
A Report on the 2008 Survey of
National Board Certified Teachers in
South Carolina

March 2010

Center for Educator Recruitment,
Retention, & Advancement (CERRA)

Introduction

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was created in 1987 after the release of a report titled *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. Authors of this document, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, called for the creation of a board to advance the quality of teaching and learning by developing professional standards that determine what an accomplished teacher should know and be able to demonstrate and to create a voluntary system that certifies teachers who meet these standards. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, NBPTS is centered on Five Core Propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

More than 82,000 educators in the United States have achieved National Board Certification. South Carolina employs the third highest number of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) with 6,639 working in schools and districts, and of those, 6,436 receive an annual stipend of \$7,500 with the option to renew after 10 years. In addition, most districts provide local incentives to their NBCTs ranging from candidate support to a \$5,500 salary supplement. All but one of the 85 public school districts in South Carolina, as well as the Palmetto Unified and Public Charter School Districts, employ at least one NBCT. Special schools in the state, such as the School for the Deaf and Blind, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, all employ Board-certified teachers. Some districts have several hundred NBCTs in their schools, often accounting for more than 20% of their teaching population.

South Carolina teachers who choose to pursue National Board Certification can apply for a \$2,500 loan that will be forgiven if the candidate is employed as a classroom teacher at the time of achieving NBCT status. Additionally, all NBCTs and National Board candidates in South Carolina have access to a variety of resources including a district liaison, a toolkit that provides assistance to candidates statewide, and candidate support workshops and awareness meetings upon request.

As part of the certification process, candidates complete 10 assessments that are reviewed by trained teachers in their certificate areas. The assessments include four portfolio entries that feature teaching practice and six constructed response exercises that assess content knowledge. In 2005, NBPTS introduced *Take One!* ®, a classroom-based professional development program which allows teachers to submit only one pre-selected video portfolio entry and transfer the score if they decide to pursue National Board candidacy. According to teachers who have participated in *Take One!* ®, the option to experience a portion of the National Board Certification process is valuable, but the real benefits come from being part of a learning community that encourages collegiality and collaboration among faculty members and ultimately improves school culture.

With the unemployment rate up and state revenues down, the current budget process will be as difficult as anyone can remember in recent years. Naturally, the cost-effectiveness of many programs, education-related and otherwise, is being questioned in South Carolina and throughout the country. This report describes the value of one particular program, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, through the written and spoken words of teachers who have successfully gone through the process and are now using what they have learned in their classrooms. It demonstrates the importance of National Board Certification beyond test scores and provides powerful evidence of professional growth.

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to determine the impact National Board Certification has on teachers' practices inside and outside the classroom, according to those who have successfully participated in the process. A comprehensive literature review discovered a significant number of studies related to NBPTS and its effect on student achievement. Most of this research, however, has been criticized for publishing inconclusive results. To determine if an NBCT produces students with higher test scores than a non-certified teacher is fairly simple, but to control for the many other variables that can affect student learning is often very difficult. Despite the debatable research surrounding National Board Certification, student learning and growth are extremely important factors embedded throughout NBPTS's fundamental objectives, and should be essential to any quality educator.

Because of the complex nature of a study centered primarily on student achievement, this research focuses on several other aspects of National Board Certification, all of which have some impact on students and their learning. A group of educators used relevant research, NBPTS's Five Core Propositions, and their own experiences to aid in the development of 17 survey questions related to the following key topics:

- Targeted recruitment in high-need schools
- Teacher retention in the classroom
- Measures of student growth
- Systematic thinking about teaching practices
- Reflection on teaching practices
- Commitment to teaching
- Leadership roles
- Collaboration in schools and the community

In March 2008, the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) administered an online survey to each of the 5,731 NBCTs who were employed in South Carolina classrooms at the time. A total of 2,105 teachers submitted a completed survey, resulting in a 37% response rate.

Survey results are presented in the following section.

Results

This section of the report is separated by five subheadings based on the content of survey questions. Before teachers commented on how the National Board Certification process affected their work, they were asked what factors motivated them to pursue certification. While the largest number chose financial incentives as a motivating factor, more than half of the respondents also selected reasons not related to money including a desire to use National Board as a way to affect student performance, examine teaching practices, and engage in high-quality professional development. As discussed in the following subsections, all of these factors, as well as others, are primary outcomes of NBPTS.

