

ADVANCING A CULTURE OF ACCOMPLISHED TEACHING



Case Studies in National Board Certification

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Promote	3
Alexis LaDuca, Deer Valley Unified School District	4
Justin Price, Paradise Valley Unified School District.....	9
Dr. Jennifer Robinson, Maricopa Unified School District	13
Recruit	19
Erica Davis, Chandler Unified School District.....	20
Randi Fielding, Florence Unified School District	24
Melissa Gutierrez, Safford Unified School District	30
Windy Mariscal, Cartwright Elementary School District.....	35
Support.....	39
Gabriela Chai, Tucson Unified School District	40
Dr. Annie Diaz, Washington Elementary School District	45
Hannah Jones, Madison School District	50
Lead.....	55
Dr. Alaina Adams, Phoenix Union High School District.....	56
Christie Olsen, Lake Havasu Unified School District.....	63

Introduction

In Arizona, the pursuit of National Board Certification is synonymous with the Arizona K12 Center. For more than a decade, we have been supporting and guiding teachers through their pursuit of Certification. Today, National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) can be found in classrooms throughout Arizona.

We do this work with good reason: every student deserves to be taught by an accomplished teacher. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' Five Core Propositions set out what it means to be an accomplished teacher:

Proposition 1: Teachers are committed to students and their learning

Proposition 2: Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students

Proposition 3: Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning

Proposition 4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience

Proposition 5: Teachers are members of learning communities

The National Board Certification process is a rigorous and reflective process that requires teachers articulate and demonstrate those Propositions in their practice. The benefits are infinite. Research shows that NBCTs' effect on student performance is positive in terms of student gains on reading and math assessments, and Arizona's NBCTs

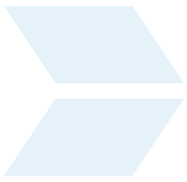
stay in the profession longer than their counterparts. This is a logical outcome of the Certification process, as we are building a profession grounded in Standards, and our teachers are invested in achieving a level of accomplished teaching. Arizona's NBCTs assume leadership roles, serving as mentors to beginning teachers or academic coaches for experienced teachers. The National Board's Five Core Propositions are also becoming embedded in preservice coursework. A common set of core beliefs is central to teaching, and these Propositions have united teachers around a shared center.

In this collection of case studies, 12 Arizona NBCTs explore the impact of Certification on their teaching and leading, and detail how they have helped promote the process within their communities; recruited teachers to pursue the process; supported candidates on their journey toward Certification; and integrated the Five Core Propositions into their leadership.

The NBCTs sharing their stories in this publication work in a variety of roles, each in a different school district across Arizona. Whether in small, rural districts or large, urban districts, working as classroom teachers, mentors, or administrators, these teacher leaders understand the power of the Certification process. Each case study includes questions to guide discussion with your professional learning community or for individual reflection. Explore them with others at your school or district to spark dialogue about the Five Core Propositions and the potential for expanding National Board Certification to help every Arizona student experience the support of NBCTs.

Promote





The Power of Your Story

by Alexis LaDuca

Abstract: As a National Board Certified Teacher, it is easy to feel the excitement of accomplishment and the desire to bring more people into this incredible experience. It can be difficult and perhaps overwhelming to find ways to promote National Board Certification and share this work with others. One way to help draw people in is for current National Board Certified Teachers to share the stories of their individual paths to inspire others to begin their own journeys.

PROMOTE

During the two years that my friend, Miss B, and I worked on National Board Certification, we were the only two teachers in our district actively pursuing it. There were many late afternoons where I would stay and work in my classroom. My other teacher friends would walk by my door, poke their head in and ask what I was doing. I would explain, and they would nod and walk away, always offering their unbridled support, even though they didn't fully grasp what I was doing. They would continually check in, asking about my process. Their understanding of what I was doing grew, but as they saw me working more, they would tell me they hoped it would be worth it. They always seemed surprised that my replies to them were consistently enthusiastic, even though sometimes a little bit of exhaustion was mingled in there.

Despite the fact that I was teaching in one of the largest districts in the state, I had never really heard about National Board Certification until one of my very favorite students, who grew up to be a teacher, and then went on to become a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), told me she

thought I would be a perfect candidate for National Board Certification. We had been in touch since she graduated high school, and I couldn't be prouder of her and her career in education. If she thought it would benefit me and help me grow, then I was in. By simply being tapped and told that I was right for this journey, I felt rejuvenated, appreciated, and excited. Her enthusiasm for the National Board tenets and process was contagious. I immediately went all in, and began my own pursuit. Role reversals slid into place; my former student was my coach and I was her candidate, and I was immediately deeply engaged in the process.

Once I lifted my head up and gleefully celebrated that I was an official NBCT, I looked around and saw that not only were there hardly any high school NBCTs in our district, but that the overall number of NBCTs was low as well. The news of our achievement was shared by our principal to the staff, and even though there was a roar of clapping and a standing ovation from our peers, they still weren't exactly sure what we had accomplished. With my new four letters added to my name, I set out to be a part of the team that would spread the word of

National Board Certification to our district, as well as help to specifically draw in more of my peers, other high school teachers.

One of the most empowering aspects of achieving Certification is that you want your colleagues to be able to feel this exhilarating stamp of success.

One of the most empowering aspects of achieving Certification is that you want your colleagues to be able to feel this exhilarating stamp of success. The task at hand was how to best get the word out to other teachers. I remembered how it felt when my former student told me she thought I should do it, and I wanted others to also have this exhilarating feeling of knowing that they too were accomplished teachers. Miss B and I felt that if they could just hear our story, we could encourage them and draw them into this amazing experience.

We quickly realized that promoting Certification wasn't one size fits all. Just like there is an art and science to teaching, there are people who will be drawn in by their heart and people who will be drawn in by their head. We immediately went back to the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching and focused on the fact that, if we knew our target audience just as well as we know our classroom of students, we could help to identify where we should begin as we strive to communicate the immense power of the Certification journey.

At first, it was a daunting task. There are just under 40 schools in our district, and we began reaching out to the principals of

the five high schools, three middle schools, and then the handful of elementary schools in our specific region. We identified the direct alignment that National Board Certifications and its Five Core Propositions echoed in our own district mission and values: To provide extraordinary educational opportunities to every learner. We also saw the district core values come alive and used those as a cornerstone for bringing in principals and leadership teams. We knew that they too would find respect, accountability, integrity, being student-driven, and excellence as important components that were clearly present in Certification—but we first needed to start with a story.

One of the first people that I reached out to was a personal friend and principal of one of our sister high schools. I asked if Miss B and I could attend and talk during one of his staff meetings. He said no. At first, I was a little heartbroken, but I kept listening. He wanted us to be successful and told us that he wanted the teachers to really hear us, so he suggested finding a time for us to present to those interested in a smaller setting. He knew his staff and guided me in preparing for that first presentation. We didn't have a large gathering for that first meeting. It was only a handful of people, but those who did show up were interested and definitely leaned in. Word of our endeavors began to slowly spread. The key here was slowly. We had to be patient and put in the time, but we knew it would be worth it.

From the beginning, we wanted to specifically draw in middle school and high school teachers. Knowing that those were our people, they really needed the 'why.' We wanted to share that the Certification process was not another hoop to jump through; we highlighted how

it was inspirational and motivating and was a direct reflection of what we all, as accomplished teachers, are already doing in the classroom. We shared the magic that happens throughout the Certification process and emphasized that this wasn't a situation where assessors were coming in and making deductions for what they didn't see; instead, they were taking note of what they did see coming through—and shining—in our writing and videos.

We wanted to share the spark that helped to ignite our individual journeys.

We wanted to share the spark that helped to ignite our individual journeys. No matter the audience, we always started with our story. I talked about the nudge I had from my former student turned National Board Certification guru, and how I had the opportunity to learn and grow from her. I was able to share the fulfillment that came with each workday and piece of data collected, and how I saw validation in what I was doing with and for my students. I spoke of the connections made and the encouragement received throughout my experience.

For our outreach, we made ourselves as available as possible: we sat in media centers and had mini-presentations; presented at staff meetings; sent email blasts to each school so they could individually contact us to talk; met teachers for coffee chats; and kept our eyes open for opportunities where we knew that we could tap a teacher and share how National Board Certification may benefit them. We knew that our promotional endeavors had to be differentiated; just like we strive to meet

students where they are, we wanted to meet our potential candidates where they were in their teaching career. The underlying unification among most of the teachers who became candidates is that they wanted to hear our stories to learn why we went through the process and how it immediately benefitted us. Yes, there were questions about the money, how much work it entailed, and how scary the test was, but their eyes widened when we shared our 'why.' The 'how' information would come later; it would work itself out.

Beyond the in-person outreach, we had our small, but mighty, group of active NBCTs who collaborated to create as many opportunities as possible to promote and advance our own network of NBCTs. The team had individuals create a recruitment video; offer pre-candidacy classes; hold district-level informational meetings; share celebrations and information through our district communication that went to all staff; develop social media posts with the focus of both recruitment and support; and create our own district Certification kick-off events. The most important piece to all of this is that we met as a team to find what our candidate support providers were most comfortable with and how they wanted to best help promote.

We reached out to our superintendent and school board members, and had our very own champion at the district office who oversaw Certification in her role as director of organizational improvement and professional learning. More than once, she said that furthering Certification was her own passion project; having her support was key.

We focused on our community and the connections we had. We shared how the

Certification journey both celebrated and advanced teachers and their own practice and improved student learning. We reached out and invited all our stakeholders in so they could see and hear what the Certification process is about.

We have seen our National Board Certification community grow and flourish. We went from having two candidates in 2017–2018 to nine in 2018–2019, then 20 in 2019–2020, and, even in the midst of a full-blown pandemic, 25 active candidates of which nine are high school teachers.

As NBCTs, we need to stretch and grow to help bring new candidates into the fold. As the Arizona NBCT Leader Core Proposition states, ‘teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring candidate

learning and progress.’ We are facilitators of candidate learning and we want to help them reach their fullest potential. It is important to promote our programs and strive to keep our potential and new candidates engaged in the process as they move through their beginning steps from pre-candidacy to National Board Institute to officially declaring they are a candidate.

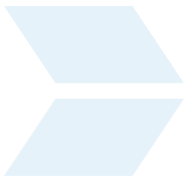
In the end, the power of the National Board Certification process is magnificent, and the sharing of our journeys is inspirational. The promotion of our work is eye-opening and life-changing for so many of our peers. Don’t be afraid to make that contact and share your own story. It may just be the spark someone needs to begin their own adventure. ➤

Reflection Questions

1. As a National Board Certified Teacher, what was the spark that drew you into beginning your own National Board Certification journey? What are the direct benefits of your Certification that you could share with others?
2. What connections could you lean into that may help you promote National Board Certification in your district?
3. In promoting National Board Certification, finding a place to start can be daunting and sometimes feel overwhelming. Don't be afraid to start small. At this time, what can you do in your building, region, and district to help advance National Board Certification?



Alexis LaDuca, NBCT, currently teaches 11th- and 12th-grade English as well as language arts lab at Mountain Ridge High School in the Deer Valley Unified School District. She has been teaching for 25 years; 24 of those at Mountain Ridge, and her very first year at her alma mater, Prescott High School. LaDuca first achieved National Board Certification in Early Adolescence —Adolescence and Young Adulthood English Language Arts in 2017. She finds much inspiration in Certification, having achieved it after having had the honor to work with current candidates. The reflective nature of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and its Five Core Propositions allow the light to shine back on her own practice so she too can continue to grow and develop to be the best teacher for her students. LaDuca also loves to travel and sometimes pretends to be an artist when she has the opportunity to paint with her friends on weekends.



Doing Everything All at Once

by Justin Price

Abstract: The National Board Certification program within Paradise Valley Unified School District was reinvigorated through creating a team of teachers who were positively impacted by the National Board Certification process, identifying people in a position to help that needed raised awareness of the work, and constantly searching for ways to best support candidates.

When I began the National Board Certification process, I did it to prove to myself that I was good at what I was doing. I wanted validation, and I wasn't going to get it from test scores or yearly evaluations. The deeper into the Certification process I was, the more my focus shifted to my students. My students needed me to be the best teacher I could be, and the Certification process made me reflect on the instructional decisions I was making moment to moment and ask, "How is this helping my students? How do I know? What would be a better way to teach this?" I couldn't justify doing something when I knew there might be a better way. The Certification process impacted my day-to-day interactions with students in a way that no other professional development experience ever had by making me a more reflective practitioner. The key to being the best educator I could be was not having my students use a certain app, following a certain writing program, or even signing up for a certain class. I became a better educator by constantly asking myself if there was a better way of doing something, and, if there was—and there always was—what's stopping me from doing it? This helped me stay focused on what was best

for my students. Achieving National Board Certification does not mean I am a better teacher than anyone else; it means that I am a better teacher than I was before.

The same year I certified, I changed schools, switched roles, and left quite a few responsibilities behind. When I considered where I wanted to put my energy, given a core belief that all students deserve their teachers to be the best they can, it was clear that I needed to commit myself to supporting other teachers going through the Certification process.

The first step was connecting with people within the district that were already involved. Our district had one continuing candidate support provider (CSP), who not only knew the needs of the current candidates, but understood the transition to what was, at the time, the new Certification process. Other recently Certified teachers brought enthusiasm and fresh passion to the work within the district, and, while having a coach from your certificate area is not a requirement, I do believe potential candidates are reassured that we have a variety of certificate areas and developmental levels represented.

When our number of CSPs was greater than our number of candidates in the pipeline, we began to look at the program as a whole, from recruiting potential candidates all the way to recognizing the accomplishments of achieving Certification. Without this team of teachers, we could never have been able to both support existing candidates and continue to expand the program within the district.

After forming our team, our next big step was getting organized. We met several times a year to identify our goals for Certification within the district. We determined it was important that any certificated employee should know generally what the Certification process was, where to get more information, and who to contact with questions. I believe that if everyone knows what the National Board Certification process is, it will call to the educators who are ready for it.

Our professional development department has become our ally in promoting the Certification process.

We created time lines of what needed to be done, and who we needed to meet with over the course of the school year, keeping in mind other time lines for pre-candidacy, submission dates, and score releases to balance where we would be putting our time. We worked with our professional development department to include general information about the Certification process and district-specific information on their website, as well as an email address that would reach all CSPs to ensure that the program will continue after the current CSPs are no longer involved. Our professional

development department has become our ally in promoting the Certification process, including upcoming events in newsletters, coordinating district-provided support, and celebrating teachers that achieve National Board Certification. This has made the Certification process more transparent and accessible to all teachers in the district, and less dependent on knowing the right person or the right question.

