



**Breakers, Benders, and Obeyers:  
Inquiring into Teacher Educators' Mediation of  
edTPA**

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**Abstract:** This article reflects a qualitative exploratory inquiry into the lived experiences of faculty members working within a system of urban schools of education as they supported diverse teacher candidates in completing the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) during its first semesters of high-stakes implementation. Drawing upon questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews, our findings demonstrate the disparity and variation in the level and kind of support offered to teacher candidates. We discuss the ways that the policy, stance, and the ethical, pedagogical, and logistical dilemmas teacher educators faced as they supported candidates intersected to shape the supports provided. Implications focus on utilization of such test scores for evaluating teacher preparation institutions, faculty relations, and the diversification of the teacher workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was fully co-authored.

**Keywords:** Urban teacher education, educational evaluation/assessment, teacher educators, accountability

### **Rompedores, dobladores y obedientes: Explorando la mediación de edTPA de los formadores de docentes**

**Resumen:** Este artículo refleja una investigación exploratoria cualitativa sobre las experiencias de vida de formadores de docentes trabajando en escuelas urbanas mientras apoyaban a candidatos a maestros para completar el programa de Evaluación del Desempeño Educativo (edTPA) durante los primeros semestres de implementación de esta propuesta de consecuencias severas. Nuestros resultados basados en respuestas al cuestionario y entrevistas semiestructuradas, muestran la disparidad y la variación en el nivel y el tipo de apoyo ofrecido a los futuros docentes. Se analizan las formas en que los posicionamientos políticos, éticos, pedagógicos y dilemas logísticos que enfrentaban los formadores de docentes influenciaban como apoyaban a los futuros docentes. Las conclusiones se centran en la utilización de resultados de este tipo de pruebas para la preparación docentes, la evaluación de las instituciones, las relaciones con los formadores docentes y la diversidad entre los docentes.

**Palabras clave:** formación docente urbana; evaluación; evaluación educativa; docentes

### **Quebradores, dobradores e obedientes: Explorando a mediação de edTPA dos formadores de professores**

**Resumo:** Este artigo apresenta uma pesquisa exploratória qualitativa sobre as experiências de vida dos formadores de professores que trabalham em escolas urbanas, apoiando futuros docentes no processo de completar a avaliação do programa do Rendimento Escolar (edTPA) durante o primeiro semestre de aplicação da presente proposta com consequências severas. Nossos resultados com base nas respostas ao questionário e entrevistas semiestructuradas mostram a disparidade e variação do nível e tipo de suporte oferecido aos futuros professores. As maneiras pelas quais os formadores docentes enfrentavam os dilemas políticos, éticos, educacionais e logísticos influenciava os apoios oferecidos aos futuros professores. Os resultados focam na utilização dos resultados de tais testes para preparação de professores, avaliação das instituições, as relações com formadores de professores e diversidade entre os professores.

**Palavras-chave:** formação de professores urbana; avaliação; avaliação educacional; professores

## **Introduction**

In recent decades the policy discourse on improving education has focused on teacher quality. The “Highly Qualified Teacher” provision introduced in the federal legislation *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2001), for instance, was designed to raise the floor and consistency of quality across states by requiring all public school teachers to have a bachelor’s degree, demonstrate subject matter competence, and obtain state certification. There is large variability across states in terms of the numbers of teachers who met the requirements, particularly in hard-to-staff certification areas, and there is little evidence that the provision did indeed increase the quality of teachers (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2007).

Moving away from ensuring a basic level of qualifications, the current accountability movement has focused on the measurement of teacher quality at multiple points in an individual’s career. *Race to the Top* (2010) has provided incentives to states that utilize value-added measures (VAM)—estimates of the contribution of an individual teacher on student standardized test

scores—as a significant portion of public school teachers’ performance evaluations. Indeed, districts are relying heavily on these scores to determine who is a quality teacher and, in some places, to monetarily reward teachers, and/or to support tenure and firing decisions, despite evidence that they are not the most accurate measures (Braun, 2005; Gandle, Noell, & Burns, 2012; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008). In New York State, 40% of teachers’ annual performance rating is based on their value-added measurements.

It has been argued that greater attention must be paid to readiness to teach prior to entry to the profession (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Lewis, & Young, 2013; Wiseman, 2012) due to novice teachers disproportionately contributing to the poor achievement of students (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Wykoff, 2009; Sawchuk, 2010). In response to this concern, states have instituted policies designed to hold teacher education programs accountable for the performance of the students their graduates teach utilizing VAM measures (Floden, 2012; Knight, Edmondson, Lloyd, Arbaugh, Nolan Jr., Whitney, & McDonald, 2012) and changes to certification exams. The report that follows focuses on the impact that these policies, and the subsequent modifications to teacher licensing assessments, are having on faculty members working within one system of urban schools of education.

### **Certification Exams**

Although there are a variety of pathways that bring teachers to classrooms (e.g., university-based teacher preparation, Teach for America, Teaching Fellows), teacher certification exams serve as a gateway to becoming a teacher of record. Paper-and-pencil certification tests have been criticized for being weak predictors of candidates’ achievement (Wilson, Hallam, Pecheone, & Moss, 2007) and abilities to meet the diverse and complex needs of students (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Pecheone & Chung, 2006) in part because they are decontextualized from teaching actual students in authentic classroom settings. These lines of critique, combined with calls for broader assessments of teacher candidate readiness (Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, & Knowles, 2001), have been an impetus for implementing performance-based assessments, like the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), which are designed to assess candidates’ teaching knowledge and skills as situated in actual practice.

### **The Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA)**

The edTPA is a summative, subject-specific, standardized assessment of teaching completed by teacher candidates during their concluding clinical experiences. Currently, the edTPA is being used to varying degrees in approximately 40 states and the District of Columbia (edTPA, n.d.), with some states offering it as one of several performance assessment options, or having candidates complete only part of it. However, two states—New York, the locale of this study, and Washington— have the successful completion of the edTPA in its entirety as a certification requirement.

For the majority of subject areas, candidates complete three “tasks”: (1) planning a “learning segment” of 3-5 lessons of instruction focused on building a singular skill and/or understanding, (2) utilizing these lessons to instruct students, and (3) assessing students’ learning from that instruction. For candidates in elementary education, these three tasks are focused on literacy instruction; a fourth task, focusing on assessment and reengagement in mathematics, is also required. Candidates plan, teach, and assess students and write extensive “commentaries,” guided by a series of prompts, documenting the rationales for their choices. Pearson Education is in charge of administration and logistics for the edTPA and, at a cost of \$300 for initial submission, candidates submit their completed portfolios for scoring by an outside evaluator.

There are multiple features of the edTPA that distinguish it from assessments that have traditionally been used for initial teacher certification purposes, the most obvious of these is the requirement that candidates submit videotape footage of themselves instructing events from the learning segment in their student teaching sites. Others are the multiple-page written commentaries on their planning, teaching, and assessment of the learning segment, and the requirement threaded through all edTPA tasks that candidates consider the function of “academic language”<sup>2</sup> in learning and instruction.

The creators of the edTPA characterize it as a summative “capstone” assessment “designed to answer the question, ‘Is a new teacher ready for the job?’” They have also emphasized its educative role for both candidates and program faculty, stating in documents that “professional conversations about teaching and learning associated with the outcomes assessed in edTPA are expected and encouraged” and recommending that programs provide formative experiences during coursework and fieldwork that are aligned to the content and format of the assessment.

