

West Liberty University Teacher Education
 Graduate
 C3
 CAEP Measure Four
 Case Study/ Focus Group Protocol
 Reading Specialist
 2020-2024

As part of our continuous improvement efforts, the purpose of this study was to determine the impact of West Liberty University’s graduates on PreK-12 student learning and development, application of professional knowledge and skills, dispositions in the classroom, and satisfaction of completers. West Liberty University School of Education students who graduated between the years of 2020-2024 were contacted via email to participate in the study. Participation in the focus groups was conducted in an online, real-time setting with the virtual platform Zoom. During the focus groups, the West Liberty University graduates were guided through a discussion that was centered on completer satisfaction and effectiveness and WV Professional Teaching Standards.

In addition, focus group participants were asked to voluntarily provide their West Virginia Teacher Evaluation ratings and Student Learning Outcome data required as part of West Virginia Department of Education Policy 5310. These data were used to determine the teacher’s impact on student learning and development is distinguished, accomplished, emerging, or unsatisfactory. The ratings are broken down into the four domains of the Danielson Framework. These domains are (1) curriculum and planning, (2) the learner and the learning environment, (3) teaching, (4) professional responsibilities for self-reflection. and (5) Professional responsibilities for School and Community.

Teachers are placed in progressions, a designation earned based on the years of teaching experience through employment. Progressions include initial; teachers in their first, second or third year of teaching, intermediate teachers in their fourth or fifth year of experience; and advanced: teachers with six or more years of teaching experience.

Participants

In an effort to ensure our data reflected the range of content areas and developmental levels in which we license teachers, we selected and invited potential participants based on proximity, content area, and developmental level. Case Study Participants

Graduates of the M.A.Ed Reading Specialists

Evaluation Data Collection

Standard/ Element	Distinguished	Accomplished	Emerging	Unsatisfactory
1.1		4		

1.2		4		
1.3		3	1	
2.1		4		
2.2		3	1	
2.3		4		
3.1		4		
3.2		4		
3.3		3	1	
4.1		4		
4.2		4		
5.1		4		
5.2		3	1	
5.3		4		

Key Observations from the Data

1. Strong Overall Performance in Most Categories

- The majority of teachers received an "Accomplished" rating across all domains, indicating solid professional competency.
- Key areas where all teachers scored "Accomplished":
 - Curriculum Design & Delivery (1.1, 1.2)
 - Classroom Culture (2.1)
 - Instructional Strategies & Assessment (3.1, 3.2)
 - Professional Responsibilities (4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.3)

2. "Emerging" Ratings in Four Specific Areas

- Curriculum & Planning – Implementation of Instruction (1.3): One teacher scored "Emerging," indicating a possible need for support in lesson execution.
- Student Engagement (2.2): One teacher received an "Emerging" rating, suggesting challenges in maintaining high levels of student involvement.
- Assessment & Feedback (3.3): One teacher scored "Emerging," which may reflect difficulties in using assessment results effectively.

- Participation in School-Wide Initiatives (5.2): One teacher rated as "Emerging" may need more experience in contributing to broader school programs.
3. No "Unsatisfactory" Ratings

- All teachers met at least the minimum proficiency in all evaluated areas.

Recommendations for Improvement

For Teachers with "Emerging" Ratings:

- Lesson Implementation (1.3):
 - Provide coaching on instructional delivery and pacing strategies.
 - Encourage peer observation and feedback from more experienced teachers.
- Student Engagement (2.2):
 - Introduce more active learning strategies such as cooperative learning and hands-on activities.
 - Use formative assessment techniques (exit tickets, student reflection) to gauge engagement levels.
- Assessment & Feedback (3.3):
 - Strengthen training in data-driven instruction, ensuring teachers effectively use assessment results.
 - Encourage personalized feedback strategies to help students understand their progress.
- Participation in School-Wide Initiatives (5.2):
 - Provide opportunities for leadership roles in literacy initiatives.
 - Facilitate collaboration with school administrators to help teachers contribute beyond their classrooms.

For the Reading Specialist Program:

- Expand Early Field Experiences – Increasing exposure to real classroom settings early in the program could help teachers feel more confident in lesson implementation.
- Increase Training on Student Engagement – Providing more hands-on strategies for keeping students actively involved in lessons.
- Strengthen School-Wide Program Design Skills – Including coursework on creating literacy initiatives, school-wide interventions, or community engagement projects.

