



ENHANCED STUDENT TEACHING

Teacher preparation programs are opportunities
to strengthen higher education and P-12 relationships.



Granted it was a long time ago, but Susan Copeland remembers the nine weeks she spent student teaching in the same school where she is now principal as a “loosey-goosey” experience. She did not see her university supervisor and knew little about the students in her classroom when she started.

“If I hadn’t had a strong teacher, I probably would not have made it in the field,” recalls Copeland, the principal of the University of Memphis Campus School for the College of Education.

Today, Copeland eagerly describes how a stronger partnership with the College of Education and its use of the edTPA assessment process have reinvented clinical experiences. The difference is so dramatic, she says, that new teachers who go through this local pipeline are mistaken for veteran educators. “When we need assistance, there is a faculty member supporting us. If there is a problem with a teacher candidate, or it’s a bad match, they work with us. We don’t let problems grow,” she says. “The process is harder for candidates; but in the end they learn if they really have a passion for this kind of work.”

In communities across the country, P-12 and higher education leaders talk about the need for increased collaboration. The clinical experience is a perfect and meaningful place to begin. The reinvented relationship between Copeland’s school and the University of Memphis represents what should be the new normal between teacher preparation programs and P-12 schools.

Each year, some 200,000 teachers who enter the profession are prepared in traditional programs. While the clinical experience was an essential part of their journey to becoming a teacher of record, the expectations, quality, and structure for this capstone event remains mixed. Some candidates get rigorous team-teaching experiences with regular feedback. Some candidates are treated as unwanted visitors in host schools, while others

are welcome help to busy teachers but get little meaningful feedback.

Increasingly, teacher preparation programs are committing to and guiding more meaningful student-teaching experiences. The momentum is shifting from casual relationships built on candidate placements to partnerships where P-12 schools see teacher candidates as resources to help them achieve ambitious learning goals.

This movement is overdue. It is being accelerated by accreditation requirements that seek to make robust clinical experience a standard for the field. But states and institutions of higher education also are using new performance assessments that require candidates to demonstrate teaching skills. The most widely used is edTPA, which was developed by educators under the leadership of the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity. Developed over four years and operational in the fall of 2013, these assessments ask teachers to demonstrate core skills such as planning lessons, assessing student progress, and modifying instruction to be more effective. edTPA was designed to complement course completion and subject-knowledge tests.

“We now have a framework and structure. The guidelines are very clear,” says Copeland. “While not everybody comes out of the edTPA clinical experience as a shining star, they come out knowing what to expect in the classroom. And that is heads and shoulders beyond where we were before.”

Shifting Expectations for Principals

Timothy Merritt is the principal at High Point Elementary School in Pasadena, Maryland. Last year, his school

By Sharon P. Robinson

hosted seven teaching interns from Towson University in Baltimore. Hosting interns has become more challenging but more rewarding since Towson began requiring candidates to complete edTPA, says Merritt. As part of this process, candidates use the clinical experience to develop and submit portfolios of lesson plans, work samples, written reflections, and an unedited video of them delivering instruction.

Because of the higher demands placed on the candidates and the host school, Merritt says it's now standard to expose teacher candidates to his school's improvement plan and work with them to develop high-impact strategies for target groups such as boys and students from low-income families. "When the intern comes in, they learn about the big rocks we want to move. Lesson development is at the forefront of our minds," he says. "We want them to be totally aligned with our data and what our school improvement plan has identified as a need. It's really cool when you see that alignment."

Merritt and his mentor teachers also must provide constant feedback and reinforce the reflection and introspection that Towson now requires. For example, candidates must write extensively to reflect on instructional strategies, effectiveness and adjustments to failed strategies. "We try to get interns to think about what they are doing. We try to pick their brains

Principal ONLINE

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✦ The **edTPA Resources Web page** features research, reflections on the edTPA program, and handouts to share with stakeholders.

✦ Find out more information about the **University of Memphis' teacher preparation program**.

✦ NCTQ's guide, "**Key Ingredients for Strong Student Teaching**," outlines key elements for ideal student teaching programs.



to understand why they are doing what they are doing," Merritt says. "It's almost a different mindset. I've tried to morph my own practice as a leader to ask a lot more questions to be more introspective. We can pat ourselves on the back and feel good, but the real intent is to get better every day."

Though he expected to hear concerns and even protests to making videos of teachers leading instruction, he has experienced neither. He chalks that up to the close cooperation and guidance from Towson, which has coached his staff and provided sample permission slips and even video equipment. Merritt is so pleased with how much candidates learn from the video process that he wants his veteran teachers to video record and review their instruction as part of professional development.

