Testimony of

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Before the

Education Committee

Re:

HB 5286: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRESERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS.

March 4, 2022

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I testify today in support of House Bill 5286 and the elimination of the statewide implementation of the preservice performance assessment, edTPA.

My name is Kathrine Grant, and I am a second year educator here in Connecticut. I completed my undergraduate degrees in English, Secondary English education, and Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Connecticut, and I student taught during Spring 2019. During my student teaching experience, I was required to complete edTPA.

I have testified on this matter before when I was a pre-service educator, and now as a classroom teacher, I feel even more strongly about the need to eliminate edTPA as a preservice performance assessment. Instead of using a performance assessment that is burdensome, costly, and unsupported by academic research, we must develop a more responsive, equitable, accurate performance assessment.

Personal Impact

As a teacher candidate in the state, I found edTPA to be narrowing to my student teaching experience; it required me to teach to a test. The inclusion of this "lesson sequence" into my teaching practice forced me to change the style of teaching I had developed to best suit the learners in my classroom in order to adhere to what would be rated "highly" by an outside observer. The "lesson sequence" I had to teach for this test felt artificial to both the content of my teaching and the culture I had created in my classroom. The standardized requirements of edTPA negated and minimized the diversity of learners in my classes, from exceptional learners to special education students and students learning English as an additional language. Completing my edTPA lessons distilled my teaching into what felt like teaching to the test in duplicate: I had to teach to a test that I was being assessed on, and so my students had to be taught in a way that aligned with that as well. As an educator, I believe that high-stakes standardized assessment is harmful to my students; the use of edTPA is the same testing experience for teacher candidates.

I loved every minute of student teaching; it was so empowering to be able to put everything that I have learned into practice, to develop relationships with students, and to learn and grow as an educator and as an individual. But, being required to complete edTPA took away from my experience and negatively affected the teacher that I was becoming. The stress of edTPA took away from my ability to show up as the best educator I could be for my students. I lost sleep, I spent hours working on this portfolio that I could have spent doing lesson

preparation, and I was constantly burdened by the chronic stress of completing this portfolio. It was so frustrating to know that I had to dedicate time to completing a portfolio that would only provide me with scripted, rubric-based feedback instead of investing even more deeply in reflecting on my practice with my cooperating teacher, university supervisor, department head, professors, or advisors—all individuals who known me and have known my growth over the many years I have spent preparing to become an educator.

Cost

As a pre-service educator, I paid for: a subscription to a portfolio system; a fully professional wardrobe; transportation to and from my clinical, student teaching, and master's internship locations; an application to graduate school; three different rounds of fingerprinting; certification testing; and not working for an entire semester—plus edTPA. This total can be conservatively summed at $3,000, which is a considerable amount of money for anyone, regardless of the fact that I was a tuition-paying college student who came from a relatively privileged background. This is the financial reality of becoming a teacher within the state: it is costly, and those costs are becoming a barrier for entry. Connecticut is currently the most expensive state to become a teacher in within New England and New York. I believe that we are rapidly approaching a point in which the costs associated with becoming a teacher, as well as the financial reality we face in the profession, is going to begin preventing individuals from pursuing what I consider the most important profession. If we are committed to diversifying who teaches students in Connecticut classrooms, we cannot be creating more barriers. edTPA will do that.

Feedback Provided

In addition to the negative impacts on myself and my students during my student teaching experience and the cost associated, I only received useless and contrived feedback from the portfolio. The feedback that I received from my university supervisor, from my professors and advisors, and from my cooperating teacher gave me a nuanced level of insight and analysis into my teaching practice that went above and beyond the simplistic and reductive feedback I received from edTPA. I know for a fact that if I had completed a portfolio assessment that had been developed by my teacher preparation program, it would have been more responsive to my development as a teacher and teacher leader, allowed me to demonstrate my growth over time, would have held me to a higher standard, and would have given me accurate and purposeful feedback to inform my future practice. None of these things happened when I completed edTPA.

Some will say that the argument against the use of edTPA is an argument that lies in fear of being held to a high standard or that we misunderstand the test or why it is "important." I had no issue with being held to a high standard as a teacher candidate, nor do I now as an educator—in fact, I want to be held to the highest standard because I know that I have the responsibility of my students' future in my hands. But, the feedback that this assessment provided did nothing to support my development as a future educator and took away from my overall experience and my ability to show up as the best educator I could be for my students. I have not used or been asked to use a single point of feedback or any other portio of my portfolio since I completed it.

Validity & Current Research

Emerging, and previous, research tells us the same: that edTPA is an unreliable, invalid measure that poses undue and harmful burdens on teacher candidates with very little benefit (Gitomer et al., 2019; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Hutt, Gottlieb, & Cohen, 2018; Shin, 2021). Researchers (Bernard, et al., 2019) have raised concerns that edTPA:
- Diminishes candidate learning
- Perpetuates inequitable systems

- Apply developmentally inappropriate standards to the assessment of teacher candidates

As an educator, we talk a lot about assessment—about what the most accurate and representative ways of assessing our students' growth and performance are. We also talk a lot about how inaccurate and unfair assessments can do more harm than good to our students. I've had these conversations since the day I enrolled in my teacher preparation program. The use of edTPA as a preservice performance assessment goes against best practices in education. It is a formative performance assessment being used as a summative measure (Gitomer et al., 2019), meaning that it only measures a specific point of performance and not sustained growth or performance over an extended time period. To use a metric that was designed to evaluate performance at a specific point as a summative, capstone-esque measure is to go against what we know to be best practice in teaching, learning, and assessment across the P-12 continuum. I was taught, and am expected, to do better than this by my students–to ensure that they have useful, responsive, accurate, and appropriate measures of their ability. I ask that the legislature does the same by teacher candidates in the state.

The Future of Teaching in Connecticut

As I reflect now on my experiences as both a student and as a teacher of the pandemic, I am worried about the future of my profession. I am worried about the sustainability of it; I worry that young people, and second-career educators, will not want to join my profession in the coming years. And I worry that if that in spite of everything, they do choose to become an educator, that they will face the barriers and obstacles that edTPA has created for preservice educators in the state.

I want nothing more than for young people and second-career educators to be excited about becoming a teacher; we need more people in our schools and in our communities who reflect the diversity of our students, who are passionate about working with them, and who are committed to excellence in our profession. From my own personal experience, from the experiences of those around me, and from research–we know that continuing the use of edTPA will create a future in which this does not happen.

Again, I urge you to support House Bill 5286 and the elimination of the statewide implementation of the preservice performance assessment, edTPA. The future of my profession, and the future of our students in the state of Connecticut depend on it.

References

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