edTPA Implementation Reflections and Suggestions

Background

At its October 2016 meeting, the State Board of Education (SBE) passed an update to its Professional Assessments Policy (5.105) that required all educators seeking licensure in Tennessee to complete the edTPA as a new required assessment of pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge. This requirement takes effect in January 2019. To prepare for edTPA's implementation at all educator preparation providers (EPPs) statewide by this date, SBE and the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) staff have been working with those institutions that have already implemented edTPA to determine the lessons they have learned from this process and their suggestions for other providers.

Interviews with Early Implementers: Overall Takeaways

In addition to implementation tips that several EPPs shared directly with TDOE, this document draws on conversations that SBE staff had with administrators at eight EPPs that have already had edTPA in place at their institution for multiple years. These EPPs include the six Tennessee Board of Regents schools (Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, the University of Memphis, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, and Tennessee Technological University), Vanderbilt University, and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

Overall, the administrators' feedback was positive: most felt their programs were already largely aligned with edTPA's requirements, though they did acknowledge learning curves with various aspects of the edTPA. Furthermore, they felt that edTPA was well-aligned with the TEAM rubric used for the observation component of the evaluation of many Tennessee teachers. Finally, while several administrators noted the pressure students felt throughout the intensive edTPA process, almost all reported that students' reflections on edTPA were more positive once they were serving in the classroom and reflecting back on the experience. Students' feedback confirmed that edTPA requirements prepared them well for classroom evaluation, and that the assessment itself reflected the skills they needed to assist with student growth and achievement.

The specific areas of the assessment that caused the most difficulties varied widely by institutions. Administrators at both Memphis and Vanderbilt mentioned the feedback portion as something that their students initially struggled with, particularly the focus on educative, as opposed to evaluative, feedback. ETSU and Austin Peay, on the other hand, found more issues with the assessment portion. Finally, Tennessee State mentioned a need to adapt to the lesson plans called for by edTPA. Fortunately, many of these institutions spoke to the steps they had been able to take to address institution-wide issues they uncovered once they had a chance to review their students' early results.

Finally, one positive comparison that we heard from several EPPs was between edTPA and National Board Certification. Tennessee State and Vanderbilt mentioned this as a helpful frame of reference to consider, both in terms of trying to earn buy-in and in trying to understand the process. They underscored the importance of reminding students and faculty that this process is rewarding and well-aligned to future career endeavors including National Board certification and earning high evaluative observation scores on the TEAM rubric. Our conversations have shown that successfully preparing candidates for the edTPA requires a lot of work at all levels of an EPP, including collective effort from students, faculty, and the administration, but keeping the benefits in mind throughout the process may help this work along.

Detailed Reflections and Suggestions

Listed below are several topics that we heard about from multiple EPPs. These common themes provide a useful framework for the implementation process, and we hope that some of the ideas suggested by the EPPs we spoke with will be useful for those just beginning the edTPA journey.

Academic Language

One source of frustration that was almost universally mentioned in our conversations was regarding the academic language used by edTPA. Although this was an issue that took several years for many of the institutions we spoke with to address, we did hear from several places that starting to incorporate edTPA's language early in students' careers led them to be much more comfortable by the time they actually completed the assessment.

- Tennessee Tech starts sharing resources regarding edTPA's academic language with students as early as their freshman or sophomore years, with professors incorporating it into their courses.

Course-Taking Sequence

The general consensus was that beyond the language used, edTPA was fairly well aligned with the program structures of most of our EPPs. However, several institutions discussed specific efforts that they have undertaken to ensure that their courses are structured to prepare their students to succeed on the edTPA.

- University of Memphis faculty members reviewed their course sequencing and back-mapped edTPA concepts into them to ensure that students are fully prepared to complete the assessment by the time they enter student teaching.
- The University of Tennessee at Knoxville mentioned reviewing rubric-level patterns after receiving their initial results to determine which courses and program areas needed to emphasize edTPA more heavily.
- Austin Peay discussed using students' Residency I semester as a practice round for the requirements of edTPA so students had some familiarity and experience with of the edTPA process.

edTPA-Specific Programming

Some of the EPPs we spoke with also told us about additional learning opportunities that they created in response to edTPA implementation.

- Vanderbilt began an edTPA Camp, which takes place between the two student teaching placements. It focuses on edTPA components such as analysis and reflection that are not naturally represented during the student teaching experience.
- MTSU has a seminar comprised of seven two-hour sessions that occur weekly during students' first placement, with each seminar designed to support language understandings, communication of thinking, reflection, and technology.
- Tennessee Tech offers four seminar meetings starting in the fall of the student teaching year that reviews edTPA task by task.
- ETSU has a support seminar that also starts during fall semester, beginning in November and continuing through the spring semester as students complete the edTPA.

Faculty Buy-In

In addition to working to incorporate edTPA into course structures and creating additional support opportunities, several institutions also mentioned seeing a significant benefit from working at the faculty level to increase buy-in and promote better understanding of what edTPA requires and how to successfully prepare students for it.

- Tennessee Tech praised the annual edTPA conference, in addition to sharing about the seminar trainings they hold for coaches.
- Middle Tennessee State representatives talked about the success they had with finding initial faculty members who were on board with the goals and value of edTPA, as these faculty members can help persuade more hesitant faculty and work to advance the institution-wide implementation program.
- Tennessee State indicated that they are working directly with representatives from the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE), the organization that initially developed edTPA. These experts have provided assistance in answering faculty and administrative questions about the assessment and its implementation.

Technical and Logistical Challenges

Beyond structural or instructional issues, one additional topic that came up often in our conversations with EPPs was technical or logistical difficulties.

- UT Knoxville, Memphis, and Vanderbilt all mentioned efforts to prepare students to upload their videos prior to the deadline
- Austin Peay went even further, incorporating this process into their technology class.
- A separate logistical issue that ETSU warned against was the impact of seasonal weather, particularly during the student teaching experience. ETSU has left extra time before official deadlines to plan around regional weather issues, and they recommended that other EPPs in areas with severe winter and spring weather do the same.

Next Steps

We have appreciated all of the helpful advice and guidance that we heard during out conversations with our EPPs about edTPA, and we hope to help facilitate further conversations as edTPA becomes a statewide requirement. If you have any additional information to share about edTPA or its implementation, either with us at the State Board or with fellow EPPs, we encourage you to do so.