

National Board Certification for recognizing effective teachers in Kansas as an alternative to a merit pay system

Presented by Monte Slaven & Bruce Wellman, January 19, 2016 before the Kansas House Committee on Education

Purpose

The purpose of our testimony today is to provide a vision for a teacher compensation system that rewards highly effective teachers while elevating student learning throughout the state of Kansas.

Introductions

My name is Bruce Wellman and I teach high school students chemistry and engineering design in a suburban public high school in Kansas. I am here today as a private citizen and without the support of my school district. All views and opinions that I express are my own and are not endorsed by my district. For this reason, I will not make direct reference during my testimony to my specific high school or my school district.

I discovered my passion for teaching while pursuing my undergraduate degree in chemistry at Penn State University. During my junior year I decided to change my major and graduate with a B.S. in General Science with the plan to go directly on to graduate school to earn my M.S. degree in Education (University of Rochester, NY) and become a high school science teacher. I began my teaching career in 1993 in rural Delaware and have since taught students in many different contexts (urban setting in Los Angeles County, California, developing country in east Africa, and two different districts in Kansas). My family roots run deep in Kansas (my great-great-grandfather settled in Jefferson County in 1861 and we have had a continuous family presence in Kansas ever since) but my wife and I, along with our three children, only moved to Kansas in 2004. Since that time I have been involved in many levels of the teaching profession within the state of Kansas and on a national level. Within Kansas I have served on the Kansas' Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Lead-States Review Team as a Leadership Committee Member and the state's lead reviewer for the engineering standards of the NGSS feedback process. In addition I have been involved in helping teachers who are pursuing National Board Certification as a certified support provider with the Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification in the Jones Institute for Educational Excellence at Emporia State University. I have also taught preservice science teachers as an adjunct instructor at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, MO. At the national level, I have presented at the National Science Teachers' Association's National Conferences, served on the executive committee for the Pre-college Division of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE), served as a Classroom Teacher Ambassador Fellow (TAF) for the US Dept. of Education, and served as a reviewer for the National Science Foundation. I am currently serving on the ASEE's Board of Directors' standing committee on P-12 Engineering Education.

My name is Monte Slaven. I teach 7th grade English/Language Arts at Maize South Middle School in northwest Wichita. I am a graduate of Friends University with a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance, Newman University with a BS in Education and Wichita State University with my M.Ed in Curriculum and Instruction. This is my 22nd year of teaching. I am actively involved as an evaluator for the Kansas Department of Education's Kansas Professional Teaching Portfolio (KPTP) which services pre-service teachers. In addition I have been an adjunct professor in the Master's Programs at Wichita State University and Friends University. I am currently on the advisory board for Friends University's Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning.

A Contextual Understanding of Merit Pay

Our testimony today falls under the auspices of merit pay. The widely used definition of merit pay is performance-related compensation. In the field of education, merit pay primarily refers to pay schemes that tie salary bonuses to student learning, usually measured by a single test on a single day. Schools that have tried establishing compensation based on the single-test-on-a-single-day have discovered serious inadequacies. The attempts to establish merit pay of this nature have not been successful. One of the biggest problems of this system is the inequity of testing across various disciplines. For example, there are no reliable testing instruments for many subject areas including Music, Family and Consumer Science, Physical Education, and Art among others. While not well known, largely low-key, and very much inconspicuous, Kansas actually has a system in place that recognizes outstanding and accomplished teachers in all subject areas. It is fair, objective, rigorous, and open to all teachers. This system is National Board Certification (NBC). If Kansas wants to reward exceptional teachers, the expansion of this current system for NBC would provide the most economical and fair way to identify and reward exceptional teachers in the state,

Mr. Wellman and I are both National Board Certified Teachers. I received my initial Board Certification in 2002 and Mr. Wellman was initially certified in 2006. I renewed my certification in 2011, and Mr. Wellman in 2015. Both of us are trained Candidate Support Providers and have been involved in mentoring National Board candidates through the Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification of Emporia State University since receiving certification.

The state of Kansas currently has 403 teachers who have received National Board Certification (Exstrom and National Conference of State Legislatures 2015) meeting rigorous standards set by the bar of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. As this testimony will demonstrate, teachers who achieve Board Certification are of the highest caliber of those who guide children in their educational quest .

A Brief History of National Board

In 1986, in response to *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner 1983), a broad coalition of stakeholders came together to develop solutions that would strengthen the education systems. Their report called for the formation of a national board as a key strategy for improving the quality of teaching. In 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was founded. The National Board worked with master teachers and other education experts to develop standards for accomplished teaching from prekindergarten through 12th grade in many subject areas. Twenty-five different certificates are now offered in specific subject areas, as well as School Counseling, Career and Technical Education, Library/Media, Music, and Physical Education.