A distinct feature of the edTPA that has not garnered as much attention is the high level of faculty involvement with candidates; this involvement, presumably guided by a document entitled “Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support,” not only occurs in preparation for the edTPA but in the process of completing it. For instance, faculty are involved in a wide variety of edTPA-related activities, ranging from integrating edTPA-like assignments into coursework, to supporting candidates in understanding the requirements described in the handbook, to providing guidance on scheduling video recording in classrooms. Through this study and interactions with teacher educators in states that use the edTPA, we have learned that to varying degrees faculty provide support to candidates in the context of edTPA workshops, edTPA “drop in” sessions, student teaching seminars, and office hours advisement, all conducted during the period that candidates are completing the edTPA. There are also schools of education where faculty has expressly chosen to take a “business-as-usual” approach to the edTPA, providing essentially no explicit support to candidates. To our knowledge, the edTPA is the only teacher certification exam that allows non-test takers to be in physical proximity of candidates and interact with candidates *as* they complete the test. We turn our attention to this feature of the edTPA because we believe that a closer inspection of it will provide unique insights into not only the role that faculty play in meeting the stated summative and educative objectives of the edTPA, but also how teacher educators may function when they become direct mediators between a high stakes reform effort and the enactment of the reform in institutions targeted by the state.

The report that follows reflects our inquiry into the lived experiences of faculty members working within a system of urban schools of education as they supported diverse teacher candidates in completing the edTPA. We set out to investigate the ways in which teacher educators brokered the policy through their support of candidates and the factors shaping decisions. So we asked: How do faculty describe their actions related to the edTPA, particularly around alignment with “The Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support”?; What dilemmas, if any, do faculty members describe around working with candidates as they complete the edTPA?

As a result of this inquiry, we offer a conceptual model for understanding teacher educators’ responses to this large-scale accountability initiatives and document the pervasive tension between states seeking alignment and coherence across institutions and faculty within these institutions working to support diverse candidates in becoming able novice teachers.

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<sup>2</sup> Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) defines academic language as “the language of the discipline that students need; to learn and use to participate and engage in meaningful ways in the content area; the oral and written language used for academic purposes; the means by which students develop and express content understandings (SCALE, n.d.)

## The Guidelines for Acceptable Support

The edTPA was designed to not only assess candidates' knowledge and skills in practice, but also to "support state and national program accreditation" (edTPA, n.d.) decisions, making it high-stakes for both candidates and schools of education. To ensure the validity of the assessment, the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) created guidelines to provide parameters to the support provided by "faculty, supervisors and cooperating teachers" as candidates prepared their edTPA. The edTPA Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support (henceforth, Guidelines) is a two-page document, with the first page serving as a kind of rationale for the guidelines, emphasizing the role of teacher-educators in facilitating the "educative" aspect of the edTPA's dual functions of measuring and developing effective teaching practice. The opening lines, for example, highlight the appropriateness of holding "professional conversation around teaching" that help candidates "examine expectations for performance evaluated by edTPA in meaningful ways and discuss how they will demonstrate their performance in relation to those expectations." Page two consists of two bulleted lists, the first of "acceptable forms" of candidate support, and the second of "unacceptable forms" of candidate support. The "acceptable list," as well as the first page narrative, indicate that to a significant extent teacher preparation programs are expected to prepare and support candidates for the edTPA through "formative experiences" before (rather than in the process of) completing the edTPA, for example, during course work, pre-student teaching fieldwork assignments, and during the early stages of student teaching. This emphasis on preparation through formative experiences, enabling candidates to "practice the activities of the edTPA," is consistent with SCALE's vision of the edTPA as a "summative" assessment of readiness to teach. However, due to the haste of implementation, these formative experiences were not initially integrated into coursework for the candidates completing the edTPA during the semesters of this study.

The list of "unacceptable forms of support" consists of one item targeting test security and candidate/ K-12 student privacy and four other items placing restrictions on the types of support that can be provided while candidates are planning, teaching, documenting and assessing the actual edTPA learning segment: (1) editing a candidate's official materials prior to submission; (2) offering critique of candidate responses that provides specific, alternative responses, prior to submission for official scoring; (3) telling candidates which video clips to select for submission; and (4) uploading candidate edTPA responses (written responses or videotape entries) on public access social media websites. A single item in the "acceptable" list—"Asking probing questions about candidates' draft edTPA responses or video recordings without providing direct edits of the candidate's writing or providing candidates with specific answers to edTPA prompts"—also appears to be targeted at restricting the level and type of feedback edTPA supporters can offer during the actual assessment.

Although it is not stated directly in the Guidelines, one can infer that Guideline items focusing on feedback to candidates in the process of completing the edTPA reflect SCALE's concern with assessment validity, namely that the edTPA measures what it intends to measure; to our knowledge, it is the only feature of the test design that SCALE implemented to ensure that the commentaries and other artifacts submitted to Pearson scorers are written and selected by the candidates, and that they serve as evidence of candidates' readiness to teach rather than that of the faculty, supervisors, and cooperating teachers supporting them. Our experiences suggest that there are few, if any, accountability mechanisms in place currently to ensure faculty adherence to the Guidelines.

## Conceptual Framing

Our interest in the supports offered, and dilemmas faced, by teacher educators during the initial semesters of edTPA implementation focuses our attention on localized enactment of policies. Spillane (1999) argues that teachers “make sense of and operationalize for their own practice the ideas advanced by reformers” (p. 144) within “zones of enactment”—the space where practitioners, their practice, and reforms intersect. He, among other researchers examining enactments of K-12 policies, point to teachers’ capacity and will as the primary drivers of reformed practice (e.g., McLaughlin, 1987; Odden, 1991; Spillane, 1999) where capacity is about ability to do the bidding of reformers and will is defined as inclination, driven by beliefs, motivations, and attitudes (McLaughlin, 1987) and “knowledge about students, subject matter and teaching, as well as...prior practice” (Spillane, 1999, p. 157). These scholars suggest that capacity can be built given enough and the right kind of resources (McLaughlin, 1987) and the proper social learning opportunities (Spillane, 1999), but acknowledge the profound challenge with shifting teachers’ inclinations to practice in alignment with the intent of reformers. Our conceptual framing of this study finds roots in this work and turns the lens toward teacher educators and their responses to large-scale accountability initiatives.

Our analyses suggest, however, that will and capacity do not sufficiently describe what shaped these teacher educators’ mediation of the edTPA. The model we present here is designed to show the more nuanced and multifaceted nature of these teacher educators’ sense-making and operationalization of the reform. As Figure 1 illustrates, the actions of the teacher educators in this study—the supports they provided to candidates—were shaped by their “stance” towards the edTPA, and the ethical, pedagogical, and logistical dilemmas they encountered as their candidates completed the edTPA. Like Spillane’s “will,” stance is a composite of beliefs and values regarding teacher education, teacher certification, pedagogy, assessment, and the process by which institutions determine education policy and reform. Stance, however, also connotes that these dispositions pre-exist policy enactment and through a dynamic interplay with ethical, pedagogical and logistical dilemmas that emerge during implementation, determines how teacher-educators make sense of the edTPA, and shapes their will to carry it out. The products of this complex process are the specific, observable supports faculty provides to candidates as they complete the edTPA.

Ethical dilemmas represent instances when an informant’s participation in the edTPA process came into tension with personal beliefs regarding the just and equitable preparation and credentialing of future teachers. Pedagogical dilemmas are those where friction between the Guidelines and beliefs about what good teaching and teacher education look like were reported. Lastly, logistical dilemmas are those where factors largely out of control of the candidate—such as cooperating teachers having poor classroom management and short timelines for student teaching—were reported. We utilize this conceptual model to help articulate how teacher educators respond to accountability initiatives within this unique “zone of enactment” (Spillane, 1999, p. 157) that prepares diverse teacher candidates who often ultimately teach in challenging school environments.

