

Growing Our Own: Developing National Board Certified Teachers in High-Needs Schools

What We Know

During the last few years, three separate studies (Cavalluzo, 2004; Goldhaber, 2004; Vandevort, 2004) have shown that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) produce greater student achievement gains than their counterparts and do so especially for lower achieving students. Unfortunately, NBCTs are currently less likely to be teaching in low-performing schools and schools serving poor and minority students.

A number of states and districts are considering policies that encourage or require NBCTs to accept assignments in low-performing schools and classrooms. For example, Georgia legislators recently passed a bill requiring that teachers who earn or renew National Board Certification will receive a 10 percent salary increase only if they work in a school that has been on the state's roster of low-performing schools for two or more consecutive years. A similar proposal from the Governor's office is on the table in South Carolina.

Policies like these that address the staffing problems of low-performing schools solely through salary incentives or forced assignments do not take into account the complex conditions that make it difficult to recruit and retain expert teachers in high-needs schools. Other factors such as collaborative leadership, a collegial staff with a shared teaching philosophy, a supportive and active parent community, and adequate resources (i.e., staff, materials) heavily influence where NBCTs decide to teach.

While it is important to recruit existing NBCTs to these schools, "grow your own" programs could help increase the number of NBCTs in high-needs schools as well. Such programs are relatively new and usually school-based rather than systemic policy. One of the exceptions to this school-based model is in Chicago where the Chicago Public Education Fund has provided a one-time \$3,000 bonus to each new NBCT in the district. The district also has a school-based model that provides \$30,000 school-wide grants to selected schools that grow teams of NBCTs.

Teachers in many high-needs schools feel overwhelmed by the daily demands placed on them, and they may not consider pursuing National Board Certification. As a result, it is critical for schools and districts to encourage and provide support for teachers pursuing National Board Certification. Examples of supports offered across the nation include:

- implementing mentoring and support groups staffed by current NBCTs to help applicants understand and navigate the process of developing their portfolios and completing the assessment;
- providing release time from the classroom for teachers to work on their portfolios;
- offering video cameras and other equipment, as well as the technical assistance needed to prepare their taped lessons; and
- paying for some or all of the application and assessment fees.

Washington Context

To encourage Washington teachers to pursue National Board Certification, the Washington Initiative, a public-private partnership coordinated through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, was established. The Initiative works to increase the number of National Board Certified Teachers, providing private and federally funded scholarships to pay \$1,250 of the \$2,500 application fee. During the certification process, candidates have the opportunity to meet regularly with a collegial support group led by a trained National Board Certified Teacher facilitator. These support groups are coordinated by six universities and fifteen districts around the state. Candidates also have the opportunity to attend intensive trainings offered by the Washington Education Association. The state awards teachers who achieve National Board Certification an annual salary stipend of \$3,500, allows use of the NBPTS certificate to fulfill the requirements for obtaining or renewing the Professional Teachers Certificate, and exempts teachers from clock-hour requirements for the Continuing Teachers Certificate.

In addition to other state supports, there are also targeted efforts at the district level to promote National Board Certification of teachers in the form of funding assistance, release days, materials, or use of technology and other resources. Local districts provide a wide array of support. For a complete listing, visit the following website:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/certification/nbpts/pubdocs/DistrictSupportsWashington2005.doc>.

In 2006, Washington was selected by the NBPTS as a Targeted High-Needs Initiative (THNI) grant site. The goal of the THNI grant over five years is to increase National Board activity in high-needs schools in the Seattle School District, particularly among teachers of color. The Washington Education Association, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession collaborate to provide cohort-based pre-candidacy and candidacy support for a diverse group of Seattle educators. THNI support is provided by National Board Certified Teachers.

Ideas To Build On

- Encourage candidates in high-needs schools to seek National Board Certification as a team.
- Create leadership roles for NBCTs in high-needs schools, such as mentoring new teachers or providing professional development.
- Provide state-sponsored, school-based incentives for schools that have cadres of teachers pursuing NBC together.
- Provide a school incentive for achieving/maintaining 20 percent of its faculty as NBCTs.