Ensuring support within administration was also key to the continued success of the program within our district. Having a supportive administrator can be a huge asset to candidates' attempts at Certification, whether it's freeing up a candidate's time, providing coaching, or filming students. While not everyone may be enthusiastic about the Certification process, there is little within the foundations of the program for someone to disagree with. The Five Core Propositions are so easy to get behind that they feel self-evident, and most all education leaders support teachers gathering evidence of their effectiveness and being more reflective in their practice.

I contacted our assistant superintendents for elementary and secondary education and arranged for my team to speak at all administration meetings at both levels, explaining the Certification process, the benefits to their teachers, and the benefits to their students. Some administrators asked thoughtful questions and sent teachers at their school our names, and some didn't look up from their computers. But, as with the teachers, when they are ready to hear about the Certification process, we will be there to speak about it. I met with our superintendent and was encouraged by his support for the Certification process. Getting his approval most certainly opened doors to other

district-level administrators, but having him make visits to each individual teacher to recognize their accomplishments acknowledges the growth that these teachers have made through continuously reflecting on and improving their practice.

Finally, my team considered how best to make use of all of the National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) already in the district. We knew we wanted to do more than just make requests from them; we made an effort to reach out to them with information they might be interested in, such as support for Maintenance of Certificate, and created a group email address that they could use to communicate with each other. We even organized our first social event, a happy hour timed to coincide with recognizing new candidates at our governing board meeting. One thing we ask of NBCTs is to help put us in touch with colleagues that have shown interest in the Certification process, or maybe even to be the person to tap someone to consider it.

My main role in all of this was to keep looking at our time line, looking at events that were coming up quickly, and making sure that someone was responsible for seeing tasks through. I frequently attended workshops or webinars of one type or another and brought questions back to the team: How can we get our governing board to attend the Celebration of Accomplished Teaching event like that district? How can we strengthen the relationship between existing NBCTs like that district? My team helped determine what we could take from something and what we could set aside. There is no division of labor between promoting the program within the district, leading pre-candidacy courses, and supporting candidates currently in

the Certification process. Rather, there is a common goal and commitment from all of us to do what we can to support that goal, sometimes stepping up, and sometimes asking for help. The group has grown large enough, and the distribution of work broad enough, that when some people have needed to step back, others have been there to step forward to keep the work going.

Going forward, I know I will need to count on the professionals I've surrounded myself with to continue to adapt to the continually changing demands of our work, and find ways to reach out to teachers who feel like they are doing their best within their classroom and are looking for something more; something to rekindle their passion for their jobs, and reconnect with the needs of their students.

Determine what is important to you, find like-minded individuals to coordinate with, and ask for lots of meetings.

Honestly, it seems like an obvious path: determine what is important to you, find like-minded individuals to coordinate with, and ask for lots of meetings. I didn't do anything novel in my district, but the work is so critically important that once you have a bit of momentum, promoting the Certification process seems to be one logical step after another. You can't grow a program too quickly, as the more candidates you have, the more NBCTs you will have around you, and the more people there will be to support the next batch of candidates. Who do you know that cares about the Certification process as much as you do and will help you grow your program? Who is at your district office

that could make a world of difference if they only knew what the Certification process is about? What would be one thing you could ask your governing board to do to recognize the teachers that have gone through the Certification process? Just like your students need an accomplished teacher, so do all the students down the hall, down the street, and across town. ➤

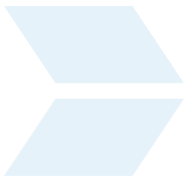
Just like your students need an accomplished teacher, so do all the students down the hall, down the street, and across town.

Reflection Questions

1. Who are your allies in growing your National Board Certification program within your community?
2. What part of the National Board Certification process do leaders need to understand better?
3. What are some ways you might address this need?



Justin Price, NBCT, currently teaches STEM to kindergarten through sixth grade at Wildfire Elementary in the Paradise Valley Unified School District in north Phoenix. He spent 13 years in the classroom, teaching second, third, fourth, and sixth grade at Eagle Ridge Elementary School, in the same district. He achieved National Board Certification in Middle Childhood Generalist in 2015. He serves as a CSP and facilitates support throughout the National Board Certification process.



National Board Tenets at the Heart of School Leadership

by Dr. Jennifer Robinson

Abstract: Going through the National Board Certification process helped me become a reflective practitioner, making me a better teacher for my students. As a National Board Certified Teacher, I gained confidence in my practice and in making instructional decisions, elevating the conversation around teaching and learning with my colleagues. As I transitioned to being a building principal, it was important to ground my work in a foundation of accomplished teaching through exposure to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching, and the Five Core Propositions. In creating a system for teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning, educators at my school have become more confident and courageous in their teaching, allowing themselves to be vulnerable and authentic.

In February of 2012, I sat in a room with other National Board Certified teachers and Ron Thorpe, then president of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. He set forth the challenge: 'We need more National Board Certified Teachers in leadership roles and leading schools.' That day, that moment changed my professional career. His vision was simply to elevate the profession through accomplished teaching. I knew I had to lean in and pursue administrative roles within my district if I was going to truly elevate the conversation. After all, if not me, then who?

I moved along my career path in a traditional manner: teacher, intervention specialist, instructional coach, then principal. Each role presented opportunities to use what I learned from the National Board Certification process. I looked through the lens of the Five Core Propositions, focusing my energy on

students, teaching, learning, reflecting, and collaborating. I naturally looked for ways to reflect on and learn from my practice. I elevated the conversation around teaching and learning by asking reflective questions to push my colleagues' thinking, helping them to understand the 'why' behind their practice. This helped them be more intentional about teaching and the strategies they used to engage their students and impact learning. We used data to help inform instructional decisions, while looking for ways for students to own their learning. We constantly moved through the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching, adjusting and making learning more accessible, while reflecting on what worked and why.

The Certification process humbled and challenged me, while also strengthening my practice and giving me confidence. For the most part, it was easy to find myself in

the Standards and make connections to my practice. Understanding some of the language of the Standards made me pause and reflect on my teaching, and question why I did what I did. That was important for me to remember moving into my role as a principal. My new role presented exciting opportunities to impact teaching and learning. I began to imagine: *What if all students had a National Board Certified Teacher?*

In reflecting back to my first few years as a principal, teacher retention was a consistent concern. Of the original staff from my first year as principal, 24% are still teaching at our school. Each year, several veteran teachers were leaving or transferring to other schools, while new or beginning teachers replaced them. At one point, over 50% of our staff was new to our site or a beginning teacher, making it clear that rebuilding our school culture was of utmost importance. If I was going to advance the work of accomplished teaching, I needed to build and nurture strong relationships with teachers, and they needed to trust me and know that I was there to support them, to help them, and to push them to be the best they could be.

***I was there to support them,
to help them, and to push them
to be the best they could be.***

As I envisioned all of our students being taught by a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), naturally I wanted to jump in and promote the Certification process. I thought I could just invite teachers or nudge them into it. I certainly tried: every chance I could, I pushed teachers to look it. But what I really needed to do was slow down and get to know who they were. Accomplished teaching doesn't

happen overnight, it's not forced, and it's not something you have to do. I needed to listen and develop a plan with teacher input while being realistic about long-term outcomes. After all, only a handful of teachers on my campus had three years of teaching experience to make them eligible to begin the Certification process. I needed to be intentional and not overwhelm them, so I looked for ways to ground our work together in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and Five Core Propositions.

First, I needed to connect with and build relationships with my staff on a deeper level. I needed to know who they were as people and who they were as teachers. I needed to understand what, why, and how they were teaching content to their students. I needed to acknowledge the distinctive traits and talents that each teacher possessed, while embedding the Standards into our conversations so they could make connections and see the value of the Certification process. I needed to know what their goals and aspirations were and where they wanted to grow, then I could look for entry points into the Certification process.

As I observed teachers in their classrooms, I began to look for ways to connect their teaching to the Standards. I used the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching to frame our conversations. This tool helped teachers gain more confidence in the instructional decisions they were making and helped them articulate the impact on student learning. All the while, we were building relationships and trust; and the teachers were becoming more vulnerable in sharing their classrooms and teaching.

I looked for creative ways to embed the Five Core Propositions and Standards into our

daily routines, observations, evaluations, and professional learning opportunities. A natural platform to begin was through our evaluation process. I reframed pre- and post-conference questions to align with the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching. If teachers could see themselves and their students through the lens of that tool, the Certification process would not be so daunting. Using reflective questions grounded in the Core Propositions opened up a lens for teachers to look differently at their teaching as well as their students' learning. Pre- and post-conferences became planning and reflecting conversations. Teachers paused while analyzing, adjusting, and articulating their practice. Some struggled because they were used to being told what proficient or highly proficient ratings should look like in their classroom, but with time, it became clear that giving them space to pause and reflect on their teaching would impact student learning on a greater level. The Architecture of Accomplished Teaching gave teachers a visual road map to see and articulate what and why they did what they did. One teacher even commented when she went through the Certification process that it was what we had been doing for years. She wondered why she had been afraid of it when, in fact, she was already teaching using the tenets of accomplished teaching.

It became clear that giving them space to pause and reflect on their teaching would impact student learning on a greater level.

It was important to me that all teachers had access to the Standards through whole-staff professional learning opportunities.

We started with the National Board's seminal piece, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*. Each month, teachers had time to explore the Five Core Propositions and related Standards based on their teaching context. As a staff, we agreed the Five Core Propositions gave us targeted areas to focus our energy.

We created a schedule of learning opportunities and embedded it into our regular staff meetings. This gave all teachers access to the Standards and the Certification process. This was intentional. I wanted those who were intimidated or had heard negative comments about the Certification process to have a chance to find themselves and their teaching practice in the Standards. This experience provided all teachers with increased efficacy and confidence in the instructional decisions they were making. At our staff meetings, we designated a different Standard each month, while committing to reading the featured Standard and engaging in conversations with each other in grade-level cohorts. Some grade-level cohorts challenged one another to begin with a pre-candidacy class and move into the Certification process. Some made agreements to use the Standards to elevate conversations at their team meetings, focusing on understanding each one and how it was demonstrated in their practice.

What happened next was pretty awesome. We began to work not as individual teachers, but as teams and as a school to better understand our students and how best to teach them. Teachers were supporting each other by asking open-ended reflective questions and elevating the conversation around teaching and learning.

During this time, teachers began to step forward and embark on their journey

of accomplished teaching through the National Board Certification process. They allowed themselves to be openly vulnerable and ask colleagues for help. They were asking each other questions to develop a better understanding of students and learning, not to offer a quick fix on how to teach. They were calling on each other to support their practice while creating an interdependence and connectedness across our school. They were looking at their teaching differently, analyzing data through the lens of equity and access. They asked one another, “What else can we do? How did you teach that lesson to your students? In what ways did you connect with that student and their family? When you were breaking down your lesson, which students were you thinking about? How did you support them?”

Our school transformed into an environment where relationships matter, learning and leading are expected, and vulnerability and courage are celebrated. Teachers looked across grade levels and content areas to seek advice and feedback from their peers. We were creating a culture of accomplished teaching. All teachers—whether Certified, in the process, or not—were stepping up and stepping out

into leadership roles, impacting teaching and learning, students and families, access, and equity—all while building a strong school culture. We collectively embraced accomplished teaching and learning.

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Fast forward: My Maintenance of Certification is quickly approaching in the next couple of years. I want to push myself to be vulnerable and courageous, just as I ask my teachers to be. I want to collaborate and reflect on my teaching and student learning with teachers who can help push on my thinking. I want to step out of my role as a principal and briefly step into the culture of accomplished teaching we have created. I want space to plan and reflect, monitor and adjust, look through a lens of equity, and access and positively impact teaching and learning. ➤

Reflection Questions

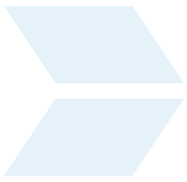
1. In what ways can you incorporate the tenets of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and Five Core Propositions into your school culture?
2. How might you use reflective questions grounded in the Five Core Propositions to help teachers look differently at their teaching and of student learning?
3. How do you ensure access and equity to all students and teachers on your campus?



Dr. Jennifer Robinson, NBCT, currently leads in the role of principal at Maricopa Elementary School in the Maricopa Unified School District. She has been in education as a teacher, instruction coach, and a principal for 27 years, and she has looked for ways to advance the work of National Board Certification in Arizona for the past 16 years. Robinson first achieved National Board Certification in Early Childhood/Generalist in 2004 and appreciates how the Certification process has humbled and challenged her, while strengthening her practice and growing her leadership capacity. She also enjoys running with her three dogs early each morning.

Recruit





Building Relationships to Improve Your Network of Support and Recruit New Candidates

by Erica Davis

Abstract: Teachers cannot engage in the process of National Board Certification until they know what it is and can see its impact on their schools and communities. Recruiting teachers to complete the Certification process requires a network of National Board Certified Teachers willing and able to organize and provide structure and support. We have found that support networks work best when they are focused on relationships, so candidate support providers are encouraging and flexible, yet organized and consistent. Support networks can range from site level to district level, depending on the level of National Board Certified Teacher engagement.

One often doesn't think of teaching in this way, but in my experience, one of the hardest parts of the profession is its isolation. Schools work hard to implement teams or professional learning communities, even finding team planning time in teachers' schedules, and districts work hard to provide spaces for collaboration in professional development and training. However, so much of our time in teaching is spent in our own classrooms, from the primary teachers being with their own classes throughout most of the day to the secondary teachers keeping within their departments or buildings. Although I have wonderful teachers in my academic subject and grade level who collaborate with me, I am still left to make my own decisions on a regular basis in the classroom.

To help with these decisions, much of my first decade of teaching was filled with collaboration in the lunchroom; socializing

with teachers who had been in the profession longer than me often evolved into advice and guidance. My district also helped by providing annual opportunities for professional development to help implement new ideas and methods in my classroom. The very best part of these opportunities came from connections and communal discussion, and I found that when I was able to choose what I wanted to take part in, such as participating in AP Summer Institutes, I got a lot more out of the experiences. That agency, coupled with building my network, is what got me through those early years, and I am forever grateful that I was provided that foundation.

