

RESEARCH

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Brief

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Missouri State University Internship Academy Graduate Follow-up Study

“Learning to teach in isolation does not effectively prepare teacher candidates, nor does it benefit P-12 students” (Heck, 2013, para. 2). Perhaps this is why some have characterized teacher education as focused heavily on theory while making little connection to the practice of teaching and learning. According to Stricker, Shaleen, Hubbard, Digiovanni and Lim (2014), “teacher education has the urgent responsibility of transforming its curriculum pedagogy, structure and delivery” (p. 40). The concept behind the Missouri State University (MSU) Internship Academy (IA) was intended to address the need for improvements to the clinical / student teaching experience. The IA approach provides pre-service teachers an authentic year-long field experience in a single school setting that replaces the traditional student teaching approach. Interns interview with participating school district administrators and matched with a Master Teacher who serves as both a mentor and coach throughout the academic year. Interns engage in co-teaching alongside the Master Teacher throughout the academic school year as opposed to observing for few weeks then teaching for a few week as has been the model in the traditional approach. In growing the novice pre-service teacher over the course of a school year, the IA hopes to provide the interns with an authentic, real-world “teaching” experience. Through collaboration with partner school districts, university coursework that had previously been delivered through a traditional “on campus” model (e.g. instructional technology, curriculum development, assessment methods, etc.) is now embedded into the day-to-day work of the classroom so that the Master Teacher can assist the Intern in making the connection between theory and practice.

Another difference between the traditional student teaching model and the Internship Academy is the identification of a Teacher in Residence who is a partner school district employee (in most cases a practicing teacher) who serves as the university per-course faculty supervisor ensuring that each Intern meets the requirements for certification. Connections with on-campus university faculty are still an important component of the Internship Academy; however, the university faculty liaisons work directly with public school educators (Teachers in Residence and Master Teachers) to ensure that Interns are meeting standards set forth by the university and the state. Replacing the traditional approach to practicum and student teaching with one that provides a yearlong experience for the pre-service teachers that matters and benefits both the interns and the partner districts.

“Teacher education has the urgent responsibility of transforming its curriculum pedagogy, structure and delivery.”

Stricker, Shaleen, Hubbard, Digiovanni and Lim (2014)

During the spring 2015, a group of local school district stakeholders and university administrators began the development of an internship academy to replace the traditional student-teaching model in elementary education programs. In its inaugural year, 25 university students were placed in three area school districts for a “year-long” co-teaching experience. Over the next several years, additional school districts requested participation and the program grew to include both elementary and early childhood interns working in school districts across the state. To date, more than 150 graduates of the MSU Internship Academy are working in Missouri school districts (Cohorts 2015-2016 through 2019-2020). Yet, the question of how effective this approach has been must be addressed. Does a year-long internship better prepare teacher education graduates for day one in the classroom?

“I loved my year-long student teaching experience with the Internship Academy! I do feel like I was a bit more prepared than an average first year teacher. I knew how to build routines, establish procedures, collaborate with colleagues, and build student relationships because I had already been doing it for a year. I am always proud to talk about this program whenever I am asked about my college or student teaching experience. I am proud to say I was part of this program its very first year.” – Internship Academy Graduate

In its inaugural year (2015-2016), the Internship Academy partnered with three Springfield area school districts to place 25 Elementary interns. The following year, in 2016-2017, 29 Elementary interns were accepted to the program. For that reason, a new partnership was formed with another area school. During the third year of the program, 2017-2018, an additional certification area, Early Childhood Education, was added to the Internship Academy and again, another school joined the stakeholder group. In total, 26 interns were accepted into the program for its third year.

