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*Journey*  
is its own  
**REWARD:**



Whitney Sherman

## *Supporting National Board Candidates*

In 1996, California art teacher Dede Tisone-Bartels triumphantly achieved certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Unlike state licensure, a check on beginners' minimum competency, National Board Certification™ is a mark of distinction for experienced teachers. Available in specific content areas for specific student age ranges, certification requires candidates to demonstrate that they have met a set of advanced standards in their teaching areas. Doing so is no mean feat.

Written by  
Joy Zimmerman

**WestEd**

*Improving education through  
research, development, and service*

Tisone-Bartels compares the nearly yearlong process to climbing Mount Whitney, one of North America's highest peaks, which she also did that same year. For both, the preparation and execution were arduous and exhilarating, the accomplishment more rewarding than she had envisioned. From each, she emerged feeling stronger, more knowledgeable about herself, and better prepared for the next challenge. But while she had prepared for and bested Whitney in the



company of mutually supportive friends, the process of attaining National Board certification was a solo experience. Tisone-Bartels recalls the year as a “tough” one. More importantly, she believes she could have learned more from the assessment process and become an even *better* teacher had there been a support system for her.

Tisone-Bartels’ sense of isolation during her candidacy year was due partly to the times. In 1996, the certification process was still very new. There simply weren’t many teachers who had already gone through it and could offer guidance to subsequent candidates. Moreover, the prevailing sense, even among some National Board members and staff, was that worthy candidates shouldn’t need assistance in the certification process. Many thought receiving help would be akin to cheating.

Times have changed. Today, Tisone-Bartels is one of 4,899 Board certified teachers nationwide. As a group, they are a rich source of experience and support for new candidates, some 7,000 of whom are now going through the assessment process. More to the point, the National Board now actively *encourages* candidates to work together in a support system of some sort, and even offers training for facilitators who provide support. (See box: “Supporting the Support Providers.”)

Prompting this shift was the growing recognition that the richest potential of Board certification lies not in the reward itself, but in the journey. Like Tisone-Bartels’ climbing team, certification candidates who prepare together gain much more than just emotional support. They can plumb each other’s knowledge of teaching strategies, discuss relevant National Board standards, jointly analyze student work, and, in the process, develop a deeper understanding of teaching and learning. In short, they will experience powerful professional development — whether or not they reach the peak.

Currently on leave from classroom teaching, Tisone-Bartels serves as interim director of a professional development project working to deepen the content knowledge of teachers in the visual and performing arts. But in the midst of this new undertaking, she has

made time to join the growing number of National Board certified teachers and other educators offering encouragement, advice, and feedback to candidates now undergoing the rigorous certification process. She is doing so through one of a variety of candidate support programs — both formal and informal — that are mushrooming across the country. (See “The Sprouting of Support Programs.”)

Recognizing the value of having these relatively new programs share their approaches and experiences, WestEd has sponsored a series of events over the last year convening a range of interested educators, policymakers, and funders. At the first such gathering, a working symposium called “In Quest of Excellence: Supporting National Board Candidates,” the tone was set by Lee Shulman. The Stanford education professor and president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching reminded participants that “one important aspect of a test is whether the full experience of preparing for and taking it helps develop the characteristics that the test is measuring.”

In the mid-1980s, it was Shulman, with colleague Gary Sykes, who conceived of a national board for professional teaching standards, governed largely by teachers, that would build both recognition for and capacity within the profession. They envisioned a certification system centering on performance, an assessment so closely tied to effective teaching that the process of going through it would, itself, be state-of-the-art professional development for certification candidates. Further, they believed that just as PhD candidates receive feedback and coaching from members of their doctoral committees while writing a dissertation, National Board candidates should receive support in the certification process. The result, they expected, would be greater learning for the candidates and, ultimately, more effective teaching. While it took some years before everyone saw the value of a coached assessment, experience to date suggests they were right.

Participating in that first symposium were representatives of seven candidate support programs :

- Bank of America Exemplary Teachers for Arizona Program;

- Great Plains Center for National Certification, operated by Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas;
- Idaho NBPTS Initiative, initiated and sponsored by The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation and involving all of the state's teacher education programs, each partnering with participating school districts;
- San Antonio Independent School District's candidate support program;
- The NBPTS Resource Center at Stanford University;
- The Support Network, collaboratively operated by Los Angeles Unified School District, United Teachers Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Education Partnership; and
- UCLA NBPTS Project, operated by Center X in the School of Education at University of California, Los Angeles.

By capturing what these programs shared at the symposium and in later interviews, this brief aims to help professional developers see what goes into making an effective support program. At the same time, teachers not yet certified can gain a clearer sense of what the process entails — in commitment and benefit — and the kind of support they might hope for.

## *Diverse Support Approaches: Common Elements*

There is no one best way to construct a support program. As the seven efforts represented at the WestEd symposium illustrate, each will have its own character. One program may be highly informal, another highly structured. Some are funded by districts, some by corporate or family foundations, some by universities, and some barely at all. Most are designed as one-year efforts, but some span two. Yet however they may differ in design and approach, all programs address two fundamental needs: helping candidates understand and manage the assessment process, and helping them become better at analyzing student work — whether an essay, a science experiment write-up, a self-portrait, or anything else — and reflecting on what that work says about the teaching behind it.