However, I reached a point in my career where I had settled into a pattern. My pattern was, to be honest, to overwork myself. I dedicated much of my time to not just teaching my content but also to advising student clubs, leading professional

development, and engaging in continued learning for myself. I had never known these behaviors to be indicators of accomplished teaching, as I just saw myself as doing what was needed to make my school the best it could be. But I needed a change and to bring a sense of balance to my life between career and family, since I was just starting my career. I had to let go of some of my responsibilities, which, by that time, I was doing more out of obligation than out of enjoyment. I didn't think about how this would allow other teachers the opportunity to lead as well, and I realize now how important it is to find the right people to fill the right roles on a campus. My next role was presented to me at a time when I thought I was done adding new things to my plate.

They brought new ideas to the school and started to improve each of their departments, confidently making suggestions for how we could better serve the students.

Three new teachers transferred to my school who were all National Board Certified Teacher (NBCTs). As a site leader who had been at the school for 10 years, I reached out and helped them with their transition. I was so impressed with these three women's teaching and their focus on what is best for students. They brought new ideas to the school and started to improve each of their departments, confidently making suggestions for how we could better serve the students. Throughout those developing relationships, they would occasionally talk about being Certified, and one of them was going through the Certification renewal process. Seeing how much value those

teachers added to my school, I couldn't help but wonder if this was something I should consider. I didn't realize that they were thinking the same thing about me, and were slowly motivating me to consider the Certification process through their invitations to collaborate.

Thinking back on this grassroots type of recruitment, I realized how much isolating myself to my classroom, grade level, and department for all those years had limited my growth. All those opportunities for professional development, and I still had so far to go. I realized that professional development required by leadership, mandated for recertification, and essential in teaching advanced courses had its limitations when considering the direct impact on my classroom and students. Surrounded by NBCTs, I realized that this was what I was missing, and why I had gotten stuck in a pattern of teaching and thinking that was holding me back from achieving my true potential and doing what was best for my students.

When my friend and mentor told me that I was already an accomplished teacher and that National Board Certification was a way for me to show others what we already knew, I was honored and inspired. I wasn't immediately confident, however, that I'd find the time or capacity to follow through. I sat, skeptical and stressed, through the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class that the social studies and Spanish NBCTs, who had transferred to our campus, offered to a small group of teachers. Learning about the Certification process felt overwhelming, and, since those teachers Certified before the updated Certification process, I often felt they didn't understand my questions. Finding out I was expecting my daughter gave me an out, and I gratefully had an excuse to back out after that pre-candidacy class was over.

But these NBCTs were now in leadership roles on campus. Each reached out and encouraged me to come back to the Certification process, and, the next thing I knew, I had registered and was working on two National Board Components. If it weren't for the relationships I had with those teachers, I likely would have quit multiple times, seeing as I had a 2-year-old and a newborn at home, and felt I was barely hanging on. I wasn't alone in the Certification process; they brought four other teachers in too, and this collaborative group was vital to helping me stay on track and feeling confident while on my journey.

I worked for two years to certify, all along the way having a support system in my cohort. I moved from an isolated teacher in my content, in my corner classroom, having taught the same grade level for more than 10 years, to a more connected and attentive colleague. Meanwhile, my school site went from having zero NBCTs to the five we currently have, which is the highest percentage of NBCTs for the high schools in our district. It is because of the relationships our 'founding three' formed—and that I seek to continue to build—that we find success. After Certifying in December of 2018, I jumped into a leadership role for our site with my mentor, immediately taking advantage of the opportunities the Arizona K12 Center offered to get me trained as a candidate support provider (CSP). I felt it was important that I had been through the updated Certification process instead of the 'old way' that my mentors had Certified, to be able to reach candidates going through the updated program. Along with other district CSPs, I worked to reorganize our district National Board cohort leadership and continue to build our program.

When one CSP retired, another moved on to a national teacher training role, and a third

stepped back to pursue her doctorate, it was my turn to make sure that more teachers had the opportunity for this career-changing experience. I knew that, much like knowledge of students is a core Component of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, my knowledge of the candidates would be key to building the program in our district. I set out to form relationships, to demystify the Certification process to the best of my ability, and to get organized for success. I planned for consistency: who to go to, and how, and where meetings were scheduled. I also worked on communication, and looked for ways to unify the support network and candidates.

Beyond recruiting candidates to start the Certification process, I also see the value in recruiting other NBCTs to join in the support network.

Starting with the first National Board Pre-Candidacy Class I set up for my district, I sought to build a culture of encouragement and a network for those candidates to use for collaboration. Over half of the original group from that pre-candidacy class are currently in the Certification process. Beyond recruiting candidates to start the Certification process, I also see the value in recruiting other NBCTs to join in the support network. I conducted a survey to gauge their interest in the various ways we could support and recruit new candidates, and promote this work within our sites and to district leadership. I recruited new NBCTs this year to assist as CSPs, who represent the elementary and junior high levels so we cover all parts of our unified school district. One of those teachers is in my own son's school, and another attended the Arizona

K12 Center trainings with me and recently moved to our district. I realize now the value in this network, in providing various voices and a variety of experiences as models to current and future candidates. I also realize that it is important to establish processes and procedures so that this work can be fulfilled by others and not fall on me alone. Not every NBCT can, or is willing to, move into leadership; some are already stretched thin in various roles, but I am doing all I can to make this easier for teachers to manage at both ends.

Continuing on my road as a CSP, I plan to inspire recruitment of teachers to join us in the Certification process in the same way I was recruited, by asking candidates and NBCTs to find people that they believe are accomplished teachers and to invite them to consider the Certification process. Relationships matter. Teaching may be

isolated, but Certification showed me that creating a collaborative community, like the lunchroom of my early years, can elevate the teaching profession. Even though it felt like I was recruited in a grassroots manner, what I was being brought into was a systematic and cohesive network that is so powerful and that impacts teaching in such a positive way.

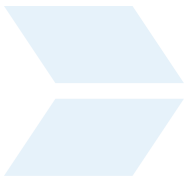
My work is not done. I have a goal to help leadership within my district see the value in promoting National Board Certification through me so I can move my grassroots movement to a systemic practice. I truly believe that there is value in the Certification process, and I would like to see more teachers engaged to help solve larger issues of teacher retention and the continued pursuit of teaching excellence for my district, state, and the country. ➤

Reflective Questions:

1. How is National Board Certification a part of the evolution of teacher leaders?
2. How can we help recruit teachers to the National Board Certification process?
3. How can we organize effective support networks for candidates?



Erica Davis, NBCT, currently teaches Advanced Placement Literature and Advanced Placement Seminar at Basha High School in Chandler Unified School District. She has been in this position for 16 years and has held various leadership roles, including the prestigious honor of serving Arizona as an Ambassador of Excellence through the Arizona Education Foundation in 2018. Davis also achieved National Board Certification in 2018 and attributes the experience to the shifting trajectory of her career, having brought a wider perspective of her influence as a teacher leader both in and out of her classroom. She gets outside whenever possible to explore the beauty of the desert or the mountains with her husband and two children.



Cultivating a Culture of Professional Growth

by Randi Fielding

Abstract: A rural school district grows a culture of professional support for teachers pursuing National Board Certification. The number of candidates in the district increases from one to 20 in just four years. This rapid growth is possible by cultivating specific conditions: equitably recruiting teachers, aligning the vision among stakeholders, and tending to teacher development.

“You have found your tribe.” Dr. Kathy Wiebke, NBCT, said these words to me and the other future National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) during my very first visit to the Arizona K12 Center back in 2016. She couldn’t have known how much those words would mean to me.

Having struggled to find my place in my first few years as a teacher, and feeling very lost, I found myself sitting up late one night searching for anything that might help. I came across the National Board website and found the Arizona K12 Center. That was where I heard the Center’s Executive Director, Dr. Wiebke say the words that would change my profession and my life.

You have found your tribe.

From that very moment, I knew that I would become a NBCT. Even before I achieved that goal, I knew I also wanted to grow the National Board Certification program in my district. I knew there were talented teachers who would fall in love with this work just as I had. I didn’t know them all by name, but I knew they were out there. I wanted to plant the seeds that would help us grow.

Planting Seeds

Knowledge of National Board Certification was limited in the rural region where I live and work, about 50 miles southeast of Phoenix. I was the only NBCT in my district when I achieved Certification in 2017, and I felt compelled to share the vision and recruit teachers to the program. I was soon trained by the Arizona K12 Center and became a candidate support provider. I was now ready to plant the seeds that would help teachers grow.

My first step was reaching out to my principal to ask for his support as I recruited teachers to the program. He was extremely encouraging and granted his blessing. I then reached out to a few teachers in my building through several informal, one-on-one conversations. This was very successful, particularly when I shared my own story of the support I received from the Arizona K12 Center. However, I also wanted to ensure equitable opportunity for teachers that I might not know personally. I extended the reach of my recruitment efforts by seeking and obtaining the support of district leadership who sent a district-wide email inviting teachers to attend an informational session. Donnie Dicus, professional learning

director at the Arizona K12 Center, joined me for this session. Later, one of the teachers told me that having a representative from the Center attend the session lent credibility to the claims I had made about the supportive team at the Center. From this session, six teachers signed up to participate in the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class, which is a curriculum created by the Center to prepare teachers for candidacy. I then taught this course with a personalized approach and facilitated team-building, modeled trust-building, and encouraged the development of peer relationships to sustain them throughout the Certification process. From this first recruitment effort, four teachers made the decision to pursue Certification. I knew the teachers needed a learning community that supported their growth throughout their candidacy. The next step was to cultivate an environment where these teachers could put down roots and extend their reach into the community.

I wanted to ensure equitable opportunity for teachers

Tips for Recruiting Equitably

- » Shoulder-tapping: Look around you for teachers who strike you as dedicated to their practice, not afraid of hard work, and willing to adjust to meet students' needs. Find an informal, non-rushed time of day to begin a conversation: "Have you ever heard of National Board Certification? I think you would be amazing at it."
- » Send out invitations via school-wide or district-wide email. (Be sure to seek and obtain appropriate permissions before doing this.)
- » Hold an informational session and invite the Arizona K12 Center to cohost it with you.

Tips for Tending Teacher Growth

- » Create a single platform, such as Google Classroom, for disseminating information.
- » Develop norms and a shared vision as a cohort.
- » Plan team-building activities and allow time for candidates to develop rapport and trust within the cohort.
- » Encourage teachers to develop and invest in peer relationships that will support them throughout their entire career.
- » Use language from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' publication, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*, to give voice to their intuitive beliefs around their profession.
- » Emphasize Core Proposition 5 throughout the National Board Certification process.
- » Be a mentor and provide coaching conversations via phone calls and sit-down conversations during monthly meetings or other times.

Cultivating

In order to develop a district-wide Certification program, and with the full support of the district superintendent, I enrolled in a course at Arizona State University that gave me guidance in creating a project that would impact the entire district. To be effective, we would need stakeholders involved. Just like a gardener might place a stake next to a tender plant, our district stakeholders could offer structure and support for our growing teachers.

To help clarify our vision, I created a promotional video, enlisting the support of our director of public relations, who helped with the editing and offered

technical expertise. For the video project, I interviewed candidates, a principal, and members of our district leadership team. As teachers and leaders were being interviewed, it gave them the opportunity to clarify and articulate their 'why' and the purpose of their work in education. I also captured footage of the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class, and the teachers teaching in their classrooms. The process of making the video was as important to our growth and shared vision as the published video.

I also developed a presentation for the school board. It included a summary of the work we were beginning, a description of the professional culture we were establishing, and the benefits to students and teachers. The day of the presentation was nerve-racking, but the district leadership team was there to encourage me. They greeted me when I arrived, offered me food, and smiled. When it was my turn to present, the board members generously committed their support to the growth of the program.

During all of these conversations and meetings, I explained the Certification process and its impact to the various stakeholder groups, catering my explanation to their context. When I found myself navigating unfamiliar terrain, I consulted with the Arizona K12 Center and members of the Arizona NBCT Network, asking for guidance. Each person I came to for advice and coaching was incredibly encouraging and generous with their time.

To be effective, we would need stakeholders involved.

Tips for Communicating With Stakeholders

- » Seek opportunities for face-to-face conversations. You may begin with an email, but then do everything you can to have face-to-face conversations.
- » Find common goals. What is their why? What is your why? How does the vision of National Board Certification align with each of these?
- » Respect their role and position.
- » Express gratitude and a desire to work together to support teachers.

Tips for Cultivating Teacher Growth

- » Ask, "What support do you need from me?"
- » Frequent walk-throughs with feedback.
- » Listen, acknowledge, and encourage teachers' growth with patience and kindness.
- » Check in frequently by asking, "How is it going with your video? Which Component are you working on right now? How are you seeing the Certification process impact student learning?"

Germinating

The next year, I partnered with a terrific colleague, Shawna Bradley, and we combined our cohorts—my school district with her charter school. The benefits of this partnership were invaluable. We supported each other's growth as we supported our candidates. Having expanded our layers of community support to include site leaders, district leaders, and school board members, we had laid the groundwork for expanding the program to include more teachers. Now the seeds we had planted were ready to germinate and grow.

We were ready to double down our efforts and recruit more teachers. I taught two more sessions of the pre-candidacy course, one in the fall and one in the spring. The teachers who participated in these sessions were incredibly dedicated to the Certification process and their students' growth. They were growing as well as setting quiet examples for others to follow. None of us knew it at the time, but these teachers were inspiring their peers to take on the challenge of Certification themselves. They were planting seeds in the minds and hearts of their peers, which would blossom the following season.

Blossoming

Then in the spring of 2020, the world was confronted with the realization that we would be doing school differently. National and state leaders were trying to contain the spread of COVID-19 by closing schools and introducing an online model of instruction. My district, like most other schools around the country, embraced the discomfort of teaching online. After one quarter of crisis-mode online teaching, we had a moment to breathe. There was great uncertainty during this time. No one knew whether school would resume in-person, online, or as a hybrid model.

It was during this time period that Shawna and I wanted to capitalize on the moment. Could we teach a pre-candidacy course in a fully online format? If so, would teachers want to come? We quickly sought and gained approval from our respective district leadership teams as well as the Arizona K12 Center. We shoulder-tapped several teachers, and we mapped out a structure, modified our poster and sticky note activities to fit various virtual platforms, and taught the course.

