



College of Education
CAEP Standard #4
Completer Focus Group Report
Exploring Teacher Perceptions of Bowie State
University's Teacher Preparation Programs and
Impact On Student Learning
October 24, 2020

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Background

Bowie State University's educational preparation program (EPP) specifically related to CAEP Standard #4 conducted a focus group which included participation on a survey to determine the perception of its alumni (also called completers). The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the focus group session assembled virtually Saturday, October 24, 2020 in a 90-minute session. The focus group supported our pursuit for continuous quality improvement relative to our teacher preparation programs. This focus group was originally established prior to March 2020. However, due to COVID-19 our plans were significantly delayed. In addition, the required memorandum of agreements, Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and necessary processes to satisfy confidentiality and other legalities have been very difficult during the uncertain times of this pandemic.

Analysis of Focus Group Data

This focus group was assembled to obtain feedback from our completers about the perception of their preparation programs at Bowie State University, which also included their perceptions on the impact of student performance in Pre-K thru 12th grade settings. The analysis of data from the focus group was completed November 13, 2020. Twelve completers participated in the focus group and completed survey questions. A series of questions were shared with focus group attendees related to their preparedness to teach and impact training the completers received at Bowie State University. Overall completers shared they were prepared for teaching as a result of internship and clinical experiences, action research projects and method courses. Completers also shared additional training, support and preparation for teachers are needed to impact student achievement for exceptional learners and struggling readers.

Method

A random list of completers was invited to participate in the focus group. This included completers who earned bachelor, master's and doctoral degrees. All completers were asked to complete a registration form, agree to participate in the focus group and complete a survey. The focus group was conducted via a ZOOM Session with specific guidelines including a confidentiality clause to facilitate the dialogue. Focus group and survey questions (see Appendix A) were created prior to the ZOOM session. The purpose of the questions was to solicit feedback from completers about aspects of the teacher preparation program.

Results

The findings from both the focus group session and survey results revealed completers across degree levels were satisfied with their specific preparation

program. The following individual response generally summarizes the groups comments about their preparation programs: “Internships, practicums and the courses prepared me to be successful in the fields of education.” A review of the responses from the focus group and survey captured many themes, but four specific ones were captured. four themes.

Relationships and Mentorships

The theme of relationships and mentorships appeared frequently in the group’s responses in both the focus group and survey. Completers from each of the degree groups shared that the support and availability of the professors provided opportunities to collaborate with multiple groups, including students in the cohort, methods teachers, mentor teachers, and supervisors. This was such an established practice, that completers were able to use it in their professional settings with students, families, and colleagues. One response spoke to the importance of “authentic relationships” with students which supported the engagement of student in content learning. Completers also spoke about the importance of field experiences and professional development in providing opportunities to build professional relationships.

Content, Teaching and Learning

Under this theme, the completers highlighted the importance of several areas that positively impacted their work in the field of education. These included content from specific programs, introductory special education programs in which IEP development and Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies were taught. Completers also shared the importance of data driven instruction, kinesthetic learning, inquiry-based strategies, and direct instruction as essential to their work with exceptional learners. However, students described the need for more instructional strategies and methods for differentiating instruction to work with students with severe special needs, struggling readers and ESOL. Specifically, they indicated more in class (as opposed to online) instruction would support their work with these populations.

Diversity and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Completers shared the importance of instructional experiences that encouraged them to be culturally relevant educators, indicating this enhanced their instruction in all content areas. One student stated, “the cultural responsiveness training really opened my eyes to how to best teach my students.” Another student indicated the need in general for more instruction in the area of differentiated instruction as it relates to special needs students, struggling readers, and ESOL students.

Technology

Completers shared instruction on the various technology platforms were essential to their success in general, but specifically integration of technology in the classroom. The utilization of technology in the teacher preparation programs assisted completers with the current situation where distance learning has become the new normal for PreK-12 learners.

Summary/Recommendations

The information obtained from both the focus group and survey clearly indicate completers from the undergraduate through graduate levels believe the teacher preparation programs at BSU prepared them to be successful in their educational settings. Several themes emerged as students shared aspects of these programs that contributed to their success as professional educators. These include relationships and mentorships in all components of their programs; content, teaching and learning strategies, culturally relevant pedagogy, and technology. Students also identified areas where they would like more comprehensive and intentional instruction: strategies for working with struggling readers, special needs and ESOL students.

Appendix A Focus Group Introduction and Questions

Good Morning! Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We will honor your time by making sure that we wrap up in the next 90 minutes. We are asking you to meet with us today to assist us in addressing CAEP Standard #4 Program Impact, which deals with customer satisfaction. This focus group is designed to provide feedback about our teacher preparation program. All we require from this focus group is a dialogue and completion of a survey. All information we collect is confidential as to who provided it. For example, we will not disclose who actually participated in this focus group nor will our final report make any attributions for quotes. We hope this encourages you to speak freely. Our evaluation will result in a written report immediately after our focus group sessions. This report will be included in our CAEP accreditation report due in November 2020. This Group is being recorded, please only use your first name. Any questions before we start?

