

*Center for Curriculum, Standards, and Technology*  
**INSTITUTE for EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES**

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**Participation of Holmes  
Partnership Institutions in  
Activities of the National  
Board for Professional  
Teaching Standards**

## About the Contributors

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The study reported in this volume was conducted under the direction of Dr. Iris C. Rotberg, research professor of education policy at The George Washington University.

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**Participation of Holmes Partnership  
Institutions in Activities of the National Board  
for Professional Teaching Standards**

Phyllis Hedlund  
based on interviews conducted by  
Andrea J. Sobel

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## Foreword

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This monograph presents the findings of a survey conducted by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development to provide information about the participation of Holmes Partnership institutions in activities of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The work was done in collaboration with the Capital Educators, a diverse array of professional development partnerships with schools, school districts, and organizations in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

The Holmes Partnership is a consortium of colleges and universities, as well as policymaking groups and professional organizations, established for the purpose of improving the quality of teacher preparation programs, promoting equity and diversity among university and college faculty, and encouraging scholarly inquiry and research on teacher quality.

The National Board was established in 1987 at the recommendation of the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986). The mission of the National Board is “to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national 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” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1997). National Board certification is strictly voluntary and therefore not a requirement for licensure in any state.

Under a grant funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Center for Curriculum, Standards, and Technology at the Graduate School of Education and Human Development worked with teachers who were seeking certification from the National Board. As part of this work, the Center also (1) developed a model designed to provide information to schools of education and school districts that wish to support teachers participating in the National Board certification process (Steeves & Browne, 2001) and (2) conducted two case studies of teachers in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area who had participated in the National Board process (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998; Rotberg, Futrell, & Holmes, 2000). The survey reported in the current volume represents a follow-up to these activities.

The monograph is published as part of a series sponsored by the Institute for Education Policy Studies. We gratefully acknowledge the support of Joel Gomez, the

director of the Institute, in the preparation of the volume. We also thank the interviewees who generously gave their time to provide the information on which this report is based. Cynthia Orticio, who served as editor for the volume, made significant contributions to the volume's presentation and style.

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## **The Participation of Holmes Partnership Institutions in Activities of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

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*Phyllis P. Hedlund*

*based on interviews conducted by Andrea Sobel*

Over a decade ago, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was established on the recommendation of the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (Carnegie Task Force, 1986). The Board's goal is to improve student learning by strengthening teaching (National Board, 2001). The mission of the National Board is "to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national 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" (National Board, 1997).

To achieve these goals, the certification process requires a significant commitment on the part of the applicants. In the first part of the assessment, teachers seeking certification submit videotapes, portfolios based on student work, and other examples of their teaching. The second part, conducted at an assessment center, requires teachers to perform a set of exercises, including evaluation of texts and teaching materials, analysis of teaching situations, and assessment of student learning based on knowledge of subject matter, teaching methods, and student needs.

Candidates often need support through this rigorous process, and universities throughout the country have responded to this need in various ways. In the spring of 1999, The George Washington University conducted a survey of Holmes Partnership member institutions about their current or projected involvement in National Board certification activities. Formed in 1996, the Holmes Partnership, successor to the Holmes Group, is "a network of universities, schools, community agencies, and national professional organizations working to create high-quality professional development and significant school renewal" (Holmes Partnership, 2001). The goals of the partnership are high-quality professional preparation; simultaneous renewal; equity, diversity, and cultural competence; scholarly inquiry and programs of research; school and university-based faculty development; and policy initiation.

Sixty-six of the 78 members of the Holmes Partnership were interviewed over the telephone. Sixty-one of these respondents represented colleges or universities, while five represented professional organizations. Respondents included deans, associate deans, department chairs, directors of professional development programs, and other faculty members, as well as association staff involved with National Board certification. Forty-eight of these institutions conducted activities related to National Board certification and 18 did not. The George Washington University's study was designed to compile information about the type of activities conducted and the factors contributing to institutions' decisions about whether or not to participate and about the choice of activities. This article summarizes the institutions' responses to the survey's questions. Of the eight topic areas covered in the survey, three related only to those institutions that were participating in National Board certification activities, and one area was relevant only to those institutions that were not participating. Not every institution responded to each question on the survey.