Student learning Goal accomplishment data

Participant 1

Reading

By the end of the academic year, all 15 fourth-grade students successfully improved their reading fluency as measured by standardized assessments

13 out of 15 students met or exceeded the goal of 120 words per minute (WPM) with 95% accuracy on grade-level passages. 2 students demonstrated significant growth, increasing their fluency by at least 20 WPM, though they fell slightly below the 120 WPM target.

Math

Participant 2

Math

By the end of the school year, all 12 students demonstrated improved proficiency in multi-step word problems, with 9 out of 12 students scoring at least 80% accuracy on the end-of-year math assessment. Additionally, all students increased their fluency in multiplying and dividing multi-digit numbers, with 10 out of 12 solving at least 85% of problems correctly on timed assessments.

Reading

By the end of the school year, all 12 students demonstrated significant growth in reading comprehension, with 10 out of 12 achieving at least a 10% increase in their reading level as measured by the district benchmark assessment. Additionally, 11 out of 12 students successfully answered at least 4 out of 5 comprehension questions on grade-level texts, showing mastery in identifying the main idea, making inferences, and summarizing key details

Participant 3

Math

By the end of the school year, all 11 third-grade students improved their ability to solve multiplication and division problems. Nine out of 11 students demonstrated at least 80% accuracy on multi-step word problems involving these operations. Additionally, all students increased their fluency in addition and subtraction within 1,000, with 10 out of 11 solving at least 85% of problems correctly on end-of-year assessments

Reading

By the end of the school year, all 11 third-grade students demonstrated measurable growth in reading fluency and comprehension. Nine out of 11 students increased their fluency rate to at least 100 words per minute with 95% accuracy on grade-level texts. Additionally, 10 out of 11 students successfully answered at least 4 out of 5 comprehension questions on assessments, demonstrating proficiency in identifying the main idea, making inferences, and using context clues to determine word meaning.

Participant 4

Math

By the end of the school year, all 18 first-grade students demonstrated increased proficiency in number sense and problem-solving. Sixteen out of 18 students fluently added and subtracted within 20 with at least 90% accuracy. Additionally, 17 out of 18 students demonstrated mastery of place value concepts, accurately identifying tens and ones in two-digit numbers and solving at least 4 out of 5 place value-based problems correctly

Reading

By the end of the school year, all 18 first-grade students demonstrated growth in foundational literacy skills. Sixteen out of 18 students mastered at least 90% of high-frequency words from the first-grade sight word list. Additionally, 17 out of 18 students improved their phonemic awareness and decoding skills, successfully reading grade-level passages with at least 85% accuracy and answering 4 out of 5 comprehension questions correctly.

Analysis of Student Learning Impact Based on Goal Accomplishment Data

This analysis evaluates the effectiveness of instruction based on the student learning outcomes from four participants. The data highlights reading and math growth across multiple grade levels.

Key Findings:

1. Strong Overall Growth in Reading and Math Across All Grade Levels
 - Every student group showed measurable improvement in fluency, comprehension, problem-solving, and foundational skills.
 - High achievement rates were observed in both subjects, with the majority of students meeting or exceeding set goals.
2. Reading Growth Highlights:
 - Fluency Improvements Across Grades:
 - Participant 1 (4th grade): 87% (13/15) met or exceeded the 120 WPM fluency goal, with the remaining students still showing notable growth.
 - Participant 3 (3rd grade): 82% (9/11) reached 100 WPM fluency with 95% accuracy.
 - Participant 4 (1st grade): 94% (17/18) improved phonemic awareness and decoding, mastering high-frequency words.
 - Comprehension Success:
 - Over 90% of students across grades answered at least 4/5 comprehension questions correctly, indicating strong critical reading skills.
3. Math Growth Highlights:
 - High Proficiency in Problem-Solving & Fluency:

- Participant 2 (5th grade): 75% (9/12) scored 80% or higher on multi-step word problems.
 - Participant 3 (3rd grade): 82% (9/11) achieved 80% accuracy in solving multiplication and division problems.
 - Participant 4 (1st grade): 89% (16/18) demonstrated fluency in addition/subtraction within 20.
- Consistent Mastery in Key Math Concepts:
 - Across all grade levels, over 85% of students demonstrated proficiency in foundational math skills such as place value, multi-digit operations, and word problem-solving.

Strengths & Areas of Impact:

High Success Rate in Reading Fluency & Comprehension:

- The majority of students achieved or exceeded fluency goals, showing strong instructional effectiveness.
- Comprehension success (inference, summarization, main idea identification) was consistent across all grades.