Ice Breaker Question: Briefly share how this pandemic impacted teaching and learning at your school/educational site.

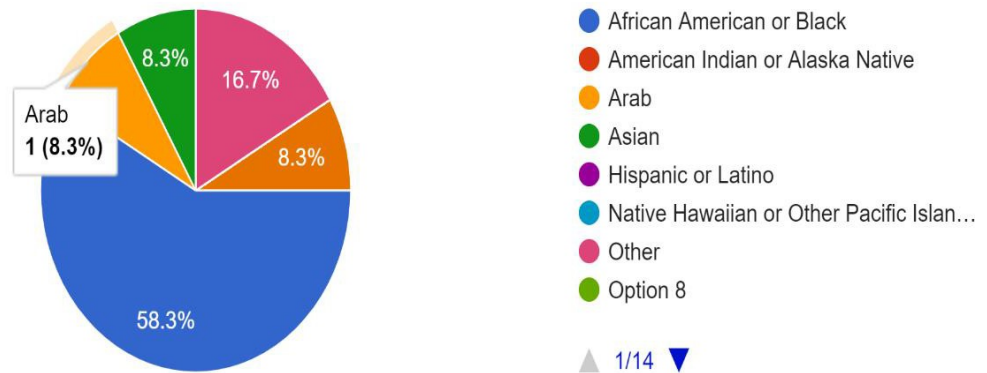
1. How do you perceive your training at Bowie State University (BSU) being related to your teaching or work in the field of education? In particular, which aspects of your teacher education training prepared you to be highly successful?
2. What evidence can you provide about your training at BSU that has made a positive impact on student performance?
3. What aspects of BSU's programs impressed you? What aspects of BSU's programs have you determined as needing to be strengthen-areas include ESL, special needs and poverty-level schools?
4. What formative and summative strategies taught to you at BSU have you found to be effective in assessing student performance?
5. What would you like to know about teaching and learning that you perceived as a missing link in your training at BSU?
6. Reflect on your teacher preparation programs. Describe some specific aspects of the program that made you realize you had made the correct decision to be an educator.
7. To close this discussion please tell us your future goals and aspirations as a professional educator.

Appendix B Survey Questions and Results

1. Share your ethnicity.

Share your ethnicity.

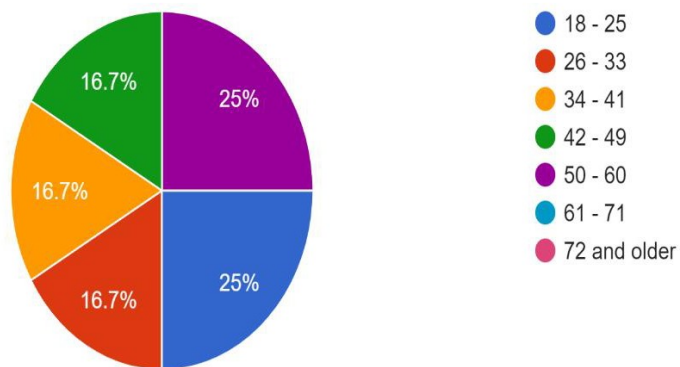
12 responses



2. Share your age range.

Share your age range.

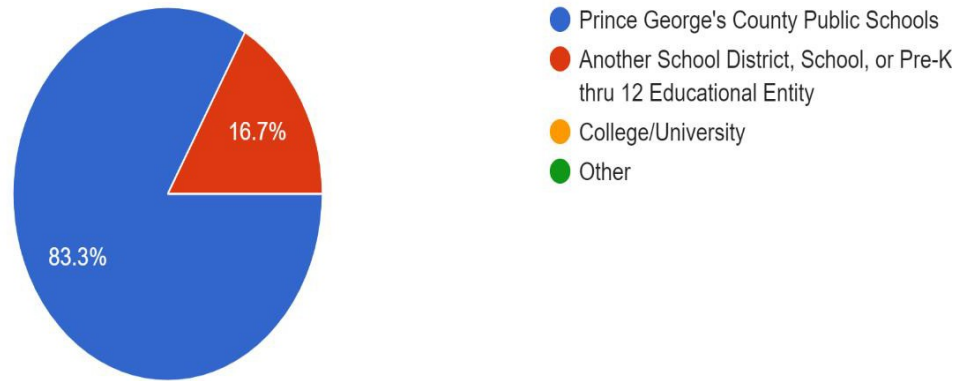
12 responses



3. Where are you employed?

Where are you employed?