The Process

In each certificate area, candidates are required to complete four components: three portfolio entries, which are submitted online, and a computer-based assessment administered at a testing center. The entire certification process is designed to collect standards-based evidence of accomplished teaching practice. The four components that make up Board certification are used holistically to assess a teacher's entire practice: content knowledge, differentiated instruction, teaching practice and learning environment, and effective and reflective practitioner.

Content Knowledge is demonstrated through a computer-based assessment. Candidates must demonstrate knowledge of developmentally appropriate content, which is necessary for teaching across the full-age range and ability level of a chosen certificate area. This is assessed through the completion of three, timed constructed response exercises and 45 selected response items.

Differentiation in instruction is validated from a classroom-based portfolio entry primarily comprised of student work samples and written commentary. Selected student work samples are submitted in order to demonstrate students' growth over a period of time. The submitted accompanying commentary includes analysis of instructional choices.

Teaching practice and learning environment is also a classroom-based portfolio entry but it requires video recordings of interactions between the teacher and students. Two written commentaries describe, analyze, and reflect on teaching and interactions. Both videos and commentaries demonstrate how the instructor engages students and impacts their learning.

The effective and reflective practitioner components are currently under re-development because the certification process has recently been revised after receiving feedback from National Board Certified Teachers.

Assessment of the Portfolio

Once a National Board candidate submits his or her work, it is evaluated by NBCTs or other teaching professionals in the same certificate area who have met minimum eligibility and experience requirements and have successfully completed an intensive training program rooted in the National Board's Standards and scoring guidelines. The extensive and rigorous training

process for assessors includes a qualifying step in which potential assessors must demonstrate their ability to evaluate responses fairly and accurately using the Standards and rubrics as their criteria. Great care is taken during the scoring process to prevent any bias toward a National Board candidate. Measurement experts rate National Board assessor reliability among the highest reported for such a complex performance assessment, which is a direct result of the focused and rigorous training National Board assessors undergo ([“Part 1: Understanding and Interpreting Your Scores” 2013](#)).

The assessors evaluate and score responses through the lens of detailed rubrics, which are derived from the Standards. As assessors identify the evidence in the responses, they are trained to judge performance solely on the basis of the criteria established by the Standards and embodied in the rubrics. Responses to each constructed response item and the evidence submitted for the portfolio components are scored holistically, in that an assessor must look at the response as a total work and award a score based on the best overall match with a level of the rubrics. Trainers evaluate an assessor's work on practice cases. Only those who successfully complete the training and meet the qualifying criteria move on to score candidates' performances. Assessors are continually evaluated and monitored throughout the scoring process. Four people score a portfolio entry and no fewer than six score the computer assessment exercise resulting in a total of ten qualified educators assessing the entire work.

Each part of the portfolio portion of the National Board process is weighted differently and the total makes up 60% of the overall score while the computer-based assessment makes up the remaining 40%. A candidate must reach a benchmark score of 2.75 (on a 4.0 scale) in order to be awarded the national certification. .

Current costs involved for candidates

The National Board process is not static but undergoes continuous reviews and revisions to insure the process remains relevant for current teaching practices. While the Standards remain the same, the certification process has recently undergone a revision which has made Board Certification even more accessible, flexible, and affordable. The voluntary process now may be completed in three years rather than one year, and teachers are able to pay \$475 for each of the 4 individual components totaling \$1,900. The certificate is now valid for five years instead of ten. The new policy for maintenance of certification will require Board certified teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and skills every five years.

Certificates Available

As mentioned earlier, there are 25 National Board Certificates available. These certificates cover a range of students' ages from Early Childhood (ages 3-8), Middle Childhood (ages 7-12), Early Adolescence (ages 11-15), and Adolescence through Young Adulthood (ages 14-18+). Elementary teachers may choose a Generalist Certificate or Literacy-Language Arts while Middle School and High School teachers focus on a content area. Certificates outside of the core

academic areas include Art, Career and Technical Education, English as a New Language, Exceptional Needs Specialist, Health Education, Library Media, Music, Physical Education, School Counseling, and World Languages. (See link for current listing of available certificates: www.boardcertifiedteachers.org/certificate-areas)

Key Research Findings related to National Board Certification

Students taught by Board-certified teachers learn more than students taught by other teachers

“During the past decade, research from states across the country has shown that students taught by Board-certified teachers learn more than students taught by other teachers.” ([National Research Council 2008](#)) This conclusion was reached in 2008 by the National Research Council in a comprehensive review of studies of National Board Certification up until that time. Estimates of the increase in learning by students of Board-certified teacher are an additional one to two months of instruction ([ibid.](#)). The positive impact of having a Board-certified teacher is even greater for minority and low-income students. Harvard University’s Strategic Data Project found that students of Board-certified teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District made learning gains equivalent to an additional two months of instruction in mathematics and one month in English Language Arts ([“SDP Human Capital Diagnostic for Los Angeles Unified School District” 2012](#)). Similar results were found in Georgia’s Gwinnett County Public Schools. ([“SDP Human Capital Diagnostic for Gwinnett County Public Schools” 2012](#)) Another study released in February 2015 showed that Board Certified teachers were more effective than non-certified teachers with similar experience ([Cowan and Goldhaber 2015](#)).

