

Northwestern College Prepares for Transition to edTPA

Northwestern College in St. Paul has helped lead Minnesota's transition to edTPA, a new step on the pathway to teacher licensure that assesses a teacher candidate's skills and readiness to lead a classroom.

Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, nearly all graduating teacher candidates in Minnesota will complete edTPA. The Minnesota Board of Teaching adopted edTPA in 2011, meeting a state mandate to add performance-based assessment to the requirements for teacher preparation.

Before that, however, Northwestern College leaders and faculty members were part of the Stanford University-led development and pilot testing of edTPA. Then, in the spring of 2012, Northwestern College was one of 160 institutions from 22 states to participate in the first edTPA field test.

The process has been an education for Northwestern faculty and students, who continue to make adjustments and learn lessons that are helping to smooth the transition.

"Students and faculty are putting a lot of great work into research and planning for edTPA," said Pamela Solvie, an associate professor at Northwestern College and certified edTPA scorer. "What our students are doing is not just for the edTPA. It will help them in the future as they become better teachers and better professionals in the field."

About 80 Northwestern College teacher candidates will complete edTPA this year. The process is built around three to five continuous days of subject-specific classroom instruction delivered by a candidate, typically at the end of student teaching.

The centerpiece is a portfolio submitted by the candidate that addresses planning, instruction, assessment, analyzing teaching, and academic language. It also includes an unedited video of the candidate teaching.

Solvie compared the portfolio requirements to her experience in becoming a National Board Certified Teacher in 1999. Solvie received National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Certification as an Early Childhood Generalist. "It was a wonderful professional development activity and I learned a great deal. Now, in supporting teacher candidates, I realize how much my National Board experience aligns with the work they are doing."

She recalls that when she and her colleagues learned that the state was going to require a performance assessment they were concerned about "more work, more mandates and more changes."

But over time and after several meetings and orientations, Solvie said, "People began to see it was a very good thing that would help us organize around goals and objectives that we already had as an institution."

Teacher candidates asked questions about what to expect, but mostly worried that they wouldn't have time to complete the portfolio during their clinical experiences, which could be seven weeks, ten weeks, or fourteen weeks in length.



Pamela Solvie, associate professor at Northwestern College

Northwestern College took several steps to respond and prepare for the edTPA transition:

- ▶ Professional development sessions helped program coordinators, instructors, and college supervisors understand the edTPA process and what is being asked of students so that they could provide ethical coaching to help students succeed.
- ▶ Cooperating teachers were given information about edTPA, what teacher candidates would be doing as part of that process and how they could help.
- ▶ Supervisors at Northwestern College were kept up to date on the new state policy so that they could support teacher candidates and the Education Department.
- ▶ The education faculty reviewed and mapped edTPA requirements and compared them to existing coursework to make sure that the focus throughout preparation was on effective pedagogy and student learning.
- ▶ A new task force designed a lesson plan template for all students, from foundational courses to clinical experiences. The template includes a pre-instructional planning form to help students understand effective planning. It reflects edTPA priorities, including student strengths and needs, alignment of instruction and student assessment.
- ▶ Target dates and responsibilities were identified and shared with students to help them remain focused and on track for submission of their edTPA portfolios.
- ▶ The college purchased video cameras and provides support to help students select clips from their edTPA videos to match specifications for their fields. Students also receive technical support to help upload their portfolios through TK20 for submission to Pearson.
- ▶ Teacher candidates participate in three edTPA seminars during their student teaching experience. Seminar presentations and workshop activities help student teachers understand the edTPA handbook and the requirements identified for their licensure areas.
- ▶ Students receive regular e-mail support and encouragement from program coordinators, faculty, and college supervisors who are available to answer questions and to help students throughout the clinical experience.
- ▶ Northwestern College developed an internal evaluation rubric to provide feedback to students following submission of their edTPA portfolios to Pearson.

Based on feedback from local schools, cooperating teachers are impressed by what the teacher candidates must do to complete edTPA. They find that the work aligns with the realities of the classroom and are impressed by how intentional teacher candidates are around planning and assessment.

“Cooperating teachers and schools like the idea that student teachers are not coming in with pre-planned lessons,” said Solvie. “Instead, they are looking at students and their strengths and needs and then planning lessons to address those strengths and needs.”