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The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987. Funded principally by the Carnegie Foundation, major teacher unions, and the U. S. Department of Education, its mission is to set advanced proficiency standards for teachers and to certify teachers who meet those standards.

Teachers pay \$2,300 to be evaluated by the NBPTS. They prepare a lengthy portfolio, make videotapes of themselves, and take an all-day written exam. Only fully licensed and experienced teachers may apply.

States and school districts have offered powerful incentives, such as salary increases in the \$5,000 to \$7,500 per year range for successful applicants. As of January 2002, the NBPTS has certified 16,037 teachers in 19 areas of teaching. Over 20,000 more have applied.

Do NBPTS-Certified Teachers Improve Student Achievement?

NBPTS standards are based on research, teacher opinion, and expert judgment; but essentially they reflect the same ideas about teaching that have dominated education for decades. They are consistent with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) teacher training standards and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium's (INTASC) teacher licensure standards.

Several studies have attempted to show that teachers who meet NBPTS standards are truly superior in the classroom. The largest of these investigations--a study by the Center for Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro--compared teachers who were awarded certification to ones who applied but were unsuccessful. The results indicated that successful applicants were higher on 11 of the 13 qualities the NBPTS considers essential to good teaching.

What neither the UNCG study nor any others found, however, is evidence that NBPTS-certified teachers are effective in improving objectively measured student achievement. Its assessment of student learning

was based on work samples chosen by the participating teachers themselves--hardly an unbiased measure. Moreover, despite the key role of standardized tests in state accountability plans, the UNCG report argued that such tests are narrow, inadequate, and arbitrary.

Independent Studies Are Needed

Over the past decade, NBPTS has spent more than \$165 million in public and private funds formulating an evaluation process and publicizing its presumed benefits. In particular, policymakers have been urged to provide financial support for applicants and substantial rewards for successful ones--all on assumption that NBPTS certification furthers the academic achievement aims of public policy. Now these claims are being called into question.

In October 2000, NBPTS President Betty Castor said of the UNCG study: "It gives us--parents, elected officials, and policymakers--the absolute highest confidence that national-board-certified teachers are providing students with a high-quality learning experience" (October 25, 2000).

Less than two years later, however, an *Education Week* headline read: "National Board is Pressed to Prove that Certified Teachers Make a Difference" (January 30, 2002). The NBPTS had called a meeting of educational researchers to propose studies that might show whether NBPTS certified teachers are truly more effective in improving measured student achievement.

What is badly needed are studies conducted independently of the NBPTS and its many stakeholders. The NBPTS has spent millions on development. Billions more have been committed on the basis of its representations. Contradictory findings such as those reported here raise questions not only about NBPTS standards but about the credibility of the NBPTS initiative.

Given the Enron/Arthur Andersen scandal, the public's sensitivity to misleading reports and conflicts of interest may be at an all-time high. Researchers who lack an arm's-length relationship with NBPTS may find themselves in the same position as the cancer researchers who worked under the auspices of the Tobacco Institute.

Tennessee's Data Are Not Supportive

Tennessee has more than 40 NBPTS-certified teachers. Sixteen of the 40 teach in grades three through eight and therefore have value-added "teacher reports" in the state database.

Tennessee's teacher reports summarize the annual achievement gains exhibited by each teacher's students. Using a sophisticated "mixed model" statistical methodology developed by Dr. William Sanders, student progress is estimated on the basis of how much students gain in comparison to their achievement increases in previous years. The Sanders estimates of teacher impact on learning--called "teacher-effect" scores--are considered the most fair and exact available.

Annual student achievement gains (i.e., teacher-effect scores) for the 16 TN NBPTS-certified teachers were compared to the average achievement gains of their local school systems (click the title of this briefing for the full text). Comparisons were made in as many as 5 subjects and over as many as 3 years. Achievement gains ranging from 85 to 115% of the school system mean were considered "average." Gains of 115% and above were considered "exemplary" and ones less than 85% were considered "deficient." Tennessee's school system performance standards regard 115% or more as an "A" and 85% or less as an "F."

Only 15% of the scores earned by the NBPTS-certified teachers reached 115%. Eleven percent were at or below 85%, and the rest were within the average range for their school system. In other words, on the whole, the students taught by NBPTS-certified teachers gained no more than their local peers.

NBPTS-certified teachers were similarly unexceptional as assessed by the standard used in one of Tennessee's urban school systems. A recently instituted program in Chattanooga rewards "high performing" teachers with a \$5,000 bonus. To be classified as high performing, a teacher must reach 115% in math, reading, and language for the 3 preceding years. Even if one disregards the Chattanooga program's 3-year, 3-subject requirement, none of the NBPTS teachers would have been awarded a bonus.

Clearly the findings of this study are at odds with that which the public has been given to believe about NBPTS-certified teachers. An analogy is appropriate: If a grocer bought several cases of hand-wrapped, premium, large apples and discovered 85 percent of the first box to be mediums and smalls, he would surely demand a refund and find another supplier--especially if the apples cost as much as NBPTS-certified teachers.

The Education Consumers Consultants Network is an alliance of experienced and credentialed educators dedicated to serving the needs of parents, policymakers, and taxpayers for independent and consumer-friendly consulting. For more information, contact J. E. Stone, Ed.D., at (423) 282-6832, or write: professor@education-consumers.com