

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

### "Ayers All Access" Podcast

*Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation  
Lipscomb University College of Education*

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#### *SPEAKERS:*

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#### *FULL TRANSCRIPT:*

**Rachael Milligan:** Hello. Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people, current topics, practical tips, and innovative solutions— all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and all the work of the Ayers Institute, check out our website at [AyersInstitute.org](http://AyersInstitute.org). You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at [@AyersInstitute](https://twitter.com/AyersInstitute).

Thanks for joining us this week for an "ask me anything" about edTPA. We've gathered some questions about this subject and will be seeking answers from someone with years of experience in the field. They have not seen these questions in advance, so there will be some surprises! Of course— out of professional courtesy— we always give our guests the option to 'pass' on any question they feel would wouldn't get a sufficient answer in the Ayers All Access podcast format.

I'm Rachel Milligan and I serve as the Assistant Dean for Program Innovation in Lipscomb's College of Education and the Director of the Ayers Institute. Today, we will be talking with Dr. Karen Marklein, Director of Programs for the Ayers Institute. Karen, thank you so much for agreeing to talk with us today about edTPA.

**Karen Marklein:** Thank you. I'm thrilled to be here.

**Rachael Milligan:** All right, so let's allow our listeners to get to know you just a little bit. So first, talk about your path to becoming an educator.

**Karen Marklein:** Well, I sort of had a roundabout path. My undergraduate was English, my major was English minor in communications. And so when I finished, I thought I was going to law school and I had this idea that I might be Atticus Finch and save the Tom Robinsons of the world. And so, in the summer before I started law school, I got a job as a clerk in a law firm in Nashville. And I learned through that experience that it's not— everybody's not Atticus Finch. And so, I really struggled with sort of how can I live out my ethics and my morals and do this job? And so, I had to have a job because I was married and, you know, had to find out what I wanted to do with my life. And so, actually, my husband suggested that I explore maybe being a graduate teaching assistant somewhere.

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So, I reached out to MTSU and asked about graduate teaching positions. And the director at the time was Dr. Larry Mapp, and he was such a great mentor for me. And he said, "You know what? We have one position. We have already 11 applicants for that. But if you want to get your stuff together and apply, you're welcome to do that." And so I did, and somehow, I got the job. And so, I taught Freshman Comp while I worked on my Master's in English.

That's when I realized I wanted to be a teacher. I just loved teaching those classes and interacting with those students. I learned so much, just sort of a trial by fire. I remember my first day Dr. Mapp walked me to my first class and said, "Don't let them hurt you." And I thought, "Oh my, here we go." But of course, I hadn't looked back. I just love all that work.

**Rachael Milligan:** Well, it's obvious that you love being an educator because of the smile on your face as you're talking about it. So I wonder what— What's your favorite part about being part of a school community?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, there's so many wonderful things about being a part of a school community. You know, the faculty really becomes my family. And, you know, every teaching situation I've ever been in, those relationships stay. You have so many relationships with students. You know, I live in the community where I did teach, and so I run into students all the time. And it's funny: you know what they remember.

You know you have— It's who you live with and it's who you work with and it's all of those things. And I say all the time, you know, everything about school is fun for me. I love it all. I love prom. I love football games. I love the nerdy kids. I love theater. You know, there's just so many things about it. It almost just connects with everything that's important to me.

**Rachael Milligan:** OK, well, I'm going to ask you kind of just an off the wall question. Okay, just so people can understand Karen Marklein. So, what is the most embarrassing fashion trend that you used to rock?

**Karen Marklein:** Oh my! Well, I'm going to say 80's hair. I had some really good 80s hair. And I know that this podcast is not a visual medium. However, what I like to say all the time is, in the 80's I had a really big hair and a really small body. And now I feel like I have a really small hair and my body may have enlarged a little. But yes, so I had the big perm. Tall bangs. Lots of highlights in my hair. But I was rocking it!

**Rachael Milligan:** Lots of Aquanet. Did you use?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, I'm not sure it was Aquanet. It was definitely whatever the Walmart brand was. And it was— it was extremely stiff.

