Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions

1.2 Moving Toward Target or Continuous Improvement

1.2.b Continuous Improvement [10,000 characters]

- Summarize activities and changes based on data that have led to continuous improvement of candidate performance and program quality.
- Discuss plans for sustaining and enhancing performance through continuous improvement as articulated in this standard.

Changes implemented to overall education program:

Each element of the Teacher Work Sample (TWS) is aligned to the Missouri Standards for the Preparation of Educators (ex. 1.4.c.13 Teacher Standard Continuum). To ensure that each candidate receives quality, developmentally appropriate instruction, activities associated with the elements are embedded throughout a candidate’s program (ex. 1.4.c.3 Elementary and 1.4.c.10 Secondary Prof. Ed. Alignment). Identified as key assessment points within specific courses, each element is scored with the same rubric used to score the full TWS, thereby allowing us to monitor candidates’ growth throughout the program. Each candidate is scored two or three times on each element of the TWS, culminating with the TWS assessment submitted during the student teaching period. Early data from this process indicates that candidates for secondary certification struggled with the elements associated with in-class assessments and analyzing student learning. These findings lead the PEU to embed these elements into secondary content methods courses to aid candidates in tying assessment plans and strategies to specific content areas. Since taking this action we have noticed an increase in scores in these elements within the group.

Another change to the education program came when we altered the way dispositions are assessed. While previously using a faculty developed instrument based upon the MoSTEP standards, research lead us to identify and adopt a new instrument and a process to ensure that candidates’ dispositions are assessed multiple times at key transition points throughout the program. Transition points have been identified for both initial and advanced programs (ex. 1.4.c.4 Graduate and 1.4.c.16 Undergraduate Assessment Flowchart by Transition Point).

In 2010, the state of Missouri expanded content requirements in special education modules to include instruction on autism and other spectrum disorders. To accommodate these new requirements Northwest’s PEU increased the Introduction to Special Education class, taken by all elementary, middle and secondary candidates, from a 2-hour to a 3-hour course.

Beginning with the incoming freshman class of 2013, teacher candidates, upon completion of the program, are required to have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.75 and minimum GPAs of 3.0 in all coursework associated with both content areas and professional education requirements. Existing university policy allows students to supersede grades of “D” or “F”, however it was determined students would need the opportunity to retake courses in which they received a grade of “C” or below. After a faculty-wide discussion, Northwest implemented a new policy—supersede courses with earned grades of “C” or below—which more closely matches that of other universities in the state.
A unit-wide effort to monitor data and make changes based on analysis of that information is facilitated by a person who now holds the newly created role of Assessment Coordinator. This individual oversees operations of the PEU’s recently initiated data management system to collect and store information across all professional education programs. Data collected at specific transition points for initial and advanced programs have been identified and a timeline for reviewing the data has been created to insure systematic evaluation and timely reports of findings to program coordinators (ex. 1.4.c.4 Graduate and 1.4.c.16 Undergraduate Assessment Flowchart by Transition Point, and 1.4.c.2 ASET Review Cycle Calendar).

**Changes implemented in the Elementary Program**

Changes to the Horace Mann Laboratory School and early childhood education centers have created better learning environments for children and teacher candidates by moving the early childhood center out of a basement space and into a more open area. Moreover, the University created a café space where PreK-6 students can now share lunch together in the same building where they attend school. Across campus, technology and access to technology have been steadily improving, bringing a greater focus on technology into classes designed for education majors. As such, education curriculums now offer instruction to candidates about best practices for use of technology to increase student learning rather than simply spurring more active levels of student engagement.

**Changes implemented in the Secondary Program**

By creating a Secondary Education Coordinating Committee, Northwest has facilitated better communication and collaboration between and among faculty involved in secondary education programs. This helped ensure the smooth implementation of a revised secondary program as described below:

Based on feedback from the Beginning Teacher Assessment Program surveys, Northwest revised the classroom management instruction the teacher candidates were receiving. Previously strategies were taught as components of various courses rather than in a specific course as is currently required. Additionally, candidates are now required to enroll in a 1-hour Classroom Management Seminar course concurrently while student teaching, thereby allowing them to reflect more directly on their experiences with faculty and peers in order to develop their own classroom management methods and philosophies.

When the secondary education program was revised the PEU determined it vital to also provide more cohesive and extensive field experiences for secondary teacher candidates. While elementary candidates receive extensive quality field experiences at the Horace Mann Laboratory School similar opportunities were not available for secondary candidates. Hence, each secondary program was redesigned to allow candidates to take a block of courses (Practicum II, Classroom Management, School and Society, and the appropriate content methods course) concurrently during the semester prior to student teaching and, as part of Practicum II, the candidates participate in a week-long field experience where they shadow one teacher in one classroom for an entire school day each day for one week. This redesigned field experience allows candidates opportunities to teach a series of lessons. These field experiences are monitored by University faculty, allowing more direct feedback than was possible in the previous model. University faculty also build relationships in schools to ensure proper placement.
of future practicum and student teachers.

**Changes implemented in the Advanced Programs**

Feedback from surveys given to recent graduates of Master’s and Specialists programs highlighted areas for improvement. In order to be eligible for financial aid, students needed to be able to take more credit hours concurrently. Research also emphasized the need to increase candidates’ clinical field experiences. To address these issues, we revised how the coursework was offered. A traditional 3-hour course involves 45 hours of face-to-face time involving 3 hours one night a week for the semester. Because full-time teachers seeking advanced degrees are often not able to attend more than one night per week, we implemented an innovative model that allowed the candidates to enroll in two courses simultaneously. Each of these courses involved 20 hours face-to-face class time (meeting 5 times per semester for 4 hours per meeting), the equivalent of 20 hours of time spent online, and 15 hours of clinical field experience. The addition of the online component of the course allows the class to meet less often, thus, the face-to-face meeting times were staggered. A candidate could attend class one night a week yet still be enrolled in two courses for the semester. In changing how the courses were offered, we were better able to meet the needs of our candidates while not compromising any of the content in the course. Additionally, we were able to include 15 hours of clinical experience in each course which greatly increased the amount of field experiences contained in the program.

Northwest Missouri State University has remote sites located in St. Joseph and in Liberty where students can enroll in advanced courses closest in proximity to their place(s) of residence and/or employment. This often results in a cohort at the Liberty site comprised of candidates working in urban/suburban schools, a cohort in St. Joseph comprised of candidate working in and around that small city, and a cohort in Maryville comprised primarily of candidates working in rural settings. Candidates from all three sites enroll in the same course and are connected for instruction by ITV while the instructor rotates between sites, thereby interacting in face-to-face venues with each group. Connecting candidates from these three different sites promotes interaction among those from diverse school settings and strengthens exploration and understanding of issues associated with school leadership in a variety of professional environments.