## *Supporting the Support Providers*

Several years ago, the National Board began offering a Facilitator's Institute, preparing participants to provide candidate support. In addition to learning about the link between NBPTS standards and assessments, participants learn about the scoring process and about the rubrics for the assessment exercises. Now, a second advanced institute is available for experienced facilitators, to help them, among other things, learn about supporting candidates in their analytic and reflective writing, become more familiar with the Getting Started section of the portfolio, and further explore the nature of their own roles as support providers. For information about either of these opportunities, visit the NBPTS Web site < [www.nbpts.org/nbpts/about/news/institutes.html](http://www.nbpts.org/nbpts/about/news/institutes.html) > or call: 248/351-4444, ext. 551.

Meanwhile, over the past year, WestEd has received a growing number of inquiries from educators throughout its own service region — Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah — about how to provide effective candidate support. In response, the agency has begun a new initiative to develop a comprehensive support system for support providers themselves. The goal is to offer the training, materials, and support they need to effectively assist teacher candidates preparing to become National Board certified. WestEd intends to do so, in part, by helping support providers — both individuals and programs — learn from each other. The working symposium in early 1999 planted the seeds for a network of support providers. It was the first of what are intended to be regular network meetings in which providers share materials, experiences, questions, and insights. WestEd will also continue, as needed, to offer a workshop for potential support providers who are new to the NBPTS candidate process and seek background information.

WestEd is also currently exploring the development of certificate-specific curriculum materials for use by support groups or candidates themselves who feed the need to ramp up their content knowledge while preparing for the National Board assessment. For information about future seminars or the network, contact Judith Shulman < [jshulma@WestEd.org](mailto:jshulma@WestEd.org) > or Joan Peterson < [jpeters@WestEd.org](mailto:jpeters@WestEd.org) > .

## The Sprouting of Support Programs

Candidate support programs evolve in a variety of ways. Some are initiated by universities eager to extend their role in teacher development and, at the same time, to begin integrating National Board standards into their own teacher education programs. David Berliner, Dean of Education at Arizona State University in Tempe, offers an additional and quite practical reason when he says, “We’re always looking for good classroom teachers with whom to place our student teachers.” Through its support program, funded by an endowment grant from the Bank of America and operated in partnership with the Arizona Education Association, Arizona State’s School of Education hopes to build a critical mass of National Board-certified teachers who will mentor and guide teachers-in-training throughout the state.

Districts start support programs for similar reasons. A key goal is to build capacity by developing and identifying accomplished teachers who can, in turn, serve as teacher leaders and classroom models throughout the district. In Idaho, The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation, a family foundation, sought to develop a candidate support program with the ambitious goal of improving the quality of teaching statewide.

While the particulars may vary from one program to the next, the underlying driver appears to be the shared belief not only that the National Board assessment process can engender improved classroom teaching but, equally important, that certification nurtures the proliferation of teacher leaders who are so key to raising the overall quality of teaching and learning everywhere.

The former is a little like a classroom teacher preparing students to take their first standardized test. The preparation is invaluable because, without it, students may not be able to effectively demonstrate what they know; but it does little to further their understanding of the content. By contrast, helping teachers become more thoughtful about their own practice will likely result in more accomplished teaching. Both types of support are essential.

### Helping Candidates Manage the Process

The NBPTS assessment process is demanding enough that even the most confident and enthusiastic of candidates can feel daunted at times. For some candidates, their own student days long past, the idea of tackling four 90-minute Assessment Center exercises over the course of a day can be scary. But what looms largest by far and will demand most of their time, intellectual effort, and emotional energy is the requirement to develop six portfolio entries as evidence that their teaching exemplifies National Board standards. (See “Different Prompts for Different Certificates.”)

To help candidates manage the assessment *process*, support programs commonly work with them to clarify the required commitment and manage expectations; attempt to generate administrative support for candidates; provide some structure for getting through the lengthy assessment process; ramp up candidates’ communications skills; and help candidates prepare for the Assessment Center experience.

**Clarifying the commitment.** As a rule, programs begin with an orientation aimed at helping potential candidates get a realistic understanding of the commitment they are about to make. “We don’t want them to think it’s snap,” says Cathy Armstrong, co-director of The Support Network in Los Angeles. Two hundred hours is a common time estimate for completing the assessment process, but many teachers speak of spending significantly more time than that. Harder by far to quantify are the emotional and intellectual resources required.

The specifics of orientation differ greatly according to the program, of course. In many instances, candidates receive a reiteration of information they

may have already read in National Board materials, but which may not have sunk in. For example, they may review and explore the fact that four of the six required portfolio entries must be classroom based: two focused on written student work and two that include videotapes of the candidate's teaching. Candidates may be reminded that each entry must include a detailed written commentary describing, analyzing, and reflecting on the teaching practice portrayed as it relates to the National Board standards. The other two entries reflect the candidate's commitment to students' families and relationships with fellow teachers. Likewise, candidates will probably be reminded that Assessment Center exercises will focus on content knowledge, as well as age- and content-appropriate teaching strategies.

Candidates may also wade into the box of assessment materials, itself complex enough to be discouraging. The instructions for completing the portfolio entries are necessarily long and, in many ways, laborious. The Early Adolescent Generalist

materials, as an example, exceed 200 pages, including the standards themselves, specific prompts for the entries, instructions, and various forms essential to the process. "People see the box with the assessment materials and wonder, 'What have I gotten myself into,'" says Linda Hazel, director of the Kansas program.

