

National Board Certified Teachers: Questions and Answers



**A legislative briefing paper by
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Introduction

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has certified over 9,500 teachers in the U.S. To be certified an individual must pay \$2,300 and go through an arduous, yearlong process that requires the completion of both a structured portfolio and written assessment exercises. Nationally, about 51 percent of applicants succeed.

Tennessee currently has only 35 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) living in the state and only 30 teaching in the state's public schools. As a state, Tennessee has failed to keep pace with national trends and averages. However, the Governor and the General Assembly are examining ways to make National Board certification more attractive to Tennessee's teachers.

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the certification process, the importance of National Board certification, and what Tennessee and other states are doing to support the process and the teachers who become NBCTs. The information provided in this report is based on the following: interviews with staff of the Tennessee Department of Education and State Board of Education, departments of education in other states, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and Tennessee local education agencies; an interview with Tennessee's first NBCT; a review of materials provided by the National Board; and an examination of relevant statutes in Tennessee and other states.

What is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards?

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization. It was established in 1987 as a result of a report released by the Carnegie Corporation's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. The report, *A Nation Prepared: Teacher's for the 21st Century*, recommended that the teaching profession set standards and certify those teachers that meet those standards. The NBPTS' stated mission is:

To establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools.

Who are the members of the Board?

The NBPTS' 63-member board is made up of representatives from corporations and higher education institutions, school administrators, policymakers, and 34 active K-12 classroom teachers.

How is the Board funded?

Fifty-five percent of the NBPTS' operating funds comes from the U.S. Department of Education's Title I program. The remaining 45 percent comes from application fees and corporate sponsors. (Appendix A contains a list of the National Board's sponsors.) The fee for each teacher to go through the National Board certification process is \$2,300.

How does a teacher become certified through the NBPTS?

In 1994, the NBPTS began its first assessment cycle for certification and in 1995, 81 teachers became the country's first National Board Certified Teachers. The National Board currently offers ten-year certificates in 19 specialized fields with five more to be available in 2002. (Appendix B is a table of the certificates presently offered.) Teachers who achieve certification have demonstrated that their classroom skills meet the specific standards developed by the committees of educators and child development experts of the National Board. The standards are structured around two dimensions: student developmental level and subject area. They are based on five core propositions:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subject they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and motivating student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

National Board candidates must have at least a baccalaureate degree and three years of classroom experience. They must also hold a valid state teaching license. The certification process has two parts: (1) completion of an extensive portfolio of classroom and professional activities and (2) knowledge and skills assessment exercises. Active classroom teachers in K-12 do all of the scoring. National Board certification is preferred but not required of the assessors. However, the teachers who act as scorers must complete a thorough recommendation process and comprehensive training.

The portfolio process involves four classroom-based entries and some documentation of work with families and communities outside the classroom. The compilation of the portfolios takes place during a designated assessment period and takes about four months to complete. Teachers who complete the process spend on average 200-300 hours on the project.¹ The classroom-based entries include samples of student work, videotapes of classroom exercises, other teaching artifacts, and detailed written analysis of and reflection on this evidence by the candidate. The other entries in the portfolio are designed to emphasize the quality of the teacher's contributions to the larger community and the teaching profession.

The second part of the certification process consists of a full day of assessment exercises. This part takes place during the summer months at 300 Sylvan Learning Centers across the country. Educational Testing Service (ETS) handles the assessment center administration for NBPTS. Each assessment includes content and pedagogical knowledge about the appropriate student developmental level and academic content relative to the pursued certificate. The exercises consist of prompts and simulations to which the candidate responds in writing by hand or by using a word processor. Candidates may bring National Board Standards documents, any advance materials received from the NBPTS, a calculator with its operation instructions, and handwritten notes. Any materials brought to the assessment center are collected upon completion of testing and destroyed.

¹ National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, *2000-2001 Guide to National Board Certification*, 2000, p. 61.

