

## TOM WHITE, NBCT

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## A Source of Association Leaders

At the end of last year, Washington gained 235 National Board Certified Teachers. We now have a total of 581 in the state. This comes at a time when the WEA and local associations are having a hard time finding new people to fill important leadership roles. My association, for example, hasn't had a bonafide election with competing candidates for executive board positions since I can remember. And these same people also make up the bargaining team. Not that these members are doing a poor job (after all, I'm one of them), but they could sure use an infusion of new people, eager to take on leadership roles.

I think the answer is right in front of our faces. I strongly believe that Washington state's National Board Certified Teachers are well qualified to fill the growing leadership vacuum in our state and local education associations.

The National Board and the Association value quality schools, quality teaching and quality working conditions. The Association has worked hard to get more collegial time so that teachers can work together to plan units and lessons. The National Board sees this as vital for effective schools. The WEA has been able to get smaller class sizes so that students can get more attention from

their teachers. My local association has been able to secure greater influence in regard to planning professional development that is more meaningful for teachers and their students, another item prominent on the National Board agenda. And the Association has also had limited success in obtaining adequate compensation, essential to attracting and retaining accomplished teachers, whether or not they're Board Certified.

The National Board and the WEA share the same goals. They understand the need for the state to fully fund the school system. They realize that adequate compensation will attract and retain good teachers and lead to increased student learning. In short, the association and the National Board have the same agenda.

The NEA has supported the National Board since it began in the mid-1980s, as a response to a perceived crisis in American education. These teachers and educational leaders articulated a set of standards to which all teachers could aspire, and have since certified more than 30,000 teachers who have demonstrated that they meet those standards. This board consists primarily of teachers, in recognition of the fact that those who teach are the ones who best understand teaching. Currently, this board also includes NEA President Reg Weaver and Lake Washington Education Association President Kevin Teeley.

In Washington, the WEA has worked alongside the OSPI to support teachers who pursue certification. This support comes in many forms, including the recruitment of prospective candidates, organizational and financial support of facilitated candidate study groups, and a yearly, weeklong symposium that gives new candidates a jump start on their certification process. It has also insisted that while every teacher should aspire to the National Board's standards, the certification process should remain entirely voluntary. Additionally, the WEA has consistently and successfully lobbied for a substantial annual stipend for those teachers who attain certification.

Where I think the association falls short in respect to National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) is what it does, or rather, doesn't do, with them after they certify. Accomplished teachers have great potential as leaders in the association. They understand good teaching, they think and care deeply about educational quality, and they can articulate this passion in a clear and compelling manner. They also have the proven ability to finish difficult tasks, and the desire to take on leadership roles without leaving the classroom. NBCTs should become building representatives at their schools. They should be on the executive boards of their local associations. They should speak up for educational issues in

Olympia on behalf of the WEA. They should be on their district bargaining teams, and they should be delegates at the state and national representative assemblies.

And if they don't step forward to take on these roles, the Association and local leaders need to step forward and recruit them. The WEA should enlist these teachers to speak to the legislature about the need for adequate support of education. National Board Certification has prepared them to become teacher leaders, to make a difference within and beyond their classroom walls. The Association could, and should, give them the structure to do just that.