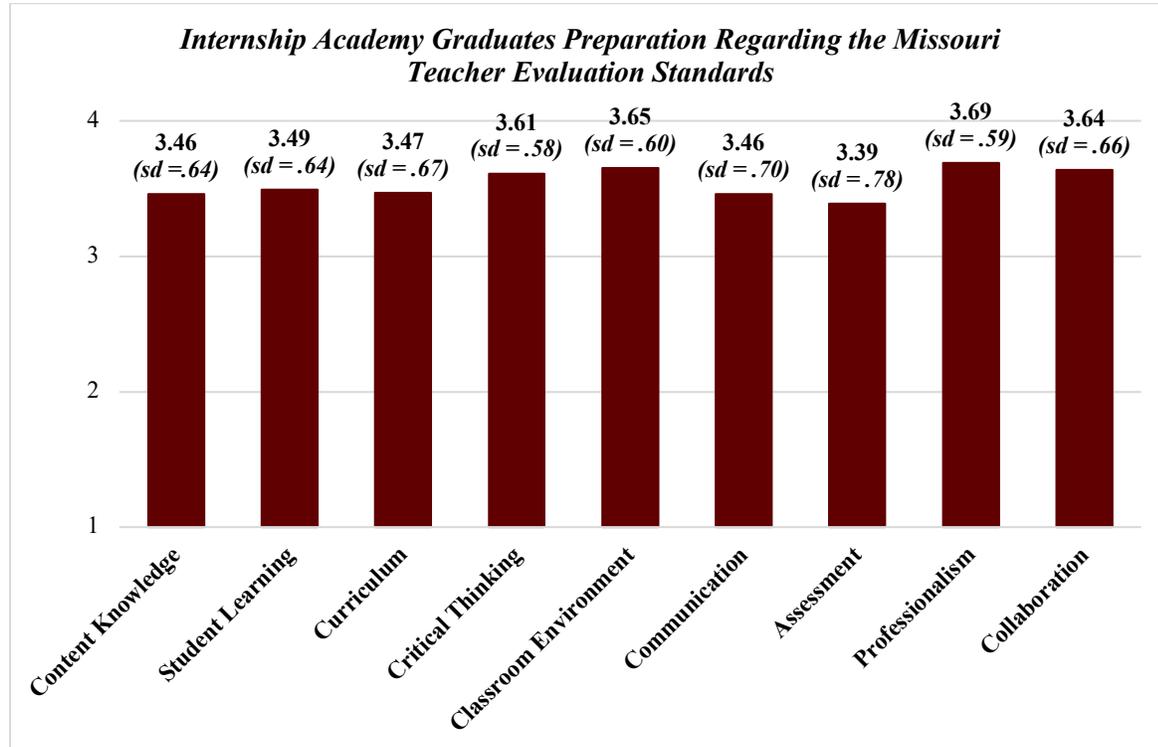
During the first three years of the program’s implementation, all partner schools/districts were in the area immediately surrounding the university in southwest Missouri. However, the need to increase district participation came during the the fourth year the program (2018-2019) when there was a significant increase in IA participants (n = 51). As a result, an additional southwest Missouri school district joined the partnership. There was also an emerging need noted to find placements for interns in areas outside of southwest Missouri. Two districts in the St. Louis region partnered with MSU that year to host eleven additional interns. This was the first year the program operated in two regions of the state.

	<i>Interns</i>	<i>Districts</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Certification</i>
2015-2016	25	3	7	Elementary 1-6
2016-2017	29	4	8	Elementary 1-6
2017-2018	26	4	8	Elementary 1-6 Early Childhood
2018-2019	51	7	12	Elementary 1-6 Early Childhood
2019-2020	37	7	12	Elementary 1-6 Early Childhood
2020-2021	58	9	16	Elementary 1-6 Early Childhood

Today, a total of 168 MSU IA students have graduated from the program. Of these graduates, 91% are currently teaching in a Missouri classroom. As the Internship Academy has grown over the years, so has the desire to capture data that examines the degree to which students experiencing a year-long approach are prepared upon entering the classroom on day one as well as the degree to which these students are impacting student learning. Are IA graduates really “learner ready day one?” That is the question the research team continues to pursue.

What Do Graduates Say about Their Preparation?

Following the spring 2020 statewide shut-down due to COVID-19, graduates of the IA were surveyed to determine their perspective on the level of preparedness they felt for teaching. In total, 133 graduates of the IA program received a request to complete the survey questionnaire. Fifty-seven IA graduates and current classroom teachers responded to the survey (response rate of: 43%). Teachers are currently within their 1st to 5th year of teaching. On average, respondents have been teaching a total of 1.5 years. Overall, graduates of the IA graduate respondents believe they were adequately to extensively prepared for their first year of teaching (M = 3.70, sd = .50). In addition, IA graduates rated their level of preparation in relationship to the nine standards and quality indicators that comprise the Missouri Teacher Evaluation Standards. Across the nine standards, IA graduates felt most prepared in the areas of professional practice or “Professionalism” (M = 3.69, sd = .59) and creating a positive “Classroom Environment” (M = 3.65, sd = .60). However, the area rated lowest among respondents is standard #7 “Use of Student Assessment Data to Analyze and Modify Instruction” (M = 3.39, sd = .78). The tables that follow provide the mean score and standard deviation for each of the indicators associated with the nine teacher standards.