**Rachael Milligan:** OK. Yes.

**Karen Marklein:** And so, I spent lots of time on that fashion trend.

**Rachael Milligan:** OK. All right. I can see it in my mind's eye. So, let's shift gears just a little bit. So, you are Director of Programs at the Ayers Institute? So, tell us about how, in that role, you became involved with edTPA.

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**Karen Marklein:** So, you know, the Ayers Institute in lots of ways serves the purposes of the College of Education at Lipscomb University. And one of the one of the main purposes, of course, is to prepare our candidates for certification tests— all of that. And so, when edTPA first became a part of the conversation in certification for candidates, I was really interested in just finding out what is this? What is this assessment about? And so, I spent some time, you know, just learning about it in general.

And then there became a need in our job embedded program for someone to direct the seminars for edTPA. And I was more than happy to do that. And so, really, it's in my role as serving in the Ayers Institute, I was able to also serve the College of Education in that way.

**Rachael Milligan:** OK, so let's talk a little bit about edTPA itself and really its purpose in the path to becoming a teacher.

**Karen Marklein:** All right. So, edTPA is a digital portfolio that candidates compile during one semester of their certification journey. And what was the second part of that question?

**Rachael Milligan:** But really, what is its purpose in the in the path? Yeah, you talk about what it is, but really kind of how does it serve in the in the path to becoming a teacher?

**Karen Marklein:** So, the focus of edTPA is all about what do you know about pedagogy? And so, in Tennessee, teaching candidates take a content test where it's just a written part of the test. But in order to show prowess in pedagogy, edTPA is the one test in Tennessee that meets that requirement.

**Rachael Milligan:** OK. So, what are the benefits? You mentioned It was a digital portfolio. What are the benefits of moving to this portfolio-based assessment of a teacher candidate as they prepare for licensure?

**Karen Marklein:** I get this question a lot. So, you know, because we are experiencing kind of a dip in teachers wanting to become teachers. And now we're raising the rigor of how a teacher becomes a teacher. But I truly believe it is a much more accurate measure of how well a teacher— how successful a teacher will be with students.

When candidates ask me that question, I say, “Would you rather have a doctor who performed surgery or a doctor who took a test on how to perform surgery?” And so edTPA takes a very practical look at what are you actually doing as a teacher? Not what do you know about how to be a teacher? And so, I think it's a much it's a much more rigorous view, and there's no way of getting around that, but it's also a much more accurate assessment of what these candidates can do.

**Rachael Milligan:** Okay. Well, and in that same vein, would you say edTPA, you know, has a one size fits all approach? Or are there different evaluations for different subject areas, content areas, grade levels? Talk a little bit about that.

**Karen Marklein:** Well, edTPA, of course, is a broad category that does measure pedagogical knowledge. But within that there's 27 different handbooks. And so, every handbook has some nuance within the handbook so that candidates can really show what they know in terms of their own content. So, if I'm certifying to be a business education teacher, I have my own handbook. If I'm certified to be an Ag-Science teacher, I have my own handbook. And so, I would say— while it is in some ways, a one size (because that's the only pedagogical test in Tennessee) it's very differentiated in terms of content.

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**Rachael Milligan:** OK, OK. That makes a lot of sense. Thinking about how you've grown a lot in your knowledge of how to support candidates. Let me just ask you this way. How have you grown in that way: in your knowledge of how to support candidates?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, the surprising thing within the support of candidates is that there are so many rules about how you can and cannot support them. And so, I would say my biggest area of growth has been, "How can I ask a really good reflective questions?" Because really, it's all about digging into the rubrics that are associated with each task, looking at the understanding rubric level progressions with a candidate. So, if this is the explanation of a 2 in whatever on whatever rubric we're looking at, then what reflective question can I ask? That really helps set a candidate get from a 2 to a 3 or a 3 to a 4. And so just digging in into those handbooks in the rubrics have been the most helpful for me.