The entire certification process takes about a year to complete. The national success rate for first-time candidates is 51 percent. Candidates can re-apply, banking good scores and only paying for and repeating sections they did not pass.

Why is National Board certification important?

One of the questions that is most often asked about NBPTS certification is whether it affects teacher quality and student achievement. The U.S. Department of Education and the National Board sponsored a study carried out by a research team at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The report, *The Certification System of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: A Construct and Consequential Study*, showed that teachers who are certified through the NBPTS differ significantly from those who are not.² The researchers compared a sample of teachers who had earned certification with a sample of teachers who had been through the process but were unsuccessful in achieving certification. They looked for differences in terms of the quality of classroom teaching practices, student work on classroom assignments, student assessment and post-assessment professional activities. The evaluation was based on 13 dimensions of teaching expertise, and the study found that NBCTs scored higher than non-board-certified teachers did on all 13 dimensions and were statistically better on 11 of the 13. (Appendix C discusses the 13 dimensions.)

The study also examined the difference in student learning in the classrooms of each group of teachers. Researchers examined two different student outcome measures: a student product in response to an instructional assignment and an “external” measure of writing in response to a prompt devised by teachers on the scoring and observation teams. While the results of the “external” measure of writing were not significant, the results of the teacher assignments

provided evidence that is compelling and consistent: The NBPTS, through its series of comprehensive performance assessments of teaching proficiency, is identifying and certifying teachers who are producing students who differ in profound and important ways from those taught by less proficient teachers. These students appear to exhibit an understanding of the concepts targeted in instruction that is more integrated, more coherent and at a higher level of abstraction than understandings achieved by other students.³

Anecdotal evidence from teachers who have gone through the National Board certification process – whether they were successful or not – suggests that the exercises are among the best professional development tools currently available to teachers. According to experienced teachers, the reflective nature of the portfolio brings to all the candidates a new way of examining their skills and practices. Even those that do receive a certificate find the experience raises their awareness of the education techniques they use and how to improve the teaching and learning that takes place in their classrooms.⁴

² L. Bond, W.K. Baker, J.A. Hattie, T.W. Smith, T.W., The Center for Educational Research and Evaluation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, September, 2000.

³ *Accomplished Teaching: A Validation of National Board Certification, Executive Summary*, October 25 2000, p.5. (The full report can be accessed through the NBPTS web site, www.nbpts.org.)

⁴ Interview with Nancy Duggin, National Board Certified Teacher, Instruction and Professional Development Coordinator, Tennessee Education Association, January 25, 2001.

How many teachers have been certified by the NBPTS?

There are 9,586 teachers in the United States and seven outside the country that have National Board certificates. The number of NBCTs has roughly doubled each year since the first 81 teachers achieved certification in 1995. Every state in the union and the District of Columbia has at least one NBCT. North Carolina has the most with 2,406; the national average is 187 per state.

How many NBCTs does Tennessee have?

Tennessee has failed to keep pace with these national trends and averages. Currently, there are only 35 NBCTs living in the state, and only 30 of those teachers teach in the state's public schools. Three who reside in the state teach across the border in Mississippi or Georgia, which are states that provide substantial salary bonuses for NBCTs.

Tennessee has averaged 31 applicants per year for National Board certification from 1999 to 2001. Yet during the current 2001 cycle, only 15 Tennessee residents are seeking certification. Of these 15, only nine teach within the state. The reasons for this dramatic decrease in applicants are unclear, though Tennessee's lack of financial incentives coupled with less promotion in recent years probably contribute to the decline. Approximately 40 percent of Tennessee's total applicants have been successful in achieving National Board certification.

What is being done to encourage teachers to seek National Board Certification?