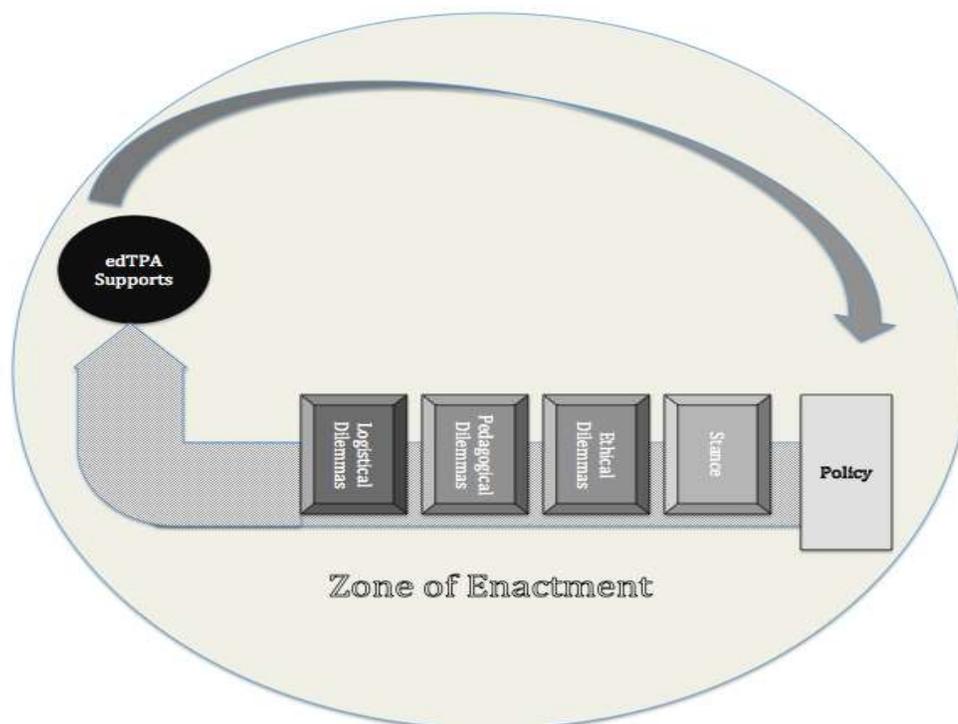


Figure 1. Conceptual Framing

## Methods

As the authors of this study, we entered this research with a shared commitment to preparing able novice teachers for urban schools and generally positive perspectives of the edTPA's capacity to support that process. We both supported a large number of teacher candidates in workshops and student teaching seminars, and one author (Joni) was also engaged in supervision of student teachers in their clinical placements. We quickly discovered in the first few weeks of high-stakes implementation that we were approaching our work with candidates in different ways and wondered how this might mediate the implementation of the edTPA policy and candidates' experiences. Thus, we developed this exploratory case study to systematically investigate the lived experiences of teacher educators during the initial semesters of edTPA implementation. We were interested in understanding both the supports provided and the drivers behind those supports, particularly in relation to the Guidelines developed by SCALE.

We elicited the perspectives of tenured and tenure-track teacher educators in public, urban schools of education in a large city in New York State. We sought out institutions where faculty prepared diverse teacher candidates for a variety of subject areas and grade levels during the first semesters of edTPA implementation. Utilizing an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews premised on the conceptual ideas of policy enactment for teachers (McLaughlin, 1987; Spillane, 1999), these instruments were designed to elicit participants' will and capacity to enact the edTPA as envisioned. The questionnaire focused on the candidate population, structure of edTPA supports within programs, and any factors and dilemmas that played into decision making in terms

of candidate support. While the majority of the questions were open-ended, we specifically inquired as to how the Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support shaped the level and type of support they provided. In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, the questionnaire was completed online and did not elicit participants' names or institution. Utilizing a snowball recruitment method, the invitation to participate asked receivers to share the link with colleagues. Thirteen individuals originally began to complete the questionnaire, and ultimately nine completed it in its entirety (Table 1). Responses ranged from single sentences to seven paragraphs, with the majority of participants writing between two and three paragraphs per open-ended question. These teacher educators were then invited to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews that drew upon themes that emerged from the questionnaires, allowing us to further clarify our understandings. Three faculty members completed these interviews with a duration of 1 to 2.5 hours. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

### Contexts of Preparation

Successful completion of the edTPA has been a requirement for New York State certification since May 2014, and yet it was introduced with little time for programs to make the curricular and programmatic changes necessary to support candidates effectively.<sup>3</sup> This short time line has been particularly challenging for faculty in institutions that serve highly diverse candidate populations such as those whose experiences are presented in this study. These institutions enroll approximately 13,000 students in education programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels. They educate a population of ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse pre-service teacher candidates who often work part- or full-time in addition to their coursework. In addition, many of these candidates attended under-resourced K-12 schools that struggle to meet the learning needs of students. Another significant context feature is the duration of the student teaching experience for candidates in the programs of the studied institutions. Whereas many teacher preparation programs require candidates to student teach, as a capstone experience, for two semesters (approximately the entire K-12 school year), the institutions we investigated require only a single semester. The one semester design is primarily in place to accommodate significant numbers of candidates who cannot afford the extended periods away from salaried employment that is required for a full school year of student teaching.

These candidates' clinical learning is often situated within K-12 schools that serve children and youth who experience poverty and other vulnerabilities. In addition, many of the schools are operating under intense pressure to meet No Child Left Behind mandated performance standards without the city and state providing adequate time and resources to meet them. Although the edTPA is a requirement for certification, the school district hosting most of the student teachers was slow to get the message out. Some of the resulting challenges to candidates successfully completing the edTPA will most likely subside as host schools and cooperating teachers become more familiar with the assessment. There are other challenges faced by candidates at these institutions, however, that might not be as easily addressed by better and more-timely messaging. The high teacher turnover in these schools and pressure to raise standardized test scores increasingly result in candidates assigned to cooperating teachers that have limited teaching experience, who are expected to teach from scripted curricula narrowly focused on standardized test preparation, and who have

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<sup>3</sup> In response to political action taken by teacher-educators toward the end of the first semester of its implementation, the New York Board of Education created a "safety net" whereby candidates who were unsuccessful on the edTPA could still be certified by passing an older certification exam (ATS-W).

Table 1  
*Participants*

Pseudonym	Tenured	Candidates supported (per term)	Classroom teaching experience (years)
James*	Y	18-22	8+
Hannah*	N	6-15	4-7
Sonia	N	**	8+
Townsend Harris	Y	10-20	8+
Mim*	N	19	4-7
Seraphina	Y	7	4-7
Vanessa	N	4	4-7
Professor	Y	25+	8+
George	Y	9	8+

*Note:* A pseudonym with a \* indicates they engaged in the follow-up semi-structured interview.

been given little time, notice, and resources necessary to create the conditions that would enable a candidate to plan, teach, record, and assess, as stipulated in the edTPA handbooks, a 3-5 lesson sequence focused on building a singular skill or understanding in the middle of a semester. This “connected instruction” requirement, is highlighted here to underscore how the test design assumes a degree of predictability and orderliness in the schools, classrooms, and curricula of cooperating teachers that would allow for cohesive and linked lessons; in fact, these qualities are not consistently present in the clinical settings germane to this study, or not enough to readily accommodate the “connectedness” that candidates are asked to build into their learning segment. In urban public schools serving vulnerable populations, particularly during a period of wide-reaching reforms and policy mandates, flux is often the only constant, not only because teachers are compelled to make abrupt changes in curricula and instructional priorities in response to these policies and reforms, but because student absenteeism, transnational populations, and abrupt reassignments of teachers within and across schools result in significant changes to classrooms from month to month. These are the conditions that characterize many of the “authentic classroom settings” where candidates from these institutions will conduct their edTPA; they are conditions that weigh heavily in how the faculty investigated in this study supported candidates.

