

Grant: Testimony in Favor of SB 1035, An Act Concerning the The Development of a New Preservice Performance Assessment for Teacher Preparation Programs

Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Kathrine Grant, and I am a first-year teacher in Manchester, CT. I am a lifelong resident of the state. I received my Master's degree from the University of Connecticut in Curriculum and Instruction in May 2020, as well as my undergraduate degrees in English and Secondary English Education in May 2019. Through such, I completed edTPA in the spring of 2019.

I am writing to you in favor of SB 1035, An Act Concerning the The Development of a New Preservice Performance Assessment for Teacher Preparation Programs.

I submitted testimony and testified last year on this same matter; the grave concerns that I have about the continued use of edTPA in the state of Connecticut have only been fortified over the past year through my experiences as an in-service teacher. edTPA has, and will continue to have, detrimental effects on future teachers within the state and on the students that are in the classrooms of those who are evaluated by edTPA. I believe that the use of this assessment will negatively impact the vital and longstanding efforts that are being made to recruit diverse, well-qualified, and committed educators to the profession. Beyond all of that, there is growing, and continued, concern over the validity of the assessment.

Coupling the detrimental impacts on the student teachers and their students as well as the significant concerns over validity, I struggle to see how this aligns with the State Department of Education's Talent Office's goal of recruiting, developing, and retaining "extraordinary teachers who have the power to motivate and engage students in ways that change lives." If we are to learn anything from the past year, is it this: schools are vital institutions for communities, and the compassionate, capable adults that help to run schools are critical in the lives of young people. I fully believe that the continued use of this standardized, limited, and reductive test as a requirement for becoming an educator will only serve to limit the recruitment and retention of those compassionate, capable adults we need in our classrooms.

edTPA and Student Teaching

During my experience with completing edTPA, I experienced a narrowing to my student teaching experience through being required 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, anonymous 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; it felt artificial to me, and my students recognized it as well.

I loved every minute of student teaching; it was so empowering to be able to put everything that I had 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

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experience and negatively affected the teacher that I was becoming—which harmed my students. The stress of being required to complete edTPA took away from my ability to show up as the best educator I could be for my students. It was so frustrating to know that I had to sacrifice time to complete 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 knew me and knew my growth over the many years I spent preparing to become an educator. The scripted, standardized, and limited feedback I received from my portfolio did not provide me any meaningful feedback that I could use as I continued on in my professional studies or now that I am an in-service educator.

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 (TPPS), or across all TPPS within the state, it would have been more responsive to my development as a teacher and teacher leader; allowed me to demonstrate my growth over time; held me to a higher standard; and given me accurate and purposeful feedback to inform my future practice. None of these things happened when I completed edTPA. I urge you to consider portfolios that are developed endemically within our state instead of edTPA. The renown teachers and educational professionals within the state can, and will, develop a more rigorous, responsive, and meaningful portfolio assessment than what is currently being used.

Validity

In becoming a teacher, we talked a lot about assessment—about what the most accurate and representative ways of assessing our students' growth and performance are. We also talked a lot about how inaccurate and unfair assessments can do more harm than good to our students. As an inservice teacher, this conversation is no different. We are constantly reflecting on the goals we have for our students, the skills and capacities we have carefully crafted learning experiences towards, and how we can assess these. The implementation and continued use of edTPA is directly antithetical to this practice.

The concerns that I have over the validity of edTPA after having experienced it firsthand are echoed in the academic literature surrounding edTPA. To quote a recent analysis of the test: “We examined the technical documentation of edTPA and raise serious concerns about scoring design, the reliability of the assessments, and the consequential impact on decisions about edTPA candidates. In light of these findings, we argue that the proposed and actual uses of the edTPA are currently unwarranted on technical grounds” (Gitomer, et al., 2021). When teachers have concerns over the validity of an assessment, it is our professional responsibility to address those concerns immediately and proactively in order to uphold our commitment to the learning experiences of all students. I was taught, and am now expected, to do better than using assessments that are “unwarranted on technical grounds” by my students. I hope that this committee chooses to do better than this by future educators within the state.

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Furthermore, Petchauer, Bowe, and Wilson (2018) bring up significant concerns about the impact of the implementation of this assessment on TPP candidates of color, finding “mixed and alarming results from edTPA racial bias reviews.” As I stated previously, I struggle to reconcile the State Department of Education’s Talent Office’s stated goal of “continued progress towards it’s goal of increasing the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the educator workforce given its intentional outreach to various partners” with what the research says about this assessment.

As an educator, I believe that high-stakes standardized assessments are harmful to my students; the use of edTPA is the same testing experience for teacher candidates. Emerging and previous research tells us what I experienced firsthand: that this is an unreliable, invalid measure that poses undue and harmful burdens on teacher candidates with very little benefit. It is imperative that the use of edTPA is halted and is replaced with a portfolio assessment that is developed within our state and for our state. The standardized, scripted assessment of teacher candidates that occurs under edTPA is one that I can guarantee will inhibit the future of education within the state of Connecticut.

Again, I urge you to support SB 1035, An Act Concerning the The Development of a New Preservice Performance Assessment for Teacher Preparation Programs. The future of my profession, and the future of our students in the state of Connecticut, depend on it.

Best regards,

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Citations

- Gitomer, Drew H, Martínez, José Felipe, Battey, Dan, & Hyland, Nora E. (2021). Assessing the Assessment: Evidence of Reliability and Validity in the edTPA. *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(1), 3–31. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219890608>
- Petchauer, E., Bowe, A. G., & Wilson, J. (2018). Winter is coming: Forecasting the impact of edTPA on Black teachers and teachers of color. *The Urban Review*, 50(2), 323-343.