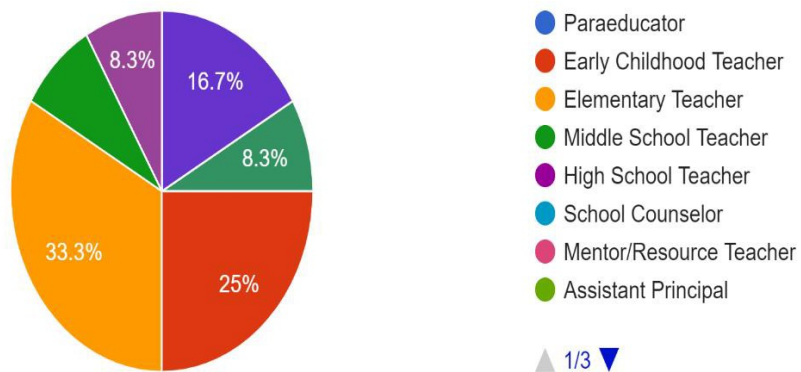
12 responses



4. Which item describes your title/role best?

Which item describes your title/role best?

12 responses



▲ 1/3 ▼

5. Discuss with us where you teach, grade level and subject you teach, how long you have been a full-time K-12 teacher or full-time educator.

- Pre-K educator, PDLT, Md State Accreditation School Lead, Chapel Forge ECC (2 years) Kenmoor ECC (5 years)
- Calverton Elementary/ second grade
- Tulip Grove Elementary, Grades K-5 Special Educator, This is my 3rd year teaching
- Lake Arbor E.S. , kindergarten autism program, math, Rela, science, social studies, and health, this is my first year of teach
- I am a 4 year old Special Education Preschool Teacher at Frances Fuchs Early Childhood Center in Prince Georges County. This is going on my 3rd year as a full-time educator.
- Talbot County Public Schools: Grade 7-8 Mathematics, Algebra I (4 years). PGCPs: 8th Grade Mathematics (1 year). Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: 9th Grade Algebra I & Geometry, (1 year). Assistant Principal (4 years), Principal (4 years), Executive Director/Principal Supervisor (2 years), Director of Learning (1 year), Assistant Superintendent (2 years).
- Glassmanor Elementary, All grade levels less than 1 year
- Bladensburg Elementary School , Special education resource teacher , 3rd and 5th grade, RELA/MATH, Full time
- Maryland Public Schools, 7-8th Grade Mathematics, Algebra I (5 years). Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, 9th grade Algebra I & Geometry (1 year). Assistant Principal (4 years). Principal (4 years). Exec Director/ Principal Supervisor (2 years). Director of Learning (1 year). Assistant Superintendent (2 years). 20 years full-time K-12 educator.
- James McHenry ES (Lanham); Second Grade Science and Social Studies; Full-time since 1991 (minus 1.5 years)
- Thomas Johnson, 6th grade WCGI- Social Studies; 12 years

6. How do you perceive your training at Bowie State University (BSU) being related to your teaching or work in the field of education? In particular, which aspects of your teacher education training prepared you to be highly successful?

- Internship, practicums, and the courses prepared me to be successful in the field of education.
- It has been very beneficial.
- I believe that the elementary education program did a great job of preparing me for teaching and the introductory special education classes.

- The field experience, professional development and support system that the education department provided has equipped us in preparation to provide quality education despite of any given situation.
- All the classes prepared me for teaching. The hands on experience that I was able to participate in I use in my everyday practice.
- Culturally relevant pedagogy, mathematics content knowledge
- The teacher education training I received at BSU prepared me to be a well rounded educator. In particular the IEP and RIT process.
- Not extensive enough
- Bowie State University has prepared me for my career. From making relationships to the conceptual framework. In every class from EDUC 101 to my methods course I have gained information, skills, and processes needed to be an effective teacher. Bowie State University, College of Ed, has also provided me opportunities to grow as a person through making connections with my students, parents, and community, to my professionalism inside and outside the classroom, to understand the importance of being a leader and being the best teacher that I can be so that my students receive the best education possible.
- The professors at Bowie State University, College of Ed, really took me under their wings and showed me what it means to be an effective teacher. Patient, kind, hardworking, enthusiastic, consistent, and so much more!
- Now there are times where I get discouraged in my career field because of the unknown and unique challenges that come my way but I know and I can say that BSU college of ed has helped me develop the vision that I have now.
- The BSU doctoral program strongly prepared me for the role of school leader and central office leadership. The aspects of the program that supported this transition into leadership included specific courses including Urban Education, Human Resources & Human Capital, and Strategic Planning.
- Bowie State University gave me the "new knowledge" about Special Education.
- I went for grad school, my undergrad training at Bowie was Psychology. That has helped me with understanding my students and what they are going through. It helps me to develop a deeper connection with them and it helps me empathize with them.