Targeted High Need Initiatives

In 2008, NBPTS reported that 42% of the nation's NBCTs were teaching in schools eligible for Title I funding. A similar trend is evident in South Carolina as 42% of NBCTs are currently employed in critical-need schools that meet one or more of the three following characteristics: a below average or at-risk absolute rating, a teacher turnover rate of 20% or higher, and a poverty index of 70% or higher. Poverty index is based on the number of students in a school who qualify for Medicaid or subsidized lunch. Furthermore, more than one in four 2008 – 2009 National Board loan applications were submitted by teachers who worked in schools with a below average or at-risk absolute rating. These statistics are encouraging, yet a great need remains to get more of these highly effective teachers into critical-need schools. To address this need on a national level, NBPTS introduced the Targeted High Need Initiative (THNI) program which aims to increase teacher quality and student achievement in high-need schools.

As a result of a recommendation from the South Carolina NBCT Policy Summit in 2006, the South Carolina Legislature now provides the opportunity for teachers in below average or at-risk schools to complete the National Board Certification process without having to repay the loan regardless of whether they become certified. In order to qualify for loan forgiveness, the teacher must continue to work in this type of school throughout the entire certification process, thus encouraging classroom retention in high-need, low-performing schools. The loan is forgiven at a rate of 33% for each year of full-time teaching.

To better determine how NBCTs feel about working in a high-need school, the survey asked the teachers to identify factors that would most motivate them to teach in such an environment. One in three survey respondents said that a school culture which values teaching and learning would motivate them to teach in a high-need area. One in four said that a highly effective, collaborative principal would encourage a similar move. Just over 31% of the responding teachers chose an additional monetary supplement as a motivating factor, and only 10% indicated that nothing would motivate them to teach in a high-need area. Whether they currently teach in a school with high poverty rates and low test scores or they are willing to do so, NBCTs understand the importance of having an effective, committed teacher in every classroom, particularly those located in high-need areas of the state.

Retention

Another critical focus of NBPTS is teacher retention. Do NBCTs stay in the classroom at a higher rate than non-certified teachers? According to several research studies, they do. The National Research Council (2008) conducted the most recent study related to the effects of National Board Certification and found that Board-certified teachers do stay in the profession at higher rates than other teachers. A 2007 study concluded that NBCTs in North Carolina are in some cases less likely than non-certified teachers to leave the public school system. A 2006 project funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation surveyed NBCTs and non-NBCTs in South Carolina and Ohio and found that NBCTs are more committed to a long-term career in teaching and are more likely to remain in the classroom when compared to a general population of teachers.

NBCTs who participated in CERRA's survey were specifically asked how the certification process affected their decision to remain in the classroom; and they were very clear about their intentions. One out of every three teachers reported that their desire to remain in a South Carolina classroom had increased greatly since becoming an NBCT. Approximately 30% said that their desire to stay in the classroom somewhat increased and about one-third reported no change, leaving only 5% of teachers who indicated a decrease in their desire to remain in a classroom in the state. In fact, nearly 70% of respondents currently teach in the same school in which they taught when they completed the National Board Certification process. These results add credibility to theories that NBPTS is a legitimate program that keeps effective teachers in the classroom, thus positively impacting student learning and achievement.

In addition to its impact on students, teacher retention also affects the economy. In a 2007 study, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) concluded that the national cost of teacher attrition is over \$7.3 billion. The Department of Labor estimates that attrition costs the employer 30% of the exiting employee's salary. Therefore, if the average South Carolina teacher salary during the 2008 – 2009 school year was \$47,421 and 3,394.5 teachers (excluding retirees) left their classroom at the end of the year, the state spent approximately \$48.3 million filling vacant positions. Furthermore, a 2005 report written by the Alliance for Excellent Education concluded that replacing public school teachers costs the nation \$4.9 billion each year, and South Carolina accounts for more than \$74.5 million (excluding retirees). Although the estimated costs associated with teacher turnover differ depending on the method of calculation used by each source, the annual loss of our teachers substantially impacts our nation and state, and most importantly, our children.

Student Growth

NBPTS's Core Proposition Three states that teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning. More specifically, teachers should know how to effectively measure student growth and understanding using multiple and meaningful methods of assessment. Assessment is an essential function of improvement at any level, whether it is the art of medicine, business, or teaching being observed. Strategies and techniques used in any field should be evaluated to determine if they are being used appropriately and effectively, and modified if they do not yield intended results.