The online platform increased accessibility so more teachers were able to attend. (Previously, the pre-candidacy courses took place in-person over several full-day Saturdays, limiting the number of teachers who could reasonably attend.) Teachers were hungry for practice and experience engaging with online platforms, and had spare time due to quarantine and travel restrictions.

The online platform increased accessibility so more teachers were able to attend.

Our district leadership team also developed their structure and support for the program. They gave credence to the National Board Certification program by making it an official professional development pathway, enabling teachers to use this work to earn their Arizona Proposition 301 money.

At the time of this writing, we have over 20 teachers actively pursuing National Board Certification. Teachers in our cohort and across the district are, first and foremost, committed to their students' success. Certification is a rigorous process that only aids in assisting that commitment.

Cycles and Seasons

Our first four years as a National Board community were marked by recursive growth. The semesters rolled along in a linear fashion, but our program developed in cycles and seasons. This is important because students deserve excellent teachers and teachers need an excellent community. Teachers need to know that their hard work is acknowledged and valued by district leadership and school board. This cycle of cultivating a professional culture, planting seeds, and tending to teacher growth made our vision come to fruition.

Tips for Online Monthly Support Meetings

- » Make them personal, accessible, and safe.
- » Plan ahead to provide high-quality content. Make every moment of your time together count!
- » Provide options of breakout rooms for individual and collaborative work, coaching, or mini professional development opportunities.
- » Schedule the meeting well in advance.
- » Send a welcoming, friendly reminder that includes a clear agenda.
- » Utilize and communicate a structure; for example: A two-hour meeting that begins with a whole-group team builder and announcements, then break into small groups. End the meeting by coming back together as a whole group for optimistic closure.

Tips for Cultivating a Professional Culture

(Adapted from chapters 3 and 4 of *Leading in Sync: Teacher Leaders and Principals Working Together for Student Learning* by Jill Harrison Berg)

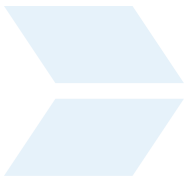
- » Follow through on commitments.
- » Respond with timely emails.
- » Establish rapport to make it easier for teachers to come with questions.
- » Model self-reflection and a growth mindset.
- » We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience. (from page 60)
- » Use language of shared ownership.
- » Learn and use names (adults and students) (from page 68)
- » Develop and practice norms (from page 68)
- » Solicit feedback with surveys. ➤

Reflection Questions

1. What are some of the conditions for success that teachers in your context already have in place? Are these conditions for success enjoyed equally by all teachers? If not, what are some ways you could expand the positives to reach more teachers?
2. Which layer of community do you feel is most important for candidate success? In which layer do you have the most influence? Which of the high-leverage practices noted above would benefit your context?
3. What is the importance of connecting your 'why' to the vision and mission of National Board Certification?
4. What is the importance of aligning goals across the layers of community: cohort, site, district, and school board?



Randi Fielding, NBCT, is an administrator in the Florence Unified School District. She has worked as a special and general education teacher, specializing in co-teaching. She graduated from Arizona State University's iTeachAZ and iLeadAZ programs and achieved National Board Certification in Early Adolescence—Adolescent Young Adulthood/Social Studies—History in 2017. Fielding appreciates how the National Board Network connects her to wonderful educators across the state. She also enjoys cycling and gardening.



The Road to Certification Is Lined With Supportive Relationships

by Melissa Gutierrez

Abstract: This case study documents the story of one National Board Certified Teacher as she moved through the Certification process in a rural community. She shares how her school district supports candidates and how the relationships built during the Certification process helped her to succeed.

My journey with National Board Certification started with an email. The director of instructional services for my school district at the time sent an email district-wide explaining the Certification process and asking any interested members of the district to respond. I had heard of the Certification and was looking forward to learning more. After several emails back and forth with the director and other teachers within our district, it was clear we had enough interested teachers to pursue the Certification process.

The director explained that members of the Arizona K12 Center would be traveling to our county to share the Certification process with us. At this meeting, Angelia Ebner, a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) and the Center's associate director of programs, talked about her experience with Certification. She explained what the Certification process was like for her, how it had developed over the previous years, and how it has changed year by year. She shared information about all the steps to Certification, what was required in order to complete each Component, and even shared a video of Arizona NBCTs

telling their own stories and working with their students. Ebner also explained how the Arizona K12 Center helped to fund Certification and support candidates along the way. She answered questions and really helped all who attended to understand what Certification was about. This meeting took place at our county superintendent's office. I would say there were about 30 teachers from three school districts in attendance. From those 30, seven of us from the same school district decided to attend the next National Board Pre-Candidacy Class, and then four moved on to attend National Board Institute and eventually enrolled in all four Components and submitted the following year.

My story is different from many. I am located in a rural community about three hours away from Phoenix, and, at the time, there were no teachers or leaders in our county who were Certified. However, our district administration were advocates for Certification and instrumental in getting us started. The district director provided support in so many ways. Most importantly, as a district-level administrator, he was able to organize and plan the meetings,

arrange attendance at necessary events such as the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class and National Board Institute, and was even on board in financially covering our travel, meals, and attendance at coaching events like National Board Workshop and Coaching Saturdays. At the time, the Arizona K12 Center offered scholarships for three of the Components, and our district was willing to fund everything else. The administrators felt so strongly about supporting those of us enrolled in the Certification process that district professional development funds and grants were used in order to support us along the way. My school district also made the decision to provide a 3.5% base pay stipend as an incentive and appreciation of achievement.

While financial support is not a reason why someone should pursue Certification, it is certainly helpful, especially to those of us teaching in rural communities. Because Safford is a significant distance away from the training centers, attending events like the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class and National Board Institute requires time away from our families to travel, nights in hotels, and meals out—on top of the cost of each event. The fact that our school district was willing to cover those costs was instrumental in planning for and attending these events, and I know it played a large role in enlisting candidates.

In recent years, funding for the Certification process has changed a bit on both the Arizona K12 Center's part as well as on the part of my school district. A music teacher at my school, who Certified in December 2020, shared that due to family commitments, she had to put off attending the National Board Institute for almost a year and finally attended in

June 2019. "I am so glad I did attend the Institute at that time," she said, "because they announced that our group would be able to get scholarships that would cover all four Components and support trainings through Arizona K12 Center. That was a huge blessing!" As the Arizona K12 Center provided scholarships for all four required Components and offered funding for support and trainings throughout the Certification process, this left less for the candidates to fund on their own. The music teacher reinforced the fact that, while funding was extremely important to her making the decision to pursue the work at that time, it was most certainly not the aspect she cared about most. She said that she "did learn so many things about how to be a better teacher in the Certification process, and, in the end, I was motivated by way more than simply money."

Our director of instructional services, superintendent, and school board members are all in full support of the Certification process.

At the same time that the Arizona K12 Center was offering more scholarships, my school district happened to have a change in administration. While this could have been devastating to recruitment in our area, it most certainly was not. Our new director of instructional services, the new superintendent, and our school board members were all in full support of the Certification process and continue to cover financial burdens for teacher candidates as well as provide support through encouragement and opportunities for training.

It is important here for me to look back on my Certification process. As a member of a rural school district, there was no one who paved the way for this experience in my community of peers; there was no one nearby I could go to for advice or assistance. This is where our district leaders played a major role. The fact that our district administration was prepared to offer all they could to support us was exceptional. They were able to bring people to our county superintendent's office to provide training and information and were willing to send us out of the district to learn more from others.

This was something that the Graham County superintendent, along with our district superintendent and the director of instructional services, had been doing all throughout my years teaching in the district. They were aware of how important it is to do as the National Board's *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do* states: 'reach beyond the boundaries of their workplace to engage wider communities of practice (and to) connect with local, state, national, and global groups in person or via technology to take advantage of a broad range of professional knowledge and expertise.' This is an important aspect of the National Board's Core Proposition 5, which states that teachers are members of learning communities. Because Safford has a team of administrators who understand and believe in Core Proposition 5, they were willing to look for the resources to support their teachers through their work with the National Board along with many other professional development opportunities. The administration also understands the importance of the teaching community and how necessary it is for candidates to have the opportunities to collaborate with other education professionals and NBCTs.

It is due to the fact that the administration in Safford already had plans in place for supporting teachers with professional development opportunities and, in turn, supporting us through Certification, that we had teachers who were able to certify. Looking back on the large group of 30 who attended the informational meeting, and specifically the group of seven who attended the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class together, it was essential that we enlisted in this journey with support behind us. As well as having that support, it was equally important for us to lean on each other. Having a group of teachers from different backgrounds teaching at different grade levels and sites provided me with the support of my peers and other stakeholders. I truly believe that forming a group, or cohort, of accomplished, effective, diverse teachers, is what played a large part in our success. The relationship we formed as a group of teachers going through the Certification process was something that can't be compared to any other collaborative group I've been a part of before or since.

The relationship we formed as a group of teachers going through the Certification process was something that can't be compared to any other collaborative group I've been a part of before or since.

When our administrators put us teachers in touch with the Arizona K12 Center, they put us on a path toward achievement. We were able to travel to events and meet NBCTs who shared their stories with us; we formed relationships with other teachers going through the Certification process and

with candidate support providers (CSPs); and we were able to ask for guidance and support from people we trusted. This was essential. The AZK12 Center also provided each candidate with training and support, even us candidates way out in Safford. I was so impressed with the fact that we had a coach, a CSP, who was willing to travel four or more hours each month to support us throughout the year. Our CSP didn't just read my work, she visited my classroom, got to know me as a person, and became a great friend. She gave me the confidence to share my experiences, share my writing, and tell my story. She is the reason I chose to pay it forward and become a CSP as well. I saw the need we had in our small city and the need of our neighboring school districts. As the goal is to have at least one NBCT in every Arizona school, there is much to be done, especially in my county and other small communities like ours.

Our CSP gave me the confidence to share my experiences, share my writing, and tell my story.

As a CSP, I work with my current administration to recruit teachers within my sphere of influence. What has worked so far has been what is known as the 'shoulder-tap' method. I have spoken with teachers at my school site, my children's teachers, and teachers who I attend district meetings with and I have expressed my thoughts about them joining the list of NBCTs around Arizona. I feel that this has worked to an extent. I am great at remaining positive about the experience and sharing the Certification process while explaining the type of work that needs to be done. Most importantly, I've shared how it has made me

a better teacher, even after 16 years in the profession. I truly believe that teachers are the most passionate professionals and that each has so much potential to influence the lives of their students.

Along with another CSP in Safford, I have recruited and coached three candidates; one is the music teacher, who certified in December of 2020. She expressed that it was our encouragement and support, as well as our ability to answer her questions, that pushed her to pursue Certification. Another candidate, who is currently pursuing Certification, also said that it was the support and encouragement she received from us that helped her to know it was something she could do. She expressed that she's always been afraid of failure, but seeing that two of her coworkers could successfully complete the Certification process in a year showed her it was possible. These two candidates are so very different, yet the meaningful relationships I've built with them, like my CSP built with me, have been influential in the Certification process. It is something that must continue to happen in order to build the list of NBCTs in our area and around the state.

I feel that my work as a CSP is just beginning. As Arizona NBCT Leader Core Proposition 1 states, leaders are committed to candidates and their learning. I recognize there are differences between the candidates who are currently pursuing Certification and know that it is my responsibility to adjust accordingly to help them develop and learn. I also see the need to continue to recruit teachers from different positions, schools, and districts.

Currently there are three NBCTs and two candidates at my school site, but there are six schools in my district and

five neighboring districts all within our county who I plan to contact. Rather than shoulder-tapping teachers in person, I will reach out to the administrators at each school and at the other districts and share Safford's story with them. It is important for

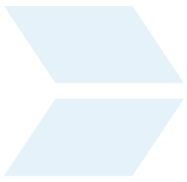
districts to learn from each other, and by sharing Safford's story along with Arizona K12 Center's mission, we can continue to grow in our county and help others to do so as well. ➤

Reflection Questions

1. What resources would you need in your school or district to support teachers who are pursuing National Board Certification? What local resources does your district already have that could benefit these candidates?
2. What is your district willing to provide as far as support?
3. How can you form relationships that will support you through the process of National Board Certification? How could you guide candidates you are working with toward forming relationships that will be supportive?



Melissa Gutierrez, NBCT, is currently in her first year teaching early childhood special education at Ruth Powell School in the Safford Unified School District. She has taught second and third grades over the last 17 years and has served as a teacher mentor, grade-level chairperson, and cooperating teacher for student teachers from both Northern Arizona University (NAU) and Grand Canyon University. She graduated with her bachelor's degree from Arizona State University, received her master's degree and reading endorsement from NAU, and is currently completing a second master's degree in early childhood special education from NAU. Gutierrez achieved National Board Certification in Early and Middle Childhood Literacy/Reading-Language Arts in 2018 and was inspired by how the process of Certification reignited her passion for teaching and helping others. She loves reading, and in her free time is trying to learn to love running.



Leveraging Relationships to Recruit Candidates

by Windy Mariscal

Abstract: Relationships are fundamental in recruiting teachers to engage in National Board Certification. Just like students, teachers are more willing to take risks and put themselves out there if they feel safe and trust the support being offered. It starts in the first year of an educator's career.

I am a teacher leader who encourages and supports professional growth through National Board Certification. My vision for recruiting new candidates is analogous to tending a garden. In the school setting, I start by cultivating relationships, much like we do with students. I take time to get to know the teachers and administrators with whom I work, actively listen to things they share, seek to understand their perspectives, and express gratitude for their collaboration and their dedication to students. Relationships are everything!

As an induction and retention specialist; I am part of the team that welcomes all new teachers during our week-long New Teacher Induction event. The majority of that week is spent preparing brand-new-to-the-profession teachers for their first days of school; however, we also have veteran teachers that attend our program for part of the week. As a candidate support provider (CSP), I'm always looking for entry points to expand on the number of accomplished teachers in my district. For the past four years, I've been able to include a short presentation for our new and veteran teachers on Certification, the support available, and the perks that come

with it. I'm intentional about keeping it succinct because I know that with any new beginning comes an overload of information. My goal is to begin building relationships and planting seeds of thought.

As a mentor to new teachers, a regular part of my job is preparing and delivering professional learning. Whenever possible, I reference the Five Core Propositions and the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching. Knowing that the first year can be quite overwhelming, I keep it simple but I am consistent. When engaging in weekly coaching conversations with mentees, I also watch and listen for those opportunities to float the idea that National Board Certification is the pathway to becoming a teacher leader. They still have a few years before they can take that path, but the seeds are sown.