7. What elements of BSU's teacher education programs were essential to your success as an educator?

- The courses fully encompassed the many roles and knowledge that an educator needs and acquires.
- Learning how to be a culturally responsive educator
- Professor / Student Office Hours, on site work practicum, year long internship
- The support system and resources that were made available for us were essential to our success as educators.
- The field experience and being able to work in classrooms was essential to me. I was able to use what I was learning to work with the students.
- Mathematics content knowledge, student-teaching practicum experiences, culturally relevant instructional learning
- Essential to my success was the platforms that we had to use for presentations. This developed my ability to use the many platforms we currently have to use in distance learning
- Internship
- Relationship building
 - FFT -Special education IEP components
 - Culturally responsive teaching
 - Trauma-informed teaching
 - Technology integrated in the classroom
 - Using data to drive instruction
 - Making connections with home/school/community
 - Learning to read, reading to learn
 - Effective Research
 - Attending off-campus events (teacher awards, conferences, alumni gala's)
 - SOOOOOOOO MUCH MORE
- The most essential component of the doctoral program was the mentorship from professors. While the content was rich in each of the courses, the support from the professors played a tremendous role in my matriculation. The professors stretched my thinking which supported me in transferring the theoretical ideas into practicality in my professional role.
- I really thought that knowing what is going to be expected in the real world was most essential.
- The resources I received from other teachers.

8. Describe how your professional practices (teaching methodologies) improved due to your college of education training?

- My teaching methodologies improved due to constant reflection and growth over the maiming years and two degrees from Bowie State.
- Bowie State was very clear on how an educator is to perform to their best of their abilities.
- Kinesthetic learning, inquiry based learning, game based learning, direct instruction (essential in special education), and student centered learning.
- I learned different teaching strategies through the fieldwork and internship which I am able to apply in my classroom now. Every professor has provided opportunities that allow us to collaborate effectively which also helped me to practice the same with my students, their families, and colleagues.
- It made me think more about what I actually want to do with my career. I am able to use what I learn in my practice. The cultural responsiveness groups that I participated really open my eyes to how I teach my students.
- Building authentic relationships with students which allowed me to engage students in mathematics content learning.
- My practices improved because I moved from basic teacher knowledge to a blend of scientific practice and teacher knowledge.
- I have a better understanding of lesson planning
- I have vision , awareness , and understand the process of effective instruction.
- My professional practices were strengthened due directly to the support received from my professors. Their knowledge directly impacted me in developing a framework for principals and school leaders.
- I believe I can think better "on my feet" when dealing with the needs of my students.
- I have been able to use resources provided by other teachers in my classes.

9. What would you like to know about teaching and learning that you perceived as a missing link in your training at BSU?

- More work with IEPs's strategies, supports and the IEP process.
- Having to teach virtually
- Strategies and methods of differentiated to teach students with special needs, IEP Writing, Deeper look into eligibility assessments. These

- classes tended to be online and I felt as though the content and emphasis on these points were skimmed over or neglected
- I think the missing link that I wish I had more training on is the IEP Writing process
 - Digital/virtual learning, how to engage families/community. Teacher leadership practices.
 - The missing link in my BSU training is teaching reading to ESOL and struggling readers.
 - Special Education!
 - Managing a caseload of (7+ students) verses one student with an IEP
 - I would like to see more emphasis in the program around managing micro/macro politics of a school system. Specifically, how to manage School Boards.
 - I have not noticed anything that is missing yet.
 - N/A

10. Reflect on your teacher preparation programs. Describe some specific aspects of the program that made you realize you had made the correct decision to be an educator.

- The wonderful colleagues (fellow students at Bowie) and professors that I had a joy collaborating and working with.
- I am just glad I chose Bowie State.
- Sociocultural Awareness Relationship building Student impact/progression Community impact
- The education program has instill to all of us that our career is not just a job but also an opportunity to make a difference in the life of the future leaders. It made me realize the weight of the responsibility but also encouraged me to grab this opportunity to also give back to my community somehow.
- I knew I made the right decision when it cam to student teaching and working with the children.
- The phase 1 classes made me prepared and able to see how I can make a difference.
- Receiving direct support from my student-teacher supervisor. Methods courses directly aligning to practical experiences.
- What made realize that I made the correct decision to be an educator was the passion of my professors. Their passion for teaching and learning made me want to be like them.
- When my ESOL students, finally started to understand new concepts.

- It wasn't a decision. This is a calling. This is my purpose.
- When I see a student "get it" or I come up with a "great way" to get knowledge out I know I'm where I'm suppose to be.
- Since I went to Bowie for grad, I am not sure if it helped me realize that this was the correct decision for me. It did show me that dedication is important.