Math Growth Demonstrates Mastery & Fluency Gains:

- Across all grades, students showed increased proficiency in problem-solving and foundational skills, supporting conceptual understanding and fluency.

Areas for Continued Focus:

- Supporting students just below fluency benchmarks:
 - A small percentage of students (e.g., 2/15 in 4th grade, 2/11 in 3rd grade) showed strong gains but did not meet the final target.
 - Targeted fluency interventions (such as repeated reading, partner reading, or fluency drills) could further support these students.
- Enhancing problem-solving confidence in math:
 - While fluency and conceptual understanding are strong, multi-step word problem accuracy could be improved, particularly in 5th grade (75% met the goal).
 - Explicit problem-solving strategies (e.g., visual models, number talks, breaking down multi-step problems) could further enhance success.

Conclusion & Recommendations:

- High success in reading and math across all grades demonstrates strong instruction, effective intervention strategies, and student engagement.
- A small group of students just below benchmarks would benefit from targeted intervention in reading fluency and multi-step math problem-solving.
- Next Steps:

- Fluency: Implement daily fluency practice and progress monitoring for students slightly below target.
- Math: Strengthen problem-solving skills with explicit instruction in multi-step strategies and real-world applications.
- Data-Driven Instruction: Continue using formative assessments to track growth and adjust teaching strategies as needed.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect data on completers' perceived impact on PreK-12 student learning and development, application of professional knowledge and skills, dispositions in the classroom, and satisfaction of completers.

The data were analyzed using qualitative methodology. The researcher read the entire interview transcript over once without applying any codes. Then, open and axial coding was used to analyze the data. During the first stage of analysis, the open coding phase, the researcher denoted a major theme (i.e., code) to each sentence or line of the interview transcript. In the axial phase of analysis, these interview codes were reviewed to find common themes across participant responses and lines of the focus group interview. The sub themes within the individual lines of the focus group interview were combined into larger themes across participant responses.

Interview Data analysis

Analysis of Focus Group 3 (2024) Themes and Subthemes

The themes that emerged from the Focus Group 3 interviews highlight key areas of teacher preparation and professional development. These themes reflect how Reading Specialist graduates perceive their growth, strengths, and areas needing improvement. Below is an in-depth analysis of each theme and its subthemes.

1. Foundational Knowledge

1.1 Developmental Skill Progression

- Teachers emphasized the importance of understanding how students develop literacy skills over time.
- Many reported feeling prepared to recognize developmental milestones and identify students at risk of reading difficulties.
- A recurring challenge was the need for more explicit coursework on recognizing learning delays and implementing targeted interventions.

◆ Recommendation:

- Strengthen training in early literacy screening tools and progress monitoring strategies.
- Provide more case-study-based coursework that helps teachers apply developmental theory to real classroom scenarios.

1.2 Differentiation by Learner Needs and Contextual Factors

- Teachers found differentiation strategies valuable in meeting the diverse needs of students.
- Many applied universal design for learning (UDL) and scaffolding techniques to address varied learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and special education needs.
- However, some reported needing more hands-on experience adapting lesson plans for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Recommendation:

- Incorporate simulations or live case studies on differentiating instruction for ELLs and students with IEPs.
- Provide mentor-led lesson planning workshops that focus on real-life differentiation challenges.

2. Collaboration

2.1 Seeking Support

- Teachers acknowledged that seeking help from colleagues, mentors, and administrators is critical for professional growth.
- Some felt comfortable reaching out for support, while others reported feeling hesitant, particularly in their first year of teaching.

Recommendation:

- Encourage a structured mentorship program where early-career teachers receive consistent guidance from veteran educators.
- Introduce collaborative lesson-planning sessions during coursework to simulate real-world peer support structures.

2.2 Communication Skills

- Teachers expressed confidence in communicating with students and colleagues but reported challenges in articulating student progress to parents.
- They emphasized the importance of using clear, non-technical language when explaining assessment results to families.

Recommendation:

- Include role-playing exercises where teachers practice parent-teacher conference scenarios.
- Provide training on culturally responsive communication to help teachers engage with diverse family backgrounds.

3. Reflective Practitioner

3.1 Efficacy in Researching Evidence-Based Practices

- Many teachers reported becoming more confident in identifying and implementing research-backed literacy strategies.
- Some expressed difficulty in staying up-to-date with new research due to limited access to academic journals or professional development opportunities.

