INTRODUCTION

Teach Plus is a teacher leadership organization that empowers excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to contribute their experience and expertise to key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. We are 29 Teach Plus Texas Policy Fellows from across the Lone Star State teaching in grades preK-to-12 and dedicated to advancing the success of our own students and of all students in Texas. In this memo, we focus on recommendations Texas certification programs should consider for the implementation of edTPA in pilot programs. We became interested in edTPA implementation because it directly affects future teachers and—if successful—could be piloted across the state to a much larger audience.

To better understand teachers' attitudes towards edTPA, we reviewed the data collected by the previous cohort of Teach Plus Fellows in the Spring of 2019. The Fellows facilitated 23 focus groups throughout the state of Texas and got direct feedback from 163 teachers about their perception of the proposed licensure requirements and considerations for education preparation programs. In this memo, we present our findings based on this previously-collected data and recommendations for the state on how to make edTPA's statewide adoption a success.

OVERVIEW OF edTPA

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in Texas vary widely in quality. While some EPPs provide rigorous training and extensive classroom experiences, others do not, thereby creating inconsistency in preparation. The result is that many students are assigned to classrooms in which their teacher is underprepared to support their learning.

What gets tested gets taught, so one tool that can help to ensure that educator preparation programs provide high-quality preparation is an effective licensure assessment. Until the adoption of the pilot of edTPA, teaching candidates were required to pass a multiple-choice pedagogy exam in order to receive their certification. EdTPA is a performance-based, subject-specific assessment and support system used by teacher preparation programs throughout the United States to emphasize, measure, and support the skills and knowledge that all teachers need from Day 1 in the classroom.[1] EdTPA is currently available in 27 teaching fields and supports a range of grade levels from elementary and middle to secondary. EdTPA was created at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) with feedback from teachers and educators across the United States.[2]

Today, teaching candidates in Texas must pass the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) test, or if they attend a program that is piloting edTPA, participate in edTPA in its place. Knowing that we want the highest quality teachers in front of our students each day, edTPA sets aspiring teachers up to be successful with its holistic approach.

EdTPA's focus on planning, instruction, and assessment sets it apart from other programs. The edTPA system requires teachers to go beyond the minimum of passing a pedagogy exam to create a teaching portfolio that showcases their knowledge and skills acquired throughout their entire preparation process. This holistic portfolio encompasses self-created lesson plans, student expectations, analysis of student data, and documentation of differentiation to meet students' unique needs in the classroom. Additionally, aspiring teachers submit unedited teaching videos to be rated by highly effective and extensively trained educators.

Currently, around 920 EPPs in 41 states are participating with edTPA at varying phases. Some states have policies approving edTPA as a performance assessment, many are working towards implementation, and others are exploring the program by piloting it. Specifically, there are 18 states that have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, statewide policies requiring a performance assessment for incoming teachers. States with this policy in place, or working towards such policies, include Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Piloting edTPA as a portfolio- and performance-based program is a much-needed change in Texas to ensure high quality teachers are entering classrooms to educate our students. Aspiring teachers will observe classrooms, create lesson plans, student teach, analyze data, and reflect on their own teaching videos, which in turn would have a positive impact on their transition into the classroom and their long-term retention in the profession.

METHODOLOGY

In Spring 2019, as the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) considered whether to adopt the edTPA pilot, Teach Plus Policy Fellows conducted focus groups with 163 teachers from across the state. The Fellows showed the respondents samples of the PPR exam and the edTPA licensure assessment. Then they asked the participants, "Overall, which assessment is best aligned to the skills and knowledge necessary to be an effective teacher?" Seventy percent of teachers thought edTPA was better aligned to the skills and knowledge necessary to be an effective teacher, with a majority of teachers thinking it was "much better" than PPR. (See the Teach Plus policy paper, "Support Portfolio Assessments to Improve Teacher Preparedness.")

Teachers were also asked: "If edTPA is adopted, what do you think Educator Preparation Programs will need to do to be ready for this?" The respondents discussed this question in their focus groups and then recorded their views in an online questionnaire. The findings and recommendations in this memo are derived from the responses to this question.

1. **Teacher preparation programs will need to adjust their current curriculum to adequately prepare for the tasks required by edTPA.**

A common theme in teachers' responses was that programs will need to adjust their curriculum to prepare their students for edTPA. Respondents believe that these adjustments can improve program quality.