Merritt says that his school could not be as effective at helping candidates meet the new edTPA requirements without close collaboration, guidance, and professional development from Towson faculty and the university's liaison to High Point. "It's a partnership

that we expect will continue growing stronger," he says.

New Challenges for Teacher Preparation

If higher education is going to be the partner that P-12 schools need, we cannot present teaching as a theoretical experience. Teacher preparation must be seen as part of the delivery of student achievement. Preparation programs must take the lead in building and sustaining a climate that makes this possible.

E. Sutton Flynt, director of teacher education and professor of literacy at the University of Memphis, said not all faculty members were ready for the changes brought on by performance-based assessment when the School of Education moved in that direction four years ago. But support grew as faculty saw more portfolios and candidate videos and learned where candidates did not perform well. Even though edTPA, the performance assessment now used by the university, is not a state requirement in Tennessee, University of Memphis teacher

Guidance and Recommendations

Below is some of the guidance Washington schools receive about field placements under the state's new requirement that teacher candidates pass edTPA for certification—in addition to existing candidate observations by university/college supervisors.

1. More than ever, districts help us ensure that teacher candidates have opportunities to demonstrate the extensive skills needed by today's teachers. Districts can support high-quality field placements by:
 - Selecting teachers with knowledge and skills expected of beginning teachers, such as English Language acquisition, cultural competence, and academic language.
 - Planning for longer field placements than traditional student teaching, including more time for the student teachers to play essential instructional roles.
 - Planning early to ensure student teaching is well integrated into the classroom, school, and instructional goals.
2. As part of this new system, the teaching supervisors' and cooperating teachers' roles may include:
 - Moving the teacher candidate toward teaching lessons in assigned subjects as soon as is feasible.
 - Providing candidates suggestions specific to the context of the classroom or learners.
 - Being a sounding board as teacher candidates reflect on experiences with learners.
3. Parents will need to be informed that P-12 students will be video-recorded during lessons led by the candidates as evidence for edTPA. Sample permission forms are available. The videos are for scoring purposes only.

Sources: State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board and Washington State University.

candidates must pass a national cut score for program completion.

"We've added a course in student assessment, which was a weakness that edTPA revealed to us. We've also gotten rid of a lot of theory and are closer to the ground with what it takes to work in a real school setting," he says. "Some faculty are taking the lead. They are vested in what it really means to teach children today."

Managing the teacher candidates' resident year looks a lot different as well. Rather than a shotgun approach to placing a candidate in any school that wants one, Flynt says the candidates are clustered in schools so that his staff can do a better job supporting the candidates and host schools—though he has capped the number of candidates at any one school at 20. This year, the program placed 145 candidates in nine schools.

"The bottom line is that we develop partnerships. We build and maintain relationships. We never make schools come to us. We go to them," says Jennifer Nelson, the associate director of teacher education at the University

of Memphis. "When you develop that kind of in-depth relationship with the school, principals and teachers are more willing to treat candidates as co-teachers in the classroom."

Beginning this year, teacher candidates in the state of Washington must pass edTPA to become certified. Though the shift has been in the works for four years, the state and higher education institutions make outreach to P-12 schools a priority, holding orientations for host schools, creating guidance on teacher internships, and drafting letters explaining the new requirements.

June Canty, professor of education and chair, bachelor of arts in education program, Washington State University Vancouver, says her institution goes even further, explaining, "We have found that communication from the state often stayed in central office." "We send letters to principals in buildings with student teachers. We send them permission slips for the video and translate them into Spanish and Russian," she says.

She also says that principals and their schools really connect to the new assessment when she explains the similarities between edTPA and National Board Certification, the respected standard for accomplished teaching

that guided edTPA's development. Adds Canty, "We explain that our candidates are taking baby steps toward National Board Certification."

Still, she concedes that some principals resist taking on candidates because of the additional work it might mean for them or their teachers. Schools that do work with the mentors, however, are finding benefits. Canty, whose program placed 68 candidates in 38 schools last spring, says some schools insist on plugging candidates directly into grade-level teams and professional communities, who then decide how and where candidates best fit in to help meet student needs.

"That was a surprise to us, but if a candidate is going to teach in a certain timeframe and align with a school's goals, then this is what is needed," she adds. In most cases, principals who work with the candidates in this new system are not disappointed: This year, one-third of her school's teacher candidates were hired over the summer and six were hired before they had graduated. "Supervising schools don't want to lose them," she says. 

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