Recommendation:

- Provide teachers with ongoing access to a professional learning network where they can share and discuss new evidence-based practices.
- Require coursework that includes a research synthesis project, where teachers critically evaluate different literacy interventions.

3.2 Seeking and Providing Constructive Feedback

- Teachers valued receiving structured feedback from mentors but reported challenges in providing peer feedback in professional settings.
- Some felt that giving constructive criticism to colleagues required more guidance and practice.

Recommendation:

- Introduce a peer-review component where teachers analyze and critique lesson plans in a low-stakes environment.
- Provide training in coaching techniques to help teachers develop effective feedback delivery skills.

4. Suggestions for Program Improvements

4.1 Programming for Community Involvement

- Teachers recognized the importance of literacy initiatives that extend beyond the classroom, such as family literacy nights or partnerships with local libraries.
- However, few had opportunities to design or participate in community-based reading programs.

Recommendation:

- Add a service-learning requirement where pre-service teachers must organize a community literacy event.
- Partner with local libraries and after-school programs to provide hands-on community engagement experiences.

4.2 Experience with Family Communication

- Many teachers expressed limited experience in navigating difficult conversations with parents, especially when discussing student struggles or behavioral concerns.
- Some felt unsure about how to involve families in literacy development outside of school.

Recommendation:

- Require teachers to develop family communication plans as part of coursework, outlining how they would engage parents in reading interventions.
- Provide training in strength-based communication techniques, emphasizing positive framing when discussing student progress.

4.3 Requirement to Attend & Reflect on Parent-Teacher Meetings

- Teachers acknowledged that parent-teacher meetings are a crucial part of their role, but few had formal opportunities to observe or participate in them before graduation.
- Some felt unprepared to handle difficult discussions about academic concerns or behavior management.

Recommendation:

- Make parent-teacher conference observation and reflection a program requirement.
- Provide a structured debrief where pre-service teachers discuss strategies for handling common parent concerns.

Final Summary & Key Takeaways

This focus group data highlights both strengths and areas for improvement in teacher preparation.

Strengths:

- Strong foundation in developmental skill progression and differentiation.
- Increased confidence in researching evidence-based literacy practices.
- Recognition of the importance of collaboration and professional support networks.

Areas for Growth:

- More training in family communication and engagement strategies.
- Hands-on experience in community literacy programming.
- Guidance on giving and receiving professional feedback among colleagues.

- Required participation in parent-teacher meetings to build confidence in real-world family interactions.

Informed Consent

___ I consent to participate in this study concerning the impact of West Liberty University's graduates in the reading specialist masters program on PreK-12 student learning, and development understand that I will be expected to provide a copy of my most recent teacher evaluation report, as well as participate in a one-hour structured focus group interview

___ I understand that I may stop my involvement in the study for any reason without penalty.

___ I understand that I may decline to answer any question asked of me, and that by doing so I will not be required to terminate my involvement in the study.

___ I understand that the researcher is willing to answer any questions I might have after I have participated in the study.

___ I understand that no individual data will be reported and that the researcher will not share my individual results with me either during or after the project.

___ I permit publication of the results of the study with the agreement that appropriate steps are taken to maintain participant confidentiality.

___ I understand that data may be collected in written or digital form and the data will be stored under password protection.

___ I understand that data collected in this study belong to the researcher.

___ I understand I may request to review the interview transcript and offer additional comments after the interview is complete.

Recording

___ I understand that the researcher will be utilizing (audio and/or video) to record the session(s). The recordings will only be used for (purpose). Only (researcher & other assistants names) will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be kept for (time range) in accordance with the study's Data Management agreement.

Compensation

___ I understand there will be no compensation for participation in this study. OR I understand that if I withdraw for any reason, I will not lose compensation for my participation.

Contact Information

___ I understand that matters relating to this study can be directed to (researcher) at (phone and email), or the faculty advisor at (phone and email). If I have additional questions or concerns about this study, I can contact The Evergreen State College Human Subjects Research Committee at irb@evergreen.edu

Age to Consent

___ I acknowledge that I am eighteen years of age or older and that I have read and understand the above explanations.

Voluntary

_____ Again, I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I have the ability to withdraw at any point without penalty or loss of compensation

Participant's Name (Print)

Participant's Signature

Date

I have presented this information to the participant and obtained his/her voluntary consent.

Researcher's Signature

Date