I watch and listen for those opportunities to float the idea that National Board Certification is the pathway to becoming a teacher leader.

There are occasions when I arrange for a new teacher and myself to observe in the classrooms of veteran teachers to help push the new teacher's practice forward. One of the advantages here is that I get to see great teaching in action. When I debrief with the veteran teacher, in addition to thanking them, I also try to point out the ways in which their practice embodies one or more of the Five Core Propositions. I build that rapport, plant the seed, give it some water, and patiently wait.

Anyone with a green thumb knows that in order for your garden to flourish, you need to include companion plants because they attract beneficial insects.

When the National Board Pre-Candidacy Class is on the schedule and we promote it across the district, I take advantage of the relationships I have with teachers and administrators in most of our 20 schools and the district office. I let the superintendent of educational services know so she can inform building principals. I call on National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) to find the year-three and -four teachers on their campus and encourage them to sign up. I make sure to reach out specifically to all the teachers with whom I've planted seeds. I look back at my caseloads of new teachers from previous years and remind them about their path to teacher leadership starting with pre-candidacy. Most of this is done through email communication but, it is also supported with drop-in visits, handwritten notes, and phone calls. My colleague, who facilitates the class, also offers to host the class on their campus if five or more people from that site enroll.

When I first became a CSP, the three other new CSPs in my district and I all had elementary backgrounds, experienced

the old process of submitting all four Components in one year, and were Certified in Early and Middle Childhood Literacy: Reading—Language Arts or Middle Childhood/Generalist. When I took over as coordinator of candidate support, I knew I needed to recruit CSPs with differing backgrounds and certificate areas in order to attract a wider range of teachers to the Certification process. Looking over the list of our newest NBCTs who had been through training with the Arizona K12 Center, I reached out to several, hoping at least a few would be interested. We now have two CSPs who are certified in Early Adolescence Through Young Adulthood/Exceptional Needs Specialist. Both are from middle schools and went through the new process of Certification. One is involved with the monthly cohort, and the other facilitates our pre-candidacy classes in the fall and spring. These two NBCTs have a different level of credibility with their middle school and special education colleagues than someone with an elementary background. One of them also happens to be an instructional support specialist, who works with all teachers on her campus. She's able to sow her own seeds of thought about the Certification process. Part of the reason they agreed to get involved was because of the relationship I had built with them. Encouraging them to rise up as teacher leaders in this capacity has strengthened our rapport as colleagues.

I also rely on a CSP in my own certificate area, but who has more experience than I do in supporting candidates. She was my CSP when I went through the Certification process and has renewed her certificate in the past couple of years. The knowledge and skills she brings is invaluable! She shoulder-taps colleagues on her campus, and also helps inform her administration

about the Certification process and the support teachers need while in pursuit of Certification.

When the seeds begin to sprout, either through enrollment in pre-candidacy, or questions that come up in conversation, I begin to expand on what I share about the Certification process. The Arizona K12 Center keeps me apprised of the latest information on scholarships, candidate support events, and updates from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. I also speak to the process and supports we have available internally. Toward the end of pre-candidacy, I present on next steps and provide them in writing. Pursuit of National Board Certification is a big undertaking. Throw in scholarship opportunities, cohorts, and other support events, and it's a lot for anyone to remember. I actively build rapport with the participants so they feel comfortable asking questions as they arise. I share all my contact information so we can chat, text or email. I also take time to meet with those who prefer a face-to-face (or virtual) experience.

When the garden is actively growing, the work I do begins to change. The tomatoes need stakes or cages for support as they grow, and the lettuces need afternoon shade so they don't get sunburned. Relationships are more important than ever as teachers begin to open up their practice for others to see.

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In our monthly cohort, we start out with the other two CSPs handling any questions about planning, writing, or videos,

while I take the ones about registration, scholarships, and support events. As teachers get going, those questions occur less often, and I shift into coaching mode, helping teachers process thinking, giving feedback on writing, and reminding them of their primary resources (Standards, portfolio instructions, Five Core Propositions, Architecture of Accomplished Teaching). We make ourselves available when teachers need support outside of our cohort meeting, and encourage them to let us know when they've finally clicked 'submit.'

A few weeks before scores come out, we send the candidates notes of encouragement to let them know we're thinking of them and to remind them that we're here to celebrate or help plan their next steps. The relationships we've built are what help us assure those candidates who don't certify that they ARE accomplished teachers and should consider trying again. I plan and organize a celebration that includes our executive team, governing board, building administrators, current and newly certified NBCTs and their families. It's a great opportunity to make introductions and directly thank our leadership for supporting the pursuit of accomplished teaching. The new NBCTs are later recognized and celebrated at the governing board meeting.

Some of the seeds I plant lay dormant, waiting for their time to sprout. Others are just beginning to emerge above the soil. This year, there are many that are reaching new heights and strengthening their stems. Soon, there will be sunflowers full of seeds ready to drop. No matter where they may be on the path to teacher leadership, relationships are what bring teachers to the Certification process and help them get through it. If we want all of our students to have an accomplished teacher, we need to recognize the potential in our colleagues and encourage them to pursue Certification. ➤

No matter where they may be on the path to teacher leadership, relationships are what bring teachers to the Certification process and help them get through it.

Reflective Questions

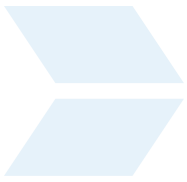
1. How do you currently recruit in your district?
2. What relationships can you tap into in order to expand your recruiting efforts?
3. How might you help colleagues connect what they're already doing to the body of knowledge surrounding National Board Certification?



Windy Mariscal, NBCT, is currently an induction and retention specialist at the Cartwright Elementary School District. She was a K-3 classroom teacher for 14 years and a K-3 language arts content specialist before becoming a mentor. Mariscal first achieved National Board Certification in Early and Middle Childhood Literacy/Reading Language Arts in 2015 and appreciates how the National Board Certification process helped her reflect deeply about her practice. She enjoys home improvement projects and spending time with family and friends.

Support





The Importance of Having a Great Foundation and Continuous Support

by Gabriela Chai

Abstract: This case study is about one teacher's journey to National Board Certification. The teacher documents how she was continuously inspired and supported by important members of her community who provided an outstanding foundation and support system. Her goals were to serve students and recruit teachers in a district with a diverse student population using a plethora of strategies and skills gained during National Board Certification.

"Oh, my goodness! You are writing so well that I am getting goose bumps on my arms. I am so happy to see your writing," Mrs. De La Rosa said to a student during a writing lesson. The little girl stood up in front of the class, so proud she could hardly contain her joy, and gave her teacher a large, sincere smile. This small interaction was an 'aha' moment for me; I realized then how important it was for students to hear words of excitement and pride from a teacher.

On another day, a different teacher, Mrs. Gee, advised me, "You need to make sure that your students understand what they read. Teach them strategies that are appropriate for them. Learning to differentiate is the key for their success. They will develop fluency and accuracy as they move along. Make it interesting, fun and engaging."

Mrs. Gee and Mrs. De La Rosa are two now-retired kindergarten teachers from my district. I was working as a teacher assistant when I met them at Ricardo Manzo Elementary School in Tucson and they later became my mentors while I worked toward a master's degree in elementary education.

They both spoke English and Spanish and each had over 25 years of experience and wisdom that they kindly shared with me during my student teaching. Being both bilingual and long-time educators, they understood the culture and could easily linguistically relate to their students. They were the two most important influences on my decision to work toward a master's degree in elementary education and pursue National Board Certification. I am so grateful to have met them! Those two teachers instilled in me a love for early education and teaching young children, the basis for reading, differentiation, and respect for each one of my students.

During my student teaching, Mrs. De La Rosa allowed me to observe multiple times in her classroom for English language development (ELD) instruction and to get ideas on how the program works. She would help me understand the reasoning behind every strategy and how it would impact student learning. On the other hand, Mrs. Gee would teach me how to connect multiple content areas and properly scaffold instruction to kindergarten students. She also taught me how to adapt books in

different ways to teach different skills. Both teachers showed me how to incorporate culture, diversity, and the love for the ELD world.

Surrounded by Outstanding Support

My Principal, Marisa Salcido, M.Ed.

Marisa Salcido had worked as a teacher and taken other school roles prior to becoming assistant principal and later principal of Lynn-Urquides Elementary School, where I currently teach. Our school has the largest number of English language learners in the district. She has changed the culture of our school in many positive ways and created a better sense of school community. Some examples of this are the addition of numerous family engagement functions, an increase in attendance, and her continual search for special projects that will academically benefit students. What I admire most about her is her willingness to provide students and staff the best opportunities to succeed; she truly cares. She believes in serving all her students with equity and justice.

My principal strongly believes in the power and impact of National Board Certification on teachers.

Salcido strongly believes in the power and impact of National Board Certification on teachers; she always offered her unconditional support throughout my journey. Once I certified, she continued to support me by allowing me to play different roles in our school. I was the math and science teacher lead from my site. And I became a professional development facilitator for reading strategies that needed to be implemented in the classroom. I was

also added to the exemplary teachers list and became a teacher mentor for two university students interested in the ELD setting in early childhood. She encouraged me to step into leadership roles on committees, district ELD teams, and groups where I was invited to participate or was already active. She has always advocated for her student population. She is tireless and committed to her work.

My Friend, Patricia Perez, M.Ed and NBCT

I am very fortunate to be a part of my district's team of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), which supports candidates in our district. But the most valuable aspect of this team is my dear friend Patricia Perez. She has been an amazing pillar of support for both me and the candidates. We not only became candidate support providers through the Arizona K12 Center at the same time, but started and achieved our journey of Certification together. We relied on each other throughout the process and also realized together in December 2017 that we were the only NBCTs of color in our district. During our journey, we felt a need to see more teachers of color going through the process. We both work at Title 1 schools, where the need for academic support is high, making it imperative to have teachers who can address students' needs using the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' Five Core Propositions and the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching. We both understand the importance of how becoming a NBCT impacts our students.

During our journey, we felt a need to see more teachers of color going through the process.

A couple of years ago, Perez and I were invited by Arizona K12 Center Executive Director Dr. Kathy Wiebke, NBCT, to present at the Arizona NBCT Leader Academy. Together, and under the direction of the Center's Angelia Ebner, we created a breakout session to recruit teachers of color for Certification. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow this to happen, but, through our work and our support in our district, we still found ways to continue to encourage the teachers in our district to continue on virtually.

Teaching, recruiting, and supporting candidates presented us with a huge challenge that school year. We also had to adapt our pre-candidacy and candidate support sessions to online platforms. Perez and I were kindly assisted by Donnie Dicus from the Arizona K12 Center, who supplied us with resources so that we could design our sessions. It paid off and our pre-candidacy class was a success!

Candidate Support

Every time I am scheduled for a Coaching Saturday, a candidate-support event through the Arizona K12 Center, I prepare myself to learn about candidates' goals, interests, and needs. I seek opportunities to get to know them and listen. I am committed to them and to their learning. I understand that Certification is an arduous and difficult task, but it is so worth it.

Another strategy I use prior to meetings is to find out candidates' certificate areas; I then read each of their certificate area specifications and consider possible questions they may have, and create a list of resources to help them address any doubts. I become familiar with all the forms for each Component so that I can make the candidates' appointments very efficient

and effective. Being proactive on my end shows my respect for the candidates and makes it easier for both of us. I continually use the National Board website and share information about upcoming webinar sessions with the team to assist the candidates. I even register myself to stay up-to-date with National Board information.

I also attend professional development sessions related to cultural diversity, inclusion, and equity so I can educate myself about these important topics. My district provides amazing opportunities during the summer on culturally relevant pedagogy and instruction. Each summer, the district puts on an institute packed with important lectures from experts from all over the country. November of 2019, I attended a marvelous professional learning opportunity from the Arizona K12 Center, Leading for Equity with the National Equity Project. This was an amazing experience and it opened my eyes to a new world of understanding. I learned new strategies, ideas, and even activities I can adapt within my classroom and also with candidates seeking Certification. It was at times so emotional that I felt like crying. One of these activities that brought up so much emotion was one that had us reflect on our multiple identities by sketching an identity map. Thus, I decided to implement it the next school year. This is definitely a way to teach students the power of identity.

Without a doubt, COVID-19 caused me to venture into the world of technology like I never had before. It seems the entire world has fully embraced the digital world. Our candidate support had been greatly affected by this, since we could not meet in person. There were many dynamics and activities embedded in the instruction of pre-candidacy and the support groups.

These sessions had to be revised using the videoconferencing software Zoom. As a team, Patricia and I continuously looked for ways to engage candidates.

Recruiting New Candidates

I always explain to candidates that Certification goes above and beyond receiving a \$3,000 stipend at the end of the school year, a perk of being a NBCT in my district. It is a process of learning, self-assessment, and reflection to become a better educator. I mention the commitment and determination that it takes to be a part of this process. It becomes a long-term endeavor. Certification teaches us to focus on the essential and important practices in the classroom. Moreover, our students deserve the best prepared teachers to help them excel academically. Because we are a highly diverse district, I make it a priority to engage with teachers who share similar backgrounds with their students, and encourage those who desire to become a NBCT to do so. This can work to further create an environment of trust and safety.

I make it a priority to engage with teachers who share similar backgrounds with their students, and encourage those who desire to become a NBCT to do so.

It was extraordinarily surprising to learn that my superintendent, Dr. Gabriel Trujillo knew I achieved National Board Certification back in 2017. Becoming a NBCT and learning about the support and opportunities at the Arizona K12 Center changed my professional career. The Center has allowed me to participate on the Teacher Advisory Team and join the Arizona TeacherSolutions® Team under the direction of Mary Field. I have participated in many different learning communities, groups, and committees related to my certificate area within my district as well. My participation includes curriculum adoptions, setting lesson templates for the district, mentoring students and ELD teachers, laying out the scope and sequence for pacing calendars, and representing my region in leadership meetings. This could not have been possible without the four letters attached to my name: NBCT.

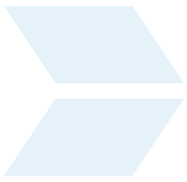
I am now pursuing my Maintenance of Certification in order to continue this work. Furthermore, I surround myself with educators who believe in the power of Certification, and teachers of color who share the belief in the importance of reaching all of our district's students. There is a need to empower our teachers and students with skills, tools, proper instruction, a better understanding of the cultures, and honor and respect for the world of education. ➤

Reflection Questions

1. What are the benefits of seeking support and guidance while going through the process of National Board Certification?
2. How do we recruit teachers from a diverse population to begin their journey to National Board Certification?
3. How can a teacher directly and indirectly impact students as a National Board Certified Teacher?