Participants in UCLA's three-day orientation receive a boiled-down version of what the certification process and the support program are all about. Potential candidates get homework, read research articles, present and discuss two pieces of student work, and share the layouts of their respective classrooms. According to Program Director Adrienne Mack, this last activity is intended to jump-start teachers' analysis of their own practice. By asking themselves, "How does my classroom reflect what I believe about teaching and learning," she says, teachers begin the metacognitive self-reflection required in the National Board assessment — and so essential to good teaching.

## *Different Prompts for Different Certificates*

By 1999, 12 years after inception of the NBPTS and just five years after offering its first two certificates, the NBPTS had developed standards for accomplished teaching in 21 fields, with assessments available for 16, including, for example, Early Childhood/Generalist, Early Adolescence/Mathematics, and Adolescence and Young Adulthood/Social Studies-History. No matter what the specific certificate area, all candidates must develop portfolio entries that document their accomplishments in two areas: collaboration in the professional community and outreach to families and community. But the other four portfolio entries focus on what happens in a teacher's classroom and are, naturally, more content specific. What follows are two examples of portfolio prompts in two different certificate areas. (The prompts in each area are the same from year to year, but the Assessment Center exercises change annually.)

*Adolescence and Young Adulthood/Science.* The four content-specific entries for this certificate are titled "Teaching a Major Idea Over Time," "Assessing Student Work," "Active Science Inquiry," and "Whole Class Discussion about Science." In the first, candidates are asked to submit a written commentary, documentation of three instructional activities, and two samples of student work resulting from each instructional activity. Through these submissions, candidates are expected to show evidence of their ability to select and justify the appropriateness of a major idea in science, and to plan and implement instruction over time to help students develop an in-depth understanding of the idea. The instructional period can range from a minimum of 3 weeks to a maximum of 12.

*Early Childhood/Generalist.* Entries for this certificate are titled "Introduction to Your Classroom Community," "Reflecting on a Teaching and Learning Sequence," "Engaging Children in Science Learning," and "Examining a Child's Literacy Development." In the first, candidates are asked to show how they structure their time, establish rules and routines, and organize space and materials to promote children's social development, mutual respect, and emerging independence. In addition to the written commentary, they are asked for a videotape highlighting their interaction with students.



**Managing expectations.** Tightly woven into all support programs is an ongoing effort to sustain candidate morale. Apprehension is not an uncommon emotion for those who, in the words of Mary Dean Barringer, NBPTS Vice-President of Outreach and Mobilization, “are asked to make their professional selves public.” The perceived risk is not only in sharing one’s work with fellow candidates or other support providers, but in setting oneself up for possible failure. The reality is that not all candidates will achieve certification on their first try. Recognizing this, the National Board gives candidates three years to pass following payment of their initial assessment fee, and it has recently begun allowing candidates to “bank” successful entries so that when they apply for a “retake,” they don’t have to redo everything. Even so, says Barringer, one of the continuing challenges for support providers is to help candidates manage expectations, their own and others’.

Invariably, some teachers will have second thoughts after hearing more about the demands of the certification process. Depending on what else is going on in their lives, some may decide they’re not prepared for the time or emotional commitment. Others may come away from orientation wondering whether their teaching is up to par. And, to the degree that they feel the certification assessment is a “test to see if you’re good enough,” teachers are more likely to shy away, wary of the success–or–failure paradigm.

A key task for support providers, therefore, is to broaden teachers’ understanding of the process. Candidates need to know, for example, that certification is not premised on the idea that there is one right way to teach. Standards can be met through quite different instructional styles. Many support programs encourage potential candidates to stay involved even if the teachers have decided to postpone applying for certification. In Idaho’s orientation, would-be candidates are asked to complete a self-assessment aimed at identifying their readiness. Stephanie Salzman, Associate Dean of Education at Idaho State University, says teachers who rate themselves low on the pre-assessment usually choose to postpone their candidacy until they are better prepared. To help them become so, the program allows teachers to complete and receive feedback on portfolio-like activities. People

who decide against applying for candidacy after going through UCLA’s summer institute are “invited to continue with the group and do everything *but* submit the final portfolio,” says Adrienne Mack. Many programs encourage these teachers to help coach colleagues who do proceed with the assessment.

Because the assessment preparation process itself is widely considered to be such effective professional development, support providers agree that having an extra year of pre-candidacy “practice” can be invaluable. Once teachers apply to the National Board for candidacy, the official clock starts running and they must complete certification requirements within a proscribed period of time. However, there is no prohibition against beginning to prepare for candidacy well before officially applying. Mack says teachers should give themselves “permission” to take more than a year in their certification efforts. Linda Hazel tells teachers in advance that three years is not an unreasonable time span to prepare for and achieve certification.

John Guardia, who coordinates the San Antonio support program, says he portrays the program as professional development plain and simple, telling would-be candidates that “certification is just icing on the cake.” The San Antonio program, run by the District in partnership with University of Texas, was conceived as a two-year program. Its pre-candidacy year looks much like the candidacy year of most other programs — with the exception that participants are not under the stress of developing their actual portfolio entries. During the course of this first year, teachers get in the habit of writing regularly by keeping daily reflective logs; make and analyze four videotapes; and become comfortable analyzing student work together. The message throughout, says Guardia, is “analyze, analyze, analyze.” So confident does the district feel about the value of this first year, that it is willing to pay the certification fees of those who go through it even if they subsequently decide to work on their own during their actual candidacy year.

