

Evaluating the Impact of National Board Teacher Certification

Do teachers attempting National Board Teacher Certification become better teachers?
How do we measure “better?”

Researchers Al Morasch and Rick Stendera used classroom observation, personal interviews, and professional teaching rubrics from *The Art and Science of Professional Teaching*¹ to measure teachers’ impact on student learning at two points in time—as they began certification and a year later as they concluded the process. These rubrics, reflecting research on what teachers can do to create optimum conditions for learning, require observers in the classroom to identify whether teachers have created those conditions by looking for specific student behaviors.

The researchers found that candidates for National Board Teacher Certification increased their ability to impact student learning, gained more confidence in their teaching, and assumed leadership roles in their schools.

Among the nineteen behavioral indicators that the researchers monitored were: the extent to which students knew their learning targets and what was required to reach them; how clearly the students understood a variety of thinking strategies and were able to apply them in diverse situations; and if students used learning materials and resources that best met their needs.

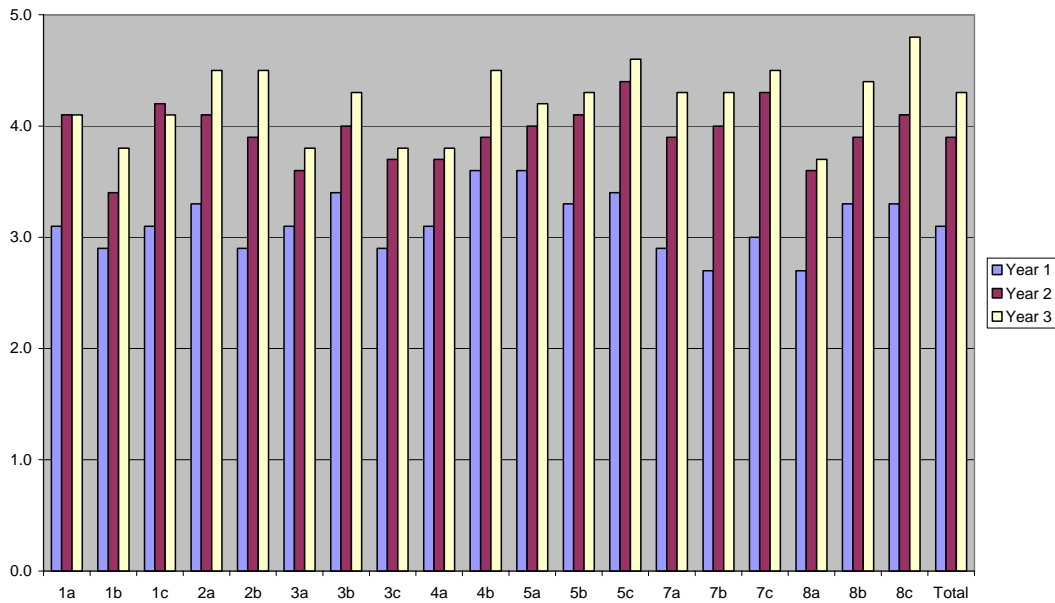
From their observations, the evaluators’ rated the teacher’s ability to provide the learning opportunities described in the rubrics. They also interviewed small groups of students. In addition the teachers rated themselves using the same rubrics.² The ratings of the researchers, teachers, and students were aggregated to create a composite score for each teacher on each indicator. The individual teacher scores were then grouped by elementary, middle, and high school. This process was repeated for two additional years with one group of 20 teachers, and for one year with a second group of 27 teachers.

Elementary and middle school teachers in both groups showed growth on all nineteen indicators. High school teachers in Group 1 displayed growth on all but two indicators, while high school teachers in Group 2 showed growth on all indicators.

¹ The Art and Science of Professional Teaching by Marilyn L. Simpson. For information, contact Education Research Network at www.teach-learn.com.

