

Fresno Assessment of Student Teachers 2.0

Locally-Controlled TPA Allows for Opportunities to Learn

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Abstract

In recent decades, multiple states replaced traditional licensure exams with teaching performance assessments (TPA) as a way for teacher candidates to more authentically demonstrate their ability to teach. But more recently, TPAs have been called into question for myriad reasons, including cost and concern about their potential to act as a barrier to candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. Yet, research has demonstrated pass rates for TPAs remain relatively stable across racial and ethnic groups. Still, TPAs are typically administered and controlled by outside organizations, leaving Teacher Education programs with little connection to the TPAs. Fresno State is an exception to this rule, as it administers its own in-house TPA, the Fresno Assessment of Student Teachers (FAST) 2.0. This article draws on a survey administered to Teacher Education faculty and program completers to highlight the affordances of a locally-controlled TPA for both program completers and program faculty as an opportunity to learn.

Introduction

In recent decades, multiple states replaced traditional licensure exams with teaching performance assessments (TPA) as a way for teacher candidates to more authentically demonstrate their ability to teach. California led the way in these efforts with, first, the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) and then the California Teaching Performance Assessment (CalTPA).

During the pandemic, numerous states put aside various teacher testing requirements, including TPAs such as the edTPA. Simultaneously, the costs and benefits associated with teacher tests have been questioned, including the costs for candidates and the barriers many tests have posed to candidates of underrepresented backgrounds. Yet, compared to other teacher tests that show large disparities, pass rates for the TPA have been shown to remain relatively stable across racial and ethnic groups and are higher than pass rates for other standardized teacher licensure exams. Additionally, studies examining the predictive validity of TPAs suggest TPAs are a better measure of candidates' future success as educators than traditional licensure exams (Darling-Hammond, 2010; edTPA, 2013; 2015; Goldhaber et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2014).

Beyond the affordances for predicting candidates' future success, when implemented at the local level, TPAs become valuable tools for teacher education (TE) programs to support candidates and to gather data about candidates' learning. When

faculty engage in analysis of the data, findings can lead to authentic reflection on program strengths and areas for growth, which can ultimately lead to program improvements.

Unlike other California TE programs that use either the CalTPA or the edTPA, Fresno State utilizes the Fresno Assessment of Student Teaching 2.0 (FAST). The administration of FAST 2.0 is handled locally, and FAST is scored by coaches and faculty with knowledge of the local context. Coaches and faculty develop authentic knowledge of the assessment that can then inform their work with candidates.

History of FAST

In the early 2000s, Fresno State joined with 10 other institutions across the country to form The Renaissance Group (Torgerson, Macy, Beare, & Tanner, 2009). With support from a Title II grant aimed at improving teacher quality, faculty from the institutions developed, piloted, and refined the Teacher Work Sample, an embedded TPA intended to provide programs with evidence of candidates' abilities in relation to state and national standards to inform program improvement (Kohler, 2008). Simultaneously, Fresno State was preparing for its NCATE accreditation site visit, for which it needed an assessment that would yield meaningful data. Faculty worked to revise the TWS to align with California's Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) for Multiple Subject (MS) and Single Subject (SS), which led to the development of the initial version of the FAST.

When the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing released its Assessment Design Standards in 2006, faculty further revised FAST to ensure it aligned. Ultimately, the FAST was reviewed and adopted by the Commission as a valid TPA to evaluate MS and SS candidates in 2007. The adoption of the revised TPEs in 2016 brought another revision of FAST. Again, it was reviewed and adopted by the Commission, with FAST 2.0 being implemented in Fall 2018.

Overview of FAST Components

The 2018 version of FAST, referred to as FAST 2.0, is the version currently in use. FAST 2.0 consists of two tasks: the Site Visitation Project (SVP) and the Teaching Sample Project (TSP).

The SVP, completed in the semester prior to candidates' final semester, assesses candidates' ability to plan, teach, and evaluate a lesson in alignment. To complete the SVP, candidates plan and teach a 20-45 minute lesson with a focus on content and language development. For MS candidates, the lesson must focus on math, as they complete the SVP while

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simultaneously taking their math methods course. Each of the three SVP sections aligns with TPEs (see Table 1) and is scored on a four-point rubric.

The TSP, completed in the final semester of each program, assesses candidates' ability to plan and teach a five-lesson unit of study that integrates content knowledge and literacy development. The TSP includes seven sections, each aligned with TPEs (see Table 2), and scored on a four-point rubric.