The survey inquired into the following activities: (1) activities related to the support of teachers going through the National Board certification process; (2) activities that encourage faculty to incorporate National Board principles into teacher education; (3) the development of specific programs for teachers interested in achieving National Board certification; (4) the development of educational models; and (5) the availability of educational models.

In addition, the survey provided information about institutions' involvement with National Board certification in the context of state and school district incentives and partnerships between institutions of higher education and school systems. It also assessed views about (1) the value of incorporating National Board principles into teacher education and professional development programs; (2) the consistency of these principles with state and local curriculum standards and tests and with school practice in the institution's region; and (3) the potential contribution of National Board certification to improving teaching and the conditions under which that improvement might occur.

## FINDINGS

*Institutions identified state, school district, or institutional support as the main factor contributing to their decision about whether or not to participate in National Board certification.*

Higher education institutions and teacher candidates require both financial and non-financial support to participate in National Board certification activities. Twenty-

six of the 48 participating institutions linked such support to their decision to participate in National Board certification, while all 18 nonparticipating institutions cited lack of support and interest as their main reasons for not participating. Sources of support that respondents listed included state and local governments, higher education institutions, teachers' unions, private foundations, and educational organizations and associations.

State and school district incentives were a main source of support for National Board certification candidates. These incentives included financial bonuses, salary increases, release time, and higher ranking on the career ladder/pay scale. Nineteen of the 48 participating institutions reported that states helped to subsidize the application and certification process, although many of these states provided funding for only a limited number of candidates each year.

Twenty-four of the 66 institutions reported that the presence or absence of state and school district incentives had an impact on their participation in National Board certification. Both participating and nonparticipating institutions linked these incentives to the number of teachers interested in certification. One participating institution explained that "the lack of teachers involved in National Boards caused the governor to initiate support through financial stipend," resulting in significant state increases in the number of National Board-certified teachers. A second participating institution commented that "if teachers were clamoring for certification, then we would be providing more support." A nonparticipating institution complained that "there are many excellent teachers who could meet standards, but they don't see the advantage."

In addition to state and local incentives, institutional support was facilitated by grant funds, faculty incentives, administrative and faculty leadership, and the endorsements of professional organizations. Eleven institutions reported that they were receiving funding to support National Board activities. Sources of funding included state and federal governments, Reader's Digest, Bank of America, Danforth Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, and business round tables. One respondent noted that "if there were not state grants [to the university], we would not be doing as much as we are doing." One institution was not able to continue its participation once funding stopped.

Lack of faculty support posed a problem for higher education institutions. Several respondents referred to low faculty interest in National Board certification. A representative from one institution explained that he met with considerable resistance for promoting National Board participation as a way of providing professional devel-

opment for teachers. Several institutions questioned the value of National Board certification. One respondent commented that he was “not sure of the value personally,” and he thought he represented other faculty members in his university. Another respondent stated that the faculty has “not come to terms as to whether or not certification at a national level is a positive thing.”

Limited higher education resources also posed support issues for National Board certification. One respondent put it this way: “We would have to break even financially with National Boards. For professional development, we wanted to tie in with what teachers are already trying to do. Teachers would have to match the time and resources the university provides. Resources have been a problem for the university at this point in time.”

According to several respondents, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education provided motivation and support for National Board certification. The support of teachers’ unions for National Board activities was mixed. Some institutions responded that unions were negotiating assistance for candidates, while others stated that unions were opposed to offering recognition to National Board-certified teachers.

***Institutions also chose to participate in National Board certification activities because they believe the activities contribute to the quality of their programs.***

Sixteen of the 48 participating institutions linked their participation to the quality they associate with National Board certification. Quality was linked with the program itself, the exceptional candidates it attracts, and the prestige it brings to the profession. One respondent revealed that university faculty “take pride in these individuals and the university’s part in their achievement.” Another respondent claimed that “professionally we want to be on the cutting edge of teacher development and improving teacher quality.” These institutions believed that the process could strengthen the professionalism of teaching, improve professional development, and lead to greater competence in the classroom. Perhaps the strongest endorsement was one institution’s report that teachers called the National Board certification process “the best professional development they have had.”