When asked how NBPTS has affected their teaching practice, several educators discussed their newfound abilities to improve their teaching strategies by assessing a child's true performance and adjusting their approaches accordingly based on those assessment results. Survey respondents identified measures of student growth being used in the classroom to support the claim that the National Board Certification experience has made a positive impact on their teaching. This question generated a wide variety of responses including classroom observation and documentation, rubrics, capstone projects, portfolios, and student surveys and interviews. Traditional assessment techniques, such as grades and standardized test scores, were also identified; but they are now being used in conjunction with more authentic, hands-on strategies that measure higher-order skills like critical thinking and problem solving.

NBCTs also learned to concentrate more on formative assessments throughout the school year to demonstrate student progress rather than relying solely on summative assessments conducted at the end of the year that do not allow time for improvement. One NBCT stated, "We have been using state standardized test scores to measure student growth. Now I am developing specific formative assessments for students in every science class in the school, assessing their work, and providing teachers with item analysis and specific data targeting areas where students are weak and need re-teaching." Through the National Board Certification process, teachers learn to focus on more frequent and authentic measures of what students have learned and to what extent they can apply new knowledge rather than relying on test scores alone.

Systematic Thinking and Reflection

Using NBPTS's Core Proposition Four as a reference, NBCTs were asked how the certification process affected their ability to think systematically about their teaching practice. Approximately 97% of all responding teachers reported that their ability had either greatly or somewhat improved. The remaining 3% of respondents reported no change, and only one teacher indicated a decrease in his/her ability to think systematically about his/her teaching practice. One of the goals of systematic thinking as it relates to teaching is to ensure familiarity with learning theories and instructional strategies and the willingness to incorporate new findings into practice. Many teachers specifically referenced the act of taking what they had learned during the National Board Certification process and using it to improve their practice. For example, one NBCT wrote, "It enabled me to look closely at my teaching practice and to apply what I had learned. My students benefit from my increased ability to assess my lessons and the outcomes. My teaching and my re-teaching has improved dramatically. I am able to monitor and adjust during and after lessons. This newfound knowledge has increased my ability to teach to each student's developmental level."

Similar to systematic thinking, 96% of NBCTs indicated that the certification experience taught them to reflect on their teaching practice and its impact on student learning more or somewhat more frequently than before entering the process. One NBCT noted, "The National Board process has given me the ability to reflect more on what I need to do to ensure student success. I know that I am a much better teacher than I was when I first started teaching. Some of that comes from experience, but most of it comes from learning how to be a good teacher. National Board is essential to this process."

Many NBCTs identified the reflection piece as the most valuable part of the entire certification process although results of reflection, unlike test scores and completions rates, are difficult to quantify. Often described by teachers as the best professional development they have ever received, the National Board Certification process teaches the art of being a reflective practitioner. Candidates are compelled to examine every aspect of a completed lesson, hoping to identify pieces that could be considered successful, but more importantly, areas that could be improved. Reflection is strongly aligned with student learning as it encourages teachers to review their students' work for evidence of understanding and opportunities for growth. Instead of stopping there, the National Board Certification process teaches candidates to create and adjust follow-up lessons to address the identified areas of concern. The importance of reflection can best be summarized by an NBCT: "I became a better teacher because of the time I spent reflecting on my practice."

Commitment, Leadership, and Collaboration

Several survey questions were dedicated to determining the impact National Board Certification has on NBCT's level of commitment to their practice. Specifically, these teachers were asked about involvement in their schools and communities before and after becoming certified. Results indicated a significant increase in level of school and community involvement after teachers successfully completed the certification process. Since achieving National Board Certification, nearly half of the responding teachers reported that they were more involved and 70% were at least somewhat more involved in school initiatives including committee work, curriculum development, and school improvement initiatives. While many of these teachers were involved in their schools before becoming certified, they maintain a notably stronger commitment to leadership after going through the process.

Many NBCTs referenced their work as mentors and coaches as 87% admitted to providing assistance more frequently or somewhat more frequently to others in the teaching profession since obtaining National Board Certification. Several NBCTs expressed their sense of responsibility to help other teachers improve their practices based on what they learned from the National Board Certification process. NBCTs also have assumed roles as department chairs, team leaders, advisory board members, and teacher of the year recipients and finalists. These results strongly align with NBPTS's Core Proposition Five which states that teachers are members of learning communities through leadership and collaboration.