## Analysis

We engaged in a collaborative analytic process (Wasser & Bresler, 1996) to begin to understand the roles of will and capacity in these teacher educators’ mediation of the policy. Over the course of several months we participated in an iterative process of reading survey data, conducting interviews, individual coding of questionnaire responses and interview transcripts, writing analytical memos, and coming together to discuss, interpret, and revisit emergent themes and

subthemes responsive to the research questions (Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This inductive approach revealed that will and capacity were limiting constructs and so we moved beyond, unearthing these participants' stances, and the ethical, pedagogical, and logistical dilemmas they faced in adhering to the Guidelines. In addition, although there was wide variation in the situations encountered, our analyses suggest there were three general responses to the Guidelines: breaking the rules (those who actively and knowingly ignored the Guidelines); bending the rules (those who at times overstepped the parameters of the Guidelines); and obeying the rules (those who followed the Guidelines). Our analyses revealed that actions—the supports these teacher educators provided—seem driven by a dynamic interplay between their particular stance and the dilemmas they face as they prepare and support candidates.

## Findings

In this section, we begin by discussing participants' views on teacher education and how these views relate to their stances towards the edTPA. In the section that follows, we describe how participants' stances are manifested, and in certain cases reshaped, through logistical, pedagogical, and ethical dilemmas that they face in their day-to-day support of candidates undertaking the assessment.

### Stances toward the edTPA

Questionnaire and interview responses reveal that participants had assumed a range of stances towards the edTPA, and that their stances influenced the level and type of support provided to candidates undergoing the assessment. In most cases, initial dispositions towards the test could be traced to participant's underlying values and beliefs regarding teaching and teacher education, and the degree to which the edTPA aligned with them.

Professor, one of two participants reporting a positive view of the edTPA prior to her support of candidates, stresses that a primary role of teacher preparation programs is to help candidates “learn to make connections [to the classroom] that are realistic and experiential.” She also identifies preparation in “understanding children and their communities” as essential for future teachers. Referring to both future teachers and teacher educators, Professor conveys that authentic assessments, like the edTPA, “must be part of the teaching tool box so that instruction becomes realistic and differentiated.”

James, the other participant who held a favorable view of the edTPA prior to this study, underscores that student teaching is too often treated as an “appendage” in teacher education. His experiences as a teaching candidate and later as a professor in a school of education shape a vision of effective teacher preparation that places student teaching as “the centerpiece of programs.” His optimism concerning the edTPA rests on the hope that a high-stakes, performance-based assessment will incentivize full time faculty to design course curricula and assignments that are more aligned and accountable to the everyday, complex realities that await candidates in K-12 schools. He envisions the edTPA as an opportunity for more full time faculty to engage directly with candidates during clinical experiences rather than “farm out the responsibility to adjuncts and remote supervisors.”

Townsend Harris' stance toward the edTPA is categorically negative, a disposition rooted in his/her belief that, “Effective teacher education should be coming from the faculty's vision—not from a publishing house or mandates from the state.” Although Harris, like many other participants, is acutely aware of the “realities” of classroom instruction, s/he believes that teacher education

should prepare candidates to find or create spaces to teach essential yet undervalued skills, knowledge and dispositions within highly regulated schools through, for instance, “the power of the arts in teaching and learning.” His/her negative stance towards the edTPA is shaped by a view of the assessment as “too narrow, too parochial” to advance a vision of teacher education that nurtures “teaching in the cracks.”

The remaining participants in our sample—a group whose stance towards the edTPA is best described as cautious and ambivalent—identify many of the same elements when asked which learning experiences and teacher-educator practices they view as essential for preparing future teachers for the classroom. These include assessment driven instruction, balancing of theoretical and clinical knowledge, harnessing knowledge of students to inform practice, reviewing and critiquing lesson plans, and critically observing videos of exemplary as well as poor teaching.

Although participants in this group generally regard the edTPA as beneficial for cultivating and assessing these particular practices in future teachers, they also raise concerns about how other elements of the edTPA’s design, process of implementation and implications for the teaching profession align with their vision for teacher education. A common theme that arises as they voice ambivalence towards the edTPA is the degree to which a large scale standardized test—even one designed to assess teaching performance in authentic classroom contexts—could fairly and fully evaluate their linguistically, culturally, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse teaching candidates conducting the edTPA in classrooms that are equally or more heterogeneous. Hannah, for example, believes that effective teacher education emphasizes and prepares future teachers to enact a pedagogy of “access and inclusion.” In her view, however, “the access piece is not so appreciated in the edTPA, or it is in a superficial or limiting way.” Noting that candidates under his charge are “taking multiple courses while working,” George expresses concern that these individuals will struggle to access the time needed to complete the labor-intensive edTPA during the student teaching semester. Mim, supporting ESL education candidates, worries that the time and English language proficiency needed to write as many as 27 pages of required edTPA commentaries disadvantages her Spanish-dominant candidates.

More than “the test itself”, Sonia directs her concern at the resource—poor schools where her school of education typically places student teachers. She, as well as Seraphina, question how successfully their candidates can teach and film a 3-5 lesson learning segment of connected instruction in urban public schools marked by absenteeism, abrupt reassignments of teachers, continually shifting class rosters, and enormous pressure to meet state accountability measures by focusing on standardized test preparation. “Diversifying the teaching workforce” is cited as an important element in Seraphina’s vision of teacher education. The participants in this group share a commitment to building a teaching force in urban public schools that has more in common with the students who attend them, and to forming partnerships with the historically underserved schools in the community surrounding their universities. At the same time, they fear that carrying out the edTPA in these settings could ultimately prevent rather than facilitate the certification of their candidates, many who come from under-represented groups in the teaching profession.

## **Responses to the Policy**

We draw on the data from the surveys and interviews to document how stance in conversation with ethical, pedagogical, and logistical dilemmas, shaped these teacher educators’ individual responses to the policy, and the Guidelines in particular (Table 2). Given our primary interest in how these faculty members ultimately mediated the policy within this zone of enactment, we utilize their actions around the Guidelines—breaking the rules; bending the rules; obeying the rules—as an organizing mechanism to illustrate the conceptual model we offer above.

Table 2  
*Dilemmas and Adherence to Guidelines for Acceptable Support*

	<b>Ethical Dilemmas</b>	<b>Pedagogical Dilemmas</b>	<b>Logistical Dilemmas</b>
<b>Breaking the Rules</b>			
Townsend Harris	X	X	X
<b>Bending the Rules</b>			
James*		X	X
Hannah*	X	X	X
Mim*	X	X	X
Seraphina	X	X	X
<b>Obeying the Rules</b>			
Sonia			X
Vanessa			X
George			X
Professor			X

*Note:* A pseudonym with a \* indicates they engaged in the follow-up semi-structured interview.

### **Breaking the Rules**

One participant's responses suggest an overt disregard for the Guidelines, highly rooted in stance and its intersection with ethical, pedagogical, and logistical dilemmas s/he faced in implementation. Townsend Harris (TH) writes,

After reading the Guidelines for Acceptable Support, I decided to ignore them. This was my act of resistance. No one can tell me how I can (or cannot) support my students.

S/he further explains that the edTPA moves teaching and teacher education in the wrong direction and was preventing candidates from engaging in important learning during their capstone student teaching experience, writing that,

Effective teacher education should be coming from the faculty's vision—not from a publishing house or mandates from the state. Effective teacher education should be about the possibilities of what good teaching could look like in our schools, taking into account a broad scope of multiple learners...it should also be about the realities of “teaching in the cracks”—in rigid environments with scripted curriculum and limited resources.

TH reports that s/he engaged in “intense readings of their commentaries” which resulted in “editing for clarity...and suggesting ideas for inclusion”—all supports well outside acceptable according to the Guidelines. TH rationalizes that such supports were necessary because of the “tremendous stress” her/his undergraduate candidates were experiencing as a result of the hasty implementation of the edTPA and the challenges these candidates face, and that her/his edits and comments were designed to help the candidates move forward and become teachers of record. S/he suggests these actions were designed to counteract ethical dilemmas, believing that in the absence of such robust supports, candidates would be prevented from becoming teachers of record and that “many of them *should be* teachers” because they have much to offer children and youth that cannot be measured by a high-stakes performance assessment implemented with such haste.

