

## More Teachers Seek National Certification

By Madeline Will

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There's been an uptick in teachers pursuing advanced certification through a leaner, simpler process.

In 2013, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards **announced a series of changes** to make the certification process cheaper and more streamlined. The board decreased the application fee for teachers to \$1,900, from \$2,500, and condensed the assessment process into four modules, which can be completed in any order within three years. Previously, teachers had to complete all the work in a single year. The standards themselves have not changed.

Now, more than 20,000 teachers are undergoing NBPTS certification—a significant increase from previous years, spokesman Richard Klein said, although historical data on candidate numbers weren't readily available.

The first teachers to complete the new process will be certified this year, since the fourth and final component just went live in mid-November. About 112,000 of the nation's 3.5 million teachers are board certified. **Some research has suggested that teachers who are certified by the national board are more effective at instruction.**

The growing number of national-board-certified teachers—and their collaboration with other teachers—contribute to the demystification of the voluntary certification, said Kristin Hamilton, the senior director of standards for the board.

"It was seen as an elite thing that only a few did," she said. "When new teachers are working with board-certified teachers and see their example, ... board certification starts to look like that thing that should be the norm in the profession."

In the past, critics have said that the assessment process was too expensive and time-consuming and that it didn't truly gauge teachers' impact on student learning. Frederick M. Hess, who raised some of those concerns in his 2004 book *Common Sense School Reform*, said in an interview that the revisions are a good example of the organization responding well to its critics.

"The national board of 2016-17 is in a much better place than 10 or 15 years ago," said Hess, the director of educational policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and an opinion blogger for edweek.org.

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And the new federal K-12 law, the **Every Student Succeeds Act**, might further help the organization—it authorizes \$2.5 billion to states and districts for professional learning and offers flexibility in how they spend that money. The national board has called ESSA an opportunity and **has released guidance** to states and districts to support more board certifications through bonuses, leadership opportunities, and mentor and induction programs.

### **Revised Assessments**

Teachers were the ones who made the foundational decisions of each module, the board's Hamilton said. And so far, she said, the feedback from teachers has been that the work involved with each component has been authentic to their everyday practice.

The assessment process has been condensed from 10 components into four. The process measures teachers' content knowledge; their use of data to analyze and meet students' needs; classroom pedagogy, based on a video analysis of each teacher's interactions with his or her students; and classroom effectiveness.

The classroom-effectiveness component, which was the most significant change, asks teachers to demonstrate how they develop assessments and then use the results to improve student learning.

A committee in the revision process considered integrating "value added" models into that component, but only about a quarter of teachers teach in grades and subjects that have the mandatory standardized testing needed for those models.

If teachers have access to standardized or mandated test data for their students, Hamilton said, they can submit the results as part of their entries. But she said the component has a broader focus on "what data and assessments and other kinds of information do [teachers] look at to know their students."

The changes were financed in part by a \$3.7 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (The foundation also gives grant support to the nonprofit corporation that publishes *Education Week*.)

### **A 'Common Goal'**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is also working to bring its certification to scale by encouraging teams of teachers—with support from their schools or districts—to undergo professional development that aligns with the components of the certification assessments.

The Clark County, Nev., district, which includes Las Vegas, has one of the fastest-growing national-certification programs. In the 2015-16 school year, about 200 district teachers were going through the process. In 2016-17, that number has jumped to about 600 teachers and counselors.

In 2015-16, 143 of those teachers were in a special yearlong school-based program, in which cohorts of 10 or more teachers pursue board certification through job-embedded professional development. The district hoped that setup would improve teacher

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retention in high-needs schools, and it saw some initial success: Of the 121 teachers who finished the training, 119 kept teaching at the same high-needs schools.

In a survey of 44 Clark County teachers after a year of the training, most reported an increase in job satisfaction and noted an improvement in collaboration and school culture.

The national board hopes to bring those programs to more districts: Currently, 444 schools nationwide have five or more teachers going through the process as a cohort.



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