**Generating administrative support.** A key reason for providing a comprehensive and realistic overview of the assessment process at an early date is that candidates may well need time to “get ready,” to

organize their lives both at home and at school in preparation for the extensive commitment. Guardia echoes many of his fellow support providers in observing that the teachers most likely to become National Board candidates are the same ones who are already involved with multiple reform efforts. “They’re already pressed,” he says, “and they will have to say no to something else.”

Recognizing this, many programs take it upon themselves to engage principals and district superintendents. The intent is to help them realize the value of the National Board’s assessment process to their teachers and, through them, to their schools and districts. Idaho State

University Associate Professor and NBPTS consultant Traci Bliss, who designed Idaho’s support program, sees administrative buy-in as vital to candidates — so much so that in the program’s early days she asked The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation to subsidize dozens of the state’s superintendents, principals, and other administrators in attending some National Board meetings so they could experience firsthand how the certification process promotes better teaching.

UCLA’s Mack and her colleagues address regularly scheduled principals’ meetings to inform administrators about the powerful professional development inherent in this process and to solicit their aid in recruiting — and supporting — candidates. Once teachers apply for certification, Mack sends a letter on university stationery notifying the candidate’s principal and other administrators all the way up to the district superintendent. Ongoing reports about the candidate’s progress are then sent to the principal (and copied to the superintendent) throughout the process, reminding them of the candidate’s continued need for support.

**Offering structure.** By their very existence, support programs offer candidates a degree of structure in

approaching the assessment. As part of that structure, many programs give candidates the opportunity to:

- participate in regular large group meetings at which teachers receive and go over information of interest across certification areas, such as how to videotape or, in some of the more academically oriented programs, new research findings;
- join certificate-specific small groups whose members might, among other things, discuss their respective understanding of the relevant teaching standards, or jointly discuss and provide feedback about a teacher’s written portfolio commentaries; and,
- interact on an as-needed basis with an individual support provider, who might, for example, prompt a teacher to think more deeply about his or her choice of student work for a portfolio entry, or simply provide a sympathetic ear if the candidate is feeling temporarily overwhelmed by the experience.

*Two communications-related issues show up on virtually every curriculum: writing and videotaping.*

Minimally, such structure can help candidates keep track of where they are in the process and help them maintain forward momentum. Some programs actually require candidates to complete certain portfolio entries by certain times. UCLA candidates, for example, are expected to have two entries drafted by September. The Idaho program requires candidates to turn in draft entries on a regular schedule; in turn, they receive systematic feedback at least monthly from university faculty and Idaho teachers who have already achieved National Board certification. The support offered by Emporia State University’s NBPTS program is, for the most part, individualized, scheduled as needed, and usually provided via distance communication technology. But halfway through the year, Linda Hazel says, “we call any candidate with whom we haven’t been in regular contact and ask how they’re doing.”



While some programs impose structure, others simply offer it for candidates to take or leave — and here may lie one of the biggest variables across programs. At one end of the spectrum is a Stanford program conceived by professional development researcher and Stanford education professor Linda Darling-Hammond, herself a former member of the National Board. Coordinator Misty Sato, a graduate student in education, identifies it as “one of the more informal programs.” The program offers a broad array of resources, of which candidates may or may not avail themselves. For example, teachers are invited to one informational meeting each month over the period of seven months. There, in both large groups and small break-out sessions, they can discuss such things as how to produce and examine classroom videos; how to analyze student work; and how to prepare for the Assessment Center exercises. But the program has no participation requirements. “We’re here as a resource for people, not to tell them what to do,” says Sato, who suggests that a more rigid structure is needed only if there is an accountability issue for a funder or the university. In fact, on the other end of the spectrum, programs that offer candidates graduate credit, that subsidize application fees, or whose funding depends on acceptable pass rates do tend to be more formal in nature and are more likely to require candidates’ regular participation.

But Diana Cotter, co-director of The Support Network, sees another reason for more formal requirements. Support Network participants are asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding — essentially, a contract — promising to attend the requisite number of meetings. If they don’t show up, they get a phone call. “It’s not because we’re control freaks,” says Cotter. “The group is what makes the assessment process stronger. For it to be effective, members have to develop a certain level of trust, and if people hop in and out like fleas, it won’t happen. ... A support program needs a structure that will let collaboration develop.”

#### **Ramping up candidate communications skills.**

As a rule, support programs have a curriculum of some sort. Some curricula, especially those developed by support programs in which universities play a key role, are more extensive than others. The Idaho, UCLA, and

San Antonio programs, for example, have curricula in which, among other things, candidates read and discuss education research and may learn about new research-based pedagogy. According to Stephanie Salzman, some Idaho candidates might well receive an assignment “to write a research-based rationale for why they chose a particular assessment method for their class.”

Most program managers, however, speak emphatically about the need to have a curriculum that is responsive rather than written in stone. John Guardia says the overall curriculum for San Antonio’s pre-candidacy year is kept “purposefully flexible so the program can respond to the needs of participants” as these are identified in small group meetings and in other ways. That said, there are two communications-related issues that show up on virtually every curriculum: writing and videotaping.

