Focus Group Discussions with K-12 Cooperating Teachers in Partnering Schools

Washington Elementary          November 12th, 2014 (15 4-6 grade educators at the meeting)
Barnes County North K-12       November 25th, 2014 (20 K-12 educators at the meeting)
Jefferson Elementary           December 10th, 2014 (30 K-3 educators at the meeting)

Three unit faculty members, who work with field experiences, met with 65 area K-12 educators during staff meetings in the fall of 2014. VCSU faculty members worked with area administrators to coordinate the visits and attended staff meetings at the schools with the intent of gaining insight and continuing dialogue on what area educators feel are strengths and weaknesses of VCSU candidates and field experiences.

The three unit faculty members who met with area educators at the three schools included:
Jackie Owen, Intro to Education and methods course instructor
Kim Knodle, Director of Field Experiences
Daisy Figueroa, methods instructor and lead instructor for diversity and ELL courses

VCSU conducts annual data sharing discussions with K-12 educators and administrators tend to focus on student teachers and first year teachers. This additional type of focus group discussion provides the School of Education with a broad range of comments about working with candidates from the introductory level to mid-level to student teaching.

The list below provides a summary of common themes shared by K-12 educators in the three area schools. These comments are not presented in any order of importance, but are simply based on the notes collected at each of the meetings.

~ Soft skills are very important such as being able to engage and communicate with other professionals and also that it is apparent our teacher candidates will be good teammates. Someone you would want to teach next to or with.
~ Special Education Endorsement is a good thing. Area educators were glad VCSU is offering the endorsement and doing more with special education.
~ Special Education teachers have interest in field experience teacher candidates.
~ The number of candidates being placed is not overburdening teachers with field experience teacher candidates at present levels, the cooperating teachers said they will say no if they don’t feel they can mentor at any given time.
~ Teacher candidates are prepared to begin each level of field experience.
~ Teacher candidates show a willingness to help the instructors and teacher candidates.
~ Teacher candidates are up and active (most common).
~ An educator commented that a teacher candidate sat back and observed (this comment was mentioned but was not a common theme).
~ Teacher candidates are nervous about classroom management.
~ Classroom management skills should be stressed as much as possible.
~ Discussions occurred about how classroom management is a very difficult skill to actually practice when teacher candidates are in someone else’s classroom and how candidates are using a plan already in place.
Teacher candidates are good with technology.
Teacher candidates need to be reliable and make sure they are present when teacher candidates have scheduled to be present.
Teacher candidates should not wait to try to do all of their hours at the end of the available time.
The Education Department’s move to MACs correlates better with these schools.
Six weeks of student teaching is too short for certain areas (Kind, Music, PE).
Greater blocks of time would be beneficial—minimum of 3-4 hours. This would facilitate a better experience with teacher candidates and also would enhance communication opportunities between the VCSU teacher candidates and the instructor.
Develop a practicum for RTI.
It can be hard to have a student teacher.
STEM teacher candidates were praised at BCN for their participation and preparation.
ELL endorsement is needed more and more even locally.
Cooperating teachers felt VCSU evaluation documents and paperwork are improved and easier to use.
Co-teaching workshop has been beneficial
Can teacher candidates split between elementary and secondary during Intro? We have done this when a student is completely undecided, however if they know what they want we tend to place them at that level.