**Rachael Milligan:** So that was your own learning journey ahead of time.

**Karen Marklein:** There was quite a learning journey. And I would say, you know, for anyone who's interested in learning more about edTPA and maybe what is effective support for edTPA candidates, that's the first thing you need to do. Get your hands on a handbook that maybe is your own content expertise, and that will give you a good foundation of knowledge about, "What are these candidates really being asked to do? And, how can I guide them to be successful?"

**Rachael Milligan:** Okay, so that's that was your own education journey. And you talked about if others want to know about more about edTPA. So, let's talk about what some specific groups of people need to know about edTPA. So, let's start with school administrators. What do school administrators need to know about edTPA?

**Karen Marklein:** So, to all the school administrators I would say you really need to understand this is not how we all became teachers. This is extremely rigorous. It takes untold amounts of time. And, you know, candidates often come to me and say, my principal doesn't understand, I can't do a TEAM evaluation the same week that I'm recording for task 2. And so, I would say to school administrators, try to get an understanding of the of the process as a whole. You don't have to get into the weeds of it. Just understanding the process as a whole and what the rigor of the end result of this portfolio is almost like a master's thesis: in terms of the writing that's required, the reflection that it takes, the time really set aside just to video in your own classroom, and all the logistics that it takes to do that. For new teachers, that's a lot to ask. And so, I would say to principals, just get a good understanding of the whole process and how you can support teachers in— Maybe let's don't do a team evaluation the three or four weeks you're videoing for edTPA. Or even maybe the semester you're working on edTPA, how can we free up some time with these new teachers so that they can really focus and be successful?

**Rachael Milligan:** OK, OK. So, I'm going to— Let me ask about this next group next. What about university advisors: those who are supporting candidates in either a mentoring role or an advising role. You know, different places call them different things. What would you say to that group? What do they need to know?

**Karen Marklein:** I would say to that group, you really need to understand that if at all possible, no other courses need to be taken while a candidate is in edTPA. Whether it's an undergrad doing traditional student teaching or a job-embedded candidate or a master's-level candidate (whatever end result it is), that really needs to be the focus of that eight to nine weeks of a semester so that a student, a candidate,

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is really free to focus on that and we want them to be successful the first time. And so, to take away all those— not necessarily distractions because every course is important— but I can focus now on it.

**Rachael Milligan:** OK. That's really helpful. And you mentioned, you know, the job-embedded candidates would have a deep experience that might be a little bit different than undergrad. I'm thinking about another group that it might be beneficial to give them some advice to the teacher or the mentor teacher or supervising teacher that may maybe an undergrad or anybody doing traditional student teaching. What would that person need to know?

**Karen Marklein:** So that person needs to know is kind of what the principal also needed to know— is that: this is not how we became a teacher. And so, very often we think, "Oh, they're just studying for a test or something." So, for the benefit of having a mentor teacher who understands this is really hard and I may need some extra time to work on that. Student teachers can really lean on their mentor teachers for that release time, if needed.

The job-embedded candidates: I would say if you are a teacher in a school and you're working with a job-embedded or one of your colleagues is a job-embedded candidate, just be an empathetic listener. You know, do the best you can to realize this is not the path most people took to become a certified teacher. And it is difficult. And so, while the job embedded person has to, you know, I'm teaching kids all day— I can still lean on my colleagues for empathy and support. And maybe, maybe I don't have a data conversation this week with my content team. Maybe I don't have an extra responsibility after school today so that I can really focus on getting this done.

**Rachael Milligan:** That's great advice. Thank you. So, from your perspective and experience, what would you say are some common pitfalls for candidates in the edTPA process?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, one common pitfall is just a misunderstanding of the process as a whole. And so to really get a picture of the entire thing, it's hard to do. You know, because you're tipping your toes in the water at the very beginning. So, I think that's going to help it— That's going to work itself out as more people go through edTPA, more candidates are talking to their friends about edTPA. But really, it's the logistics that get everybody. It's like, "OK, I really have to have a video release for all of my students?" Yes, you really do. "I really need to practice videoing? You know, do I need to set up two or three angles?" Yes, you really do. So, we're not making a movie here, but we do have a lot of logistics to work through so that we are protecting the privacy of these students in our care. So, I think there's a lot of surprise about that. So that's a big pitfall.

