of technology that exists for classroom use. Additionally, students need better skills in how to find and use different classroom technologies, particularly given that technology availability is constantly changing and variations exist across schools. Having the knowledge and skills to adapt is important, and this skill, based on participant comments, does seem to vary with students. It was suggested by many that rather than receiving in-depth instruction on how to use specific technologies that may become quickly outdated, students should be taught about, and come into the classroom with, a top-10 list of technology sites and top-10 technology tools in their tool kit.

An additional area of concern identified by many interviewees related to graduates’ use of technology in the classroom to enhance student learning. Several participants noted that in the past few years there has been a major shift towards using technology in a student-centered, rather than a teacher-centered, way. Nearly every group acknowledged that although students are prepared to use technology for administrative work and in their actual teaching, they are much less able to use student-centered approaches to technology. A number of participants, particularly mentors and employers, talked about the need for graduates to be trained in more nuanced ways of using technology to enhance students’ learning of specific processes such as critical thinking. Many participants explained that as more schools move to a one-to-one model of technology with every student having a Chromebook, keeping students focused and fully integrating the technology into learning becomes more complex and challenging. These challenges were captured in the words of several participants. As a graduate pointed out...Just because all of your students are using their individual computers does not mean that you are fully integrating technology into teaching—it is not a babysitter but a learning tool. A mentor highlighted a concern expressed in nearly every focus group when explaining...I don’t think they’re very well trained in how to incorporate technology for the students...so technically playing a game to practice multiplication, that is a valid use, but it’s not the only use. And I think a lot of them don’t have the exposure to what’s out there. Others talked about the need for graduates to understand when to use technology and when to disconnect “digital natives” from technology and use other, less technologically focused, learning tools. A final area of discussion was the belief by many, particularly mentors and employers, that training needs to provide students with a realistic understanding of how technology can and should be used for different grade levels.

**Key Finding 6: Communication**

- Communication effectiveness
- Awareness of communication behaviors
- Communication with parents
Managing conflicts

Communication using technology

Many participants talked about the importance of communication in multiple ways. As communication was discussed in focus groups, there was agreement among nearly all participants that COE graduates come into the classroom with solid communication skills. Interviewees expressed that pre-service teachers were generally excellent in working with students and had good relationships with their colleagues. However, there was an overall sense that students’ communication skills were lacking in some areas, and the focus groups identified several areas where pre-service teachers’ skills could be strengthened. Participants emphasized the importance of soft skills and the ability to engage interpersonally and effectively with students, colleagues, and particularly parents. They also talked about managing the technology side of communication more appropriately and effectively teaching graduates about various technology mediums (texting, email, phone calls) and when they are appropriate and most effective.

Some participants noted that communication ability varied among students—one mentor described a student who was off-putting to everyone; the mentor believed that the student did not understand how others interpreted her behaviors. This mentor and others agreed that it would be helpful to incorporate exercises into students’ training that encouraged them to make observations on each other’s communication behaviors and reflect on their own communication strengths and challenges.

Several participants noted that pre-service teachers struggled with communication and conflict management. They talked about teachers having difficulty communicating with parents and often preferring to communicate via text or email, rather than face-to-face. They described how pre-service teachers often presented information (particularly negative information) to parents in ways that resulted in the parents reacting negatively. Then, when parents reacted emotionally, the teachers struggled to de-escalate the situation and manage the conflicts that resulted. All of these factors were described as inhibiting teachers’ ability to build relationships with parents and manage conflicts that occurred. This lack of conflict management skills was also noted in the way teachers interacted with their colleagues. Additionally, there was significant discussion of the need for teachers to have stronger skills in classroom management. These discussions focused on structuring the classroom, managing diverse students, handling conflicts in the classroom, and managing challenging student behaviors (students acting out, throwing desks, etc.).