(Scale: 1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively)

Standard #1. Content Knowledge and Perspectives Aligned with Appropriate Instruction

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S1.QI-1: Content Knowledge and Academic Language	3.45	(0.54)
S1.QI-2: Engaging Students in Subject Matter	3.64	(0.65)
S1.QI-3: Disciplinary Research and Inquiry Methods	3.43	(0.60)
S1.QI-4: Interdisciplinary Instruction	3.57	(0.57)
S1.QI-5: Diverse Social and Cultural Perspectives	3.20	(0.83)
Overall	3.46	(0.64)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #2. Understanding and Encouraging Student Learning Growth and Development

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S2.QI-1: Cognitive, Social, Emotional, and Physical Development	3.62	(0.53)
S2.QI-2: Student Goals	3.54	(0.71)
S2.QI-3: Theory of Learning	3.27	(0.68)
S2.QI-4: Meeting the Needs of Every Student	3.54	(0.64)
S2.QI-5: Prior Experiences, Learning Styles/ Intelligences, Strengths and Needs	3.56	(0.57)
S2.QI-6: Language, Culture, Family and Knowledge of Community Values	3.42	(0.71)
Overall	3.49	(0.64)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #3. Implementing the Curriculum

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S3.QI-1: Implementation of Curriculum Standards	3.64	(0.56)
S3.QI-2: Develop Lessons for Diverse Learners	3.25	(0.81)
S3.QI-3: Analyze Instructional Goals and Differentiated Instructional Strategies	3.53	(0.64)
Overall	3.47	(0.67)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #4. Teaching for Critical Thinking

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S4.QI-1: Instructional Strategies leading to Student Engagement in Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking	3.55	(0.57)
S4.QI-2: Appropriate use of Instructional Resources to Enhance Student Learning	3.53	(0.64)
S4.QI-3: Cooperative Learning	3.75	(0.52)
Overall	3.61	(0.58)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #5. Creating a Positive Classroom Learning Environment

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S5.QI-1: Classroom Management, Motivation, and Engagement	3.60	(0.66)
S5.QI-2: Managing Time, Space, Transitions, and Activities	3.60	(0.60)
S5.QI-3: Classroom, School and Community Culture	3.74	(0.52)
Overall	3.65	(0.60)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #6. Utilizing Effective Communication

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S6.QI-1: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication	3.63	(0.60)
S6.QI-2: Sensitivity to Culture, Gender, Intellectual and Physical Differences	3.42	(0.75)
S6.QI3: Learner Expression in Speaking, Writing and other Media	3.40	(0.67)
S6.QI-4: Technology and Media Communication Tools	3.37	(0.79)
Overall	3.46	(0.70)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #7. Use of Student Assessment Data to Analyze and Modify Instruction

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S7.QI-1: Effective Use of Assessments	3.43	(0.78)
S7.QI-2: Assessment Data to Improve Learning	3.44	(0.78)
S7.QI3: Student-led Assessment Strategies	3.00	(0.89)
S7.QI-4: Effect of Instruction on Individual/Class Learning	3.52	(0.73)
S7.QI-5: Communication of Student Progress and Maintaining Records	3.50	(0.73)
S7.QI-6: Collaborative Data Analysis Process	3.43	(0.81)
Overall	3.39	(0.78)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #8. Professional Practice

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S8.QI-1: Self-Assessment and Improvement	3.71	(0.61)
S8.QI-2: Professional Learning	3.69	(0.58)
S8.QI-3: Professional Rights, Responsibilities and Ethical Practices	3.65	(0.59)
Overall	3.69	(0.59)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

Standard #9. Professional Collaboration

(n = 57)	\bar{X}	σ
S9.QI-1: Roles, Responsibilities and Collegial Activities	3.52	(0.71)
S9.QI-2: Collaborating with Historical, Cultural, Political and Social Context to Meet the Needs of Students	3.73	(0.60)
S9.QI-3: Cooperative Partnerships in Support of Student Learning	3.65	(0.68)
Overall	3.64	(0.66)