Federal Application Subsidies

The \$2,300 application fee can be a barrier for many prospective candidates. Some financial assistance is available for a limited number of candidates through the federal Candidate Subsidy Program (CSP). The money comes in the form of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to each state to help offset the certification fee for individual candidates. The subsidy acts as a discount — the money does not actually go to the state or the individual. It can only be used to offset 50 percent of the fee for candidates and is not available for re-takes. The funds from the program are appropriated to the states based on a formula and are managed by a program administrator in the Department of Education in each state. States can receive additional funds if they use all of their allotment. Unused funds are not carried over to the next cycle.

Tennessee received \$40,000 in subsidy funds for the 2000-2001 assessment cycle and only used \$5,750 to support half of the fee for five candidates. The remaining funds were sent back to the U.S. Department of Education for use by other states. The number of applicants for Tennessee's federal CSP funds has decreased since the 1999 high of 23.⁵

State Subsidy Programs

Since these subsidies are offered to a limited number of candidates and are used to fund only a portion of the total fee, 29 states including Tennessee have passed legislation offering additional funds for fee reimbursement. The extent of the aid varies from state to state. Some states pay the entire fee up front for candidates while others offer full or partial reimbursement. Some states offer half of the fee upon application, and reimburse the other

⁵ Interview with Carol Groppe, Division of Training and Professional Development, Tennessee Department of Education, February 10, 2001.

half only if the certificate is awarded. Teachers and administrators repeatedly mention payment of the application fee in full is one of the best incentives to get qualified teachers to pursue certification through the NBPTS.⁶ Tennessee's additional fee subsidies are provided for in TCA§ 49-5-5609 as follows:

It is the legislative intent to encourage Tennessee teachers to seek voluntary national certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The commissioner of education shall provide reimbursement to no more than twenty-five (25) teachers to cover the evaluation fees. In order to be eligible for reimbursement, teachers must apply to the commissioner for state funding and have completed the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards evaluation. The commissioner shall report to the state board of education regarding the number of Tennessee candidates and the number attaining certification.

Each year since 1998-1999, the Department of Education has been appropriated \$50,000 to implement the above statute. However, the language in the law essentially caps the number of application fee subsidies at a *total* of 25 teachers (as opposed to 25 per year, which may have been the actual intent of the law). Tennessee has already covered the total fees for 25 applicants through this program, and subsequent funding has been used by the Department to fund other support items for National Board candidates, such as mentoring, professional development, and substitute teachers.⁷

Salary Bonuses

In addition to providing support for application fees, many states are now offering other incentives to encourage and support teachers interested in National Board certification. Currently, 23 states have laws that provide a financial bonus for teachers who achieve certification. Nineteen states offer an annual salary bonus for each of the ten years the certificate is valid. In three of these states, there is also a one-time bonus given at the time of certification. Three states give one-time bonuses only, and another three states offer an annual increase for a few years but not the whole life of the certificate. The annual increases range from \$1,000 to \$7,500, and the national average is \$3,300.

Tennessee and Texas are the only two southeastern states that do not offer a financial bonus to teachers who achieve National Board certification. The following table shows the incentives provided by the southeastern states. Seven of these states share a border with Tennessee. Tennessee's only other border state, Missouri, does not offer a salary bonus, but state law allows local school systems to automatically place NBCTs at a higher stage of their career ladder system.

⁶ Interviews with Dr. Robbie Anderson, Curriculum Director of Johnson City Schools, March 5, 2001 and Karen Garr, Office of the Governor of North Carolina, October 27, 2000.

⁷ Interview with John Sharp, Budget Director, Department of Education, March 20, 2001.

**Salary Incentive Programs for NBPTS Certification
In the Southeast Region**

State	# of NBC Teachers*	Salary Incentives (Year of Implementation) (given for the 10-year life of the certificate)
Alabama	143	\$5,000 salary increase (1998)
Arkansas	24	\$2,000 initial award + \$2,000 salary increase (1997)
Florida	1,268	10% salary increase (1998)
Georgia	112	10% salary increase (2000)
Kentucky	73	\$2,000 salary increase (2000)
Louisiana	42	\$5,000 salary increase (1997)
Mississippi	755	\$6,000 salary increase (1996)
N Carolina	2,407	12% increase in state salary (1994)
S Carolina	361	\$2,000 initial award + \$7,500 salary increase (2000)
Tennessee	30	None
Texas	36	None
Virginia	142	\$5,000 initial award + annual \$2,500 salary increase (1999)
W Virginia	23	annual \$1,000 salary increase (1998)