*Writing.* Because each National Board assessment entry must include a written reflective commentary, high level writing skills are essential. Yet, depending on what they teach, candidates may have had little opportunity or reason over the course of their professional lives to hone their writing skills to the level required by the assessment. Even teachers who write prolifically might do so in a style — narrative, for example — not called for in the assessment. The upshot is that, as one support provider notes, “writing can be a real stumbling block for lots of candidates.”

Writing support takes a variety of forms. All programs make it a focus for a large group meeting, trying to help candidates understand, among other things, the distinctions between various kinds of writing the assessment calls for (e.g., descriptive, analytical, and reflective). Just as professional writers receive feedback from their editors, in many programs, although not all, National Board candidates receive editorial feedback on their draft entries from one or more support providers, whether fellow candidates, a teacher coach like Tisone-Bartels or, at some universities, a graduate student or an education professor. One support provider feels strongly that, if at all possible, candidates should have the option of being matched with a writing coach. All agree that one cannot overemphasize the importance of writing effectively for this assessment.



*Videotaping.* If relatively few teachers find themselves needing to write reflectively or analytically over the course of their normal teaching duties, fewer still are called upon to videotape their teaching. Thus, the requirement to develop two videotaped portfolio entries can be more than a little daunting, both practically speaking and intellectually. There's the need for equipment, for knowing how to effectively operate it, and then, equally challenging, the understanding of what to videotape. Virtually all programs offer at least one session on how to make and assess videos: giving tips on where to station the camera; reminding candidates that the focus of the video should include students, not just the teacher; and, as Linda Hazel only half-jokes, reminding them that "the Board doesn't care if they're having a bad hair day." Rather, the NBPTS cares about the quality of the teaching and learning evidenced in the videotape.

In some instances, other teachers volunteer to do videotaping for the candidate, and at least one program provides substitute pay to free certified teachers to videotape for current candidates. One well-funded program even started out paying for professional videographers to tape for candidates, but has subsequently decided to put the money into making sure that candidates have access to good quality, easy-to-use video equipment. Some support providers recommend that teachers start videotaping on their own — using a tripod — in order to help students get comfortable with having a camera in the room before actual entries are taped.

**Preparing for the Assessment Center.** Teachers who are accustomed to giving timed tests to their students may, nonetheless, feel quite intimidated by the prospect of taking one themselves. And because the Assessment Center exercises are aimed at eliciting the depth and breadth of a candidate's knowledge of both content and pedagogical content, a teacher may fear simply "not knowing enough." While the National Board materials themselves and the NEA/AFT Candidate Guide offer helpful suggestions about how to prepare for the exercises, support programs can make a large contribution by demystifying the experience and dispelling the fear. Most try to do so, in part, by bringing in teachers who have already gone through the

## Districts and States See the Light

A growing number of states and local school districts offer incentives to encourage National Board certification. According to the National Board, as of August 1999, 38 states and 129 local school districts had enacted legislation or adopted policies in support of the NBPTS certification process — and that number continues to grow. The application fee for candidacy is \$2,300, and fee support of some degree or another is offered in 24 states and 72 districts. Salary supplements for those who have achieved certification are offered by 24 states and 71 districts — not all of which are the same ones offering fee support. Fifteen states allow Board certified teachers from out of state to teach in their states without going through any additional assessment process, and 18 states allow Board certification to count toward license renewal and required continuing education units.

In California, for example, the legislature established an incentive program that allows school districts to provide one-time awards of \$10,000 to public school teachers attaining Board certification. It also allows licensed teachers from other states who have been Board certified to teach in California without taking any additional tests. Florida's legislature appropriated \$12 million to pay for a variety of support efforts, including 90 percent of candidates' certification fee, a 10 percent salary increase for successful candidates over the six-year life of the certificate, and a 10 percent bonus to certified teachers who turn around and serve as mentors to new teachers or support providers to NBPTS candidates. In Idaho, the state considers NBPTS teachers to be "master teachers" and they receive a \$2,000 annual bonus for five years.

At the district level, Los Angeles unified School District and the local teachers association agreed that Board certified teachers can receive up to a 15 percent increase in compensation above the base rate. Half of that increase comes immediately in the form of a salary adjustment. The other half is offered as incentive pay for teachers to work for up to 92 hours in a professional development capacity for the district. The intent is to capitalize on the growing cadre of certified teachers to help build districtwide capacity. At the other end of the size spectrum for districts, the Apache Junction District in Arizona pays \$500 of a candidate's certification fee.

Both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association recognize the value of the certification process and offer loan programs to cover certification fees for members.

For the latest information about state and local support, including candidate fee subsidies, visit the National Board's Web site: < [www.nbpts.org/nbpts/where/](http://www.nbpts.org/nbpts/where/) > .



process to explain how they prepared, what the experience was like, and how they managed it. They may talk about such things as the time it takes to read and absorb the prompts, reading the whole prompt before starting to work, taking notes, and the kinds of materials candidates can bring into the Assessment Center. Some programs also go over sample exercises, pulling them apart and helping candidates think about how to analyze what's being asked and how to plan their response time. In a similar vein, one program asks candidates to examine a piece of student work in their certificate area and identify what it says about: what the student knows compared to relevant content standards, what the student doesn't know, what he or she is ready to learn, and what kind of lesson might be effective in moving the student ahead.

