



Supporting the Best Teachers

School leaders can promote educator effectiveness by supporting National Board Certification

Being designated as the 2013 Wisconsin State Teacher of the Year is an honor that carries responsibility. As a representative of all teachers in Wisconsin, I have been given a voice of credibility and influence. One of my goals is using this voice to revive the perception of educators as professionals.

Teachers are highly trained professionals. Teachers practice the skill and art of teaching, but not as in the “practice makes perfect” definition. Rather, a teaching practice is like a physician’s practice, which is defined as performing a profession, art, or occupation. A practitioner performs their profession in a holistic way, not only taking into account the work, but how it is delivered, perceived, and the impact it will have. It’s the difference between being a practitioner using judgment to drive progress rather than being a technician getting a job done. The new educator effectiveness framework only measures a portion of those qualities that hallmark a true education professional.

I believe National Board Certification is a more rigorous and

encompassing metric by which to determine educator effectiveness. National Board Certification is an independent, voluntary process a teacher chooses to undertake. National Board Certification requires a financial commitment,



an obligation of time, and carries with it the risk of rejection. To embark on a National Board candidacy is not an easy decision to make.

The National Board Certification process requires teachers to prepare four written entries. Teachers videotape their class and analyze his or

her practice for two of the entries. Another entry focuses on how student achievement advances through with the submission and analysis of student work. The final entry demonstrates the teacher’s connection to the community, collaboration with colleagues, and as a life-long learner. Each entry is limited to 13 pages. The narrative and analysis is accompanied by artifacts and affidavits collected and compiled by the teacher for submission. In addition to the four written entries, teachers must also take a six-question essay exam.

As a candidate, I spent well over 350 hours preparing my four entries and many hours preparing for the testing center exercises. As a candidate mentor, I see the same commitment in the teachers who are seeking National Board Certification. It is an arduous journey. The obligation is enormous and the dedication is unmistakable.

Not all teachers who pursue National Board Certification achieve the qualification. Candidacy is limited to a three-year cycle. A candidate will prepare the four required entries and write the test the first

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year. If the candidate's scores on those items do not meet the standard, they become advanced candidates. Advanced candidates will submit new entries and re-take test center exercises. Each of the items the candidate re-submits requires additional payment. Advanced candidates can re-do entries twice to increase their score to meet the standards. Some candidates do not certify by the third year. The possibility of failure and rejection is real.

A study by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards found that having a National Board Certified teacher leading a classroom results in greater student achievement compared to classrooms with equally qualified teachers who are not certified. It's my contention that, given the rigor of the process, only the best teachers risk candidacy. In addition, I can attest to the professional growth that occurs during the process. I became a more reflective practitioner with a laser-beam focused on the student outcomes of my lesson planning and delivery. That is one of the beauties of National Board Certification. Although it is designed as a professional certification process, it is one of the best professional development experiences a teacher can have.

With all these positives, it seems logical that it would be a highly supported endeavor, but it is not. When I was a candidate, a federal

grant covered half of the first year \$2,500 fee. This year was the last year it was available. In Wisconsin, the state offers up to a \$2,000 reimbursement for expenses related to certification once a teacher is certified. After that original reimbursement, a teacher can receive an annual grant of \$2,500, or \$5,000 in high-need schools, for nine years. The new budget has included a new qualifier for the grant — a Nationally Board Certified teacher has to be deemed effective annually to receive the grant. Districts vary greatly on support given to candidates and rewards for certification. Most districts provide no support in the way of reimbursement, professional development time, or finan-

cial reward for certification. Some districts do offer incentives, but they too are shrinking due to budget constraints.

National Board Certified teachers know how students learn, have demonstrated that their practice leads to student learning, and are proven leaders with their colleagues and communities. This self-motivated leadership needs to be supported and incentivized by the districts served by these master teachers. Invest in the professional capital of your personnel. The dividends will be life-changing for the students in your district. ■

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