And then, you know, just all the pieces. How all of the pieces work together. I can't tell you in, you know, 9 or 10 semesters of teaching seminar how many students about, you know, a week before all of its due. It's like, "Oh my gosh, it all makes sense now." And so just how everything is connected, and you almost have to do it to come to that realization. So, I don't know that that's a pitfall we can overcome, but it's really important for candidates to realize that at the beginning, so that they're not, you know, just trudging uphill the whole time. But they see all these connections.

**Rachael Milligan:** I love that you mentioned that it all comes together and they're like, "Oh!"

**Karen Marklein:** Yes.

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**Rachael Milligan:** Well, and I know the value you put in celebration of this great success that is the final product. So, talk a little bit about how you how you celebrate edTPA.

**Karen Marklein:** So, submission night as a party. And so, I have a I have a wonderful person in my life. We all call her Nana. She's not my Nana, but she is Nana to me. And she's famous for cakes. And so, we get a big Nana cake and we have a big celebration. And you know, every time somebody— because it's— somehow, it's all staggered. Like, we all start at the same time, but the whole process just takes some time. And so, we all do jazz hands every time somebody says, "I just hit the button!" You know, we do our jazz hands and we get really excited and we're all eating cake and just, you know, supporting one another.

And then I also made little buttons for the candidates. And it says I passed a TPA and several exclamation points. And I always think there's no way they're going to come back and get a button, but they are thrilled when they get their buttons. It's like, "Oh my gosh, I'm put this on my teacher bag," you know, like, I'm going to have this forever. And so, it's really fun. The whole process is fun, and you feel like that on submission night. It's almost like they're excited, but they don't want to leave because we've built such strong relationships. You know, when you really support somebody through something this rigorous, you really become friends. And so, everybody just kind of lingers on submission night, but it's a lot of fun.

**Rachael Milligan:** I love that. Yeah, I love that. So, what would be your one piece of advice for a candidate who's about to embark on this edTPA process?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, I would say get your seat belt on. It is kind of a bumpy ride. And there are some really hard things that have to be done. But also, be ready to feel really proud of yourself. At one point (I think it's week five or six), my 'check in' is, "What's the hardest thing you've ever had to do?" And I remind my candidates that, you know, there are hard things that they have faced, and they've overcome that. And so, I would also say, when you're in the middle of the process and you're feeling tired and overwhelmed: how do you, as a teacher, encourage your own students to persevere? Because they are working one on one with their own students all the time and somehow all they're there, encouraging and motivating them that, you know, whenever you do something the first time, it's hard.

So, whether it's first grade and I'm learning, you know, how to read or it's, you know, I'm a I'm a grown adult and I'm having to do this assessment. So how do you encourage your students to persevere? And have some positive self-talk for yourself. You know, like, figure out where is it? Where is that encouragement? And I'll always think of— I try not to focus on this too much— but one of my favorite metaphors through this process is, you know, when you're squeezing a toothpaste tube and you think it's empty— there's always something left!

**Rachael Milligan:** Always a little bit more.

**Karen Marklein:** Just a little.

**Rachael Milligan:** Yeah.

**Karen Marklein:** And so, I always try to think: Are you like, where? Where is this candidate? Is this candidate just like, is the toothpaste gone? Or if I just do one more? Or question or one more

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conversation where, you know, where would the bang for your buck be for that? And so, yeah, just think of yourself as a toothpaste tube and somehow there's always a little more.

**Rachael Milligan:** I love that. Well, thank you, Karen, so much for answering these questions about the edTPA process, and thank you so much for your work in education.

**Karen Marklein:** Well, thank you. I'm always thrilled to talk about it.

**Rachael Milligan:** And to our listeners, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned today. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired. You can find more episodes of Ayers Institute podcasts at <https://podcast.AyersInstitute.org>, on Apple Podcasts, and anywhere podcasts are found.

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Until next time, remember: "Educators change the world!"