Integration of FAST 2.0 into Teacher Education Programs

At the beginning of their field placement experience, the FAST coordinator introduces candidates to the FAST 2.0 through orientations. Faculty also work to highlight the connection between coursework and FAST components, particularly in the MS program, which includes a three-semester Inquiry and Puzzles of Practice course series that guides

candidates through collecting and using different types of data to inform their instruction.

Because FAST is a localized teaching performance assessment, the scoring is done by faculty and coaches who support the candidates. Each semester, the FAST coordinator provides an orientation for coaches and faculty that includes an overview of the FAST 2.0 components and an analysis of model projects and their alignment with the rubrics. All scorers must also participate in an annual calibration session in which they score sample completed projects. To score, their scores in the calibration must be within one score point of the official score.

Perhaps because of the tight integration of FAST 2.0 into the TE Program, scores from recent years demonstrate a nearly 100 percent pass rate for all candidates by the completion of the second attempt (see Table 3). Although not all candidates pass on the first attempt, the opportunity to retake the assessment and the coaching that happens in-between allows coaches to provide extra targeted support to individual candidates who may be struggling with a certain component of teaching or certain TPEs.

Table 1.
Alignment of Site Visitation Project Tasks
with Teaching Performance Expectations

<i>Teaching Performance Expectation</i>	<i>Site Visitation Project Tasks</i>		
	<i>Planning</i>	<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Reflection</i>
TPE 1			
1.1	X	X	
1.3	X	X	
1.5	X	X	
1.8		X	
TPE 2			
2.2		X	X
2.6		X	
TPE 3			
3.1	X	X	
3.2	X	X	X
3.3	X	X	
3.5	X	X	
TPE 4			
4.1	X		
4.2	X		
4.7	X		
TPE 6			
6.1			X

Assessment as an Opportunity to Learn

By participating directly in scoring the FAST 2.0, faculty and coaches observe firsthand areas where candidates are successful and areas where they struggled. In a survey of 67 faculty and coaches who scored FAST 2.0 in the 2021-2022 academic year, 44 of the 47 coaches who responded (93.6%) indicated scoring the FAST helped them as they coached their candidates. Participating in the scoring helped them better understand program expectations and specific areas where candidates excelled as well as areas where they needed more support. As one coach wrote, "It helped me to become familiar with the TPEs and gave me something to focus on with the student over the course of the semester."

Others shared that, because they had firsthand knowledge of the FAST, they were able to use its components in their work with candidates. In fact, 46 of the 54 faculty and coaches who responded (85.2%) indicated they used the SVP and/or TSP as tools when supporting candidates. Some of the coaches indicated they used FAST 2.0 to prompt reflective conversations with candidates. Others used FAST 2.0 as a guidepost for providing feedback. "When I discuss various practices with my student teachers, I connect it to the FAST," shared one coach. "For one example, when discussing the importance of relationship building to student learning, I show the students how the Class Profile and Students in Con-

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text aspects of the FAST are helpful tools for getting to know your students.” By using FAST 2.0 to inform her feedback, this coach also helped to bridge the divide between seeing FAST 2.0 as just another task to complete to seeing the processes called for by FAST 2.0 as processes that are beneficial for teachers. In this way, FAST 2.0 supports not just the faculty and coaches’ learning about how to better support candidates, it also supports the candidates’ development as teachers.

Results from a survey sent to 2327 individuals who completed the MS or SS programs between Fall 2017 and Spring 2021 conducted in Summer 2022 indicated the FAST did support responding teachers in their development. Although the response rate was just 4% for myriad reasons (inaccurate contact information and a lack of a system to accurately track completers), of the 105 who did respond, 80 (76.2%) responded the FAST was at least somewhat helpful in pre-

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Table 2.
Alignment of Teaching Sample Project Tasks with Teaching Performance Expectations

Teaching Performance Expectation	Teaching Sample Project Tasks						
	Students in Context	Learning Outcomes	Assessment Plan	Design for Instruction	Instructional Decision Making	Analysis of Student Learning	Reflection and Self-Evaluation
TPE 1							
1.5				X			
1.6	X			X			
1.8					X		
TPE 2							
2.1	X						
2.3	X						
2.6	X						
TPE 3							
3.1		X		X			
3.2		X		X	X		
3.3		X		X			
TPE 4							
4.1	X						
4.3			X				
4.4				X			
4.7				X			
TPE 5							
5.1			X				
5.2			X			X	
5.5						X	
5.8	X			X			
TPE 6							
6.1							X
6.3							X
6.5							X

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paring them for the work of teaching. Responders agreed the FAST helped them consider what data to collect from students to inform their teaching; how to use assessments to inform their planning; how to modify instruction to meet the needs of specialized groups of learners; how to integrate ELA/ELD/literacy standards into different content areas; how to plan multiple lessons as part of a cohesive unit; how to adjust instruction based on student performance; how to communicate student progress on specific learning objectives to parents; and how to reflect on instruction (see Table 4). One program completer shared that they

remember(ed) the recommendation/requirement to plan lessons with particular students in mind in order to provide support for all students. That was a really helpful practice for me and I still use it today. I remember learning the importance of assessment to planning and responding to assessed student need.