Board Certified Teachers in Kansas

Of the 403 NBCTs in Kansas, 85 are in the Blue Valley School District, 47 teach in Olathe, 38 in Wichita, 27 in Manhattan-Ogden, and 18 in Geary County. These 5 districts account for 215 of NBCTs in Kansas. The remaining 188 are scattered across the state in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

The initial rate of certification in Kansas is notably higher than most states with approximately 79% of candidates successful on the first attempt compared to the national average of 35-40%. The renewal rate in Kansas is 100%. This high level of success is largely due to the support system for Kansas teachers pursuing national board certification that is in place through the Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification at Emporia State University. (Statistics compiled by Alvin Peters, NBCT, Director, Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification)

Currently the State of Kansas requires a school district to pay Board-certified teachers a yearly stipend based upon statute K.S.A. 72-1398 which states: “Teachers who have attained certification from the national board and who are employed by a school district shall be paid an

incentive bonus in the amount of \$1,000 each school year that the teacher remains employed by a school district and retains a valid master teacher's license”

The NBCT option is the best available process to recognize and reward effective teaching

Current Merit Pay Approaches: Traditional Merit Pay systems that depend only upon local administrators’ evaluation can be subjective and biased.

Proposed NBCT standard: The process of being reviewed for one’s board certification is done by highly skilled teachers from the SAME content area (many are NBCT’s themselves), the written portfolio submissions are evaluated through a blind review process where the identity (name, gender, marital status, etc..) is unknown to the assessor, the videos are assessed by individuals from a different region of the country than the teacher being evaluated, and the assessors undergo additional training to minimize bias during the evaluation process.

Current Merit Pay Approaches: It is difficult to determine what is a “good” teacher so a merit pay system doesn’t have a way to identify who should receive additional pay.

Proposed NBCT standard: Various research studies have shown the National Board process to be an effective indicator of teacher quality (Goldhaber and Anthony 2007) (Cavalluzzo 2004). The National Board Certification for teachers is a well-established system that monitors new research finding on learning and teaching and adjusts its practices to best reflect the needs and trends of the profession. By using a National Board Certificate as the standard to identify highly effective teachers, Kansas would be using the best research-validated process currently available in the education profession.

Current Merit Pay Approaches: Merit pay systems create competition rather than collaboration among teachers.

Proposed NBCT standard: National Board certificates are available in 25 different areas which specify not only a given content area but also a specific age range. Every teacher would have the same opportunity to complete the National Board certification process in his/her own professional focus. In addition, the proposed supplemental pay is not limited to a set number of teachers per year so there is not a competitive component to the system. Kansas has also had a long history of current NBCT’s helping new candidates through the certification process as well as serving as valuable members of collaborative professional learning communities (PLC’s) within their schools and districts.

Current Merit Pay Approaches: Merit pay systems must have a component of student performance assessments to insure the best teachers are being rewarded.

Proposed NBCT standard: Student achievement is a desirable dimension to include when trying to identify high performing teachers but there are no currently available tools in widespread use to adequately assess student learning which can solely be attributed to teachers' impact on student learning. In order to adequately attribute the teacher's contribution to a student's learning, we need assessment tools that provide valid/reliable data on a student's starting point as well as multiple data points throughout the year that show learning gains on multiple learning targets across all subjects being taught in Kansas schools.

Challenge: Current state testing only uses one test on one day and *the learning targets are not well aligned to classroom practices*. Example: KS state science test

Challenge: Single data point models are NOT adequate for evaluating student learning.: Let me share an example of my high school chemistry students re-take of questions from the fall semester final exam. I wanted to provide students feedback on the questions they missed on our "common" questions (given to every chemistry student in our high school) on the fall semester final exam as well as feedback on the quality of their study practices (retention of knowledge/skills). In December, immediately after completing the 33 questions, students were told the number of questions they got correct but they were not given any specific feedback on which questions they missed. On the first day of classes in January, students reworked the same 33 questions and they were given specific feedback on which questions they missed on each attempt. I was expecting almost every student to have a lower score on the 2nd attempt but to my surprise 32 of the 87 students (37%) received higher scores on the second attempt with an average of 2.2 more questions correct out of the 33 questions. One student improved his score by 11 additional questions correct. [Other results: 20 of the 87 students (23%) got the same score both times and 35 of the 87 students (40%) received a lower score with an average of 2.5 fewer questions correct on the re-take.] After an all-class discussion we felt confident that none of my students performed any new chemistry studying over the holiday break so we concluded that the lower performance on the initial attempt most likely was attributed to student stress or fatigue during final exam days. This small project illustrates the danger of using a single data-point assessment model to make claims related to the extent of student learning/teacher effectiveness.