Participating institutions also cited quality as one of the main benefits of incorporating National Board principles into teacher education and professional development programs. Twenty-six of the 48 participating institutions mentioned the quality of

the standards or candidates. One respondent commented, “National Board standards are the clearest statement of what teacher preparation programs should be. The assessment procedures are rigorous and also sensitive to the complexities of teaching.” Through the National Board process, teachers “see themselves as professionals building the profession, not just teaching.”

In addition, participating institutions cited the potential contribution of National Board certification to the improvement of teaching. Twenty-three of the 48 participating institutions asserted that National Board certification will lead to an improvement in teacher quality. One respondent claimed that eventually the standards will improve professional development for all teachers, even those who do not go through the process. Another respondent simply stated, “Since the board’s propositions represent a professional consensus about good teaching practice, the quality of teaching will be higher to the extent that kind of teaching becomes more pervasive.”

***Institutions reported that partnerships to conduct National Board certification activities existed most frequently with other higher education institutions.***

Twenty-two of the 48 participating institutions were working on National Board certification with other colleges and universities. Institutions also reported formal partnerships with local teacher academies and professional development schools. Less common were formal and informal partnerships with school systems. Professional societies, associations, and unions were helping with certification for nine of the respondents. In a few instances, state legislatures and departments of education were cited as providing or supporting activities related to certification. Several institutions suggested that support for teachers could be provided through such university/state partnerships.

***The primary activity reported by participating institutions was the support of teachers applying for National Board certification.***

Twelve of the 48 participating institutions described mentoring activities. For example, one institution held meetings twice a month for groups of 10 teachers working within the same certificate. At another institution, an individual was hired to serve as a mentor to candidates. In other instances, the mentoring was informal. Informal activities included offering release time for candidates, having faculty

participate in National Board certification, disseminating information about the National Board, and hiring a coordinator for National Board certification.

Eight institutions reported holding seminars for candidates applying for National Board certification. At one institution, for example, the seminar met 13 times a year for two hours, with candidates grouped according to certification area. Another institution provided seminars along with course work and training experiences. Other activities to support teachers through the National Board certification process included courses, workshops, and master's degree programs.

Six institutions referred to their relationships with local school districts. Those relationships involved a program of study for local teachers, in-service opportunities, informal support of teachers through the certification process, and financial support. Five institutions referred to partnerships with professional development schools. One respondent explained that such a partnership “presents opportunities to discuss National Board certification and provide awareness information for teachers.” A second institution supported a group of teachers through the process, while a third institution paid for the application fees of candidates and offered them financial incentives upon certification.

***Some participating institutions reported creating or revising their teacher preparation programs to reflect National Board principles.***

Twenty-five of the 48 participating institutions stated that their current program reflects National Board standards or that they are either examining the present curriculum to see how it corresponds with National Board principles or revising it to do so. One respondent described using the National Board standards “to look at curriculum.” Another institution stated that the faculty “have recently overhauled their teacher preparation program and have aligned it with NECTAS [National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System], NCATE [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education], and new state standards—all of which are aligned with National Boards.”

Thirteen of the participating institutions stated that they hoped to incorporate training for certification into master's degree programs. Six institutions reported that they were developing or have developed programs at the graduate level. These programs included a specialist degree in elementary education, an advanced preparation certificate, and certification as a requirement for candidates for the interdisciplinary educational leadership doctorate program.

***In addition to the direct benefits of National Board certification, institutions saw indirect effects such as improvement in teacher status or the involvement of a broader set of constituencies.***

Twenty-five of the 66 institutions stated that teacher status will improve as a result of National Board certification. One respondent expressed the “hope that in the not-so-distant future, the teacher standards movement, NCATE, NECTAS, and National Board will increase public confidence in the quality of teaching so that maybe states will relax their standardized testing agenda.” A nonparticipating institution stated that “the potential is huge. If more teachers are led in this direction or encouraged to seek certification, it would make a positive impact on the professionalism of teaching.” Another institution concluded that the “public perception about the level of competence and professionalism can improve through National Board certification.”