*Represents the number of NBCTs who actually teach in each state's public school system

Sources: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Southern Regional Education Board

The purpose of the salary incentives is twofold. First, states want to recognize and reward teachers who are meeting the high and rigorous standards set by the NBPTS. Second, states are also interested in increasing the number of NBCTs they have teaching in their state in hopes of improving teacher quality and student achievement. North Carolina, for example, used its high number of NBCTs as one indicator of the progress they have made in education in the last decade. North Carolina now averages at least one NBCT for every school and has a goal of continuing to lead the nation in the number of National Board Certified Teachers.⁸ The state's *First In America* report notes, "[M]aintaining the lead will be increasingly difficult as more and more states begin to defray the costs of Board assessment and to offer competitive salary increases for achieving certification." Monetary rewards are thought to be the best way to get teachers to dedicate the many hours required to attempt certification. Furthermore, some states also expect the financial bonuses to be powerful retention tools.

South Carolina had an enormous increase in the number of its applicants and subsequent National Board certification recipients once a \$2,000 initial award and a \$7,500 per year salary bonus were implemented. In 1999-2000, the state went from 35 NBCTs to 361 NBCTs. However, the mere existence of a salary bonus does not necessarily produce a significant increase in the number of NBCTs. South Carolina also offers mentoring and administrative support to applicants. All of these incentives are well publicized in the state. West Virginia offers little more than a \$1,000 annual bonus, and its number of NBCTs has changed very little.

⁸ North Carolina Research Council, *First in America Report Card*, December 2000.

As noted in the South Carolina example, other important factors may encourage National Board candidates. Teachers usually need some time off during the school year to complete the portfolio portion of the process. In most cases, leave time for National Board related activities is up to local schools or systems, but five states do have provisions for leave time. Mentoring is another aspect of candidate support that may help teachers be more successful in achieving National Board certification. Teachers who have gone through the assessment process as well as prospective candidates indicate lack of administrative support is one of the main barriers to achieving certification. National Board candidates tend to have greater success in states that (1) have mentoring programs and (2) train school administrators to understand the importance of supporting candidates – by supplying release time and substitute teachers, for example.⁹

What is being done locally in Tennessee to support candidates for National Board certification?

Some school systems in Tennessee offer support initiatives and incentives for teachers in their schools to seek National Board certification. It is no accident that almost one-fourth (seven out of 30) of Tennessee's NBCTs teach in Johnson City's classrooms. The Johnson City school system pays the entire application fee for each teacher seeking certification and allows the teacher five days off to work on his or her portfolio. The district also offers additional support in the form of videotaping assistance, free videotapes, group support and mentoring. Johnson City also actively recruits teachers to become candidates using networking and readiness sessions.

Furthermore, the Johnson City schools and East Tennessee State University (ETSU) have entered into a partnership which offers a specially designed Education Specialist degree (Ed.S.) program. The program's curriculum is aligned with National Board standards, and work on the portfolio is counted as course work toward the Ed.S. degree. There are currently 10 people in the program at ETSU, five of whom teach in the Johnson City Schools.

The following are some additional local NBPTS support initiatives.

- Athens City School District offers a \$1,000 salary increase for the life of the certificate.
- In Knoxville, the University of Tennessee College of Education offers a financial scholarship to an alumni candidate seeking certification through the NBPTS.
- The Memphis City School District offers support through the Teaching and Learning Academy, a professional development facility funded by the school district and the Memphis community. The Academy provides a structured program of mentoring and professional development activities, including a thirty-hour Pre-candidacy Study Group to familiarize NBPTS candidates with the portfolio experiences they will encounter during the candidacy year.