Since we do not have robust tools for making accurate claims of student learning that is solely attributed to teacher practices, the best available metric is to use National Board Certification to identify teachers that have been connected to students who have

outperformed non-NBC teachers on currently used single data point student learning measures.

Specifics of our proposed NBCT recognition system

Many state policymakers around the country have recognized the strategic benefits of using National Board Certification (NBC) as a lever to support and strengthen the teaching profession. We are proposing that Kansas takes the best parts of NBC teacher recognition programs from other states and implements a new teacher career pathway process that positions Kansas as the leader in the nation for the best state in which to work as a teacher.

In Kansas:

1. Reward and retain accomplished teaching and attract teachers to high professional standards by embedding compensation increases for Board-certified teachers into the salary structure used by school districts in the state.
 - a. Match the top state in the country, North Carolina, by putting into law the requirement that NBC teachers earn an additional 12% salary supplement to their regular placement on their local salary schedule (Exstrom and National Conference of State Legislatures 2015).
 - b. Actual verbiage from the North Carolina law: North Carolina Session Law 2015-241, House Bill 97; TEACHER SALARY SCHEDULE SECTION 9.1.(b) (1) Licensed teachers who have NBPTS certification shall receive a salary supplement each month of twelve percent (12%) of their monthly salary on the salary schedule.
 - c. With this incentive in place, North Carolina has 21% of its 98,590 teachers holding NBC's. Kansas currently has 1% or 403 of its 41,243 teachers holding NBC's (Exstrom and National Conference of State Legislatures 2015). This pattern would suggest that over the next few years Kansas would see an increase in the numbers of teachers obtaining National Board Certification but it will be unlikely to have more than approximately 20-25% of teachers holding National Board Certifications in Kansas.
 - d. To insure local districts do not limit or discourage the number of teachers eligible to receive this NBC salary supplement, local districts would apply for reimbursement from the State for any additional funds required to cover the supplemental salary levels within their district. This would follow the current process in place from K.S.A. 72-1398 for NBCT stipends in Kansas.
2. Continue to provide financial assistance for teachers submitting applications for NBC. Some states have adopted grants and/or loans as a possible funding mechanisms to insure

that the initial cost of obtaining certification is not a barrier to pursuing a teacher's national board certification.

3. Increase investment in the current support program in Kansas for teachers pursuing National Board Certification (The Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification in the Jones Institute for Educational Excellence at Emporia State University). We propose the creation of 3-5 hybrid teacher/NBC support provider positions (scaled up as the number of candidates increases) that would provide increased support for teachers throughout the state who wish to pursue their NBC. These positions would allow NBCTs to remain in the classroom while also expanding their impact on the teaching profession beyond their classroom and school districts.
4. Use Board certification as a qualification (or at least preference) for clinical faculty at all teacher preparation programs in the state of Kansas, as well as cooperating teachers who work with student teachers, and mentors who work with novice teachers during their first years in the profession..

Conclusions:

Today we have presented you with a brief history of the origins of the National Board Certification Process, a detailed description of the certification process, a brief summary of key research findings related to NBCT's impact on student learning, and why an NBCT option is the best available process to recognize and reward effective teaching in Kansas. We also assert that this option strategically uses existing processes to identify effective teachers and thereby is an equitable and economical method to help elevate the teaching profession in Kansas.

National Board Certification is not the end-all identifier for excellent educators but it is a starting point for recognizing accomplished teachers who are truly making a difference. We believe that this proposed recognition and supplemental pay for highly effective teachers in Kansas can be one essential part of an overall strategy to optimize the education system in Kansas.

Contact information

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EDUCATION POLICY NOTE: *I (Bruce) strongly believe that Kansas would benefit greatly by shifting funds currently allocated to the development of single data point high-stakes assessments to classroom based formative assessment tools that are collaboratively developed by current classroom teachers, education researchers, cognitive scientists, and psychometricians. Investments in these types of tools will have a much better chance of improving student learning and teaching practices. Along this line I have submitted a project proposal with a KU chemistry professor, Chris Elles, to the National Science Foundation to create such a collaborative group. If our focus as a state can shift to the development of high quality learning targets with valid/reliable classroom-based formative assessment tools which provide timely feedback to students, teachers, and parents, then we can improve student learning while also generating actionable data that contributes to teacher evaluation and accountability systems.*