Eleven institutions mentioned that National Board certification has the potential for developing leadership in teachers and higher education institutions. Five respondents stated that the process creates teachers who are leaders. One respondent described certification as a “way for teachers to be leaders and remain in the classroom.” Six respondents saw the process as a way for their institutions to assume leadership positions.

Nine respondents mentioned that the National Board principles challenge higher education institutions to improve the quality of their programs. One respondent stated that “it forces us to project further into the professional lives of teachers, rather than just getting someone through student teaching.” Another respondent agreed, stating that the principles are “a good way for faculty to be on the cutting edge of what is going on in schools and connect to teachers in very different ways than they had in the past and provide a different way of delivering instruction.” According to one respondent, the National Board principles could lead to greater consistency among teacher education programs in the country.

A number of institutions observed that the National Board principles unify expectations for teachers and offer educators a language with which to hold a dialogue about teaching. According to one respondent, the National Board “provides a common language for schools and universities.” Another respondent noted that beginning teachers will understand what is expected of them in the future through the incorporation of National Board standards. A third described a benefit of the standards as opening up the dialogue on quality teacher preparation to those outside of teacher education institutions. He explained:

The principles and beliefs [of National Board certification] represent a neat package to present to people who are not educators. To explain teaching to many groups—state legislatures, community groups, etc.—it takes this type of viewpoint on what constitutes good teaching. With this in hand, it is easier to move stakeholders to thinking about something other than test scores as evidence of quality education.

Other benefits the respondents mentioned included the involvement of a broader set of constituencies, the potential for mentoring and networking opportunities, political appeal, the “bottom-up” aspect of this reform, and increased knowledge about teaching.

***Many respondents stated that National Board standards are aligned with state and local curriculum standards and tests.***

Thirty-two of the 66 institutions stated that National Board standards are consistent with state and local curriculum standards and tests. One respondent commented that “the fact that the state is pouring so much money into National Boards and has incorporated it into licensure and professional development programs suggests that it will become even more integrated into the state system.” Some respondents, however, pointed out problems. One institution stated that National Board standards “are inconsistent with [state standards]. The two are moving in different directions, which is problematic.”

***Some institutions cited potential problems associated with participation in National Board certification.***

Potential problems institutions associated with participation included the politics surrounding certification and the need for additional research. Sixteen of the 66 participating and nonparticipating institutions stated that the National Board principles provoked debate within their institutions. The two main questions raised were whether National Board standards are too prescriptive and limit the autonomy of higher education institutions and whether universities can integrate all the standards with which they are inundated. One respondent complained that “the process of reviewing programs and trying to comply with so many standards that may not all go together is difficult. It is difficult to answer to all of the different groups.” An-

other respondent noted that “it is often hard for university faculty to accept change from the outside. The extent to which [our state] bought into National Board raises some skeptical ears among the faculty. They may be looking not at the substance of the National Boards, but at the politics in [our state] and seeing this as yet another state-mandated objective.”

Sixteen of the 66 institutions also cited an absence of research on National Board standards. For some faculty members, reflective practice does not replace quantitative or qualitative research. One respondent stated that “self-reflection is an excellent mode of inquiry, but it doesn’t always match faculty members’ vision of research. Selling this in an institution that prides itself on certain types of research can be difficult.” Another respondent explained, “We don’t know yet how the certification will determine the effectiveness of National Board teachers.” According to one respondent, for his state to buy into National Board certification, political groups “would need ‘proof’ that kids will perform better with certified teachers.”

Four respondents believed that incorporating the principles at the pre-service stage prepared teachers for certification down the road but emphasized that the levels of accomplishment for a novice and a master teacher are very different. One respondent warned that “the National Boards are designed for master teachers. Certain elements would fit in pre-service, but others are not related to the beginning teacher.”

