

Making Best Practice Everyday Practice in Schools

Experts See Potential to Increase the Effect of National Board Certification By Raising Profile of Teachers in Leadership, High-Need Schools and Policy Debates

ARLINGTON, VA – In its 21th year, the National Board Certification movement continues to grow in size and influence. The 2007 class of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) is the largest ever, bringing the total to nearly 64,000 nationwide. In addition, more teacher-education programs are using National Board Standards as a resource. The impact—or “multiplier effect”—of this expansion goes beyond the number of NBCTs to touch tens of thousands of aspiring teachers, as well as every child fortunate enough to have an NBCT and every teacher who has worked with an NBCT.

To have an even greater impact, the movement should continue to seek more systemic ways for NBCTs to become leaders in schools, reach more high-need schools, and forge closer relationship with administrators, and thus strengthen their role as agents of change. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and NBCTs also must expand their efforts to share their expertise and contribute to debates about teaching, teacher quality, and measuring student learning.

These are some observations education leaders, scholars, policymakers and NBCTs made at the conference, *20/20: Clarifying a Vision for Quality Teaching* held Oct. 22-24, 2007, at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The Johnson Foundation convened the meeting in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the nonprofit organization that oversees the National Board Certification Standards and assessment process.

“Beyond setting the standard for highly accomplished teaching, the National Board can also help raise the performance of all teachers and move the field away from minimal standards,” said Gov. Roy Barnes, chair, NBPTS Board of Directors.

“Education is where medicine was in 1910; on the verge of creating a profession of teaching,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Stanford University. “The National Board’s work has been critical in developing standards and embedding them in the practice of teaching. We have quite a lot to do in the next 10 or 20 years.”

LONG-TERM EDUCATION REFORM

The Wingspread participants were given an open forum to discuss the National Board Certification’s role in systemic education reform. Still, there was general consensus on areas where the movement appears to have the greatest long-term potential as well as strategies and steps that could be taken to realize that potential. They are as follows

Raise awareness of the achievements, successes, and importance of NBCTs and the National Board's Standards and assessment process; promote ongoing research, review and improvements. National Board Certification is the most researched assessment program in the world, but is not yet as embedded or well known as other professional certifications (e.g., medicine, law, and accounting). To raise awareness of the standards and how the assessment process positively impacts teaching and learning, participants encouraged NBPTS to conduct research on how the spillover benefits of NBCTs effect positive school change and enhance student achievement. NBPTS also should quantify and publish information more aggressively about the movement's multiplier effect, contributions of the standards, and build collaborations to disseminate this information. In addition, NBPTS should continue to re-examine the standards and core propositions in the context of 21st century learning needs, revising the assessment process as necessary to help teachers to better use technology, data, and assessment results.

Use National Board Certification to broaden the dialogue about what constitutes student learning and achievement—and how best to assess it. NBPTS needs to help the field better understand teacher quality and how it relates to student learning and measuring student achievement. Participants urged NBPTS to advance the understanding of effective practice and student achievement—e.g., which learning outcomes are valuable to measure and how they relate to learning gains. NBPTS must also show how NBCTs can affect achievement and curricular tests—and that the two do not necessarily need to be in conflict. Other ideas include developing a series of case studies of schools with high numbers of National Board Certified Teachers; documenting the impact in schools and districts with higher numbers of NBCTs; and utilizing the National Board Certification portfolio process in teacher preparation and induction in ways akin to medical and nursing residency programs and their structured supervision and evaluation.

Develop systemic ways for NBPTS, NBCTs and supporters to contribute to policy debates and share their collective knowledge about teaching, teacher preparation and classroom practice. The National Board and NBCTs must promote their expertise and experience to help develop policies conducive to effective teaching and to raise awareness of the need to provide adequate funding for education. Participants encouraged NBPTS to develop and promote systemic ways to become regular and high-profile participants in policy discussions at all levels of government. NBPTS was urged to continue partnering with schools of education, public education foundations, graduate schools, K-12 and higher education associations, and others to urge reform using NBCTs as change agents.

