

Retaining South Carolina Teachers Through National Board Certification

According to the most recent South Carolina Annual Educator Supply and Demand Report released by CERRA, more teachers are leaving their positions and fewer are entering the profession. A program called National Board Certification (NBC) provides a strategy for keeping accomplished teachers in the classroom, and it is currently available to teachers in this state. Results from national research confirm that the retention rates of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) are often significantly higher than those of teachers who are not National Board certified.

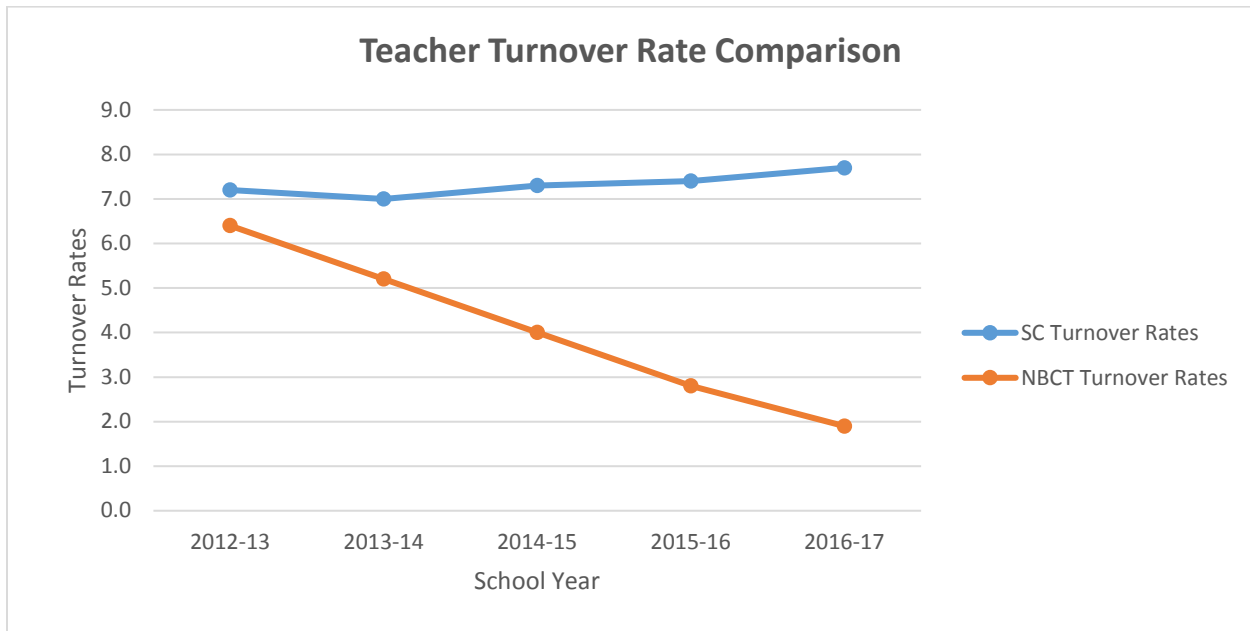
NBC is a voluntary, advanced certification process for teachers that requires candidates to provide content specific, standards-based evidence of accomplished practice. Candidates are assessed across four components, each of which is designed to evaluate a different aspect of a teacher's practice. Component 1 is a computer-based assessment that focuses on both content knowledge and pedagogy. Components 2-4 are portfolio assessments that require candidates to, among other tasks, analyze student work samples, submit videos of classroom instruction, demonstrate their collaboration with families, the community, and colleagues to impact student learning, and provide evidence of assessment knowledge.

Crosswalk documents, created by a group of experienced NBCTs in 2016, illustrate a close alignment between the NBC requirements of accomplished teaching and South Carolina's teacher evaluation system. Consequently, the NBC requirements were found to be more rigorous than the state's proficient level of teacher performance. Candidates who achieve NBC receive a five-year certificate from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Pursuant to SC Proviso, those educators who are employed in a teaching position are eligible to receive a state supplement of \$5,000 per year for the duration of the National Board certificate. The current National Board Proviso requires educators to apply with NBPTS prior to July 1, 2018 in order to be eligible for the state supplement.

While national research exists related to the retention benefits of NBC, South Carolina has not produced any recent studies that focus on this topic. With substantial numbers of teachers leaving their classrooms, CERRA began examining this issue in the fall of 2017. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) provided statewide teacher turnover rates that include teachers who leave the state for any reason. Teachers who move from one SC public school district to another are not considered statewide turnover as long as they remain in a teaching position. These rates do, however, include teachers who move into a non-teaching position (i.e., assistant principal, district coordinator, etc.) in any SC public school district.

The state's turnover rates were compared to turnover rates of South Carolina NBCTs over a five-year period. For each of the five years, CERRA calculated turnover rates for NBCTs by applying the same formula used by the SCDE to determine turnover rates for the entire state. Like the statewide rates, the rates among NBCTs account for those who leave the state for any reason and those who move into a non-teaching position that is no longer eligible for the National Board state supplement. NBCTs who leave a SC public school district to teach in another one are not considered statewide turnover.

The most recent data available from the SCDE are for the 2016-17 school year. Specifically, these data represent the rates of teachers who were teaching in a SC public school district in 2015-16, but not teaching in any SC public school district in 2016-17. Some of these teachers remain employed in a SC public school district, but they are no longer in a teaching position. As shown in the following table, the SC teacher turnover rate for the 2016-17 school year was 7.7%, yet only 1.9% for all NBCTs in the state. A line chart was used to reveal the slight increase in SC teacher turnover rates over five years and the significant decrease in turnover among NBCTs.



In November 2017, a survey was sent to the SC National Board Network (SCNBN) to gain anecdotal evidence related to the impact of NBC on teacher instruction and retention. The SCNBN is a new membership organization comprised of NBCTs. Members were asked if they believed that the NBC process affected their planning, instruction, and/or assessment practices. All teachers who responded to the survey credited the process with enabling them to reflect on their practice and better assess the different needs of their students. Such reflection and differentiated instruction often have a positive impact on student learning and growth and can lead to an improvement in the teacher’s overall effectiveness.

Teachers also were asked if the National Board state supplement impacted their decision to remain in the classroom. With the exception of one teacher who certified before the supplement was available, all respondents reported that the supplement influenced their choice to stay in the classroom. Many specifically noted that going into administration was not a feasible option since they would no longer be eligible for the supplement. When questioned about the NBC renewal process, some teachers indicated that they would leave the classroom or at least begin to consider district-level positions with larger salaries if they lost the supplement.

The turnover rate comparisons and anecdotal evidence provided in this paper provide compelling reasons to conclude that National Board Certification is an effective teacher retention tool in South Carolina. Whether it is the process itself that keeps teachers in the classroom or the supplemental funds or both, the results are notable. If more teachers were to experience the NBC process and become certified, more teachers likely will remain in the classroom. South Carolina must improve its teacher retention rates as the state continues to struggle with an ongoing teacher shortage.