



The Teachers That Oklahoma Students Deserve

*Recommendations from
National Board Certified
Teachers® and Administrators
on How to Support and Staff
High-Needs Schools*

**Barnett Berry and Melissa Rasberry
with
Kevin McDonald**



Great Public Schools for Every Child



Oklahoma Education Association



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**National Education
Association**



**Center for
Teaching Quality**



**Oklahoma
Education Association**

December 2006

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, education support professionals, college faculty, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

Copies of this report can be obtained by contacting Dr. Dottie Caldwell, Associate Executive Director, Oklahoma Education Association, (405) 528-7785.

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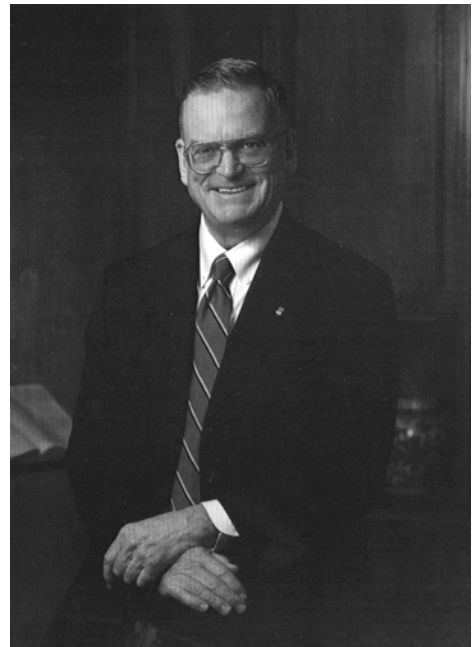
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This Report Is Dedicated to the Memory of John W. Rex

An active leader in the Oklahoma business and education communities, John Rex was a tireless advocate for the teaching profession. John had great respect for teachers, as evidenced by his membership on the NBPTS board of directors. He was instrumental in organizing the National Board Summit. From the initial planning stages, John worked tirelessly to help support the event on behalf of the children of Oklahoma. Dedicated and committed to the success of the Summit, John would not take “no” for an answer. He contacted numerous businesses to find the financial support and reached out to teachers, administrators, and superintendents to ensure they would participate in the conversation to support and staff high-needs schools. At the Summit planning meetings, John always had another plan for ways to include more stakeholders. This strong advocate for education will always be remembered for his efforts to promote teaching quality and ensure a quality educator for every student in the state. John Rex ... a true icon in Oklahoma education.



***December 11, 1933 -
April 26, 2006***

For the educators of Oklahoma, March 30, 2006, was an important day. With leadership from the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA), over 330 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs®) and 100 administrators had a chance to meet with some of the state's leading policymakers, including Governor Brad Henry, Senator Susan Paddock, Representative Ann Coody, and Superintendent Sandy Garrett, to consider recommendations on how to support and staff high-needs schools.¹ The first-of-its-kind policy summit provided a unique opportunity for a large group of Oklahoma's accomplished teachers to gather with school-level and district administrators to collaboratively offer solutions to one of the most vexing teaching quality problems in the state and nation—how to recruit and retain accomplished teachers for the students who need them the most.

Introduction

Studies continue to surface a disheartening fact: while research shows that teachers are key to closing achievement gaps, poor and minority students as well as those in low-performing schools are far less likely to have access to the most experienced and qualified teachers. For instance, although NBCTs are more likely to produce higher student achievement gains when compared to their non-NBCT counterparts, only 19 percent of NBCTs teach in schools in the bottom third of their state's performance ratings.² The situation in Oklahoma is no different. Even with 1,289 NBCTs,³ the state has only 115 serving in low-performing schools. Like many states, Oklahoma has tried to put in place a number of incentives to attract accomplished teachers to high-needs schools; however, there is little evidence about the effectiveness of these strategies. Andrew Rotherham, drawing on related data, has argued that the vast majority of NBCT incentives, while important in encouraging and recognizing accomplished teachers, "are generally divorced from efforts to make the distribution of top-flight teachers more equitable."⁴



Governor Brad Henry

It seems that the maldistribution of good teachers is as much a problem today as ever before.

Still resolved, the Oklahoma Commission on Teacher Preparation has set a goal to have a National Board Certified Teacher at every school site in Oklahoma by 2007. To encourage teachers across

How the NBC Process Works

In order to become National Board Certified, teachers and school counselors must complete a rigorous assessment process. These educators must have a baccalaureate degree, three years of teaching experience in early childhood, elementary, middle, or secondary schools prior to submitting an application, and a valid state teaching license, where required, for each of those three years. National Board Certification is available in 24 categories, ranging from Early and Middle Childhood/Art to World Languages Other than English. It is estimated that approximately 200-400 hours are needed to complete the following components:

- Analysis and reflection on videotaped classroom teaching lessons (two portfolio entries);
- Analysis and reflection on student work samples (one portfolio entry);
- Documented educational accomplishments outside of the regular classroom and evidence of how that involvement impacts student learning (one portfolio entry);
- Online assessment exercises that demonstrate subject matter expertise (six exercises, each allowing 30 minutes for response).

Because the National Board process is so rigorous, many candidates do not achieve Certification on their first attempt. Educators who do not initially certify are given two additional years to retake and resubmit entries.*

* Information was gathered from the NBPTS document, *Making the commitment to accomplished teaching: Q & A for 2006 National Board Certification*.

the state to pursue National Board Certification[®], the state legislature and governor annually provide 400 candidates with Education Leadership Oklahoma scholarships that cover application fees, training with Oklahoma NBCTs and regional coordinators, and mentors from Oklahoma universities. This a good start.