Participants also noted that many students did not have a good sense of how to communicate effectively and professionally using technology. Interviewees noted that basic skills such as how to write emails, respond to emails in a timely manner, and engage in positive phone interactions would be useful. Participants noted that students often wanted to use texting to communicate but were unaware of how to determine when texting was and was not effective. Additionally, participants expressed concern with students’ ability to communicate professionally in writing, sharing examples of emails and newsletters that students had sent containing grammatical and spelling errors. Another related area of concern was how students presented themselves on social media and lacked an understanding of how employers, students, and parents could access this information or how it might reflect on them.
While participants acknowledged that some things can only be learned in real-world interactions, many discussed the need for more practice and role-playing experiences focused on communication skills in pre-service training. Several students indicated there was not a class that focused on these skills and indicated that there needed to be more time spent on learning how to build relationships, communicate, and manage conflicts.

**Key Finding 7: Connection and Collaboration**

- Connecting the COE with schools and agencies
- Enhancing integration and collaborative exchanges between schools and agencies and the COE
- Utilizing advisory board effectively

In all focus groups there was significant unanimity about the importance of keeping constituents (schools, agencies, graduates, and advisory board members) connected with the COE. Participants talked about this taking place in a number of ways, all of which were focused on ensuring both constituents and the COE were sharing information and collaborating effectively in order to provide the best teacher preparation possible.

Participants in all focus groups talked about establishing programs and initiatives that would be reciprocal and designed to allow COE administrators and faculty to understand what is happening in schools or agencies. Many suggestions for how this could be accomplished were offered. For example, individuals within schools and agencies could serve as pulse points, which one advisory board member described as...someone who's in the trenches, a pulse point is kind of aware of issues and concerns and things, the pulse point might see the train coming and a pulse point gives you a heads up and so you listen to the pulse point and you can accept or reject it but you hear that and then you take heed and make decisions. Another suggestion was to create externships that allow college professors to come into schools and the community, even just for a little while...for a day, much as businesses do. A third suggestion was to expand the idea of bringing public school teachers into the classroom as teachers-in-residence and provide more opportunities for public school teachers to teach as per-course instructors. An additional idea was teaching education classes in the schools. For example, teaching a middle-school COE class in one of the area middle schools or teaching the same class in different middle schools throughout the semester.

Another issue related to teacher preparation centered on integration and collaborative exchanges between the COE and schools. There was significant discussion by mentors, principals, and advisory board members about the need for collaboration and meaningful opportunities to interact. Collaboration and integration as they were discussed looked different among the groups. Several teachers and mentors indicated they would like to see more visits and observations in their classroom from COE professors. Others, including graduates, shared the desire to have more instruction being carried out by teachers and administrators who are actually integrated in the schools and aware of how things work in the real world. There was a strong sense by some, particularly graduates, that some COE faculty are not familiar with current practice, and that this impedes learning. Participants also indicated it would be valuable to receive updates from the College through mechanisms like quarterly newsletters and the like.
Another final issue raised, in particular in the advisory board focus group, was the need to use advisory board members more effectively. Advisory board members discussed the desire to have more meetings with the College, to interact with professors, to be asked for and allowed to give more input to the College, and to have their expertise applied in meaningful ways. The majority of the group interviewed were not aware of many of the initiatives in the COE, and some indicated they had never been invited to an advisory meeting, or had been invited for several years. Those who had attended meetings more recently expressed that they felt their input was not invited or listened to and that they were rarely asked their opinion on important issues. There was a strong desire among advisory board members participating in the focus group to take a much more active role in advising and assisting the COE.

*Summary charts of COE Strengths and Areas for Growth identified in focus groups are presented on the following pages.*
Summary of Strengths of the COE Identified in Focus Groups

- **Quality of Teacher Preparation**
  - Perceived as a cutting-edge institution that is highly effective in preparing students
  - Provides year-long onsite teaching experiences

- **Diversity and Classroom Management**
  - Students have solid foundation in understanding and addressing diversity in the classroom

- **Assessment**
  - Students have good working knowledge of formative and summative assessment
  - Students are able to develop pre-test and post-test questions

- **Curriculum Development**
  - Students have strong skills in developing curriculum

- **Technology**
  - Students have strong technology skills
  - Students are prepared to use technology in administrative work and teaching