Here, too, candidates often break into certificate-alike groups to consider and discuss sample exercises and, sometimes, to learn about or share specific content information. This is a time when many programs bring in outside experts to address content-specific questions that have been raised by candidates but not yet been addressed. In fact, several programs offer precisely the same example of bringing in a professor or someone else steeped in the latest knowledge about early childhood development to talk about the role of play, which is a key issue in assessment exercises for the Early Childhood/Generalist certificate.

### Helping Candidates Become More Analytical about Their Own Teaching

As noted earlier, what makes the National Board certification process such potentially powerful professional development is its inherent requirement that candidates analyze their own practice against the National Board standards. Certification rests not only on candidates' actual teaching, but on their ability to explain the rationale behind it, the underlying *why* of their practice. As one support provider puts it, they

must be able to articulate "the method to their madness." Are they teaching according to some algorithm or are they making each teaching decision based on appropriate teaching goals and a solid understanding of content, pedagogy, and, especially important, the needs of individual students? Are they able to use student work to make appropriate instructional decisions? Are they able to reflect on and learn from their own experiences? To communicate all this, candidates must include with each portfolio entry a written commentary, explaining not only what they were trying to accomplish in a particular lesson or activity, but what was going on in their heads as they taught and what they learned from analyzing the student work samples and the classroom videotapes. At the heart of this is a candidate's ability to think clearly and carefully about his or her own teaching, to become metacognitive about his or her work. It's here that the second type of candidate support comes into play.

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According to National Board assessors, most candidates who don't achieve certification fail at

least in part because they have not provided evidence that they meet the standards. There are 11 to 15 standards in each certificate area, each one measured in the assessment process, either in the portfolio prompts or in assessment center exercises. Each standard is measured in more than one way, and each portfolio or prompt or exercise gives the candidate an opportunity to address more than one standard.

### Setting the stage for focused examination.

Getting familiar with the standards and beginning to understand how to analyze student work to see what it says about teaching and learning are clearly things candidates can and should undertake on their own. But support programs can help by bringing in speakers or facilitating large group discussions on relevant topics, such as how to analyze student work. Such large-group formats are essential when programs are trying to serve a growing number of candidates. But no one

doubts that it's in one-on-one or small group discussions that the real learning and the habit-building takes place. In this intimate and focused context, candidates can move beyond simply understanding the standards intellectually. They can grapple closely with hard data — student work samples and classroom videotapes, their own and those of other candidates — to see what this evidence reveals about teaching practice and whether it exemplifies “accomplished teaching” according to the standards.

Consider, for example, what might happen when high school science candidates come together to review one member's draft for the portfolio entry on assessment. Sarah, in her fourth year of teaching, brings material from a unit she recently taught in her ninth-grade conceptual physics class where her students were learning about sound as a vibration.

The entry asks for three classroom assessments, formal or informal, from different points in the unit, accompanied by work samples from the same two students, each representing a different teaching challenge. Sarah has chosen a written pre-assessment showing what the students already knew about sound; an end of the unit multiple choice and short-answer test; and her evaluation of class presentations in which the students explained how vibration, pitch, and frequency work to produce sound on a particular musical instrument of their choice.

Sarah hasn't finished writing the accompanying commentary. In it, she'll explain relevant context, instructional goals and strategies, and her general evaluation criteria; and she will reflect on what she might do differently, and why, when teaching the same material again. First she wants to check with the group about the choices she's made so far and talk through some ideas.

In the discussion, her colleagues help Sarah see where she is meeting the required standards, including

her use of a range of assessment strategies, whether her chosen student work samples reveal progress toward her stated learning goals, and what insights she has gained about teaching this unit. Sarah gets positive feedback about meeting the standard on using a variety of assessment strategies. Her use of a *range* of assessments makes it more likely that *all* of her students had the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. Sarah has a good mix of formal and informal measures, covering multiple modes of gauging student learning. The group also notes the pedagogic value of her informal pre-assessment, which helped prepare her to build on the knowledge kids bring to the lesson.

But her final assessment, the students' formal presentation, raises real questions. As Sarah explains her evaluation criteria, it becomes evident that she had focused on such issues as whether the students' presentations were clear, well organized, and whether they made eye contact with the class while speaking. Where's the science, her peers ask. The entry must offer clear evidence of the teacher's ability to use assessment to advance appropriate learning goals. How do you know your kids really understand the concepts of pitch and frequency if your criteria are mostly about communications?

Sarah comes away from this lively discussion with a much deeper understanding of the need to match assessments with learning goals. She had focused on communication in the oral presentation, she realizes, because she was relying too heavily on the end-of-unit test to gauge students' understanding of concepts. She also now recognizes that *neither* assessment reveals enough about students' underlying misconceptions. It occurs to her that a better way of getting this important information next time would be to do project-based assessment, asking students to construct an instrument and explain how it works as one way to demonstrate their understanding of sound and the relationship of pitch and frequency.