Conclusion

Nationwide, the number of candidates for the NBPTS certification program continues to grow every year. The Board "expects that eventually, about ten percent of all teachers will achieve this advance certification."¹⁰ For more information about the National Board and the certification process, refer to the NBPTS web site at www.nbpts.org.

⁹ Interview with LaDonna Leyva, Executive Associate, State and Local Relations, National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, November 2000.

¹⁰ North Carolina Research Council, *First in America Report Card*, December 2000, p.72.

Appendix A
Corporate and Foundation Funding Sources for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Carnegie Corporation of New York	Xerox
Lilly Endowment, Inc.	Chrysler Corporation and Fund
The Pew Charitable Trust	E.I. du Pont de Nemours
Getty Education Institute of the Arts	BellSouth
Special Projects Fund	United Parcel Service
DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund	Ford Motor Company
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation	Union Carbide
Ford Foundation	General Electric
The Stuart Foundations	American Express
McGregor Fund	ARA Services
John D. and Katherine T. McArthur Foundation	Sears Roebuck Company
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation	Mobil Oil Corporation
Charleston Research Foundation	Johnson & Johnson
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	Eastman Kodak
Phillip Morris Companies	Boeing Company
AT&T	Chase Manhattan
RJR Nabisco	New York Times
IBM	Spencer Foundation
Proctor & Gamble	
State Farm Insurance Companies	

Source: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, *Quick Facts*, no date.

Appendix B
NBPTS Standards and Certificate Fields

Early Childhood (ages 3-8)	Middle Childhood (ages 7-12)	Early Adolescence (ages 11-15)	Adolescence and Young Adulthood
Generalist	Generalist	Generalist	
		Science	Science
		Mathematics	Mathematics
Physical Education		Physical Education	
Exceptional Needs			
Art		Art	
		Social Studies- History	Social Studies- History
English as a New Language		English as a New Language	
		English Language Arts	English Language Arts
		Career and Technical Education	
Library Media*			
World Languages Other than English*		World Languages Other than English*	
Music*		Music*	

*Certificate will be available for the 2001-02-assessment cycle.

Source: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, *2000-2001 Guide to National Board Certification*, 2000, p. 6-7.

Appendix C

The Thirteen Dimensions of Teaching Expertise

1. **Use of Knowledge:** Having an extensive knowledge of subject matter and helping students to link their prior knowledge to the current subject matter being taught.
2. **Deep Representations:** Reconciling their content knowledge with the student's abilities and backgrounds more effectively plan instruction.
3. **Problem Solving:** Identifying problems related to curriculum and instruction, and formulating a range of solutions that connect students' contents and context.
4. **Improvisation:** Adapting and improvising instruction during the actual flow of lessons to better meet students' needs.
5. **Classroom Climate:** Having the ability to interpret student behavior to anticipate prevent students from disrupting or disengaging from a lesson.
6. **Multidimensional Perception:** Demonstrating a deeper understanding of students' verbal and non-verbal responses, and using this information to prioritize instruction.
7. **Sensitivity to Content:** Recognizing the uniqueness of particular students or classroom situations and using these factors to help guide instructional choices.
8. **Monitor Learning:** Consistently monitoring student learning and offering feedback that corrects misunderstandings and enhances comprehension.
9. **Test Hypothesis:** Generating hypotheses and continually reassessing instructional options.
10. **Passion:** Exhibiting an intense enthusiasm for teaching that is closely linked to their sense of responsibility.
11. **Respect:** Caring deeply for students in a sustained way that recognizes learning barriers, while communicating their belief in students' abilities to overcome those barriers.
12. **Challenge:** Articulating high expectations and formulating lessons and activities that are more demanding and engaging for everyone.
13. **Deep Understanding:** Promoting academic achievement in ways that emphasize both personal accomplishment and intellectual engagement.

Source: The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, *The Professional Standard*, Volume 1, Number 1, p.8.