As this teacher highlights, the authentic nature of the tasks included within FAST 2.0 supports candidates in their work connecting the theoretical knowledge they learn in their coursework with the practice of teaching. By asking

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Table 3.
FAST 2.0 Pass Rates for First and Second Attempts 2018-2021

Academic Year	Total Attempted	N Passed First Attempt	Percent Passed First Attempt	N Passed Second Attempt	Percent Passed Second Attempt	N Passed First or Second Attempt	Percent Passed First or Second Attempt 2018-
2018-2019	785	741	94.4%	44	100%	785	100%
2019-2020	773	746	96.5%	25	93%	771	99.7%
2020-2021	806	784	97.3%	22	100%	806	100%

Table 4.
Participants' Responses of the Ways They Believed the FAST Prepared Them for Teaching
(Participants could respond in multiple ways)

Response Option	N (% of total responses)
The FAST helped me consider what data to collect from my students to inform my teaching	53 (13.02%)
The FAST helped me consider how to use assessments to inform my planning	53 (13.02%)
The FAST helped me consider how to modify instruction to meet specialized groups of learners	56 (13.76%)
The FAST helped me consider how to integrate ELA/ELD/literacy standards into different content areas	41 (10.07%)
The FAST helped me to plan multiple lessons as a part of a cohesive unit	54 (13.27%)
The FAST helped me to think about how to adjust my instruction based on student performance	44 (10.81%)
The FAST helped me to think about how to communicate student progress on specific learning objectives to parents	25 (6.14%)
The FAST helped me to reflect on my instruction	63 (15.48%)
Other	3 (0.74%)
The FAST did not prepare me for teaching	15 (3.69%)

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them to engage in these tasks within their teacher preparation, the FAST acts as a bridge between the world of teacher development and the world of K-12 schooling.

Missed Opportunities to Learn

Even though FAST 2.0 provides a very tangible way for TE program faculty and coaches to analyze the learning candidates take up and put into practice, the reality is more could be done. In fact, of the 54 coaches and faculty who responded to an item about their opportunities to analyze FAST scores from candidates across the program, 25 indicated they had not had any opportunities to engage in such analysis. Of those, 22 saw how doing so would be beneficial. They noted that seeing patterns across candidate performance would help with course redesign and with considering how to better support candidates. In fact, analyzing data systematically program-wide as a way to engage in continuous improvement is exactly what is called for by the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation, Fresno State's national accrediting body for educator preparation.

Of course, engaging in such efforts takes time and resources, both of which are often in short supply in TE programs in California and nationally. Especially in the current context, faculty are feeling exhausted and overworked and reluctant to engage in anything regarded as "extra." Unfortunately, scoring the FAST is often seen as extra, and so not all faculty take advantage of the opportunity to engage in the process. Additionally, as is the case at many institutions, on average, just under two-thirds of Fresno State's MS and SS courses are taught by adjunct faculty who are not required to participate in the scoring. Often, these individuals have no familiarity with the FAST and its components and so are unable to integrate it into their coursework in any meaningful way. Although FAST has the potential to bring together the various silos engaged in teacher preparation, that potential has still not been fully realized.

Conclusion and Next Steps

As results from the use of FAST 2.0 presented here highlight, when controlled at the local level and embedded in authentic ways, TPAs have the potential to provide a meaningful experience for candidates. Additionally, the tasks of FAST 2.0 serve as scaffolds to support coaches in providing focused feedback aligned with the TPEs, feedback that will help candidates as they move from teacher

preparation into induction. The specificity of feedback coaches are able to provide because of the alignment likely goes beyond what coaches might provide in a more traditional coaching session.

Still, more work remains. Faculty and coaches need more opportunities to engage in timely, authentic reflection of their candidates' scores so they can make necessary adjustments to their courses. These data should be specific to the actual tasks and their corresponding TPEs in order to begin to better to understand where candidates struggle. Adjunct faculty should also be included in these discussions, as they, too, play an important role in preparing candidates. Only when all program stakeholders work together to engage in meaningful analysis of the data can the program begin to reach its full potential in preparing future educators.

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