TH also reports that logistical obstacles unique to these candidates’ situations—particularly weak student teaching placements and monetary needs—contributed to the extent of support offered candidates. TH laments,

The [candidates] need to have sane placements with cooperating teachers who are experienced, creative, and who enjoy working with our candidates, and whose practice is aligned to the theories we promote within the School of Education. In addition, we need to have field supervisors who are also well informed and who will support our student teachers. Sadly, some of our placements continue to be problematic and some of our field supervisors are not as supportive as they could be.

These hurdles, well outside the control of candidates but potentially having a profound influence on their ability to effectively complete the edTPA in a timely fashion, is a challenge likely experienced by many teacher preparation programs. Finding cooperating teachers who are interested in, and capable of, mentoring pre-service teachers in high-accountability environments where their own jobs often hinge on student test scores, is challenging. Combined with the expense of certification exams that are a large financial hurdle for these candidates, TH describes a willingness to go beyond the parameters of the Guidelines to meet the needs of these pre-service teachers.

### **Bending the Rules**

While TH reports overt disregard for the Guidelines, other participants’ actions could be characterized as toeing the line of acceptable support. James, Hannah, Mim, and Seraphina each describe occasionally and knowingly providing more explicit instruction than they believe is allowed—editing, helping candidates work out the specifics of their lessons, helping them choose appropriate video clips. Their willingness to only overstep occasionally seems to be partially rooted in their shared stance on the edTPA—as an assessment measuring important capacities that teachers should have—combined with the unique ethical, pedagogical, and logistical dilemmas they encountered in implementation.

Hannah frames her actions as addressing a social justice issue, arguing that she occasionally oversteps the boundaries of what is acceptable support because her primary responsibility is to ensure that candidates are ready to be teachers of record. She explains,

Given that most of our candidates teach in schools with children who have experienced a revolving door of teacher quality, it is essential that they have a sufficient handle on the fundamentals of teaching—it is a social justice issue.

Otherwise, we, as teacher educators, are contributing to children in the highest-need schools being taught by the least capable teachers.

She articulates that teacher educators must use their professional judgment when making decisions about candidate support. In her interview she describes working with a candidate who was a “very strong student but also overly cautious and hesitant.” The outline for the lesson sequence the candidate showed her demonstrated confusion about objectives and how lessons would build upon one another. Hannah was frustrated listening to this candidate take the lesson sequence in a direction that would likely be a weak learning experience for students and so she sat her down and discussed what this lesson sequence might look like, the way that the objectives could be aligned, and how it all influences the formative and summative assessments. Hannah argued that she engaged in this explicit kind of support because she was concerned that the candidate may not have gained sufficient understanding through her curriculum development courses. She acknowledged that while she could have “replicated this exact scenario using something that was not the intended edTPA lessons but it seemed like a waste of time because this was such a teachable moment.” For Hannah, her supports privileged the importance of candidates being prepared to teach in high-accountability, low-resource classrooms over the edTPA Guidelines, acknowledging both the ethical and pedagogical dilemmas she was facing.

Mim shared Hannah’s concerns around candidates being prepared for the classroom and seizing teachable moments but the dilemmas she reports emphasize the dissonance between the edTPA her candidates complete and the job they will be doing as ESL classroom teachers. In her interview, she explained that their program prepares candidates for teaching in dual language classrooms and works to develop their skills in translanguaging and language acquisition. However, she notes that the edTPA that her candidates complete is not designed for candidates preparing for such certification. Due to this mismatch, she explains that she “gives them substantial feedback which stems from [the candidates’] lack of clarity in terms of the handbook because it seems disparate from what they learned in their coursework.” However, Mim is clear that she thinks the edTPA, if it attended to the particular skills these candidates require, would be a good assessment, but that it adds to the “already existing, and often overwhelming, demands of student teaching.” She also states that when she tells candidates to revisit a prompt or points out issues, that she is doing her job as a teacher educator because she is helping them be a better teacher and “supporting their development through the handbook.”

James describes his frustration with being asked to overlook teachable moments in the name of following a set of guidelines. “There’s a ton that candidates can learn about teaching [while completing the edTPA] and so many opportunities for us to facilitate learning.” He reports that instances of “wordsmithing” and “editing” candidate’s commentaries “freed up” both he and the candidates to focus their limited time together “mining teachable moments rather than getting hunkered down in the composing process.”

One of Seraphina’s main concerns with the edTPA is specifically situated in the timeline for its completion—during the capstone student teaching experience when “all of the learning in courses has the opportunity to come together and be put into practice for these candidates.” In her responses, she wonders if it is ethical for teacher educators to spend so much time preparing candidates for the realities of urban classroom teaching and then limiting the time and space to try their hand at practice because the edTPA coopts their entire semester of student teaching. She saw the edTPA moving the profession away from the goals she sees for teacher education, away from developing “candidates’ ability to think about meeting the needs of children.” Her writing suggests that in order to counter much of the stress and all-consuming nature of the edTPA and to let the

student teaching experience be educative, she often overstepped. She notes that “keeping them to strict guidelines didn’t really work because these candidates really needed individual supports” and that her undergraduate candidates likely could not effectively complete the edTPA, and develop in their ability to teach, if she did not go beyond the Guidelines.

A driving force in bending the rules for some of these participants is related to the logistics of completing the edTPA during a semester-long student teaching and candidates’ abilities to persevere in the face of many drafts. Hannah, Seraphina, and Mim note that the candidates were so busy student teaching, finishing up coursework, occasionally working on the side, and caring for family members, that they rarely had the ability to sit, grapple and revise their commentaries for long periods of time; Seraphina raises particular concerns about undergraduates’ writing stamina. Mim’s rationale for her rule bending was typical of these kinds of narratives:

I wanted candidates to be able to adequately express themselves and what they know but I was concerned that they may not have the skills to effectively accomplish this given the constraints of time...

James, Hannah, and Mim all share a concern with TH about the quality of placements and cooperating teachers that their candidates were experiencing, and the potential impact on the quality of their edTPAs. This was a driving factor behind James’s bending practices:

These candidates are teaching in less than ideal teaching situations. Sometimes I am watching a video with someone teaching in a classroom setting that starts at a difficult space, knowing that they didn’t establish that classroom culture, the cooperating teacher did. There are factors that feed into the degree students in the class are on task and engaged—a million things that are out of the control of teacher candidates. A student teacher can’t impact that culture significantly—it is naïve to think they could. So when I see someone is teaching in a classroom that by no fault of their own is not a good culture I feel like in some respects I need to help more. I have to help them look harder and help them find the few places where they maybe made efforts to impact the classroom culture. I feel the need to be more active in that process. I feel sorry for them.

Mim shares similar concerns, but in regard to the role that cooperating teachers play in the development of lessons for the planning task. She notes,

Their cooperating teachers don’t know what they will be teaching a month from now and so they take a guess and the candidates develop lessons from what they are told. Come the day before they are supposed to teach and video record and they ultimately have to teach something much different than they had planned for. So the candidates end up redoing the lessons multiple times. We have started telling them to plan for a broader central focus so whatever they end up doing can be aligned to what they talk about in the grand scheme of things but this impacts candidates’ stress levels, and causes the writing of Task 1 to drag on and on, and impacts their ability to attend to the other tasks.

Seraphina describes working with her undergraduate candidates fairly extensively in terms of their writing and helping to edit. Like TH, her bending on such aspects was related to her acknowledgement that candidates are struggling to pay for the costs of the exams, made particularly

difficult by the fact that many are on leave from their jobs so they can complete student teaching. Providing what she perceives as support outside the Guidelines is motivated by her hope that candidates will not have to pay additional money to redo failed tasks.

