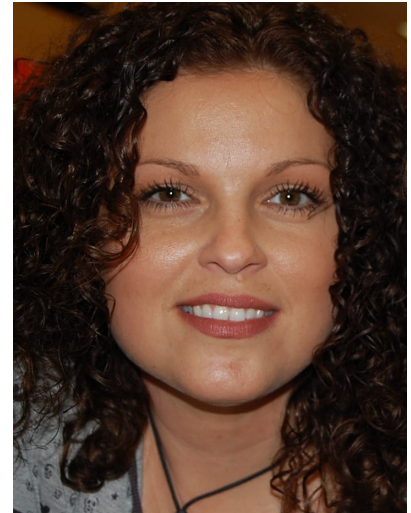


Minnesota's Performance Assessment Requirement Puts Student Learning Front and Center for New Teachers

When Melissa Greene and her husband decided to move back to his home state of Minnesota, she had a BA in psychology and religion from Eastern New Mexico University, two children and her plans to teach were put on hold. After spending 10 years building a successful sales career, while adding three more children to their family, Melissa began to consider teaching again. She obtained a limited license to substitute teach and spent six years as a substitute before she decided to make teaching her career.



Melissa Greene

She had never heard of edTPA™; wasn't sure what it would take to obtain a special education licensure, or find a full-time teaching position. As the daughter of a Dad in the military who moved frequently, Melissa was used to change. When she was almost finished with her full licensure, she began looking for a teaching job in northern Minnesota. Melissa wasn't sure what to make of Pine River, but she knew the small town in north central Minnesota needed a special education teacher at Pine River Backus Elementary and Greene set out to qualify for the job.

Turning to Bemidji State University, she enrolled in the graduate special education program that could be completed in 2-to-3 years to obtain teaching licensure along with the credits for a master's degree. It was during her second year of study that Bemidji professors began to educate students about edTPA and preparing them for the performance assessment, which now is required for all teacher candidates as part of the preparation process.

edTPA is a research- and standard-based tool to independently measure a teacher candidate's readiness to teach. The assessment requires candidates to submit a portfolio that documents teaching and learning in a 3-to-5-day learning segment with a class of students. That portfolio includes an unedited video of the candidate engaging students in learning as well as examples of teaching materials that address planning, instruction, assessment, analyzing teaching and academic language.

The use of edTPA in Minnesota follows a mandate by the state legislature to add a performance-based assessment to Minnesota's teacher licensure programs. Since 2001, Minnesota teacher candidates have been required to pass subject-matter tests of knowledge to become licensed, but those tests didn't require a demonstration by the candidates that they knew how to teach.

The Minnesota Board of Teaching adopted edTPA as the specific tool that would satisfy the state mandate and beginning with the 2012-13 school year, all graduating teacher candidates in Minnesota had to complete edTPA.

While Greene knew nothing of edTPA when she started at Bemidji, she quickly discovered her previous classroom experience and her work to earn licensure as a special education teacher gave her a leg up on the process.

“I found edTPA to be a tool that emphasizes putting a focus on each student, while asking myself if they are really learning the material I am trying to teach,” Greene says.

“As a special education teacher, that’s what I have to do from the start; I have to develop an individual learning plan for every one of my students, based on their strengths and weaknesses,” Greene continued. “So it’s very reaffirming for a special ed teacher to know that all new teachers will have to learn how to design their teaching to meet the needs of all students. I can see that the edTPA will push younger teacher candidates to adapt their teaching style to achieve focus, along with constantly asking themselves if their students are learning.”

Even with her prior experience, Greene says the edTPA video recording of her teaching was instructive. “In reviewing the video, I noticed one of my students, with limited verbal ability, gave me non-verbal cues to indicate he knew an answer, and I failed to acknowledge him. This changed my entire perspective of how this student communicates his understanding of the material.”

Today, Greene is teaching reading and math to special education students in the 5th and 6th grades at Pine River Backus while case managing 12 students. She has dual licenses in emotional behavioral disorders and learning disabilities for students in grades from K-12, thanks to her preparation at Bemidji State. In addition to her licensures, she has gained a new appreciation for performance-based assessments.

“I do think a national assessment tool like edTPA is important,” adds Greene. “Children today are bombarded with information, so the issue for teachers is teaching them to focus on what information is important. Education has to change to meet the needs of today’s learners and I do think we need something in place that helps teachers develop before they get into the classroom.”