

Why Teachers Must Play a Role in Setting National Standards

A teacher member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards reports on the board's mission: to enrich teacher preparation and professional development and to make schools better places for learning.



Members of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards work in the board's exhibit booth. Foreground, Teacher Sue Hovey, Moscow, Idaho; Librarian Leonard Anderson, Portland, Oregon; NEA Past President Mary Hatwood Futrell.

BARBARA BOSWELL LAWS

Why are teacher members of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards so committed to playing a part in setting high and rigorous standards for teachers? If change in education is to occur, we, as professionals, must be part of the conversation.

As members of the board, we believe that standards set by a self-governing, nongovernmental board will help achieve the goal of professionalism for teachers—first through the process of preparation for assessments and then through certification itself.

Finally, but at the center of all we believe in, is a passionate desire to make education better for our kids—all kids. Voluntary national certification, as a central part of reform, will make school a richer environment for teachers to teach and students to learn.

The Board's Efforts

Achieving the mission of the board is

complex, given that education is an open system and that key players hold a variety of views. Further complicating our work are the facts that the board's standards reflect highly accomplished practice, not the entry level of state licensure, and that assessment must be designed to reflect the complexities of teaching.

To accomplish our goals, the board has adopted a strategic plan. During phase one, from 1988 through half of 1989, the board discussed, debated, refined, and modified our statement, "What Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do."¹ We adopted initial policy guidelines on assessments, national certificates, education reform, and prerequisites to sitting for certification.

The second phase, from 1989 through 1993, involves extensive research and development of standards and assessment instruments for each of 34 certification fields. National certificates are defined along two dimensions, the developmental level of students and subject area. Teachers of Limited English Proficient, Special Education,

and Exceptional Needs students will require a third dimension related to teaching practice.

Five certification standards committees, on which teachers are the majority, are under way (Early Adolescence: Generalist; Early Adolescence: English Language Arts; Early Adolescence-Young Adulthood: Art; Adolescence-Young Adulthood: Mathematics; and Middle Childhood: Generalist). Two assessment development laboratories are also presently at work.

Realizing that the certification process does not exist in a vacuum but as a piece of overall reform, the board is developing position papers on issues related to its mission: creating more effective school learning environments, increasing the supply of high-quality entrants into the profession (especially minorities), and improving teacher preparation and professional development.

Phase two has also seen the development of fund-raising strategies to support research. While the board communicates regularly with many constituency groups, further

activities — including state, regional, and national forums — are being held to increase understanding by educators and the public.

During the third phase, beginning in 1993, the board will begin assessing teachers for certification. In preparation, we have begun looking at the certification process and developing a marketing plan.

A Teacher's Role

The preceding was a bird's-eye view of the board's efforts to achieve our mission. Next is an "ant's eye" view from one teacher's perspective of the roles teachers play on the board. Two-thirds of the board's directors are teaching professionals; more than one-half are regularly engaged in teaching and represent diverse content areas and developmental levels, in both public and private schools.

As a Norfolk Public Schools itinerant elementary art teacher, I came to the board in October 1987, elated by the inclusion of the visual arts—in fact, any of the arts—in the process but concerned about representing that sector effectively and professionally. To ensure that positions taken are responsible, I attempt to maintain good communications with organizations representing the arts education world. To see the broader picture beyond arts education, I also participate in national and state forums to inform others of, and collect reactions to, the board's work.

As a professional educator, my responsibility is to help my students acquire the highest quality education. The board offered a vehicle by which I could personally contribute to the quality of education available to my students and an opportunity for personal growth—powerful incentives to go forward.

As the sole art educator on a board of 64 members, I felt strongly about contributing to policy development on the definition of certificates, certifica-

From Toward High and Rigorous Standards

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards will structure its certificates and associated assessment processes guided by the following understandings:

- All teachers should possess a core of professional knowledge and skills regardless of whom they teach or what they teach.
- Teachers should have knowledge and skills specific to the developmental stages of the children under their care.
- Teachers in each subject area should command a core of subject- and discipline-specific knowledge.
- Teachers should demonstrate depth as well as breadth of knowledge in the disciplines they teach, as well as skill in conveying that knowledge to their students.

tion standards, and the direction of individual standards committees. Thus, I requested to sit on the Certification Standards Working Group.

The Art Standards Committee

One of the highlights of my tenure has been acting as the board's liaison to the Early Adolescence-Young Adulthood: Art Standards Committee. The task of these talented art teachers and scholars is to use the five propositions from "What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do" as a framework for developing standards for visual art teachers at the Early Adolescence-Young Adulthood development levels.²

So far, I have participated in four meetings and have walked away exhilarated each time. Never before, in my 17-year teaching career, have I had such

a sustained opportunity to participate in discussion and debate, over hours and days, about the merits of conceptual frameworks for organizing the content of art education. Intellectual passion runs high, and the teachers, through their discourse, provide each other with snapshots of their own classroom practice. I look inside myself to see how the ideas presented can contribute both to long-term improvement in the quality of education in general and to the immediate enhancement of my own practice.

Full Circle

We have come full circle, back to what we really care about: creating the highest quality learning experiences for our students and initiating reform that will allow us to do just that. When I was elected to the board four years ago, achieving our mission seemed pretty remote. But what was then a distant vision is now grounded in reality. The experience has been a lesson in disparate bodies coming together to make decisions for the common good.

Voluntary teacher certification is not the entire answer to improving American education. It cannot exist effectively without other types of systemic reform, but it is pivotal to professionalizing our teaching force and encouraging highly accomplished practice. □

¹National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, (June 1991), *Toward High and Rigorous Standards for the Teaching Profession: Initial Policies and Procedures of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*, 3d ed., (Detroit and Washington, D.C.: NBPTS).

²Ibid.

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