There is also significant variation in our sample in terms of the number of candidates that faculty were supporting while completing the edTPA, the length and number of workshops or seminar sessions directly devoted to edTPA support, and the amount of time faculty are assisting candidates outside of the formal support events and structures. For instance, while some faculty members were supporting five or six candidates, others had up to 20 candidates to support through the edTPA process. And while Hannah and Mim describe the support process as very time consuming, largely because the hasty implementation meant there were so many gaps to fill that were not addressed in coursework, James, who was supporting 20 or more candidates across several subject areas in one semester, found the numbers influenced his capacity to adhere to the Guidelines. He notes that a student who was “woefully behind in terms of reading and writing skills” could not be caught up in alignment with the Guidelines because he “couldn’t meet with her for 6 or 8 hours to get it done the ‘right’ way—there was so much teaching to do at that point.” He concludes that his approach to supporting edTPA candidates is ultimately determined by numbers:

If I was able to work with four or five students rather than 20 plus, I don’t think I would feel the need to speed up the process by occasionally feeding students language, or, sometimes ‘pointing’ them to relevant scholarship or moments on their videos of engaging students instead of using ‘probing’ questions, which is what I’m supposed to do but takes more time than I have.

Our explorations suggest that the four faculty members who occasionally veered from the Guidelines generally have a favorable view of the edTPA as an assessment, but faced dilemmas that were largely shaped by the implementation timeline, challenges with school placements, and concerns about the monetary costs to candidates.

### **Obeying the Rules**

Four participants report a willingness to adhere to the Guidelines despite sharing some of the same logistical concerns as the other participants. Professor, Sonia and Vanessa provide detailed account of their edTPA practices while George simply outlines limited intervention and concerns about the time constraints other participants have cited. Professor, based on her nearly half a century as a classroom teacher and school administrator, is convinced that “authentic performance assessment is the best evaluator”. She believes that the edTPA has pushed her faculty to revisit “perceptions and previous assumptions” regarding what and how to teach during teacher preparation courses, and “forced [candidates] to re-examine their preconceived notions and strategies” concerning classroom instruction. Perhaps most pertinent to this discussion, Professor wants candidates “to become independent and resourceful” and states that,

If we gave too much support, they would not have been forced to develop in-depth self-reflection, focus, and attention to the details and connections they will be exposed to in the school system.

It is not surprising, therefore, that she reports viewing the Guidelines as “not terrible” and perhaps of all our participants, demonstrates greatest fidelity to them “as it encouraged our students to be resourceful and careful as they developed plans and reflected on instruction.”

Sonia similarly adhered to the Guidelines, reporting that she supported the program in over-viewing the format of the edTPA in a student teaching orientation with candidates where they addressed planning and assessment in light of the rubrics. When providing candidates support at their individual request she describes going over larger conceptual ideas but not specifically addressing candidates' portfolios. Her adherence perhaps is related to her belief that the edTPA, as an actual assessment, has many merits, because it "requires thoughtful planning about learning and assessment, as well as good reflective practice." This is not to discount her questions about whether it is an appropriate assessment for initial certification given the logistics of completing the assessment during a one-semester student teaching experience. She describes the "pressures of completing the portfolio" as making

...student teaching a lot less about learning from the experience of implementing lessons and assuming an active role in a school context and more about figuring out how to get all of the pieces of their portfolio in order and submitted in time.

Similar to other participants, she cites challenges with placement schools, particularly with their lack of investment in the assessment, as a barrier to candidates being able to complete all pieces in a timely manner. She attributes these logistical issues to both the sudden high-stakes nature of the policy implementation and the fact that candidates "don't have much locus of control in their cooperating teachers' classrooms in a highly-charged context of standardization and accountability."

In contrast to Professor and Sonia's respective programs, Vanessa's program instituted a supplemental edTPA seminar that created more opportunities for direct support of candidates, and in theory at least, more opportunities for providing support that might be characterized as outside the Guidelines. In practice, however, Vanessa's stance on teacher education meant that she did not. She reports, "trying to ask questions of candidates and being more visual, such as drawing diagrams to show how the pieces fit together" and providing feedback "always in the form of questions and encouraging them to align things," as that is her typical approach to practice. Yet she too experienced frustration with the logistical dilemmas, describing the situation as "outside of our control" because the cooperating teachers often did not "set the best learning environments, particularly in terms of classroom management" that she often spent time helping candidates navigate the logistics of teaching and assessment as opposed to really supporting their learning with this "educative" performance assessment tool.

For the participants who adhered to the Guidelines, their stance, particularly around what teacher education should look like combined with belief in the value of the assessment, seems to drive the more limited supports described. Like the other participants, however, logistical dilemmas arise—particularly in regard to placements and time—and are raised as potential barriers to candidates' success.

## Discussion

Our data suggests large variations and disparities in the level and kind of supports that candidates received; similar variance was found in terms of adherence to the Guidelines. A common thread across the findings is the profound commitment by these teacher educators to the candidates and the children that the candidates will ultimately teach. Beliefs about what constitutes sound pedagogical approaches and the merit of the edTPA, however, varied widely across the sample.

All participants shared logistical concerns around the plausibility of candidates completing the edTPA within a single student teaching semester, and the ways in which contextual factors

(classroom environments, cooperating teachers, the high-accountability environments of schools) shape the work the candidates ultimately produce. It is unclear the extent to which the scorers of the edTPA can and do take into account the challenging environments in which many of the candidates student teach, or the impact of their cooperating teachers on what they produce, but our research suggests that these concerns weighed heavy on the minds of all participants.

All of these factors seem to contribute to large differences in the level and kinds of supports candidates ultimately received, and the willingness of faculty members to provide it. It is likely that some of the variation is due to the recent and rapid introduction of the edTPA in New York State. Deans and chairpersons have been scrambling to determine not only how to best allocate resources for edTPA support, but also two other high-stakes assessments that were recently introduced by the state. It is understandable that under these conditions decisions can be made ad hoc; overtime we could expect that there will be more uniformity in how schools of education directly support candidates as they work on the edTPA.

The state of New York has adopted a teacher certification exam that “is designed to be *educative and predictive of effective teaching and student learning*” (New York State Teacher Certification Examinations, n.d.). In light of the disparity reported by our subjects in direct edTPA support for candidates, both claims of the predictive power of the edTPA and its educative power require further examination. The Guidelines may establish a degree of consistency in the type of input provided by faculty to candidates, but there is nothing in the design to ensure consistency and equity in the amount and intensity of support. When reviewing an edTPA commentary, for example, two faculty members may both follow the Guidelines of limiting their interaction with respective candidates to “asking probing questions”, but there will be stark differences in the *number* of probing questions, or even the total number of commentary pages reviewed, if one faculty has been assigned to support 22 candidates while the other only support five.

The capacity driven issues revealed by the participants, however, are not solely limited to the number of meetings they have with candidates or number of pages they can review given their case-load. Capacity also influences the nature of support delivered by these teacher-educators; it shapes how they, to use Spillane’s (1999) phrase, “make sense of and operationalize” (p. 159) the conceptual underpinnings of the edTPA, and ultimately, their involvement in the final products submitted by teacher candidates to Pearson for scoring. Townsend Harris, for example, views the edTPA as an impediment to enacting what s/he views as teacher education that helps candidates navigate within high-accountability school environments, and thereby ignores the Guidelines in an act of “resistance.” James, by contrast, views the pedagogical thrust and instructional standards promoted by the edTPA as “fundamentally in line” with his own vision of what future teachers should know and be able to do. Though not to the extent of Townsend Harris, he is also willing to stray from the Guidelines, but in his case it is to “maximize” what he views as the edTPA’s efficacy as a tool for teacher development.

