

Finally, a Truly Promising New Approach to Improving Teacher Preparation

Etta Hollins
Kauffman Endowed Chair for Urban Teacher Education
University of Missouri-Kansas City

After more than 40 years as a classroom teacher, administrator and teacher educator, I've learned that new ideas are rarely as new and promising as their proponents want us to believe. I've also become painfully aware that many teachers enter field without the basic skills and knowledge about how to teach that their students need and deserve.

Facilitating learning for students from different backgrounds and skill levels requires sophisticated teaching practice and conceptual understanding of the job. Unfortunately, the field of education in general, and teacher preparation programs specifically, have not done enough to fully prepare new teachers for the challenges they will face.

Earlier this spring, however, some 160 institutions of higher education and more than 7,000 teacher candidates finished field testing a new assessment for incoming teachers that looks at whether they have the necessary skills and understanding to be effective teachers who are not quickly discouraged when the going gets tough – as it will. This is different because in most states teachers are required to pass assessments that test content knowledge before they can teach in public schools.

In an obvious but much-needed change of direction, this new assessment will gauge *how well* candidates can teach and how likely they are to perform effectively in the classroom.

edTPA, formerly the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA), was developed and field tested by a team at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE). Teachers and teacher educators are finally taking the lead to create a more meaningful way to determine if teacher candidates are prepared to enter the field. edTPA provides the framework for a shared vision of competence for new teachers and highlights the knowledge, understanding, habits of mind, and practices that are evident and can be documented in competent entry-level teaching.

edTPA does this by requiring teacher candidates to provide a portfolio that includes a video of him/her delivering instruction, student work samples and commentaries linked to classroom tasks and prompts focused on classroom instruction. This evidence is reviewed by faculty and veteran teachers to assess progress in the core areas of (a) planning, instruction and assessment; (b) instructing and engaging students in learning; (c) assessing student learning; and (d) analyzing teaching.

Just as important as edTPA is for assessing the preparation of new teachers, it also provides much-needed evidence for teacher preparation programs. edTPA looks at how well candidates understand learning patterns in a class, among groups, and for individuals. This aspect of the assessment is especially important in the preparation of candidates for teaching diverse and underserved students.

edTPA is more than an assessment. The materials developed and the feedback candidates receive as part of the process will help prepare them to make seamless transitions from learning teaching to competent teaching practice in different school settings with different populations of students. This is especially important for novices who will be placed in the most challenging schools where students have

cumulative deficits in their learning that are in part attributable to the lack of access to high quality learning experiences.

The team at SCALE developed a very rigorous standard for evaluating the evidence for progress toward competent teaching. Initially, faculty at universities were trained to score and left to monitor this process. However, as edTPA has been scaled up, it has been important to reduce the burden on faculty and ensure trustworthiness in scoring. This has led to engaging a commercial source, Pearson. This important decision transfers the labor-intensive responsibility for scoring to a company that has years of experience and the resources to train scorers, manage the process, and provide faculty more time to focus on using the evidence and outcomes of the assessment to improve the quality of teacher preparation programs.

As a teacher educator, I can tell you that a high-quality preparation program requires an approach that is systematic and based on performance and evidence. I believe that edTPA is one of the most important and promising steps now being taken to improve the teaching profession.