1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Adequately, 4 = Extensively

One intern had the following to say about her preparation in the Internship Academy: The fact that the internship is year-long is one of the biggest strengths of the program. There is no way I could have gotten a better experience student teaching if I had taken any other path. Another strength is that the internship approach provides authentic learning experiences because every day is both a learning experience and a time to apply previous learning. I've always believed that I feel more confident and learn more when I can actually be hands-on in a classroom, and this experience proved that further. It also gives the interns time to build strong relationships with students and embed themselves in school community and culture. This was what I feel made my year so successful; I am amazed at how close I feel with the staff and students at my placement school. The internship approach makes for great networking opportunities and really gives the full school experience in terms of all of the goings-on (data meetings, different job roles, planning, issues in education and school politics, etc.). It opened my mind up to the many possibilities that education has in terms of different jobs, committees, professional development opportunities, etc. I also think it gives the interns involved an immediate team of support through seminars and working together in the same buildings or districts. I loved getting to hear about their experiences and learn from them. The Internship Academy gives interns a chance to figure out who they are or who they *may be* as a teacher in terms of management and philosophy. It even helps them determine who they are *not* as a teacher, which I believe is just as powerful. This program has been hands-down my best college experience.

“I felt very prepared for the workload that comes with teaching.”
 – Internship Academy Graduate

What Do Teachers in Residence and Master Teachers Say about the IA?

At the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year, focus group interviews were conducted with Master Teachers and Teachers in Residence for the Internship Academy. Participants of the focus group interviews included eleven Master Teachers and Teachers in Residence from the St. Louis and Springfield Regions who supported early childhood and elementary interns during the 2019-2020 school year. From the focus group interviews, themes emerged in the strengths and challenges of the Internship Academy.

Teachers in Residence and Master Teachers indicated the experience interns gained by participating for an entire school year as one of the primary strengths of the Internship Academy. Specifically, the focus groups referenced interns participated in activities before the school year began, such as new teacher orientation and professional development which helped establish interns as a welcome part of the school community. In addition, interns engaged in beginning of the year assessments and saw how data was used to identify needs

“By being in the classroom the entire year, even before the school year starts, interns are able to see all aspects of being a teacher...”
 – Internship Master Teacher

and plan instruction for students. Continuing this, interns saw the cyclical process over time of assessing and analyzing data to make decisions regarding differentiated instruction. Being in the school an entire year also gave interns opportunities to experience even small aspects of being a teacher which could be missed if less time was spent in the placement. One participant said, “By being in the classroom the entire year, even before the school year starts, interns are able to see all aspects of being a teacher. They see that what works sometimes doesn’t always work all of the time. They see that teachers must keep reinforcing throughout the year. Students in the classroom for a semester do not always get to see that.”

Top Program Strengths

	<i>Frequency of Theme Appearance Focus Group Interviews</i>
Experiencing the entire year	17
Co-Teaching model	16
Relationships	15
Additional time to grow as a pre-service teacher	10
Quality of preparation	10

The implementation of the co-teaching model also emerged as a strength of the Internship Academy. Focus group participants voiced that this served as a win-win for the intern and students in the classroom as interns grew as teachers while students had increased instructional minutes. Having two teachers allowed for two perspectives when planning and for the co-teachers to build on the strengths of each other. This also allowed two targeted lessons to be taught simultaneously. Participants indicated students recognized the interns were invested as co-teachers in the classroom for the entire year, which had a positive result in regards to classroom management. One focus group participant said, “The co-teaching method was a strength. It was not just my turn, then your turn. We learned from each other, and we were able to conduct extra small groups in reading and math. We were able to have two small group lessons at the same time. Students benefitted from having two teachers.” Another participant said, “When we planned as co-teachers, we got two different perspectives. My intern had strengths that were different from mine, so my intern lead in those areas.”

A third strength that emerged for participants of the Internship Academy was the opportunity to build relationships. Specifically, participants mentioned relationships with the students and their families. This affected instruction, the classroom community, and classroom management. One participant noted she saw her intern build good relationships with students’ families by first building strong relationships with the students. Focus group participants also stated that interns were able to build relationships with colleagues in the building which benefitted them as they were planning lessons and interventions for their students. They had a team of support around them. Another level of relationship that emerged as a benefit for the Internship Academy is the cohort of interns placed in a building or district. These interns were experiencing similar things through the Internship Academy and were able to be a support system for each other.