*The point is to “provide a safe, secure environment in which to collaboratively explore and learn from student work.”*

## Turning to the Experts

Increasingly, the ranks of those who design, influence, and actually provide candidate support include teachers who have already gone through the certification process themselves. Their effectiveness in helping current candidates seems to depend less on whether they have actually achieved certification and more on the fact that they have gone through this very demanding, self-reflective process and understand what's involved. Their knowledge of the process, of the standards, and of what's entailed in analyzing and learning from evidence, whether student work or videotapes of classroom interaction, gives them a lot to offer not only to individual candidates, but to support programs themselves. Seeking advice and guidance from candidates — both past and current — has become the norm. Linda Hazel, who directs the Great Plains Center for National Certification, says she learned the value of candidate input in a very real way early on: "The first year, we gave candidates what we thought they needed in terms of support, and we had a low pass rate. The second year, we let them tell us what they needed, and we had a high pass rate."

As a result, Sarah may go back to her classroom with a different approach to assessing learning. Her students may well end up with more diverse opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, and that broader range of assessments is likely to yield better information for guiding instruction. Not incidentally, she is also likely to end up with a better choice of assessments and student work samples to include in her final entry.

While all support programs recognize the value of this kind of focused examination, they differ in how it's facilitated. In the ideal, programs try to give candidates the opportunity to meet in small groups with other candidates from the same certificate area. The intent is for members to evolve into a learning community that discusses and develops a mutual understanding of the relevant teaching standards; that analyzes and gives feedback on members' draft portfolio entries; and that provides mutual emotional support. The point, says Cathy Armstrong, is to "provide a safe, secure environment in which to collaboratively explore and learn from student work."

**Facilitating discussions.** Most programs assign a facilitator to each small group, although that person's intended role can differ. "Some programs are modeled on a mentoring system in which there is an expert and there are the candidates," explains Diana Cotter. "But when you put a group of accomplished teachers around a table together discussing student work, powerful

things can happen. I know some facilitators feel they should be asking the important questions and making judgements about the work that's being discussed. But we believe that if there is an awful video, for example, it's not the facilitator who should be asking where the standards are. It's the other teachers."

While not essential, most agree that it's helpful if facilitators have been through the candidacy process because it gives them more credibility. Similarly, it's helpful if a facilitator has content expertise, not because he or she is intended to be the resident expert, but because content knowledge can inform a facilitator's understanding of what's going on in a group discussion. One support provider, a long-time professional developer, uses herself as an example of why this is important: "I know a lot about effective pedagogy and could help candidates hone in on, and offer them good feedback about, the pedagogy reflected in a videotape, for example. But as an elementary teacher, I would have difficulty giving feedback to a high school physics teacher on the content of her instructional unit." Adds another support provider: "A good facilitator will get people in the group to use each other's expertise."

**Grouping by certificate area.** While candidates benefit from facilitators who share their content focus, more important still is being able to collaborate with others in their own certificate area. In reality, however, programs must adapt to the local context — which

means small groups cannot always be organized according to certificate areas. Particularly in smaller programs, there may be only one candidate going after an art certification, for example. Other programs may actually have a number of candidates in the same certificate area, but the candidates live so far from each other that they don't find it practical to work together. This can happen in both rural and urban areas, such as Los Angeles. Many of these candidates choose, instead, to meet regularly with people who live in closer proximity. Clearly, they find value in working with other candidates even when their certificate areas don't match — and programs find other ways to support candidates' need for content.

On the other hand, some far-flung candidates are determined to work together anyway. Depending on its availability and cost, distance technology can help connect them — and it doesn't always have to be the latest, most sophisticated technology. In Kansas, two candidates who initially met face-to-face at the program's orientation, but who lived at opposite ends of the state, nonetheless opted to work together in developing their portfolios. Linda Hazel gave each a calling card that allowed them to take advantage of a special low telephone rate available through the program — an inexpensive alternative to travel in a state where the program is supporting candidates spread across 82,000 square miles. (Given the distance, Hazel says, the most cost effective method of delivering or exchanging information is by phone, fax, or e-mail.)

**Individualizing support.** In addition to facilitating small candidate groups, most programs make sure that each teacher has access to some degree of individualized support. Looked at collectively across programs, these one-on-one support providers make an eclectic group. Among them are Board-certified teachers like Tisone-Bartels; teachers who have not yet achieved or tried to achieve Board certification; university professors like those from The University of Texas who are involved in San Antonio's program;

graduate students in education like Misty Sato and others she has recruited as support providers for Stanford's program; and support program staff themselves, like Hazel.

Such people are referred to variously, and often interchangeably, as coaches, mentors, facilitators, or just plain support providers. It can be confusing because, in education, different people attach different meanings to such terms. But the underlying issue isn't what these people are called; it's how they see their roles. In her current work with an NBPTS candidate,

Tisone-Bartels videotapes the teacher's classes and offers feedback on specific lessons. She also provides feedback on written portfolio entries. Asked to characterize her role, Tisone-Bartels says she thinks of herself more as a coach than a mentor: "I think of a mentor as helping someone set new directions and the candidate I'm working with doesn't need any new direction. I'm more like a coach, helping her with the rules of the game."

*As a support provider,  
"I try to be the same  
mentor to them that  
the National Board  
asks them to be to  
their students."*

**Identifying appropriate support.** Herein lies one of the constant challenges for support providers: finding an appropriate level of support for candidates, specifically as it relates to the development of portfolio entries. Although "official" support providers are grappling with it more directly, the same issue comes up for fellow candidates working together in a small group. Should feedback be more directive or more constructive? Is it appropriate to take apart a candidate's entry piece by piece? Or is it better to take a Socratic approach, simply asking the candidate to explain where the relevant standards are addressed in an entry?