- **Communication**
  - Students have solid communication skills
  - Students are excellent working with students
  - Students have good relationships with colleagues

- **Connection and Collaboration**
  - The COE has developed strong relationships with schools and agencies

Summary of Areas for Growth Identified in Focus Groups

- **Quality of Teacher Preparation**
  - Increase internships and practicums
  - Change student teaching schedules

- **Diversity and Classroom Management**
  - Prepare students for the extent of differentiation in the classroom
  - Provide more training in classroom management
  - Offer more diverse placements in internships, practicums, and student teaching

- **Assessment**
  - Update instruction to reflect how assessment in schools has changed
  - Ensure students know what to do with assessment data
  - Prepare students for how much existing data will receive and how to connect it to instruction
  - Address standards and how standards need to match assignments and grade cards

- **Curriculum Development**
  - Prepare students for how curriculum is developed in real-world classrooms
  - Encourage flexibility in creating curriculum collaboratively and adapting curriculum to district and school approaches and classroom needs

- **Technology**
  - Prepare students to keep abreast of changes in technology
  - Focus on using technology in a student-centered way
- **Communication**
  - Assist students in developing awareness of their communication behaviors
  - Focus on how to communicate effectively and build relationships with parents
  - Build students conflict management skills
  - Teach students to communicate professionally and appropriately using technology
- **Connection and Collaboration**
  - Establish programs and initiatives that allow COE administrators and faculty to understand what is happening in schools and agencies.
  - Enhance integration and collaborative exchanges between schools and agencies and the COE
  - Utilize advisory board effectively through meetings and requesting input
  - Share College updates with constituents to keep them informed
References


Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating in this focus group. Your experiences and suggestions are valuable and we appreciate that you have taken the time to share them with us. Before leaving we have just a few remaining questions.

What is your current position? _______________________________________________________

How long have you been in your current position? _______________________________________

QUESTION FOR EMPLOYERS: How many Missouri State University graduates have you worked with or supervised? __________

QUESTION FOR MENTORS: Approximately how many Missouri State graduates have you mentored?_______

QUESTION FOR GRADUATES: What year did you graduate from Missouri State? ________________

Is there anything that you did not share in the focus group that you feel is important for us to know?

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING
## Appendix B: Participant Demographics

### Current Student/Graduate Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Length of Service in Position</th>
<th>Year Graduated from Missouri State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade teacher</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>English teacher (I, II, III, IH)</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>HS English</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Music Appreciation/Piano</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>HS History</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year</td>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade Math and SPED Science</td>
<td>Middle of 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; year</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; grade elementary teacher</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; year</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>JH/HS Family and Consumer Science teacher</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; grade teacher</td>
<td>2 years (3 years at teacher)</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>ECSE teacher</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>FACS 8-12, Instructional Coach</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>2015 undergrad; 2016 masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>Graduated 12-17, currently substitute</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Employer & Mentor Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Length of Service in Position</th>
<th>MSU Graduates Worked With or Supervised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Elementary Assistant Principal</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Middle School Principal</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>15-20?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Principal K-6</td>
<td>3 years (admin for 11, teacher 11)</td>
<td>4-6 as a teacher; 21 interns as an admin, 30-40 student teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2 years as main</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Retired Elementary Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Elementary Principal</td>
<td>4 here, 12 as principal</td>
<td>100s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Elementary Principal</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>4th grade teacher</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>1st grade teacher</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>hundreds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>6th grade teacher</td>
<td>4 years, 17 additionally at 6th grade level</td>
<td>about 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Elementary teacher</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>Chemistry teacher/departmental chair (high school)</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>Classroom teacher 3rd grade</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>23 (student teachers) and too many practicums to keep up with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td>Instructor – elementary</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 16</td>
<td>K-12 Music teacher</td>
<td>6 years (20 total)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 17</td>
<td>JTSD 2nd grade</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 18</td>
<td>1st grade teacher</td>
<td>2 years here, 11 years total</td>
<td>Numerous practicum/intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 19</td>
<td>Classroom teacher and teacher in residence</td>
<td>10 years and 3 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 20</td>
<td>Classroom teacher in elementary, TIR for internship at MSU</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Advisory Board Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Length of Service in Position</th>
<th>MSU Graduates Worked With or Supervised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Early childhood specialist</td>
<td>1 ½ years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Springfield’s child advocate</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>More than 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Outreach/Education</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Too many to know, 100 is a guess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>4 ½ years</td>
<td>20+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Director Children’s Day TX, VP of Special Projects Burrell</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>Students from Master of Counseling program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>High School Principal</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>7-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Middle School Principal</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Too many to count, over 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>MSU student teacher supervisor</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>300?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Executive Director of Betty and Bobby Allison Ozarks Counseling Center</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guides