Several respondents pointed to teacher shortages in some areas as an obstacle to National Board certification. As one respondent pointed out, the National Board certification process “is not being supported through a teacher shortage when you need bodies in the classroom.” Other potential problems the respondents cited were the complexity of National Board principles, their ambiguity, inequities the process creates, a lack of support from the National Board, and a need for better communication about the process.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many of the findings of this study are consistent with earlier studies of teachers conducted by The George Washington University. As part of a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at The George Washington University conducted two case studies of teachers who applied for National Board certification. The first study was based on telephone interviews conducted in 1997 with 28 of the 38 participants who had been supported by the Pew grant project team in the first three years of the project. That

study showed both the potential benefits of National Board certification and the factors that may limit its potential (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998).

The second case study was based on telephone interviews conducted in 1998 with 22 of the 26 teachers who participated in the certification process during the fourth year of the project. Many of the candidates had taken part in support activities sponsored by their school districts and by The George Washington University. The findings of this study were consistent with the earlier research: while some teachers had reservations about the benefits of the certification process, most described it as an extremely valuable professional development experience (Rotberg, Futrell, & Holmes, 2000).

The respondents from the Holmes Partnership institutions also agreed that preparation for National Board certification was an outstanding professional development experience (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998). However, these higher education institutions called attention to the limited number of teacher preparation curriculum models based on National Board certification, confirming teachers' report of a scarcity of formal preparation materials (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998). In the earlier research, the need for research to assess the impact of certification on the quality of teaching was also established (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998).

However, the institutions surveyed were more positive than were earlier reports about the consistency between National Board standards and conventional practices in colleges of education and school districts (Rotberg, Futrell, & Holmes, 2000). Most of the institutions participating in National Board certification reported that they have aligned or are in the process of aligning their teacher preparation programs with National Board standards. In addition, many respondents stated that National Board standards are aligned with state and local curriculum standards and tests.

The findings of this report suggest that state, school district, and institutional support are essential for teachers seeking certification and institutions guiding them through the process. Two thirds of the respondents cited financial and nonfinancial support as instrumental in their decisions about whether or not to participate in National Board certification activities. Teachers and higher education institutions agreed that the quality of the certification process is high, yet incentives, though on the rise, do not appear to match the time and effort that teachers need to invest in the process.

Even though the number of teachers going through the certification process remains relatively low, over a third of the respondents reported that their teacher preparation programs reflect or will reflect National Board standards. This shift in teacher preparation curricula suggests that future teachers may be more prepared to go through the certification process. It also suggests that teachers who are not undertaking the certification process are benefiting from the standards. The debate within higher education institutions over the value of these standards challenges proponents of the National Board. To address these differences, it will be important to conduct research that assesses the contributions of the certification process to the quality of teaching.

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## **APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS**

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**I. Does your institution currently conduct activities in connection with National Board certification?**

**II. If yes to question I:**

A. We are particularly interested in the following three types of activities related to National Board certification:

- Activities related to the support of teachers going through the National Board certification process.
- Activities that encourage faculty to incorporate National Board principles into their teacher preparation programs.
- The development of specific programs designed for teachers interested in achieving National Board certification.
- Has your institution conducted activities in any of these or other areas? Please describe.

B. Has your institution developed educational models and research projects or evaluations in connection with any of these activities? Please describe. How are they disseminated?

C. Has your state or school district provided incentives for participation in National Board certification? Please describe.

D. Have these incentives, or lack of incentives, had an impact on your institution's participation in National Board certification?

E. Please describe any partnerships with institutions of higher education or with school systems to conduct activities related to National Board certification.

We also are interested in the experience your institution has had with respect to several issues related to National Board certification:

- A. What are the benefits, or disadvantages, of attempting to incorporate National Board principles into teacher education and professional development programs?
- B. Are the National Board principles consistent, or inconsistent, with state and local curriculum standards and tests and with school practice in your region?
- C. What is the potential contribution of National Board certification to improved teaching and the conditions under which that improvement might occur?
- D. Would your institution be interested in exchanging information about current work and research findings on National Board certification?
- E. Do you have additional comments?

**III. If no to question I:**

- A. What factors influenced your institution's decision about whether or not to participate in National Board certification?
- B. Has your state or school district provided incentives for participation in National Board certification? Please describe.
- C. Is your institution interested in initiating National Board activities?
- D. Would your institution be interested in receiving information about activities, educational models, and research projects conducted by other institutions?





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