Increase the number and impact of National Board Certified Teachers in high-need schools. While 41 percent of NBCTs work in Title I schools, there remains a great need to get more of these highly accomplished teachers in struggling schools. "Because of the time and energy it takes to do this, it's critical that teachers feel that, if I get certified, I will have the voice to make changes at the policy level for all students," said Debby Saintil, an NBCT and Ph.D. Candidate, Harvard University. Participants encouraged more focused recruitment of teachers in high-need schools to become candidates for National Board Certification. In addition to offering financial and other incentives, recruiting efforts should promote curricular support, improved working conditions, and strong school-based leadership. NBPTS should focus on increasing the numbers of NBCTs in urban and rural areas; buttress support and mentoring programs; intensify recruitment of career-changers; and create teaching schools that model best practices and are linked to serving high-need schools. An-

other idea is to publicize and promote research that shows NBCTs are likely to work in schools longer than non-NBCTs.

Help principals better understand teaching and how to use NBCTs to advance a school-wide culture of learning. School and district administrators are critical to using NBCTs to create and support learning in all schools—especially high-need schools. NBCTs, in collaboration with teacher leaders and administrators, can improve support for new and struggling teachers and change school cultures. Accordingly, participants said that NBPTS needs to do more to educate principals about National Board Certification as a vehicle for student improvement; develop a certification process for school leadership; and utilize school-based teams of teachers to improve practice and open doors of the classroom. “When you ask NBCTs what it takes to be in—and stay in—a school, they will say: It is school leadership and school culture,” said Barbara Kelley, former chair, NBPTS Board of Directors.

Leverage collaborations and partnerships to increase the impact of NBCTs on education practice and policies—especially at the district level. National Board Certification reaches its potential through partnerships that include NBCTs and non-NBCTs, administrators, school boards, policymakers, businesses, and communities. “We’ve learned that if teachers go through the National Board Certification process, they can be not only the best teachers, but the best change agents,” said Anne Bryant, executive director, National School Boards Association. “The big question for school boards is: How do we use the National Board Certification process to encourage standardization of teaching excellence so that all teachers are brought to the level where we can change the student achievement in our districts?” To promote collaboration and raise the number of NBCTs, participants recommended that NBPTS promote and encourage more grassroots, district-focused partnerships that include interdisciplinary organizations, foundations, and superintendents. Chicago could be used as an urban model of broad collaboration to expand and support the National Board Certification process. Further, NBPTS should promote research that identifies and studies six to 12 districts that demonstrate strong support for National Board Certification.

Embed National Board Standards, assessment, and mentoring in pre-service training and as part of a professional continuum throughout teachers’ careers. The National Board must consider how to encourage the expansion of its core propositions and standards in pre-service preparation and induction. It also should seek ways to embed National Board Standards, reflection and reflective writing, and portfolio concepts throughout the teaching continuum for all teachers. Additionally, master’s programs would benefit from better and more systemic integration of the National Board Standards and assessment process. To increase the number of minority NBCTs, the National Board should collaborate with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and colleges with large Hispanic and other minority student populations early in the teacher-education process. Finally, NBCTs should be encouraged and trained for mentoring and other support programs for new and struggling teachers and teachers who aspire to become National Board certified.

CONCLUSION

The Wingspread participants repeatedly stressed that, on multiple fronts, NBPTS is helping to improve teaching, teacher preparation, and understanding of how highly accomplished teaching affects student learning. They also agreed that NBPTS, working with National Board Certified Teachers and supporters across the nation, can do more to share its knowledge, influence policy, and gain

more recognition for the movement.

Achieving these goals will require new NBPTS strategies, a higher public profile, and greater presence in policy discussions. The field is waiting for NBPTS to weigh in on the major issues of the day and will listen to what NBPTS has to say. Capitalizing on the solid foundation and momentum that NBPTS now enjoys to raise its profile does not mean minimizing its core mission. Indeed, it is crucial that NBPTS continue to set high standards for what teachers should know and be able to do. “For some reason, we’re in the midst of a period in our society where, when people are not fully satisfied with what teachers are doing, they advocate lowering the standards,” said Lee Shulman, president, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning. “The National Board stands as a symbol of why those standards have to be rigorous, visible, widely understood, and supported by our population as a whole.”

For more information about the conference discussion, a list of participants, and video clips, visit the NBPTS Web site (www.nbpts.org).

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