ADVISORY BOARD FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

In general, what is your opinion regarding the overall quality of teacher education programs at Missouri State University? Elementary teachers? Early childhood teachers? Special educators? What is your opinion regarding the quality of education programs that prepare school counselors? Principals? Superintendents? Reading Specialists? Others? Again, in general, how do you believe MSU education programs compare to others in the State of Missouri?

Keeping in mind the education programs we just identified above, are you aware of ways diversity and/or multicultural concepts are taught? Examples? Are you aware of ways any of these education programs address diversity issues that are specifically focused on college students and university faculty? P-12 students and teachers

Are you aware of specific diversity initiatives that have been or are being undertaken by education programs, academic departments, the College of Education, or the University? Could you describe and/or give specific examples of the diversity initiatives we just identified? What types of diversity initiatives do you believe should be developed? How well does the College of Education at Missouri State University focus on diversity issues related to students?

Are you aware of specific technology initiatives that have been or are being undertaken by education programs, academic departments, the College of Education, or the University? Could you describe and/or give specific examples of the technology initiatives we just identified? What types of technology initiatives do you believe should be developed? How well does the College of Education at Missouri State University focus on technology issues related to students?

What are the specific areas of improvement that need to be addressed in preparing graduates to be effective teachers?

What are the specific areas of improvement that need to be addressed in preparing undergraduates to be effective teachers?

What changes have occurred in the College of Education and teacher education in the last five years?

Describe how prepared the students are in the COE and teacher education to solve problems?

In your advisory capacity, how receptive has your committee leaders been to the feedback you provide to initiate change?

What questions have I not asked that you think are important for the College of Education and teacher education at Missouri State University to know about your experiences working on your advisory committee?
GRADUATES FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION:

We appreciate that you have taken time out of your day to participate in this focus group. What you have to say is important and has the potential to make a difference in how the College of Education prepares graduates. Before going further we would like you to read and sign the informed consent document that you have each received. This is a voluntary process so you should feel free to leave at any time if you are not comfortable participating and feel free to pass on any question that you would prefer not to answer. Please be assured that anything you say will be kept confidential. While we will report what is said here, no one will be able to connect what is said to you personally. We have a diverse group participating today and we have worded the questions in a general way to make them relevant to everyone. With your permission we would like to tape record our conversation to make sure that we capture your words and perceptions as you share them. Does anyone have concerns with tape recording the conversation? Before we get started are there any questions? Could we begin with everyone introducing yourself and indicate the school/agency that you are employed or represent?

TOPIC: Learning Styles, Other Challenges, and Adaptation

Many of you have diverse clients/students with different learning styles, as well as behavioral, emotional, cognitive, physical, and/or developmental needs. What aspects of your education were most helpful in developing your skills related to students with different learning styles as well as behavioral, emotional, cognitive, physical, and/or developmental needs. PROBE/FOLLOW UP: How well do you feel your education has prepared you to address and meet the needs of diverse students/clients?

TOPIC: Curriculum Development and Long Range Planning

Curriculum development and/or long range planning are aspects of the work you do in the schools. What aspects of your education were most helpful in developing your skills in curriculum development and long range planning? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: Are there things that you believe could have been done differently or included in your education to better prepare you for curriculum development and/or planning?