Gabriela Chai, NBCT, is a kindergarten ELD teacher and a member of the NBCT team that recruits, teaches, and supports candidates in the Tucson Unified School District. She earned a Bachelor of Science in business finance from the University of Arizona and a Master of Arts in elementary education from Northern Arizona University. Yes, she is a 'LumberCat' and very proud of it! Her greatest accomplishment as an educator was to become a NBCT, which allows her to further support her students and also encourage her peers to start their own journey toward National Board Certification. She has a love for and commitment to the teaching profession, especially for English language learner students in the early childhood setting. As a NBCT, Chai knows that she can positively impact her students directly and indirectly in and out of a classroom environment.



Supporting Teachers Across State Lines:

A Story of Remote Support Linked to Accomplished Teaching

by Dr. Annie Diaz

Abstract: The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards ‘believes that educators must help students consider their role in a diverse world, value individual differences, and—especially in times such as these—we believe in the power of the teaching profession to defend what is good and right for all people.’ With this in mind, I’ve sought opportunities to mentor and support teachers from diverse contexts who are interested in National Board Certification. I am a teacher leader in Arizona. I have coaching expertise and am known for providing quality and effective methods of support across Arizona. I’ve created systems for support and spaces for teachers to learn about and engage in the National Board Certification process. I have a network and a reputation for being a champion for Certification in districts where I’ve worked. It’s been my experience that for a Certification program to grow, you need a district champion, a National Board Certified Teacher who is respected and valued, as well as sustainable conditions to maintain momentum. I know we need to diversify the population of teachers in order to elevate and transform teaching. I also know that teachers in diverse teaching settings need quality support, especially when the support is linked to the Certification process.

The Project

In 2019, I was asked by the Arizona K12 Center to use my coaching skills to assist teachers pursuing National Board Certification outside of my current network in Arizona and to support a group of Houston teachers. There were only seven National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in the Houston Independent School District at the time. I was told there were to be three cohorts over the course of a year. It was a diverse group of educators, eager for a space to explore what their profession might become.

I knew very little about Houston and had never traveled to Texas. I had confidence that I could be of some help, but I had no idea what I might expect from this opportunity and what impact I might have.

The teachers in Houston were hungry for an opportunity and safe space to promote and grow their practice and profession. I hope teachers like them—those who feel disconnected from their system and want to grow—read this story of my work with them. I want this story in the hands of teachers of color and teacher leaders like me who have the skills to provide quality support no matter what the context might be.

The plan was to facilitate a pre-candidacy course and follow it with a National Board Institute to prepare the teachers for the Certification process. After traveling to Houston, I discovered on the first day that this group of teachers needed a container to hold their thoughts about teaching and student learning, and a network that

allowed for transparency and vulnerability. My goal was to share why pre-candidacy was important and help them understand why Certification is a thing that they can own for themselves. Over the course of several months, I established relationships, listened, and became inspired through virtual and in-person meetings.

The Backdrop

The building was a warehouse. It was a Saturday, and the air-conditioner was broken. The teachers in the room were mostly women, along with two men of color, one white woman who was originally born in Mexico, and one woman who came to the United States from Serbia as a child. My audience was unlike any I had ever presented to. I was nervous as to whether or not I could inspire them and earn their trust.

Maybe one of these brilliant female or male teachers of color might inspire their students of color to become brilliant teachers and leaders of change one day.

I sensed they lacked trust in the systems that were meant to support them. They expressed concerns about the potential workload the Certification process might hold. Then they began to open up. A few of them were single mothers. They shared their fear of needing to prove their content knowledge or of being judged based on their knowledge of content. Many of the teachers expressed concerns about the time commitment the process might take. On the other hand, they articulated a desire to build their resumes and engage in opportunities to grow professionally

through self-discipline. It was noted that a network of leaders in the district was a need. I sensed many felt disenfranchised and invisible, and craved support. I realized that maybe my purpose wasn't about building a program in Houston, but more about inspiring and supporting a ripple effect. My purpose might be to build relationships with this unique group of teachers. Teachers in the United States are predominantly white females. We need to increase representation. Maybe one of these brilliant female or male teachers of color might inspire their students of color to become brilliant teachers and leaders of change one day. Maybe I could inspire them to seek Certification as a way to be a leader of change.

Houston Independent School District

I recall the moment when we engaged in an activity around the article *Why America Needs Board Certified Teachers*. I stood in the front of the room and observed the teachers around the warehouse room reading the article before we engaged in our first discussion. They all wore appropriate shorts, jeans, and casual clothing. I remember wondering if they thought I was a ridiculous white girl for wearing high heels, a dress, and makeup when it essentially felt like a humid greenhouse. And I wondered if I might earn their trust. Will they share with me? Will they ask for support? The trust and rapport had not yet been established and I felt a little intimidated. I reminded myself that we were all on the same team and that they were here because they care about students and our profession. We were colleagues. We were the same. I knew it was my responsibility to help facilitate their learning and support their thinking by presuming positive intentions and creating high expectations for them in this context.

The Houston teachers spent time reading and responding to *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' mission, and the Five Core Propositions and began making connections to their practice. They were invited to write the distinguishing qualities and traits that came to mind when they thought of accomplished teaching onto sticky notes. The following were some of the qualities they shared: students first, purposeful, growth and development, challenges students, knows content, proactive, altruistic, passionate, strong work ethic, data driven, advocate, collaborative.

I observed them connecting the qualities they listed to the Five Core Propositions, and I recall the moment where they felt validation and realized that the Certification process was doable. They discovered that they already embodied the qualities of accomplished teachers. On Twitter later that day, I tweeted a quote from one of the teachers: "This process awakens my soul." I began to feel that they were opening up.

This process awakens my soul.

Over the course of a year, I developed trusting and solid relationships with the teachers in Houston. I recall one of the teachers bringing her kids to each session. She asked if I minded because she didn't have childcare. I told her I was a single mother and totally understood. She was a hard-working mother of three. I was so impressed by her dedication. Her kids sat in the back of the room and worked on homework while their mom worked on growing herself as a teacher. She expressed concern about not having the time to finish pre-candidacy. Though she ended up taking longer than the others, she persevered and got it done.

Another teacher was a middle school math teacher and a district advocate for quality instruction in mathematics. She often sat and observed the others, and saved her writing for when she got home. I knew she respected me and valued my support and facilitation when she called me over and asked for a selfie!

One of the teachers was a father and husband. I recall the despair in his voice over a Zoom meeting when he shared that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, his school was going all virtual and he was quarantined. He was very upset about it. He tried to laugh and said he really wasn't sure what he was going to do about the Certification process, but he promised that he'd take some time to think about it. Then I received an email the very next day where he told me he chose to defer.

I traveled to Houston on three different occasions and provided ongoing virtual feedback and support as the teachers completed pre-candidacy and the National Board Institute curriculum designed by the Arizona K12 Center. On the final day of my last trip, we laughed together and a couple of them joked about wanting me to come back. They expressed appreciation for the time I spent with them. Then I asked them to share their thoughts and experiences. These were some of their final thoughts that I recorded that day:

- » Pre-candidacy and National Board Institute brought the puzzle together.
- » After teaching many years, you become complacent. National Board Certification awakens the inner being. The small group support and time together helps. Everyone can engage.
- » I'm happy to teach the students. I'm more equipped to move forward.
- » I was very lost at the beginning. The

experience has been great. A powerful tool. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I'm grateful to have you here and for this experience. Some people think of one another as colleagues, but I think of all of you as family. I'm very family oriented. I'm pleased to be here.

- » This is the highest achievement a teacher can earn. I want that. Sign me up. The more I got into it, the more I realized that's me. I read the Five Core Propositions and realized that's me too. In doing this, I'm going to find what I'm looking for and my purpose in education. I'm not ready to leave the classroom. I haven't reached my peak yet.

We scheduled Zoom meetings and engaged in frequent email communication. It was important that I do whatever it took to provide equitable support remotely. At one point, it became obvious to me that the conditions were not in place in Houston for these teachers to stay motivated to complete the Certification process and sustain a potential program. They didn't have a NBCT in the district who was championing the Certification process. I believe they valued the visits I made to Houston and the knowledge, experiences and coaching I could provide as a NBCT. Unfortunately, I was unable to remain with them long-term, given that my full-time work was in Arizona. On our final Zoom meeting in June of 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, only three teachers showed up to the meeting. It wasn't feasible for me to continue the work with them, but I promised to be there for them if they needed me, even if it was only via email. To my knowledge, a few of the teachers deferred their deadline to submit. However, I recently received an email from

the middle school math teacher from the original cohort. "Dr. Annie, I submitted Component 2 in October!"

What I learned

I love that I was able to provide remote support across state lines and cultivate relationships with a diverse group of teachers. I never would have met the teachers in Houston if it wasn't for their interest in the Certification process. Over the course of my work with the Houston teachers, our bond evolved. They appreciated when I shared stories of how the National Board Certification process has impacted so many teachers and students. I shared that many NBCTs in Arizona, including myself, had been the only teachers interested in Certification in their district, and that it was possible for these Houston teachers to be the champions in their district too. They were inspired by that notion. We lived in different states but, ultimately, we discovered commonalities and shared a passion for how the Certification process might impact teachers in Houston and be a pathway for them to elevate the profession as teachers of color.

If it was possible for me to have continued supporting those Houston teachers, I believe they would have valued the opportunity to work with me. Maybe someday our paths will cross again. Until then, it's my hope that they will continue their Certification journeys and begin to champion the impact of the Certification process in the Houston school district. It is also my hope that they continue to advocate for support and spaces to reflect on their teaching practice. ➤

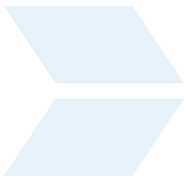
Reflection Questions

1. How do candidate support providers adjust support to meet the needs of diverse educators?
2. How do we treat candidates equitably?
3. How can we provide quality coaching and support remotely to ensure candidate success?
4. Is it possible to provide equitable and meaningful support remotely and across state lines?



Dr. Annie Diaz, NBCT, is an instructional coach for the Washington Elementary School District and is in her 18th year in education. She achieved National Board Certification as an early childhood generalist in 2008 and renewed in 2017.

The Certification process inspired Diaz to explore action research and a doctorate. She received her Ed.D. in teacher leadership and innovation from Arizona State University. Her dissertation topic studied the links between cognitive coaching and the features required for Certification. Diaz is an avid practitioner of Pilates, a mother of three children, and owner of a dog, cat, and tortoise.



Empowering Special Education Teachers Through National Board Certification

by Hannah Jones

Abstract: This case study is about the journey of a special education teacher who achieved National Board Certification, and her role as a candidate support provider (CSP). National Board Certification is not only the highest credential a teacher can receive, but it is also the most impactful professional development. This story offers insight into empowering special education teachers pursuing National Board Certification, and guidance to CSPs in supporting exceptional needs specialist (ENS) candidates, and it challenges other stakeholders to consider the National Board Certification process for their special education teachers.

I fell in love with my profession during my intro to special education class as an undergraduate at Arizona State University. I had no clue that special education was such a broad category and included students with so many exceptionalities. This seemed like something I wanted to take on—to teach students with such varying abilities and challenges. Then an elementary education major, I immediately changed my major to special education and never looked back. I fiercely believed my students should be held to high expectations regardless of ability, and that ALL students, including those with special needs, deserve an accomplished teacher. I continuously looked for high-quality professional development opportunities directly related to teaching students with special needs and, unfortunately, found this to be lacking. At that time, so much of the professional development was geared toward general education or the procedural aspect of special education. I desired professional development that would

transform my thinking and directly impact my students. That's when my then mentor and coach shoulder-tapped me to pursue National Board Certification.

ALL students, including those with special needs, deserve an accomplished teacher.

Because the certificate for ENS is so different from most of the generalist-type certificate areas, I sought out others pursuing that same certificate as well as CSPs from my same certificate area. The most powerful coaching came from one CSP in particular, Anne. I met Anne at the National Board Workshop in Tubac. Special educators are used to others not understanding our students or classrooms, let alone how to provide evidence of the unique teaching strategies on paper and in video. But Anne was a special education teacher, so she got it. I felt truly seen for the first time in my career. Her questioning and

coaching took me deeper into my practice and, because of that, I was able to write clearly, concisely, and convincingly to show how I was an accomplished teacher. The Component (they were called 'entries' back in the day I Certified!) I worked on in Tubac received a score of 4, and I believe that was due to Anne's coaching, which didn't just transform my Certification writing, it transformed my thinking around students with special needs and assessment. And that, not my score, is what I still carry with me today.

I Certified as an ENS in 2012. Going through the Certification process has made the most impact on my professional career. I became not just a teacher but a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) leader. Because I had received so much support from the Arizona K12 Center, I wanted to give back so, immediately following Certification, I jumped into candidate support. At that time, there were few ENS candidates and even fewer ENS CSPs. I wanted to empower special education teachers going through the Certification process like Anne empowered me.

I started helping at Coaching Saturdays with the Arizona K12 Center, where I was paired with ENS candidates. They were always excited, as this may have been the first time they had met with a coach in their same certificate area. One of my top strengths is building relationships with others, and I used this when working with the candidates. I was able to quickly build a rapport of trust and understanding with them, and much of that was because I got it; I was one of them. We were all special educators. This rapport led to candidates continually seeking me out for support, long after a Coaching Saturday ended.

Over my eight years working with ENS candidates, the question I heard the most was, "How can I show evidence when my classroom looks so different from others?" I loved answering this question, and would do so passionately, "This is the beauty of the Certification process. It is vague for this very reason—no two classrooms are alike. You get to showcase YOU as a teacher to YOUR students in YOUR classroom at THIS time. This is YOUR time to shine and show how YOU as a teacher are able to make an exceptional impact on YOUR students." I wanted to empower the special educators with the belief that they were already accomplished teachers. This applies to any and all certificates! Another question I was often asked was, "How can I show evidence when one of my students is nonverbal?" With this question, I posed the following questions back, "How DOES your student communicate? How do you know when your student is happy/sad/excited/engaged? How do you know when this student has made progress?" Often the unique students and circumstances in a special education classroom can block a candidate's thinking, but once candidates believed that they really did have evidence they could showcase, they felt empowered.