In addition to school initiatives, NBCTs were also more likely to be involved in community-level activities, particularly in the form of advocacy and outreach projects, since completing the certification process. After becoming certified, teachers reported more involvement in the political process by contacting their legislators regarding education-related policies, encouraging other teachers and community members to vote, and advocating for a better education system for students and teachers. NBCTs also identified collaborative efforts aimed at improving student learning such as reading and literacy initiatives outside the school and involvement in mentoring, tutoring, and coaching programs within the community. Finally, NBCTs demonstrated their increased level of involvement and commitment through community partnership-building with local businesses and colleges and universities. NBPTS instills in teachers that being a committed leader in their schools does not stop inside the four walls of a classroom.

Conclusion

This report was specifically written to describe the results of a survey completed by more than 2,100 NBCTs in South Carolina. It focused on their responses to multiple choice questions as well as questions that allowed them to more openly share how the National Board Certification experience has affected them as educators. These teachers provided insightful information about the undeniable advantages of becoming an NBCT, particularly the improvements seen in their teaching practice. They also reported an increased desire to remain in the classroom since becoming certified, signifying a positive correlation between NBPTS and teacher retention. Regardless of reasons why these NBCTs want to stay in the classroom (maybe they are now better teachers or maybe the money is enough), NBPTS is a program that keeps good teachers on the front lines where they have the greatest impact.

Despite all the benefits NBPTS lends to students and teachers, pending legislation in South Carolina threatens to eliminate the National Board Loan Program and the annual salary supplement received by NBCTs. If the bill is passed into law, loans covering the \$2,500 application fees for National Board will no longer be available, nor will the \$7,500 stipend be awarded to NBCTs once their ten-year certificate expires. South Carolina NBCTs who apply for renewal on or after July 1, 2010 will not receive the additional funds upon the expiration of their original certificate. This stipulation will also affect candidates who wish to apply for initial certification after the cutoff date. Unless their district provides local incentives, these educators will have no access to the monetary benefits associated with becoming National Board Certified.

If this legislation becomes a reality in South Carolina, the state will lose a key teacher recruitment and retention tool. More importantly, students will lose access to more NBCTs and teachers will lose the opportunity to grow professionally through the process. South Carolina educators who have three years of teaching experience will still have the opportunity to pursue National Board Certification, but no monetary supplement will be available. With state and local incentives combined, many teachers stand to lose as much as \$10,000 per year. Some teachers have made it very clear that if their National Board stipend is taken away, they will be forced to seek an administrative position in education that maintains their current salary level or leave the teaching profession altogether. Either way, accomplished teachers will be moving out of the classrooms.

As our state continues its economic struggle, the Legislature is faced with very difficult decisions as it determines where and how money is spent. A judgment will soon be made whether to eliminate funds associated with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, a program which has been affirmed by South Carolina teachers as enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and as effective in retaining accomplished teachers in the classroom where they can make the biggest difference in the lives of our children.

References

- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2005). *Teacher attrition: A costly loss to the nation and to the states*. Washington, DC. Available online at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/TeacherAttrition.pdf>
- Goldhaber, D. and Hansen, M. (2007). *National board certification and teachers' career paths: Does NBPTS certification influence how long teachers remain in the profession and where they teach?* Seattle, WA. Available online at http://www.crpe.org/cs/crpe/download/csr_files/wp_crpe1r_nbptscp_aug07.pdf
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF). (2007). *The high cost of teacher turnover*. Washington, DC. Available online at http://www.nctaf.org/resources/demonstration_projects/turnover/documents/CTTPolicyBrief6-19.pdf
- National Research Council (2008). *Assessing accomplished teaching: Advanced-level certification programs*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Sykes, G., Anagnostopoulos, D., Cannata, M., Chard, L., Frank, K., McCrory, R., and Wolfe, E. (2006). *National board certified teachers as an organizational resource*. Michigan State University. Available online at http://www.nbpts.org/UserFiles/File/NBPTS_final_report_D_-_Sykes_-_Michigan_State.pdf

Report Prepared By:

Dr. Jennifer Garrett, Coordinator of Research and Program Development, CERRA