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– Internship Master Teacher

The quality of preparation and additional time to grow as a pre-service teacher emerged as the next two strengths for the IA. Participants indicated they noticed their interns were confident at the end of the year. Some interns needed more time to grow, and the Internship Academy allowed them that opportunity. Participants specified that interns were well prepared to step into their own classroom and begin teaching. They highlighted the interns’ experience with collaborative lesson planning as a strong experience. “They get to be part of a team and plan with other teachers. They see how ideas are formed, where teachers get information, and how to research instructional needs.” Participants also noted the regular Seminars interns attend at least monthly helped interns improve their teaching with inquiry-based instruction and higher order thinking skills.

Top Program Challenges

	<i>Frequency of Theme Appearance Focus Group Interviews</i>
Financial strain for interns	4
Balancing/transition from college student to professional	4
Persistence in a hard field	4

Focus group participants identified several challenges of participating in the Internship Academy. The top three challenges identified were challenges specifically for the interns. Financial strain and balancing part-time work on top of the IA was one of the top challenges. Interns had the schedule of a teacher. They were at school before it began and stayed after to prepare for the next day. They had lessons to prepare and assessments to evaluate. However, they were not paid as a teacher is paid. Many interns had to work part-time jobs outside of the Internship Academy, and this could be overwhelming and exhausting for interns. One participant said, “It is hard not to get paid. We found ways to pay a bit through subbing and extracurricular activities to help with that, but it’s a challenge. When interns have to juggle the IA with outside work, it is stressful.”

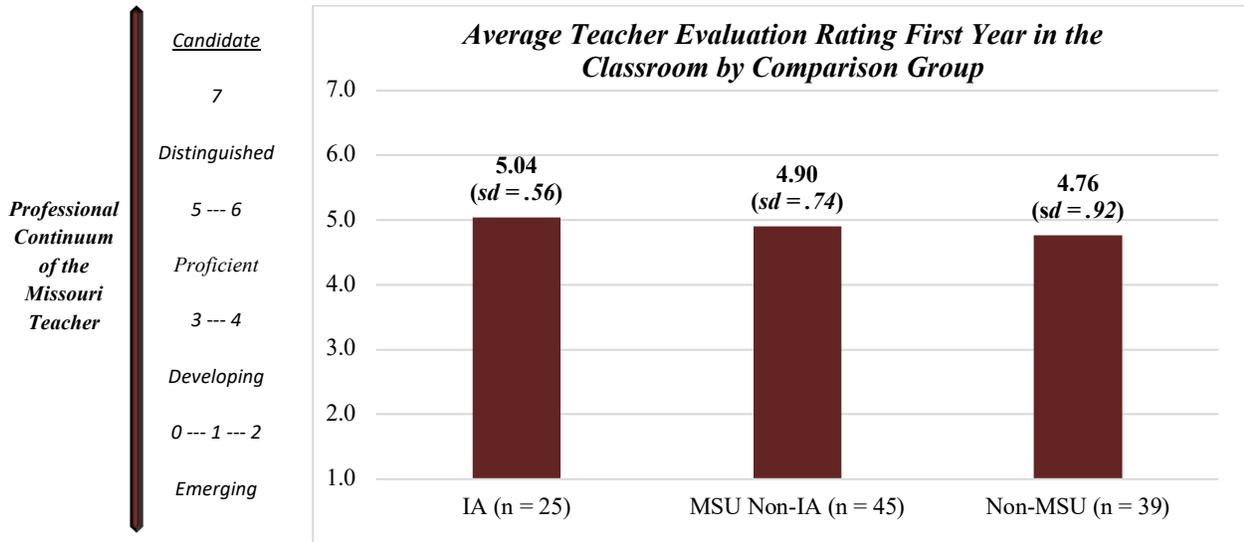
Another challenge participants noted for interns was balancing life as a college student with life as a professional. In many ways, interns were expected to be professionals. The transition into the professional world could be tricky as the expectations for a university student are different than those for a teacher. Missing a deadline as a college student could result in a reduced grade, but missing a deadline as a teacher could result in not having a lesson to teach your class. Interns were expect to maintain the professionalism of a teacher throughout their co-teaching placement at their school; however, the fall semester coursework required interns to continue to complete assignments and take an online course. This was a difficult balance for some students to maintain, especially if they also worked part-time.