As a CSP I had the opportunity to go and support candidates at the National Board Workshop in Tubac several times. I would have groups of four or five ENS candidates to coach over three days. Remembering how my time with Anne had been so impactful, I sought to provide the candidates with the same effective support. Unlike Coaching Saturdays, which are based regionally, I had the experience of working with ENS candidates from all over Arizona. This challenged me as a CSP, as I needed to coach special education teachers from every corner of Arizona and in every

type of school/community. The majority of the time, Tubac was the only time I saw these candidates in person, but they would keep in touch. I loved getting emails after the score release that read, “Hi Hannah, I don’t know if you remember me, but you were my CSP in Tubac. I wanted to let you know that I achieved Certification! Thank you for all of your help and support with the Certification process.” These moments inspired me to further develop my ‘craft’ of supporting ENS candidates.

I helped develop the current curriculum for Arizona K12 Center’s National Board Pre-Candidacy Class, National Board Institute, and National Board Candidate Support Provider Training, as well as served each as faculty. These experiences really expanded my knowledge around Certification and greatly deepened my skills for candidate support. For example, as a candidate going through Certification, I barely looked at the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching—don’t ask me why! But when I started supporting candidates, I really had to grow. I dived into the documents in a way that I had not during my own candidacy. The Five Core Propositions and the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching became not only a means in which to support candidates, but they truly grounded my practice. Even after certifying as a NBCT, I was continuing to cultivate my own teaching practice, this time by empowering ENS candidates.

As a CSP, the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching is quite possibly the most valuable tool I have at my fingertips. Adapted by the Arizona K12 Center, this tool has powerful questions built into it that are often my go-tos when working with candidates. Due to the nature of our job, special education teachers naturally think through those questions all day, whether we realize it

or not. Simply by utilizing that tool when coaching, I was able to tap into candidates’ thinking and help them realize that they hold the answers they are looking for, not me. Second, by embodying The Five Core Propositions, they became a constant in the language I used with candidates. I reinforce the Five Core Propositions during almost every coaching conversation; that is the power they hold!

Achieving National Board Certification opened doors at the district, state, and national level and provided me opportunities to lead.

In my experience, impactful professional development that is worth the time and cost for special education teachers can, unfortunately, be difficult to find. Every teacher, not just special education teachers, have said over and over again that National Board Certification was hands down the best professional development experience they had. For me, it truly propelled me into a teacher leader. Having ‘NBCT’ behind my name boosted my confidence and pushed me to look outside my classroom and school for leadership opportunities. Achieving National Board Certification opened doors at the district, state, and national level and provided me opportunities to lead.

Special education teachers are some of the most accomplished teachers I know. They find inventive strategies daily to reach some of the hardest to reach students. They cross barriers of communication, physical limitations, sensory needs, behavior challenges, and much more in order to ensure each student reaches

their full potential. By empowering these educators through the Certification process, you will not only gain a more confident, accomplished teacher in the classroom but a teacher leader that will create a positive impact across the district. I challenge school and district leadership

to shoulder-tap some of their special education teachers and not only encourage them to pursue Certification, but champion them during their adventure toward accomplished teaching. And when they take their first steps into their journey, I will be there to support them! ➤

Reflection Questions

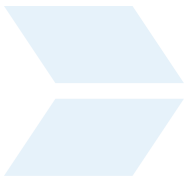
1. What type of professional support has made the greatest impact on your practice?
2. How has your understanding of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards primary resources evolved since your National Board Certification?
3. In what ways can you empower a special education teacher to pursue National Board Certification?



Hannah Jones, NBCT, is the assistive technology specialist and a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support coach in the Madison School District in Phoenix. She first achieved National Board Certification as an Early Childhood/Young Adulthood ENS in 2012, and this paved the way for her to help develop programs and support for special education teachers at the school, district, state, and national levels. Jones loves living in sunny Phoenix and spending time with her husband, daughter, son, and two goldendoodles.

Lead





National Board Certification:

An Operationalized Continuum for Evaluation and Transformation

by Alaina Adams

Abstract: Providing a return on investment to students and stakeholders in the communities that we serve is an essential part of our charge as leaders in education. Although standardized metrics and education reform measures dominate the current landscape of education in the United States, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has operationalized an autonomous, research-based approach for individual teachers and systems to identify the initial spark of learning and provides a way to magnify that spark along a continuum of accomplished practice. Through a series of vignettes, this case study shows how National Board Certification can enhance evaluation frameworks across a continuum of practice and highlights its potential to transform systems and the teaching profession.

The Calling: A Nation Prepared

Every student in our nation deserves access to a highly accomplished teacher for every year of their learning journey. The idea of ensuring teacher quality, however, has been filled with controversy and has been exacerbated by a persistent, national teacher shortage for my entire career as an educator. I became a teacher the year after the No Child Left Behind Act launched in 2002. During the last year of my preservice program, professors warned us about the Act's possible narrowing of curriculum, punitive metrics, and unknown changes that might affect the teaching profession as a result. And in the same space that they offered caution, they also told us to not lose hope—that the pendulum swings different ways at different times—and, as teachers for our society, part of living our oath may involve reminding our nation of where we have been in order to find new ways forward.

As a high school student in an urban Arizona public school system in the early

1990s, I had the benefit of being taught by educators who were using National Board Certification to guide their classroom practice. During my junior year, I distinctly remember two of those high school teachers actively challenging their practice together; my English language arts and economics teachers designed a multi-month, cross-curricular unit in which we learned many essential content standards through inquiry projects—and had fun while learning!

In 2001, as a preservice teacher, I also experienced two mentor teachers who were actively going through the Certification process together. As they guided me through my university program of study, they also taught me how enriching, necessary, and fun being part of a community of practice larger than my classroom could be. And as the September 11 tragedy struck our nation, we watched it live with middle schoolers, cried together, and continued to find our way forward as we crafted meaningful

lessons grounded in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

In 2006, as a third-year teacher, I saw an email advertising a National Board Certification Pre-Candidacy Class offered by the Arizona K12 Center. Because I had been exposed to the Certification process by my own teachers, I just knew that it was where I needed to be to keep finding my way as an educator. In 2008, I became a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) and borrowed a classroom as an administrator to renew my Certification in 2018. Throughout my entire learning journey, Certification has continually provided markers to help me find my way forward.

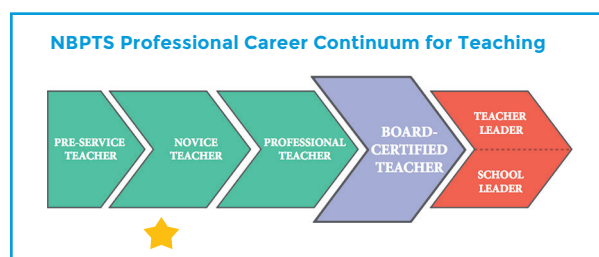
Now, more than ever, Certification provides a viable means to help us all find new ways forward by educating our citizenry and connecting where we have been to where we are heading as a nation. Much like the professions of medicine, engineering, and architecture, Certification offers a way to demonstrate and regulate accomplished practice and strengthens a coherent pipeline of preparation that begins in preservice and continues beyond (NBPTS, 2014). As a student, I benefited from it. As a teacher, my students and I have grown because of it. As a teacher leader, I have developed advocacy skills and systems-thinking thanks to it. And now, as an administrator, I remove barriers and advocate to protect it.

Evaluation: Vignettes Across the Continuum

Along a continuum of practice, Certification provides steps for meaningful evaluation of classroom practice, leadership development, and systems improvement. As a NBCT who now works within the same school district

that I attended as a high school student, I have traveled all parts of this continuum, quite literally, and not always in a linear fashion. The vignettes below provide a few examples of how the NBPTS body of knowledge has created more meaningful and transformational practices across the continuum in my context.

New Teacher Induction: Igniting the Spark



"I'm new. I don't need another meeting to learn how to be 'new'—I just need more time. And if I have to attend more meetings after school because I'm new, please at least make the time meaningful, or it's no better than the busy work that we are not supposed to give students."

When I heard this statement from a first-year teacher that I was supervising as a principal, I couldn't argue with his logic. Sometimes, in our efforts to help those newest to our profession become acclimated, we unintentionally create more work for them to do when what they really need is connection to their purpose—and lots of time for guided reflection. To help make more meaningful experiences for new teachers in my district, we redesigned our New Teacher Induction Program to include the NBPTS' Five Core Propositions as guiding pillars. Now, instead of attending long meetings after school to engage with compartmentalized state criteria for induction, new teachers can engage with

the same learning, but guided by the more holistic and focused lens of National Board Certification. Through a series of reflective modules facilitated by caring instructional coaches and NBCT leaders, we also blend in-person and virtual learning structures to allow differentiated time and space for new teachers to:

1. analyze their **commitment to students** through relationship building and goal setting
2. deepen **content knowledge** and connect meaningful **strategies** to facilitate learning
3. **manage and monitor evidence** of learning in a variety of instructional models
4. **think systematically** about their practice and learn from their own experiences
5. participate in a variety of **learning communities** to help them see the breadth of their impact on students learning

But we did not do this work in isolation. Over a two-year period, we actively worked with the Arizona K12 Center and the NBPTS as part of the Network to Transform Teaching project, which was designed to accelerate and integrate tenets of National Board Certification more strategically into U.S. school systems (NBPTS, 2015). Working with outside partners to guide our system transformation afforded us an external mirror to reflect on our action research cycles and helped us stay connected with our fundamental purpose as educators. Though there may still be parts of being a new teacher that are just overwhelming, the new teachers in my district say that they are grateful to have a vision for accomplished practice that helps guide their own internal compasses versus completing ‘modules of compliance.’ The immediate benefit to teachers is evident;

our staff has become more focused on evidence-based learning for all, and we are now seeing more teachers naturally pursue Certification as next steps for growth when they become fourth-year teachers.

Professional Teaching: Activating the Village



“This teacher evaluation hype feels like the dystopic model of competition in *The Hunger Games* novel that my students are reading. Why do I need to jump through these ‘value-added’ hoops when I’ve already shown that I know what I’m doing?”

In 2009, as an English language arts department chair, I was leading a group of passionate colleagues through a sea of new accountability/reform efforts connected to Common Core State Standards adoption and the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top initiative. As we engaged in professional learning community conversations about our *internal* markers for student learning while our nation was focused on *external* markers for teacher quality, my colleagues frequently noticed discrepancies between how they treated students and how they felt they were treated as professionals. Teachers who were already Certified and/or who had consistently demonstrated highly effective levels of practice started to speak out in advocacy for more than the punitive ‘stick and carrot’ approaches that were trending nationally (Adams, 2016).

Because the district, union, and NBCT leaders in my system believe that teacher evaluation is about so much more than content and competition, we knew that we could collaboratively redesign our evaluation tools and processes in ways that met the new requirements. We also knew our efforts would highlight the deep knowledge of students, leading and learning through relationships, inquiry, collaboration, advocacy, fairness, equity, and diversity, which are also common themes across the 26 certificate areas within the Standards for accomplished practice (NBPTS, 2014). Together, we examined National Board Certification criteria and the new Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards adopted by the state of Arizona in response to Race to the Top, and redefined our certified evaluation instrument accordingly. We also used the Arizona K12 Center's *Standards Continuum Guide for Reflective Teaching Practice* to help us craft our 'what, why, and how' to bring the InTASC standards to life (Arizona K12 Center, 2012). The result was a more meaningful evaluation tool that we could use to sustainably guide teaching and learning practices into the future.

When the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed in 2015, we knew that we already had a strong evaluation system that would carry our mission and vision forward without a need for major revision. In an effort to show more varied and meaningful assessment of student growth and teacher quality, we engaged in another revision process with district, union, and NBCT leaders to provide more differentiated opportunities for teachers who had already demonstrated highly effective ratings within our traditional evaluation system for (at least) three consecutive years.

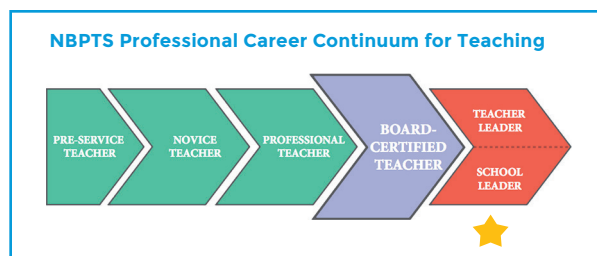
Once again, we anchored our thinking in National Board Certification criteria and InTASC standards, and used the Arizona K12 Center's reflective guide. But this time, we took a deeper look at the responsibilities criteria of professional learning, leadership, ethics, and collaboration for InTASC Standards 9 & 10 (InTASC, 2013). The result was a new Exemplary Educator Achievement Model that allows qualifying teachers to voluntarily participate in one of these conceptual pathways:

- » **Pursuit of National Board Certification.** After completing a pre-candidacy experience to learn the foundations of Certification and declaring candidacy with the NBPTS, teachers can align evidence from the Certification process to instructional problems of practice within their own classrooms.
- » **Continued Learning.** After acceptance into a degree-seeking program, teachers can align learning from a doctorate of philosophy, doctorate of education, master's, or additional bachelor's programs to help solve campus-based problems of practice. Teachers may also opt to seek accredited micro-credentialing options instead of degree-seeking programs.
- » **Teacher Coaching and Mentoring.** This pathway requires teachers to design and implement a custom mentoring program for mentees on their campus and identify outcomes relevant to their own classroom practice alongside those of their mentees.
- » **Brave Explorer.** This popular pathway is sought after by many because it allows for a self-selected topic in which teachers conduct an action research cycle to solve a campus problem of practice that aligns with school improvement goals.

Pathway selection involves submitting a plan to articulate benchmarks and anticipated artifacts; periodic check-ins with principals and self-selected mentors; and collaboration with administrators to solve site-based problems of practice toward school improvement. Whichever pathway an exemplary educator may choose for this collaborative evaluation process, demonstrating evidence of direct and individual impact on student learning is at its core, and is also at the core of the Certification process. At the end of every school year, Exemplary Educator Achievement Model participants also have the option to publicly present their findings in a symposium format, in which colleagues and stakeholders can visit with them individually to learn about their work and celebrate the act of exemplary teaching and learning.