TOPIC: Assessment

In what ways do you use assessment processes and data in your planning and decision making? PROBE: If participants do not discuss assessment in terms of critical thinking and higher order thinking, may want to probe about specific areas where formative and summative assessment is used. FOLLOW UP What aspect of your education was most helpful in developing your skills in assessment? PROBE/FOLLOW UP Are there things that you believe could have been done differently or included your education to better prepare you in assessment and data analysis.

TOPIC: Communication, Work Environment, and Working Relationships

How well and in what way do you feel your education prepared you to create a positive learning and work environment. PROBE/FOLLOW UP: Part of creating positive environments with constituents is Communication. How well do you feel your educations prepared you to communicate and work effectively with constituents including students, parents, colleagues, and the community? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: Is there any aspect of communication generally or with particular groups that you feel you are not well prepared to deal with? What could have been done in your program that would have helped you to be a better communicator?
TOPIC: Technology

To what extent did your education prepare you to use and integrate technology into your work with students /clients? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: What was particularly effective in your technology education? Is there any aspect of technology that you feel unprepared to utilize in your work?

TOPIC: Reflection and Professional Growth

To what extent do you feel that reflection and professional development is an important part of your growth in your field. PROBE/FOLLOW UP: How well do you feel your program at MSU assisted you in developing skills in reflection? How well did your program prepare and motivate you to become a lifelong learner in your profession? Can you give me a specific example of this?

TOPIC: Conflict Question

In recent years there has been a focus on conflict and managing differences in society, work environments, and schools. To what extent and in what ways do you experience conflict in your work? FOLLOW UP: Are there conflict situations that you find particularly challenging or difficult to deal with? FOLLOW UP: How well and in what ways do you feel your education prepared you to deal with conflict? PROBE: When thinking of conflict in the classroom we also see discussions about restorative processes like circles and restorative ways to manage discipline and suspension issues. What is your reaction to these processes? Were you exposed to them in your education? Do you use restorative processes? PROBE: If conflict workshops or education were available, what kinds of preparation would be most valuable to you or those you work with?

TOPIC: Ending Questions

MOST AND LEAST USEFUL ASPECTS OF YOUR PREPARATION AT MSU?

I would like you to take a moment and think about your education. As you think about your experiences, what aspect of your education is MOST useful for you today? What part of your education has been LEAST helpful or useful to you? PROBE: Now that you have had experience working, if you could change one thing about the education program at Missouri State, what would you change? Talk to us about the reasons that you would make this change?

WHAT HAS BEEN LEFT OUT?

What have I not asked that you think is important for the College of Education at Missouri State University to know about your education and preparation?
EMPLOYERS AND MENTORS FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

We appreciate that you have taken time out of your day to participate in this focus group. What you have to say is important and has the potential to make a difference in how the College of Education prepares graduates. Before going further we would like you to read and sign the informed consent document that you have each received. This is a voluntary process so you should feel free to leave at any time if you are not comfortable participating and feel free to pass on any question that you would prefer not to answer. Please be assured that anything you say will be kept confidential. While we will report what is said here, no one will be able to connect what is said to you personally. We have a diverse group participating today and we have worded the questions in a general way to make them relevant to everyone. With your permission we would like to tape record our conversation to make sure that we capture your words and perceptions as you share them. Does anyone have concerns with tape recording the conversation? Before we get started are there any questions? Could we begin with everyone introducing yourself and indicate the school/agency that you are from.

TOPIC: Learning Styles, Other Challenges, and Adaptation

Many of you have diverse clients/students with different learning styles, as well as behavioral, emotional, cognitive, physical, and/or developmental needs. How well do you feel MSU has prepared your employees to address and meet the needs of these diverse clients? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: To what extent have MSU graduates contributed to improved client outcomes and or student achievement? Can you provide any examples of this?

TOPIC: Curriculum Development and Long Range Planning

Curriculum development and planning are aspects of the work that your employees do. How well are your Missouri State employees able to effectively engage in these processes? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: What are the greatest strengths MSU employees have in these areas? Are there areas of improvement that need to be addressed in preparing graduates to handle these issues effectively? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: To what extent have MSU graduates’ curriculum development and planning skills contributed to improved client outcomes and or student achievement in your organization?