² The evaluators found that teachers assessing themselves were often much tougher in their ratings than what was “readily observable by the evaluator in their classrooms.”

Group 1 - Elementary School Average Growth in Impact on Student Learning by Indicator - Years 1, 2, 3



Teachers at middle and high schools showed similar growth patterns.

Growth in capacity to impact student learning

Teachers who choose to attempt National Board Teacher Certification are often good teachers already. That was the case in this study. The majority of the teachers scored “At Standard” or “Above Standard” on the rubrics at the beginning of the study, and the majority were judged as highly competent teachers by their principals. Moving to a higher level of competence would be a notable achievement for these teachers. Not only did they demonstrate growth over the course of their certification year, but they continued to grow, as evidenced by a third year of observation of Group I.

On a scale of 1-5, with 3 representing “At Standard” and 5 representing “Above Standard,” the average score of Group 1 at the outset was 3.1 for teachers at all three levels. In year 2, the scores for this group increased to 3.9 for elementary and middle school teachers, and 3.8 for high school teachers. Results for Group 2 were remarkably similar. This group began with slightly lower scores overall: 2.8 for elementary school teachers, 2.9 for middle school teachers, and 3.2 for high school teachers. In year 2, the average score climbed to 3.8 for elementary teachers, 3.9 for middle school teachers, and 3.8 for high school teachers.

The evaluators found that teachers showed marked improvements in these areas:

- Relating learning targets to the students;
- Engaging students in meaningful tasks;
- Using varied teaching and learning strategies
- Use of technology;
- Assessment of student learning.

Teaching is a human endeavor. Teachers bring their own personal style and decision-making into the classroom. Since the focus of the professional teaching standards is on student behavior and student work, the wide variety of approaches to teaching are factored out of the research design. The report notes “the teaching style, classroom organization and structure, and the way teachers related to students varied greatly across the classrooms...With their focus on student behavior, the standards cut through the highly visible variables of teaching style, grade level, subject content and student ability.”

She demands that we think reflectively. It's built into all of our work. She wants us to think and learn from it, not just repeat what we've seen or read.
HS Student – Suburban