James’s final comment on this topic, however, sounds an ominous note, one that could be instructive for state education officials, SCALE, and other stakeholders interested in maintaining the validity of the edTPA and its educative function:

So, I’m pretty sure I would remain faithful to the guidelines [given smaller numbers of candidates to support], but if I continue to be responsible for dozens of students I’ll eventually feel forced to make one of two unappealing choices: I’m afraid I’ll find I’m inserting myself into student’s edTPAs far more than I’m comfortable with ethically or instructionally, or more likely I’ll have to leave them largely to their own devices. That would be disappointing because a) many of my candidates need a lot

support, and b) I've found that supporting candidates through the edTPA has been really valuable for their development as teachers.

Other participants who also report supporting a large number of candidates express different concerns. Seraphina states that the edTPA experience runs counter to her vision of effective teacher education. Although she makes vague references to the edTPA undermining candidates' "ability to think about meeting the needs of students" and "moving us away from the goals of teacher education," she describes ultimately teaching to the test, telling candidates "just to look at the rubrics." It is a decision that appears largely driven by her commitment to diversifying the teacher workforce and fear that in the absence of such steps, able candidates will not become teachers of record. Her descriptions also seem to reflect her general frustration with helping multiple high-need candidates in limited time meet the complex thinking and writing demands of the test; it is not a specific critique of edTPA elements or principled stand against its validity as is the case with Townsend Harris.

Like Seraphina, Professor supports large numbers of candidates and does so with fidelity to the Guidelines. In comparison to Seraphina, however, abiding by the Guidelines is not a source of tension; Professor's vision of teacher education is well-aligned with the edTPA. She also wants candidates to develop and demonstrate independence before they become teachers of record and views the Guidelines' limitations of faculty involvement as congruent with this objective. Moreover, Professor's willingness to follow the Guidelines is evidence that faculty charged with supporting large numbers of candidates will not inevitably take a more active role in the construction of edTPA submissions than intended by the test designers. They, however, are not representative of our sample; there are clearly faculty who willingly chose to bend or abandon the Guidelines, or simply feel incapable of following them given the conditions under which they are providing support. It is also apparent from our research that beyond the issue of inconsistent adherence to the Guidelines, the level of direct edTPA support candidates are receiving differs greatly from program to program and school to school, and that these differences most likely result from financial constraints and the distinct needs of their student populations. Given the high-stakes nature of the edTPA for candidates, we call upon representatives of New York State, SCALE, and independent researchers to further study the variations in faculty support of candidates completing the edTPA, the factors producing this variation, and the impact it has on the quality of submissions.

### **Potential Impact on Evaluations of Teacher Preparation Institutions**

In January 2015, Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, proposed that the State Education Department "de-register and suspend the operation of any teacher education program that has more than 50% of its graduates failing to pass any state certification exam in a given year in three consecutive years." Before his appointment as senior adviser to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, former state school chancellor John King also communicated that the edTPA had "raised the bar for the teaching profession" (King, 2014) and that teacher preparation programs failing to meet that bar should no longer operate (Harris, 2014). The findings of our study indicate that future research should pay close attention to how pronouncements—and potential legislation—tying continued operation of teacher certification programs to candidate performance on certification exams, will impact how faculty support candidates on the edTPA.

Even before Cuomo and King's statements, the surveys and interviews conducted for this study revealed that more than half of the participants demonstrated a willingness to "bend" or "break" the acceptable support guidelines. As the state continues to utilize the edTPA as a gatekeeper for entering the teaching profession and begins to treat it as a factor in teacher education

program accreditation, it is conceivable that self-interest will play a larger role in how and how much faculty become involved in candidate's edTPA submissions. In the state germane to this study, the edTPA can prevent teaching candidates from entering the profession, will potentially cost teacher educators their jobs, and allows for significant levels of unmonitored faculty involvement in the testing process.

The testing conditions are similar in some ways to those that existed when recent high profile cheating scandals occurred in K-12 schools districts of Washington D.C., Baltimore, Maryland, and Atlanta, Georgia. It is notable that the schools of education in this study, like the K-12 districts associated with the cheating scandals, serve large numbers of students subject to economic hardships and cultural biases that have historically had a negative impact on academic achievement and standardized test performance. The overlapping concerns and conditions of these institutions in relation to high-stakes testing compels us to question how the breakers, benders and obeyers will think and act in their support roles as the stakes of the edTPA become even higher or more pronounced. There are significant differences in the organizational cultures, faculty make-up, and basic missions of these institutions, and the similarities between the schools of education involved in this study and the discredited K-12 districts are not nearly enough to anticipate systemic cheating by faculty in their support of edTPA candidates. Still, the findings from our investigation, the increasingly high stakes of the edTPA for teacher educators, and the low security conditions compel us to draw attention to the potential for egregious and endemic contravention of the parameters SCALE has established for acceptable involvement of non-test takers. Stated simply, the edTPA is a take home test that has significant consequences for the livelihoods of current and future professional educators. If the stakes continue to be raised, the potential for fraudulent behavior increases and confidence in the legitimacy of the edTPA as a teacher certification exam may be undermined.

### **Potential Impact on Faculty Relations**

In a document describing "Benefits to Teacher Education Programs" SCALE asserts that the edTPA: (1) "offers rich data and feedback that can help identify strengths and weaknesses, bringing to light areas that need revision or strengthening"; (2) "provides empirical evidence of whether or not some of those components that we say are 'infused throughout the curriculum' really are, in fact, sufficiently integrated"; (3) "uses evidence-based scoring and rubrics to "clearly define each performance level, it counters any tendency to "give the benefit of the doubt" to candidates, or assume we know what they are thinking"; and (4) "promotes "uniform, high standards within and across programs," which supports "cohesiveness across programs" (edTPA Orientation for Program Leaders, Faculty, and P-12 Partners 2014).

While the scope of this study does not allow us to conclusively assess the degree to which the edTPA provided these benefits to the teacher education programs associated with our participants, our findings suggest that the edTPA impacts, in ways that can be viewed as desirable and undesirable, how teacher education faculty interact and collaborate. The program benefits articulated by SCALE suggest that the assessment designers intended for the edTPA to be a catalyst for developing shared language, values and clarity of purpose across a teacher preparation faculty. Although our surveys did not directly ask if the edTPA was serving this purpose on their respective faculties, four participants voiced appreciation for how the assessment had instigated meaningful discussions on fundamental aspects of effective teacher preparation and how to organize, instruct and coordinate courses in order to best prepare candidates for, through and beyond student teaching. Professor, for example, reported that as a response to the edTPA, faculty at his/her college "revisited our perceptions and previous assumptions, revisited our lesson foci in all courses,

made connections with other programs on our campus and with other colleagues and campuses.” James wrote that while the core professors in his program have always considered how their courses “fit together,” these discussions “are more serious and goal-directed now.” He also reports that now faculty outside his immediate program are “brought into these conversations and planning meetings” because “we need to be certain that the breadth of courses our students take to fulfill program requirements are all working towards preparing them to take the edTPA and the other certification exams.”

A number of participants revealed that the edTPA has in fact provided insight into whether teaching practices and knowledge they assumed were “infused throughout the curriculum” were adequately taught or taught at all through pre-student teaching lessons and assignments. Based on her review of edTPA lesson plans candidates submitted for feedback, for example, Hannah wrote that “many candidates did not seem to have the foundation from their other courses to do strong, sequential lesson design or to develop assessments.” Many of the participants became more cognizant of gaps in candidates’ knowledge of academic writing conventions such as how to embed quotes from scholarship into their commentaries.

Our study provides clear examples of the edTPA motivating individual faculty to pursue increased rigor and cohesion across their teacher preparation programs, as well as targeted program revision based on authentic evidence of candidate performance. Not all faculty, however, responded in this manner. Even when the assessment revealed clear gaps in candidates’ teaching knowledge or weaknesses in teaching practice, there were participants who questioned the content validity of the assessment (“the edTPA vision of effective teaching is not my vision of what it means to be a good educator”) or critiqued the test materials (“I feel the prompts are poorly written and it is difficult to figure out what exactly the questions are asking”), rather than view unsatisfactory candidate performance as motivation to raise the rigor of coursework or revise curricula to target need areas. In other words, for some faculty the edTPA did not counter the tendency to “give the benefit of the doubt” to candidates and perhaps even reinforced it.