TOPIC: Assessment

How well are your MSU employees prepared to do formative and summative assessments and analyze data? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: What are the greatest strengths that your employees trained at MSU have in these areas? Are there areas in preparing MSU graduates to do assessment and analyze data that could be improved? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: To what extent has MSU graduates’ ability to use assessment and analyze data contributed to improved client outcomes and or student achievement in your organization? Can you provide an example to illustrate this?

TOPIC: Communication, Work Environment, and Working Relationships

Employees have to be part of creating a positive and productive work/learning environment as well as communicating and working effectively with a variety of constituents including students, parents, colleagues, and the community. How well do you feel that your MSU employees have been prepared to accomplish these goals? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: Is there any aspect of communication generally or with a
particular group that you feel these employees are not well prepared to deal with? Can share a specific example that causes you to say this? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: Can you think of examples where MSU graduates’ ability to create and manage positive work/learning environments has contributed to improved client outcomes and or student achievement?

TOPIC: Technology

To what extent do you believe your employees trained at Missouri State are effective at using and integrating technology into their work? PROBE/FOLLOW UP Are there any particular strengths or areas of improvement that are needed in terms of knowledge about or experiences with technology? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: To what extent has the MSU graduates’ knowledge of technology contributed to improved client outcomes and or student achievement in your organization?

TOPIC: Reflection and Professional Growth

How effective do you believe your MSU employees are in their ability to be reflective and how likely are they to engage in life-long learning? PROBE/FOLLOW UP: How have self-reflection and continuous improvement contributed to improved client outcomes and or student achievement in your organization.

TOPIC: Conflict Question

In recent years there has been a focus on conflict in society, work environments, and schools. What types of conflict situations are particularly challenging or difficult to deal with in your organization? FOLLOW UP: How well do you feel your MSU employees are prepared to deal with these conflicts? Do you currently have any conflict programs or training in your organization? If conflict workshops or education were available, what kinds of preparation would be most valuable to you or those you work with?

TOPIC: Ending Questions

PREPARATION

I would like you to take a moment and think about the employees under your supervision who have been educated at Missouri State. Based upon your experiences with these individuals, what do you feel that the Missouri State College of Education is doing particularly well in preparing these professionals? What is the one skill or ability or knowledge base that you would like them to have more preparation in?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What have I not asked that you think is important for the College of Education at Missouri State University to know about your experiences working with employees who have been educated there?
Appendix D: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Thank you for participating in this focus group sponsored by the College of Education at Missouri State University. We are conducting these focus groups because we are interested in your experiences with the College of Education and your perceptions of your education now that you have graduated or you have interacted with Missouri State University graduates in your role as a school leader or mentor. Your input will allow the College of Education to build on its strengths and make improvements to its programs. In addition, the College of Education at Missouri State University is preparing for CAEP re-accreditation and your insights about your educational experiences will assist us with this process.

By signing this consent form, you are authorizing us to use the information from the focus groups to complete a report for the CAEP self-study. You will not be identified in any manner in the report.

We do not anticipate any risks to you for participating in this study. We do ask that you agree to keep all information discussed in the focus group confidential and not share any information about who participated in the group or what was discussed with others outside the group.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may pass on any questions that we ask and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, this will not negatively affect you in any manner. Any information that you disclose will be kept confidential by the facilitators. We may use excerpts of what you say in reports and or publications resulting from the data collected in these focus groups, however in order to protect your privacy, no one will be able to connect what is said with you personally.

It is very important to us that we are able to accurately keep track of what is said in the group by you. In order to do so we would like, with your permission, to audiotape the interviews. At the conclusion of the process, after the written transcripts have been completed, all audio tapes and notes will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact Missouri State University College of Education Dean, Dr. David Hough at 417.836.5254 or DavidHough@MissouriState.edu.

I hereby certify that I have read and understand the above consent document, and I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. As shown by my signature below, I consent to participate in this study, and to allow data from the interview process to be used in this study in the confidential manner described above.

---------------------------------------------------------------
Participant’s Signature          Date
---------------------------------------------------------------