

Completer Focus Group/Notes Spring 2023

A focus group of teachers who completed the BSC Collaborative Education program was held May 2, 2023 at 4:00 PM. All completers who graduated in the last three years in the last three years (2020, 2021, 2022) were invited to be a part of the focus group and a variety of dates/times were offered in order to meet the scheduling needs of the teachers. This meeting was held virtually via Zoom. Five completers attended the focus group, E. Drummond, C. Sharbutt, M. Scales, T. Dunlay, and A. Sharit. Faculty who attended the focus group meeting included G. Barnes, A. Dominick, L. Jacobs, and A. Spencer. This group represented 3 general education teachers (grades K, 1st, and 6th) and 2 special educators (representing 1 self-contained classroom teacher and 1 resource teacher).

The following represents major points shared by the completers in reference to their perceptions about how the BSC Department of Education can better prepare our teacher candidates for the complex work of teaching.

Protocol: The EPP contact leading the meeting should begin by welcoming all participants, thanking them for their participation and partnership, explaining the purpose of the focus group meeting, and explaining that the EPP is interested in how completers perceive that Birmingham-Southern prepared them to teach, lead, and learn in four broad areas: (1) The Learner and Learning, (2) Content Knowledge, (3) Instructional Practice, and (4) Professional Responsibility.

(1) The Learner and Learning: The EPP leader should then say that the first area, The Learner and Learning, includes Learner Development, Learner Differences, and the Learning Environment, and ask, “Can you talk to us about how you think we have done in preparing you to address Learner Development, Learner Differences, and the Learning Environment? What strengths have you noticed and what areas for improvement?” Then the EPP leader should open the floor, prompt for clarification, and take notes.

(2) Content Knowledge: The EPP leader should then say that the second area, Content Knowledge, includes Content Knowledge and Content Ability, and ask, “Can you talk to us about how you think we have done in preparing you to know and be able to apply/teach academic content? What strengths have you noticed and what areas for improvement?” Then the EPP leader should open the floor, prompt for clarification, and take notes.

(3) Instructional Practice: The EPP leader should then say that the third area, Instructional Practice, includes Assessment, Planning, and Instructional Strategies, and ask, “Can you talk to us about how you think we have done in preparing you to assess learning, plan for instruction, and know and use instructional strategies? What strengths have you noticed and what areas for improvement?” Then the EPP leader should open the floor, prompt for clarification, and take notes.

(4) Professional Responsibility: : The EPP leader should then say that the fourth area, Professional Responsibility, includes Professional Learning and Ethical Practice, and Leadership and Collaboration, and ask, “Can you talk to us about how you think we have done in preparing you to engage in and seek out professional learning, behave ethically, collaborate as a member of a learning community, and take

on or seek out leadership opportunities?” What strengths have you noticed and what areas for improvement?” Then the EPP leader should open the floor, prompt for clarification, and take notes.

Qualitative Data 2023

Areas of Strength (Lesson Planning/Relationships):

Completers reported that the BSC Education Department had prepared them well to develop appropriate lesson plans. This was noted from both general and special education teachers. Many of the participants reported they were required to use scripted curriculum for literacy and math. It was noted that while curriculum was provided and mandated, BSC completers believed they were better able to determine the main goals and objectives of those lessons, to determine if the assessments were aligned, and to adjust the provided lessons in ways that would provide more targeted instruction for their students.

Completers perceived this was especially true of their ability to work with literacy curricula. Specifically, completers noted as part of being well prepared to plan they are well equipped to plan for questioning, listening to students to help guide their instruction, developing plans for teaching as well as documenting student progress in small groups, and working with their state standards.

Completers also reported they were well prepared by the BSC Education Department to create safe classroom environments that focused on building relationships with their students. Completers noted that the department prepared them well for creating inclusive environments and that they do not observe these from their colleagues. One common thread in this theme was relationships. Completers noted that the faculty had great relationships with candidates, and not only taught that relationship building was vital but also taught how to build them. Completers linked this to their purposefulness in, and ability to, serve as advocates for their students.

Areas for Improvement (Math Instruction/Parent Communications/Non-Compliant Behaviors):

Completers reported they did not feel well prepared for teaching math. They noted they had not had adequate preparation in content/instruction nor adequate field experience hours. Completers also shared their perceptions that they need more preparation in knowing how to effectively communicate with parents and hold parent conferences. The completers suggested adding opportunities to hold “mock” parent conferences and/or IEP meetings as a way to better prepare candidates for this part of the job. The last area of improvement shared by completers was being better prepared to address non-compliant and “big” behaviors. Completers shared they felt unprepared in having effective strategies to use with a student who refuses to do work and who just says, “no” they will not do something. They reported that they were not prepared for the range of behaviors they often encounter in their classrooms.