### **Potential Impact on the Diversification of the Teacher Workforce**

Three participants expressed concern that the edTPA and other new certification exams would unfairly prevent candidates from their institution’s sizable populations of recent immigrants, non-whites, poor and working class students from entering the profession or even pursuing it. These individuals, and many of their colleagues, view increasing the number of teachers from historically underrepresented groups in the teaching force as an important part of their work as teacher educators and central to the mission of their institutions. Some, however, not only fear that the new tests will result in significant numbers of students leaving or never applying to teacher preparation programs, but also question the appropriateness of encouraging candidates with limited finances to, as TH reports, “pay the costs of taking these state certification tests that many need to take over and over again in order to pass.” According to Hannah, “There has also been talk at recent faculty meetings about increasing the rigor of admissions assessments, and creating hurdles before student teaching to weed out candidates from programs or steer them into non-certification tracks.” Though these proposed changes, according to Hannah, are never explicitly linked to demonstrating higher passing rates for the state, she believes that this is the intent.

As expressed in questionnaire and interview responses, the overriding commitment of faculty in our sample is in developing all candidates in their programs into well-prepared teachers of children and youth. Faculty uniformly cite this as a goal even if they hold markedly different views on the degree to which the edTPA makes it more or less achievable. As reflected in the words of

James, however, our study of the lived experiences of teacher educators supporting edTPA candidates reveals the potential for shifts in faculty stances and behaviors:

Sometimes I feel like I'm getting cornered into making one of two bad choices: do no more than what the edTPA people say I can do and accept that some of my students, through no fault of their own, will never teach; do more than I'm probably supposed to do and feel both corrupt and corrupting of a test that I still pretty much believe in.

As the implications of edTPA adoption in the state become clearer to teaching candidates, faculty and teacher preparation institutions, it will be in the interest of all stakeholders to continue investigating how faculty, like James, are thinking and acting in their support roles.

## Conclusions

The study we have presented was undertaken to better understand the lived experiences of educators supporting candidates during the initial semesters of edTPA implementation. We conclude by reflecting on our own stances towards the edTPA, and how this investigation, as well as our experiences directly supporting candidates, has shaped our current perspectives on the assessment. Our disposition towards the edTPA during the early stages of implementation was generally positive, rooted in a mutual belief that teaching, at its essence, is a performative act. As such, we believed that a rigorous performance assessment of candidates in authentic instructional settings could be a welcome addition to the existing battery of decontextualized pencil and paper certification exams in our state. We also shared a conviction that clinical experiences need to be at the core of teacher education rather than treated as peripheral element resulting in candidates too often “learning *about* instructional methods and less about learning to enact such practices fluidly” (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009, p. 275). We recognized the potential for the edTPA to bring clinical components closer to the core, motivating full time faculty to engage more with candidates in the field, and teach courses that emphasize application of pedagogical knowledge through practice in authentic contexts.

Two semesters of supporting candidates in process of completing the edTPA, and studying others doing the same, have further convinced us that the edTPA can benefit candidates, faculty, and teacher preparation institutions in ways that we anticipated when we first became familiar with the assessment. Like some, but not all participants in our study, we have found that the edTPA has given us a more precise and thorough understanding of what our students know and are able to put into practice concerning planning, instruction and assessment. We have developed concrete insights about how our courses have succeeded, as well as failed, to prepare candidates for teaching in authentic classroom contexts; we feel more determined—and sense similar urgency from our participants—to augment and refine our teacher preparation practices to ensure that graduates of our programs are truly ready to become teachers of record. Finally, we have observed a heightened interest on the part of faculty to work together within and across programs to ensure that learning experiences from course to course and into student teaching are coherent and comprehensive in preparing candidates for the essentials practices in planning, instruction and assessment.

This investigation of edTPA support, however, has also raised questions for us around a significant number of issues with the design and implementation of the edTPA, ones that could undermine the value and legitimacy of the assessment if left unaddressed. We called attention to these issues in the findings and discussion sections, and offer the recommendations that follow

because we remain hopeful that modifications can be made to the edTPA design and implementation process that would allow it to fulfill its potential.

The first recommendation that we make is for states to institute the edTPA as a certification requirement only after providing teacher education programs and linked K-12 school districts a realistic timeline and ample resources to make the programmatic, administrative, curricular, and logistical modifications demanded by the assessment. We make this recommendation in response to the near universal complaint by participants that the state's precipitous implementation of the edTPA as a certification requirement did not allow teacher education programs adequate time or notice to prepare for it. Teachers unions and other stakeholders contended that the rushed implementation placed teaching candidates "at risk for unwarranted and undeserved failure" (NYSUT Media Relations, 2014), an argument that apparently convinced the state to institute a "safety net" allowing candidates who were unsuccessful on the edTPA to be certified by passing a no longer used paper-and-pencil certification test. Our study, however, revealed other reasons for states to avoid breakneck implementation. Making hurried and multiple high-stakes reforms (three additional new or revised high-stakes certification exams were introduced at the same time as the edTPA) puts extraordinary strain on institutions; furthermore, the edTPA required a high degree of coordination with district K-12 schools that were also adapting to multiple new standardized tests driven by the Common Core and reforms to the state's school evaluation system. A theme emerged in our data indicating how this confluence of changes resulted in working conditions that the faculty members characterized as highly stressful, chaotic and overwhelming. These working conditions tested their ability to provide edTPA support with fidelity to the Guidelines established by SCALE while also fulfilling their commitment to the learning of teacher candidates and the children and youth they ultimately will teach. If the edTPA is to be a valid and reliable assessment of readiness to teach, it is in the interest of the state to create implementation conditions that enable faculty to remain clearheaded and evenhanded while carrying out these dual roles.

Another step that states can take is to postpone linking candidate certification and teacher preparation program evaluation to candidate performance on the edTPA until programs have administered the edTPA multiple times under low-stakes conditions, as has been done in many other states. This will enable teacher preparation programs to become more versed in edTPA content and procedures. Moreover, our findings illustrate the negative consequences of not allowing time for school districts, K-12 practitioners, and schools of education to address the complex coordination demands of the edTPA. Multiple administrations of the edTPA before it becomes high-stakes will enable these groups to iron out the logistical and communication issues raised by our participants.

The evidence is murky in terms of how the length of student teaching and access to quality field placements might disadvantage segments of the state's candidate population. This gap in understanding consistently raised concerns for our participants and influenced their actions around edTPA support. We therefore also recommend that states and SCALE investigate how these testing conditions might unfairly restrict entry into the profession and serve as a barrier to the diversification of the teacher workforce.

Our findings also suggest a need for SCALE, and others involved in edTPA design, to clearly articulate a position on how the edTPA addresses variations in the quality of field placements and support capacity with particular attention to teacher preparation programs serving vulnerable populations. This will alleviate some of the concerns raised by many participants around the role of challenging clinical placements in their candidates' abilities to pass the edTPA. In addition, we believe the a revision of the Guidelines for Acceptable Support is called for, making them more directive regarding level and type of faculty involvement permitted while candidates are in the

process of completing the edTPA. In so doing it will reduce the need for creating additional mechanisms to increase the likelihood that individuals will adhere to the Guidelines.

There is fertile ground for additional study around the lived experiences of faculty working within this zone of enactment. Our work suggests that understandings would be furthered with replication of studies of this kind with a larger sample to examine variation and disparity in the level and kinds of edTPA supports candidates experience, including comparative samples, particularly faculty from private institutions and those supporting alternative certification candidates such as Teach for America and residency programs. Lastly, it might be beneficial to enlist other disciplines, such as organizational psychology and sociology, to further explore how faculty is “making sense” of the edTPA and operationalizing support for candidates.

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