“It can be very hard transitioning from college classes to basically a full-time teaching job. It was very hard to learn that academic/personal balance in the beginning.” – Internship Academy Graduate

The third challenge focus groups indicated for interns was persistence. Interns committed to a longer placement in a classroom than their on-campus peers. Not only did they spend additional hours in the classroom, this extended over additional months. Focus group participants indicated some interns had trouble persisting over time or when faced with the reality of how hard teaching can be. One focus group participant said, “Teaching changes rapidly. It’s more work every year. Interns come in with a grand idea of what teaching is. Then, they have a shock of how much work is required outside of the day to be prepared for tomorrow.”

What Do Administrators Say about First Year Performance of IA Graduates?

As reported in a previous study (Schmitt & Kleinsmith, 2018), teachers entering their first year of teaching tend to be scored by principals within the “Developing” to “Proficient” category according to the state’s evaluation system. Teachers who were prepared by the MSU Internship Academy (n = 25) tended to score higher than their MSU peers who followed a more traditional path (n = 45), and they scored higher than non-MSU (n = 39) graduates did. [MSU-IA = 5.04 (.57); MSU Non-IA = 4.90 (.74); Non-MSU = 4.76 (.92)]. While these differences were not found to be significant ($F_{(2,104)} = .955, p > .05$), increasing the sample by continuing to add to these data is recommended.



Principals from Internship Academy partner schools were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the Internship Academy. One principal said, “Interns have the opportunity to see how classrooms are set up and operated from the beginning to the end of the year. They build lasting relationships with the students/families they serve and staff they work with. It provides the interns with value experiences and the opportunities to plan with professional educators. Interns are better able to collaborate with other key players in the building, such as special education and reading teachers, to help meet the needs of students and also to gain additional professional development.” Another principal said, “The ongoing relationships we build with the interns and their connections to staff, students, and our families are a strength of the Internship Academy. We view the interns as an extension of our staff. I love to see the progression of learning the interns get to be a part of each year. The best part of the internship is the team teaching aspect. Our students benefit from two educators in the room all year.”

Multiple principals discussed the importance of the informed placements of the IA and ensuring the right intern is placed with the right Master Teacher. Each principal participated in the placement process by reviewing application and interview information for each candidate as well as interviewing each candidate. These principals then provided input into placements for their school. One principal indicated, “The key is to match the personalities of the Intern with the Master Teacher. It is important they bond and work well together. The Intern must be coachable and the Master Teacher must be skilled in coaching.” Another principal stated, “One challenge is addressing and mentoring intern/master teacher relationships. If it is not a great fit, it is difficult.”

Repeatedly, principals voiced appreciation for the partnership with Missouri State University through the Internship Academy. One principal said, “Thank you MSU for providing this program; it truly prepares the interns for being strong educators their first year of teaching.” Another stated, “It has been a great

partnership with interns and the university. It is great to see the growth of the interns and have them become part of our school family.”

What Are Areas for Improvement and Growth?

Through focus group and personal interviews, principals, Teachers in Residence, and Master Teachers were asked to consider areas for improvement and growth for the Internship Academy. Many participants indicated the Stakeholder Team actively informs decisions and guides the Internship Academy which allows for regular input into improving the IA. The system for two-way communication is effective which reduces the need for significant improvements at the end of a year. One participant said, “As the program has developed through the years, we have had input and made adjustments regularly through the Stakeholder Team meetings. We have a continuous process of communication with stakeholder input. By meeting regularly and hearing from all stakeholders, we improve as we go.”

However, there is always room to improve, and the group did generate ideas. Participants voiced that expanding the program into middle and high school is an area for growth. It was also suggested to add an opportunity for interns and Master Teachers to get to know each other before beginning back to school preparations in August. “In the beginning of the year, we are thrust into, *nice to meet you, now let’s start working*. Perhaps add a get to know you time.”

One area for improvement is regarding the preparation of interns prior to beginning the Internship Academy. Participants noted that from year to year, the preparation interns receive is inconsistent in regards to Project Based Learning, cooperative learning structures, and inquiry based instruction. Participants noted interns could also benefit from preparation using assessment data to differentiate instruction.

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