Teachers in the Stanford program receive most of their portfolio feedback from colleagues and the facilitator in their small groups. Before looking at an entry, group members, including the facilitator, review the relevant standards. In this way, they're more likely to be on the same page as they then pore over the entry looking for evidence of those standards. "We



often give a blow-by-blow analysis of what's strong about a candidate's entry, as well as discussing what's potentially puzzling or problematic," says Darling-Hammond.

When Hazel works directly with candidates, she says, "I try to be the same mentor to them that the National Board asks them to be to their students." The interaction around portfolio development begins with candidates faxing drafts of their entries to Hazel or whomever else is serving as support provider. For her part, once Hazel has read an entry, she calls to discuss the draft with the candidate. She describes her approach as "playing 20 questions," all 20 of them either directly or indirectly asking, "Where are the standards?"

Says Hazel, "I may tell them 'I see where you've covered standards numbers 3, 4, and 5, but not 1, 6, or 7. For example, where's the collaboration?' I'm sometimes more or less directive, but I never rewrite or even offer suggestions about edits or cuts."

On the other hand, if a candidate has two lessons and can't decide which is most effective in showing that he or she is meeting the standards, Hazel says she may offer her opinion.

Weighing in for the value of a more directive approach at times, another support provider asks rhetorically, "Why not just tell them what you see?" Just as we wouldn't expect an accomplished teacher to use the exact same teaching strategy with all students in every situation, he says, support providers shouldn't expect to employ only one approach in working with a candidate.

Clearly, determining what's appropriate in a given situation with a given candidate is a matter both of judgement and philosophy. Says one support provider, "The constant challenge is to give quality feedback while not compromising the learning process."

## MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF SUPPORT

Support providers are, of course, delighted to see their candidates achieve certification. Yet sometimes it's those who don't get certified first time out who offer good reminders that the object is not to have the highest pass rate, but to help teachers become more effective in their classrooms.

Over her seven years with the Great Plains Center for National Certification, Hazel has worked with dozens of National Board candidates throughout

Kansas and neighboring states. One who stands out clearly in her memory did not achieve certification. Hazel had run into the teacher's superintendent at a conference soon after the teacher had applied for candidacy. He volunteered that, based on his observation, the teacher's practice would not meet National Board's standards for accomplished teaching, and he turned out to be right.

*The key to professional growth is "deliberate practice" — the process of thinking about what you're doing and why you're doing it every step of the way.*

When her first effort failed, the teacher gave up, unfortunately electing not to try a second time. Hazel then lost track of her for several years before once again running into her superintendent. Happy to see Hazel, he immediately brought up the subject of the teacher, recounting his pleased surprise at how the experience of going through the certification process, with support from Hazel's program, had affected the teacher. Her teaching, he said, had improved considerably.

This would come as no surprise to researcher and Arizona State University education dean David Berliner, who has done extensive studies on how people develop expertise in their particular line of work, whether in sports, medicine, teaching, or anything else. The key to professional growth, he says, is "deliberate practice" — the process of thinking about what you're

doing and why you're doing it every step of the way. As we have seen, this is precisely what support programs do: help teachers engage in deliberate, focused reflection on how they teach and how their students learn.

In fact, early studies of the impact of National Board candidacy suggest that the certification process can, indeed, have a profound effect on teachers. Many say it has transformed their practice by helping them better focus on the relationship between teaching and student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

A teacher who participated in the pilot test for one of the first certificate areas later wrote about that experience and how it changed his teaching:

Completing the school-site portfolio ... was, quite simply, the single, most powerful professional development experience of my career. Never before had I thought so deeply about what I do with children, and why I do it. I looked critically at my practice, judging it against a set of high and rigorous standards. Often, in daily work, I found myself rethinking my goals, correcting my course, moving in new directions. I am not the same teacher as I was before the assessment (Haynes, 1995, as cited in Sato, M., 1999).

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## REFERENCES

Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). *Reshaping teaching policy, preparation and practice: Influences of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*. Paper prepared for the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching.

Sato, M. (1999). *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: A review of the literature*. Paper prepared for WestEd.

## RESOURCES

### **Bank of America Exemplary Teachers for Arizona Program**

Thomas M. McGowan  
Arizona State University  
Box 870911  
Tempe, Arizona 85287  
480/965-6052  
e-mail: [tmcgowan@asu.edu](mailto:tmcgowan@asu.edu)  
Web site: [teachers.ed.asu.edu](http://teachers.ed.asu.edu)

### **Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification**

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### **Idaho NBPTS Initiative**

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### **NBPTS Resource Center at Stanford University**

Marcela Griffin  
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CERAS Building  
520 Galvez Mall, Room 310E  
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(see next page for more resources)

## more resources

### **San Antonio Independent School District**

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Parent and Community Partnership Network  
237 West Travis  
San Antonio Independent School District  
San Antonio, Texas 78205  
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jguardia@gateway.sanantonio.isd.tenet.edu

### **The Support Network**

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Los Angeles, California 90010  
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### **UCLA NBPTS Project**

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