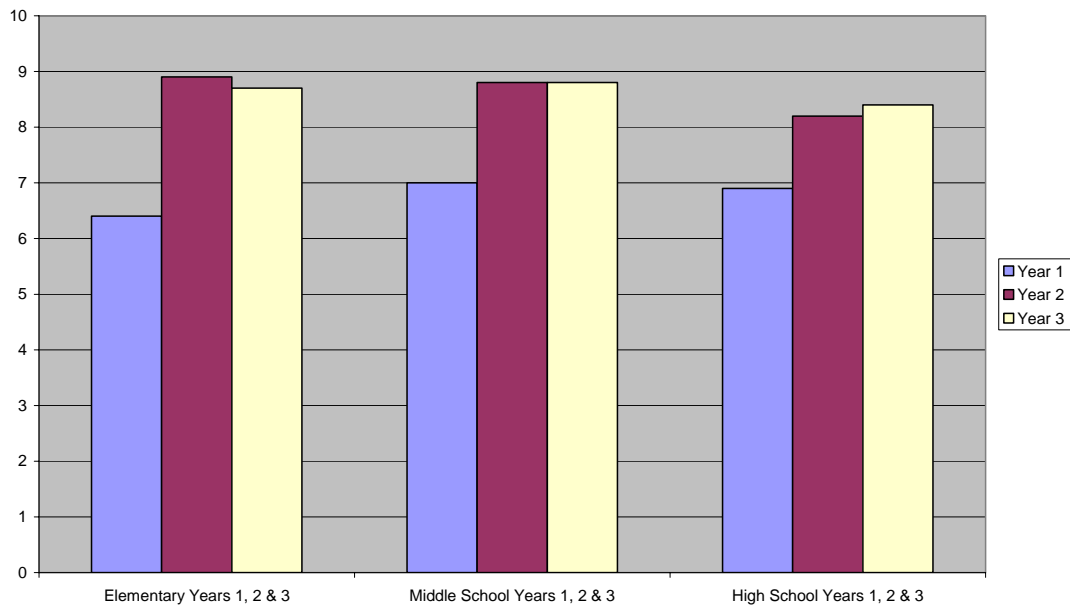
Increase in confidence

Teachers increased their confidence in their ability to impact student learning, as evidenced by self-rating over the period of the study and observations by the evaluators. Teachers at the elementary level in both Groups 1 and 2 showed higher increases in confidence levels than their middle and high school colleagues.

These teachers attributed much of their increase in confidence to the National Board study and their ability to apply what they had learned in the classroom. They pointed to student work, test scores, and classroom assessments as evidence for their confidence levels, and expressed an expectation that their teaching would continue to improve over time.

The evaluators measured teacher confidence by “the ease with which they worked with and related to students, the depth of knowledge they demonstrated regarding the content of learning and the pedagogy of learning, their direct and honest responses to interview questions and self-ratings, and the absolute joy that many of them displayed in their work as teachers.”

Group 1 - Average Self-reported Growth in Teacher Confidence to Positively Impact Student Learning - by School Level



Growth in leadership

The majority of the teachers who attempted National Board Certification are now leaders in their schools. For some, leadership is a new endeavor, while for others, their existing leadership roles were reinforced and enlarged by the certification experience.³

Teachers are involved in curriculum work, department leadership, program development, teacher training, research reporting, parent involvement and communications, and other areas of leadership.

From interviews with teachers and their principals, the evaluators learned that the adoption of leadership roles began as the teachers shared what they had learned through the certification process. The evaluators write: “The power of that knowledge and experience gave them immediate authority and, in most cases, principals and teachers were eager to accept their leadership in student learning improvement efforts.”

3

Inverness Research Associates also found that teachers who achieved National Board Certification assumed leadership roles in their schools and school districts. Their report can be found at www.cstp-wa.org/leadership.html.

Principals view the assumption of leadership as one of the greatest benefits of the certification process. They spoke of teachers who were able to win support from other colleagues for implementation of programs, teachers who mentored newcomers to the profession, teachers who wrote grants or led study groups, and teachers who served on district assessment committees. Many principals expressed gratitude “for the assistance teachers provided in moving schools forward on behalf of students and their needs.”

The development of teacher leadership in a school is the strongest and most lasting investment that can be made. The National Board program gave her the confidence to become a powerful teacher trainer in our school and district. This has been so valuable for all of us. HS Principal - Rural

Increase in capacity for professional growth

In going through the process of National Board Certification, teachers developed behaviors and practices they can use to grow continually as teaching professionals. They learned to use structured reflection to evaluate a lesson they introduced in the classroom and to assess what they needed to change. They learned to focus their work on the individual needs of students, to increase student choice and responsibility, and to offer different ways that students could demonstrate their learning. They especially appreciated the opportunity to discuss their questions and insights with other professionals in support groups.

These teachers became “more deliberate and intentional in the planning and work with students and more focused in their use of time...Regardless of the specific areas of growth, each teacher openly attributed the National Board study for the newly gained skills and knowledge and felt much stronger as professionals as a result.”

It provided a focus on learning both for students and me. It made me a true learner again. It is different from other things I've done. It caused me to focus on what my students are learning and how to evaluate that learning. I now see more clearly what the students are doing and how they are doing it. Middle School Teacher

The greatest benefit of the National Board program is the reflective practice. I never saw the equity issue until I had a chance to see my classroom on videotape. It was an eye-opener to see what the kids experience - very valuable. Meeting kids at different levels and adapting curriculum for their specific needs and finding solutions for each different child have all been valuable to me. High School Teacher

This summary is based on *National Board Certification: Impact on Student Learning*, research conducted by Al Morasch and Rick Stendera for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in Washington state.