Educators who have participated in the Exemplary Educator Achievement Model cite it as a transformational experience that renewed their commitment to teaching, challenged them as professionals, and took their professional learning community and school improvement work to new levels. The return on investment for embedding the NBPTS' body of knowledge into our evaluation practices has resulted in an increased focus on creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and deep subject matter knowledge that allows our students and staff to more fully thrive in our democracy and an increasingly global society and economy (Phoenix Union High School District, 2020).

Leadership: Walking the Talk



“Principals never come into our classrooms when students are here unless it’s time for evaluations or something is wrong.”

This one stings a bit as an administrator. But the teacher who said this to me was not wrong; as a new principal trying to get through 40+ evaluations during my first ‘evaluation season,’ I felt the struggle of trying to be present in classrooms, while trying to complete the overwhelming tasks of building logistics, navigating parents/ community needs, safety protocols, lunch lines, bus duties, neighborhood disruptions, etc. Thankfully, my administrative team helped shift the load to allow me time to be in classrooms and actively co-teach to help our campus make larger school improvement gains. We also carved out dedicated time weekly, beyond the usual administration meetings, to talk explicitly about instruction and how all of us saw accomplished practice through our weekly campus interactions, evaluations, and professional learning community meetings.

Teaching, at its core, is primarily done in isolation from other teachers. Though teachers sometimes participate in professional development and meetings that involve other educators, time spent in collaboration with others pales in comparison to the amount of time spent actively teaching students (Adams, 2016). And because teachers do not have direct

control over many external factors that influence student achievement, they often internalize the failure of students and leave the teaching profession at high rates (Ingersoll, Strong, 2011; Tirozzi, Carbonaro, Winters, 2014). Modeling and co-constructing the art of teaching along a fluid continuum may be one small step that we can take as school leaders that can go a long way toward keeping more educators in our profession.

As leaders who must maintain content-specific certifications within our states of employment, we also have the power and freedom to borrow classrooms and engage in the Certification process ourselves within our own content areas. Having borrowed an English language arts classroom in 2018 to maintain my own Certification, I can tell you just how rewarding it was to teach students and work alongside members of our staff. As a school leader, maintaining my Certification also helped me maintain an authentic, consistent pulse on my campus' instructional practices and I was able to more readily speak to external stakeholders about the power and potential of our learning system. Though it was easier for me to adopt a growth mindset and engage with the Certification process because I was already a NBCT, I have seen other administrators who were not already Certified borrow classrooms and successfully certify. It was a bit terrifying to move from 'expert' to 'novice' again so publicly, but it was one of the most powerful things I've experienced as an educator.

If we subscribe to the notion that the four walls of our classrooms are our nation's sacred spaces where the spark of learning is ignited and spread, then it is our duty

as school leaders to stay as close to those spaces as possible. And if we cannot do it ourselves, we should strive to create and protect resources and processes, such as National Board Certification, that provide systemic collaboration and transparency for learning within our systems.

Return on Investment: A Nation Transformed

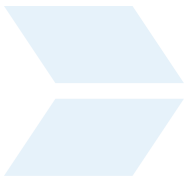
As I sit here writing this, we are still grappling with rhetoric and lessons learned from 20 years of education reform efforts stemming from A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind. We are also still dealing with a global pandemic, still trying to shore up our country's chronic teacher shortage, continually witnessing systemic racism play out on our television screens, and navigating a highly divisive political climate. As we seek ways to move forward as a nation, let us also seek to mindfully raise learning expectations and increase meaningful practices in education. Let us set our 'bar' at more than a single moment or place on the professional teaching continuum, as we can show that it is more about a series of intentional movements along the way, in authentic collaboration with others (Thorpe, 2014). Since its formation in 1987, the NBPTS has provided both the goal and measure for this model (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986). As educators, we have a timely opportunity to connect work in our local contexts to the body of knowledge offered by the NBPTS. Together, we can remind our nation of where we have been. Together, we can craft a better path forward for the children in our communities. And together, we can rise as a nation that is not only prepared, but transformed. ➤

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways might the integration of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' body of knowledge enhance new teacher and mentoring structures within Arizona's school settings? How might we use what we learn to ignite and spread the spark of learning?
2. How might the inclusion of National Board Certification honor a continuum of teaching experience in ways that allow for differentiated movement? Leadership development? Evaluation? Advocacy?
3. As we consider what we have learned from 20 years of education reform in the United States, how might we use the tenets of National Board Certification to provide more holistic and meaningful teaching and learning conditions?
4. The teachers and students of our nation are watching; how might we create ways for them to become co-constructors of our nation's new path forward?



Dr. Alaina Adams, NBCT, is an administrator in residence for the Phoenix Union High School District. She is proud to be a 'Double Devil' that has earned bachelor's and Doctor of Education degrees from Arizona State University (2003 and 2016) and that she continues to refine her craft within the same school district that she attended high school as a student. She has 17 years of experience in education, spanning from the classroom to the district level. Adams achieved initial National Board Certification in 2008, renewed her Certification while serving as an assistant principal in 2018, and actively supports National Board Certification endeavors at district, state, and national levels. In her spare time, she also likes to read fancy books, mobilizes the #teacherarmy on social media, has a child in college studying to be a music teacher, and has recently adopted a kitten.



How Can We Do This Better?

by Christie Olsen

Abstract: The purpose of every aspect of professional development is to improve teaching and learning. Those who seek high performance begin with higher purpose. The emotional glue of any culture is its sense of identity and purpose. At the school documented in this case study, the Five Core Propositions are held in common by teachers of all grade levels and disciplines, and underscore the accomplished teacher's commitment to advancing student learning and achievement.

Our goal was beautifully simple and exceptionally lofty: create an organizational identity. We began by asking multiple individuals in our system, "What is the purpose of our work?" Some made reference to the district mission statement—but none could actually quote the mission statement—or they replied with some version of "to develop the intellect, serve social needs, contribute to the economy, create an effective workforce, or prepare students for a job or career." We knew our 'why' and our 'what,' but who were we? If we did not have an organizational identity; could we indeed do better? In order to create that identity, we knew we must connect personal meaning to a higher purpose to create a sense of direction. Designating the Five Core Propositions as the anchor document of our organizational identity seemed obvious.

How can we do this better?

Our school year began the last week of July. A convergence of multiple identities—teachers fresh-faced from time away from student teaching, others with years of knowledge and expertise, and some with

experience outside of education—met for the first time in a week-long new teacher orientation. The work began as we reflected on feedback provided on our 2017 New Teacher Orientation. New teachers wrote that they "felt disconnected, revolving doors of presenters, too many papers, some of this could have been covered in an email, still not sure who my mentor is." As organizers of this annual event, we asked ourselves, "How can we do this better?" New teacher orientation is our first impression to candidates, our shining moment. It needs to be executed thoughtfully and flawlessly. We began considering how we might help the newest teachers in our district connect on a personal level with the Five Core Propositions. We know if an individual's values and beliefs align with those of our district, then individuals will work harder toward the success of our system. We introduced each and every session of New Teacher Orientation with a Core Proposition. We mindfully built in time for new teachers to read and reflect on each of the Core Propositions, taking every opportunity to immerse new teachers in the language and ideology of the Core Propositions. If we couldn't connect our work to a Core

Proposition, we questioned its purpose in moving teacher practice and student learning forward. For example, teachers need to know how to submit absence requests, but they don't need to learn it during New Teacher Orientation. The Five Core Propositions articulate what teachers should know and be able to do in relation to the students we serve, and also know what those students need in order to be successful. For example, scripting the first day of school aligns with Core Proposition 4. The Five Core Propositions became the touchstone of our New Teacher Orientation. However, grounding new teachers in the Five Core Propositions was simply not enough in creating an organizational identity.

Our new teachers leave the cocoon of orientation and move to eight different school sites, where they meet and interact with dozens of other teachers. We knew the reality that individuals in our district connected the Five Core Propositions to National Board Certification, and, for many, that Certification was viewed as an elitist club—a gold star sought after by only a select few, something 'other' teachers accomplished. We aspired to shift the paradigm that National Board Certification was truly about elevating the teaching profession. The dialogue had to revolve around accomplished teaching. Again, we considered the question, "How can we do this better?" We revisited how we might provide an opportunity for experienced teachers to connect on a personal level with the Five Core Propositions. Veteran teachers have a broad range of professional knowledge and expertise. The Five Core Propositions are written by teachers for teachers; we knew the credibility of the ideology would resonate with all teachers. We recognized that if veteran teachers could see themselves and their professional

practice in the Core Propositions, then we would be creating shared ownership of the organizational identity of accomplished teaching. We would significantly impact the quality of teaching in every classroom in our district. It was imperative to our success that these conversations happen at the site level. This is where teachers had developed trust that would lend itself to a sense of safe vulnerability, where they could be authentic. Thus, we constructed a protocol that we facilitated with every teacher at every site. We gave space for teachers to explore their deepest professional values and purpose. We provided every teacher and administrator a copy of the Five Core Propositions; it became our common language.

***We gave space for teachers
to explore their deepest
professional values and purpose.***

As we reflected on other professional learning opportunities offered throughout the district, we once again noticed misalignment and lack of purpose. We again asked ourselves, "How can we do this better?" We had to develop concrete actions to ensure the Five Core Propositions remained the foundation of our organizational identity. We began our work by developing a three-year mentoring and induction program that includes seven professional learning seminars for first-year teachers, seven seminars for second-year teachers, six seminars for third-year teachers, and five seminars for site-based mentors. We established the ritual of connecting every learning experience objective to one of the Core Propositions. Every seminar was an opportunity to renew and reinterpret the Core Propositions. They became the narrative. They were not another thing; they were THE thing.

We reflected on the level of support we provided to the veteran teachers in our profession. After teachers were immersed in the Five Core Propositions for three years, how could we provide additional opportunities for growth and leadership? “How could we do this better?” We knew sustaining an organizational identity and a system of professional development anchored in the Core Propositions required us to empower individuals and entrust them with responsibility for the success of the system. We began by creating leadership positions for National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) as district articulation leads, professional development leads, ‘observe me’ classroom hosts, and National Board Certification candidate support providers. The shared responsibility created ownership, inclusion, and more individuals embracing the ideology of the Core Propositions. We used every opportunity available to reflect, remind, reinforce, and reignite the collective identity and purpose of our teachers. The Five Core Propositions began to be our collective integrity.

If the principles articulated in the Five Core Propositions were the basis of our organizational identity, then how do we support individuals to improve their craft? What was the purpose of evaluation? Our current evaluation tool was not aligned to our organizational identity of accomplished teaching. “How can we do this better?” We started the work by assembling a team of NBCTs and administrators who set forth on the task of eliminating all of the unimportant minutiae, such as ‘the teacher surpasses district expectations by arriving before and leaving after designated times/contract hours’ and became laser-focused on the craft of teaching. We completely revised our teacher evaluation tool to

measure only criteria supporting the Core Propositions. The new evaluation instrument provided clarity and certainty; it set high benchmarks. As non-Certified teachers began reaching and exceeding those benchmarks, affirmations of accomplished teaching, the principles of the Five Core Propositions, became a deep conviction.

The legacy of organizational identity aligned to the Five Core Propositions has positively impacted teacher retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. Comparing statistics from the 2017–2018 school year to the 2020–2021 school year, the number of teachers with 0–2 years of experience has decreased by 20%, the number of long-term subs or teacher interns has decreased by 50%, and the number of unfilled positions has decreased by 29%. Twenty percent of our teachers are Certified or in the Certification process. Of new teachers, 77% demonstrated proficiency in the areas of planning for instruction, instructional scaffolding, formative assessment, and student engagement. State test scores demonstrate the direct impact on student outcomes. From the 2017–2018 school year to the 2018–2019 school year, five out of eight schools improved in English language arts and math scores. Four schools improved their school letter grade, and two schools maintained their school letter grade of A and B, respectively.

Growth is not linear, not a clean trajectory of refinement and growth; but rather more like the Sigmoid curve, a cycle of learning, growing, and declining. The challenge is, even when we think we are at our best, at the pinnacle of our game, we must reassess and prepare for the inevitable decline and ask, “How can we do this better?” ➤

Reflection Questions

1. Where are there opportunities for improvement in your context?
2. Why does that improvement matter?
3. What do you anticipate will be the impact if that improvement is achieved?
4. What will be evidence of that impact?



Christie Olsen, NBCT, currently supports elementary school teachers in their first through third years of employment in the Lake Havasu Unified School District. She has served in the district for 29 years. Olsen Certified as a Middle Childhood Generalist National Board Certified Teacher in 2002, recertified in 2012, and is currently completing her Maintenance of Certificate. She believes National Board Certification has the potential to impact entire school systems. Olsen has been married to her husband for 30 years; they have two grown daughters who are changing the world.

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About the Arizona K12 Center

Founded in 1999, the Arizona K12 Center supports Arizona teachers with rich and relevant learning opportunities. With the practitioner standing at the intersection of theory and practice, the Arizona K12 Center develops and facilitates leading professional learning solutions for today's classrooms. The Center is home to the Arizona Teacher Program, which supports teachers wherever they are along the continuum of practice, and is renowned for its comprehensive system of support for those seeking National Board Certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

“Every student in our nation deserves access to a highly accomplished teacher for every year of their learning journey.”

Dr. Alaina Adams, Phoenix Union High School District

About National Board Certification

National Board Certification is the highest certificate an educator can achieve in the United States. Administered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, its Certification is a rigorous and reflective process that requires teachers to demonstrate the National Board Standards in their practice.

Since 1996, teachers throughout Arizona have been seeking and achieving Certification, and the impact National Board Certified Teachers have on students and the profession has proven to be significant. The Arizona K12 Center provides guidance, resources, and financial support for teachers to pursue Certification. Learn more at: azk12.org/national-board-candidate-program

About the Arizona Teacher Program

The Arizona Teacher Program supports teachers across the continuum of practice, building capacity for teacher leadership while providing support to the newest members of the teaching profession. For new teachers, the program provides a robust system of induction support that includes mentoring and targeted professional learning opportunities. For their mentors, it includes connection to the Arizona New Teacher Induction Network and opportunities to hone their skills as a mentor or coach. The program provides support to those who seek National Board Certification and teacher leadership development opportunities through the Arizona TeacherSolutions® Team and annual Teacher Leadership Institute. The Arizona Teacher Program builds on the premise that the success of Arizona's students is directly tied to the success of their teachers, and it is through this program that Arizona teachers can advance their skills.



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***“Just like your students,
the students down the
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Justin Price, NBCT, Paradise Valley Unified School District

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