

Testimony of

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S.B. No. 1035: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PRESERVICE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Education Committee: 3/16/2021

edTPA PORTFOLIOS

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, members of the Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the implementation of the edTPA Portfolio as a prerequisite to teacher certification in Connecticut. I currently serve as a high school Mathematics teacher in New Haven, where I am also Chief Steward of AFT Local 933 representing 1811 public school teachers working in 44 New Haven schools. I have served as a cooperating teacher for Yale University, Southern Connecticut State University, the University of New Haven and Albertus Magnus. I have also served as a BEST mentor and a TEAM mentor for New Haven. I worked in a consulting capacity throughout the pilot stage of edTPA and currently continue to consult and advise at Albertus.

I am concerned about this implementation on several grounds:

- The portfolio adds no new information to our assessment of a candidate's readiness to teach. The candidate's ability to write, reflect upon, deliver and assess a unit is already well established in a series of courses and field work experiences currently in place.
- The portfolio does not address the very real needs and deficits demonstrated by most beginning teachers – an ability to maintain discipline in the classroom and a facility with cultural literacy. I cannot guess how long it has been since you were a student, but I have been teaching since 1969, and the classroom of today is radically different from the classroom of your memory. There is a chasm of distance between a written Unit plan and its execution. The only real tool we have is our ability to establish relationship with our students. From relationship is born a desire to cooperate, to contribute, to be curious, to learn, to value the opportunity that education presents. The value of hands-on experience is in listening to many, many, many students express their ideas and their misunderstandings as well as in having built a library of responses to every possible wrong turn. None of that is coming from a piece of paper, no matter how well written.

- The edTPA puts an onerous burden on pre-service teachers at a time when their focus should be on real-time classroom practice and mentoring. This is the last training experience these candidates will have before being responsible for their own classrooms. They need to use their time and energy in that capacity, not in writing another paper. Cooperating teachers are specifically excluded from the edTPA process; edTPA requires the creation of a separate Unit from the one student teachers are already honing and developing under supervision. It is essential that the cooperating teacher relationship be as close as possible. My student teachers maintain our relationship throughout their early years of teaching; my mentorship continues. Distracting from that relationship with a different, high-stakes parallel unit is deleterious to the nature of student teaching.
- As you are no doubt aware, 1/3 of the current roster of public school teachers in this country is at retirement age. We cannot afford to put artificial barriers in the way of students who have expressed and worked hard for the opportunity to serve.
- As you are aware, we have a current deficit of teachers of Special Education, Spanish, and all STEM fields. This is a time to support any candidate working toward filling this deficit, not to make it more difficult. I am aware that you have taken steps to certify second-career candidates who have expertise in the subject matter. That expertise does not make them teachers; this emergency stopgap will not advance the academic success of Connecticut's children. Better we should seek to support individuals committed to education first - with scholarships, loan forgiveness, Master's programs like PIMMS.
- I have serious concerns about the scoring of the portfolios. A well-scored, annotated portfolio should take about six hours of labor. Will you find certified teachers who will do this work for the allotted stipend? You may recall that we were unable to maintain an adequate pool for the BEST program and that accessed teachers available during summer. I assume edTPA needs to be completed before graduation?

IN SUMMARY, the edTPA portfolio is an onerous, expensive, redundant vehicle that produces no information that is not readily available already, that places an additional obstacle in front of candidates whose success is already fraught and fragile and which reduces the effectiveness and value of the existing student teaching program while adding nothing to the skills needed by beginning teachers in the real world. Please rescind it as a pre-certification requirement in Connecticut, or replace it with the disciplinary and cultural tools teachers really need.