According to one focus group participant, *"The educator prep programs will need to schedule/implement designated time to the video clips with student teachers, including how to prep, what will happen in the lesson, and reflection on how to improve for next time. The prep program will be shifting their focus from how to prep for an exam to how to apply knowledge to the classroom."* Another wrote, *"The edTPA model requires a lot of extra work and documentation for the student teacher on top of the responsibilities they will have in their course work and student teaching experience. In order to acquire the depth of evidence, work samples, videos, etc., a student teacher would need more time in the same classroom than is typically given in a student teaching experience."*

2. **In order for educators to be successful in their first few years in the classroom, a strong mentorship/cooperating teacher program must be established for teachers pursuing edTPA.**

In our experience, and in that of many of our peers, the quality of the mentor/cooperating teacher plays a significant role in the quality of the preparation program overall. Similarly, focus group respondents indicated that in order to be successful on a performance-based assessment like edTPA, teaching candidates must have a strong cooperating teacher.

One focus group participant wrote, *"Establish a system in which new teachers are matched with an experienced teacher that can mentor them and foster their growth throughout the year."* Another wrote, *"Help mentor teachers going through edTPA so they aren't drowning in stress and overwhelmed."* One participant believes, *"In order for edTPA to work, educator programs would need to truly focus on finding great mentors and coaches to help their students/teachers to succeed."*

3. **There is no substitute for field experience.**

Because edTPA is designed to measure the skills necessary to be successful in a real classroom, focus group participants indicated the importance of high-quality field experience in a teacher's success on edTPA and, ultimately, their success in the classroom. One participant said, *"Teacher candidates should have various opportunities to experience different teaching levels so teachers can experience more."* Another wrote, *"Provide more hours in the classroom and in a variety of grade levels. Prepare and provide information for real world classroom experiences."* Another participant expressed, *"Classroom experience is vital. The students need to be in the classroom to use their experience to help build their portfolio."*

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Recommendation 1: Incorporate lesson planning and classroom management techniques in the EPP curriculum.

Since lesson planning and classroom management are teachers' primary daily responsibilities, educator preparation programs using edTPA should create a curriculum in which lesson planning and classroom management are given strong emphasis. Many programs, particularly some of the faster-paced alternative certification programs, do not provide sufficient training in these areas. One current teacher expressed the need for this addition to the curriculum, saying that the educator programs need to *"prepare teachers for what actually happens in a classroom."* Making lesson planning and classroom management a significant part of the curriculum would more closely align the tasks of pre-service teachers to those of certified, full-time teachers and help them succeed on edTPA.

Recommendation 2: Create a mentorship program that pairs new teachers with veteran teacher coaches.

Because a new teacher faces many challenges, educator preparation programs, including those piloting edTPA, should provide teacher candidates with veteran teacher coaches who serve as mentors or cooperating teachers. According to one teacher candidate: *"In order for edTPA to work, educator programs would need to truly focus on finding great mentors and coaches to help their students/teachers succeed."* Additionally, there is value in assigning all new teachers a mentor. In the Teach Plus brief, "Smart Start: Mentoring for New Teachers Benefits Kids," Teach Plus Texas Policy Fellows argue that all new teachers should have an experienced teacher mentor during the first two years of their careers.

Recommendation 3: Make field placements a key component of edTPA programs.

EdTPA programs should make strong field placement a key component. Hands-on teaching training is vital to new teachers' success. Spending time in a classroom would allow a new teacher to see how the theory they learned works in practice and would also give them tips and strategies to use in their own classrooms. Furthermore, additional field placement would allow new teachers adequate time to collect artifacts such as video recording and student samples for their portfolios. One teacher in the focus groups suggested that edTPA establish a long timeframe for students to complete their required hours and gather the evidence for the portfolio.

CONCLUSION

More consistent expectations for teacher preparation in Texas would help improve both the effectiveness and retention of our state's teaching force. The successful implementation of edTPA will require time for educator preparation programs to prepare both their students and faculty for the changes which include classroom experiences, video submissions, and content expectations. Programs will also need to revamp their curriculum to provide more practical lessons and classroom opportunities for their teacher candidates. Lastly, teacher candidates will need enhanced support from exceptional mentor teachers. These changes are necessary if we're to ensure that all children in the state of Texas receive a stellar education that sets them up for success.

ENDNOTES

[1] "About edTPA," edTPA, AACTE. 2020. http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa#Overview-0.

[2] "About edTPA," edTPA, Pearson Education, Inc. 2020. http://www.edtpa.com/PageView.aspx-?f=GEN_AboutEdTPA.html.

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