Once teachers pass muster on the rigorous National Board Certification[®] assessments, they receive a \$5,000 annual bonus for the life of the certification, which ranks Oklahoma in the top ten states in the amount of annual stipends offered to teachers who achieve National Board Certification—an advanced certification process akin to what accomplished engineers, architects, and doctors are expected to achieve.

However, if students in high-needs schools are ever to achieve at a level commensurate with their more advantaged peers, then much needs to be done to recruit and retain accomplished teachers for these challenging schools. For the NBCTs of Oklahoma, the need to more *fully professionalize teaching* in the

state is paramount. In fact, if the state's policymakers are going to ensure that every student is taught by an effective teacher, then they *must offer the kinds of incentives and supports needed to teach effectively* and then make certain that the *most accomplished practitioners have sufficient autonomy and tools to serve their students well*. However, as the NBCTs at the Oklahoma Summit reported, the state's conditions for teacher professionalism are not ripe.

Many policymakers across the nation simply believe paying accomplished teachers—like NBCTs—more for teaching in high-needs schools will do the trick. For example, the governor and the legislature in Georgia recently approved a law that awards teachers who earn or renew National Board Certification status with a 10% bonus *only* if they work in a school that has been on the state's roster of low-performing schools for two or more consecutive years. A similar proposal from the governor's office has been on the table in South Carolina.

Unfortunately, these policymakers are not paying attention to the research. Getting good teachers to

Robyn Hilger on the Value of NBC

"The National Board process has been the most influential and beneficial professional development activity for me as a teacher. It affirmed what I already knew about myself as a teacher. I knew that I had great classroom climate and a strong connection to my students and their families. I knew that I had well-planned lessons. I knew that I collaborated well with my colleagues. There are so many things I did right every day, and this process brought all my strengths to light. In the same respect, all my weaknesses became glaringly obvious during this process as well. As a music teacher, many times I made decisions about my classroom based on my experiences as a student in a music classroom. The National Board process pointed out to me that sometimes I was 'doing unto others' what had been

done to me, rather than taking a good look at the group of students that I was serving and their unique needs. I had to refocus not on what I wanted the students to learn, but rather what the students needed to know. This was a huge and much needed paradigm shift for me. I also noticed that, while my lessons were well-planned, my assessments were not. I lacked authentic student self-assessment and consistent evaluation measures. As painful as it was to see those weaknesses, it was through their identification that I saw the most growth in my teaching.

"The National Board process also connected me to a professional learning community. Teachers who were like me—teachers who wanted to better themselves—so that they could have more im-

pact on their students. One of the best parts of National Board is that you must form relationships with your colleagues and work with other teachers, not only in your building but state and nationwide. It forces us to come off our 'classroom islands' and become part of a larger network. I know that I would not have certified had it not been for those mentors who invested their time and energy with me. I am forever grateful and know that it is my duty to pay it forward to our future candidates. The relationships I formed have been and continue to be invaluable. I started as a skeptic but quickly became a true believer. My teaching has been changed forever."

—Robyn Hilger, NBCT, 2005-06
Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year,
Oklahoma City Public Schools

go to and teach effectively in high-needs schools has more to do with access to good principals, colleagues, and materials than anything else. For example, a recent six-state survey of NBCTs found overwhelmingly that financial incentives alone will not lure these accomplished teachers to low-performing schools. Other factors—such as strong principal leadership, a collegial staff with a shared teaching philosophy, adequate resources for teaching, and a supportive and active parent community—were far more powerful determinants.⁵

Similarly, in recent studies of working conditions, the Center for Teaching Quality has found that school leadership is the strongest predictor of whether a school meets state standards and Adequate Yearly Progress. School leadership has much to do with promoting and sustaining what teachers need to teach effectively—including time to learn from their colleagues and autonomy in making decisions that directly affect their ability to help students learn.

With this research in mind, the National Education Association has come up with a common-sense idea: *Invite highly accomplished teachers to sit down at the table together with administrators to collaboratively explore what it will take to recruit and retain them in high-needs schools.* The NBCT Policy Summit on Supporting and Staffing High-Needs Schools held in Oklahoma City in spring 2006 was designed to do just that.

A Strong Foundation on Which to Build

Oklahoma's teaching profession has benefited from the commitment of political leaders like Governor Henry and Superintendent Garrett as well as from business leaders turned teacher advocates such as the late John Rex, president of the American Fidelity

Sociologists have labeled professions as those occupations that: (a) use a “codified” body of knowledge to serve clients effectively and ethically; (b) establish and enforce standards; (c) rely on skilled practitioner judgment to solve problems; and (d) design accountability systems to promote the spread of best practices.

Ten years ago, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future called for a comprehensive effort to close the student achievement and teacher quality gaps by professionalizing teaching. The 1996 NCTAF report specifically focused on:

- Closing inadequate schools of education;
- Using both professional standards boards and accreditation of teacher education programs to demand increasingly higher standards for teachers and universities that prepare them;
- Using demonstrated performance as the basis of licensing teachers;
- Using the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards® as a benchmark for accomplished teaching;
- Developing a year-long internship in a professional development school as part of teacher education;
- Creating high-quality alternative routes into teaching for mid-career teacher candidates;
- Funding mentoring programs for all novices to reduce teacher attrition;
- Creating stable sources of high-quality professional development;
- Improving working conditions so teachers have the time and tools to serve students and families effectively;
- Equalizing access to quality teaching by helping low-wealth districts afford quality teachers;
- Fixing dysfunctional personnel systems that cause late hiring and placement of the least experienced teachers with the most challenging students;
- Providing an array of incentives for working in the areas where we most need high-quality teachers;
- Developing a career continuum that links professional compensation with knowledge, skills, and effective performance;
- Using peer review strategies for removing incompetent teachers; and
- Promoting board certification so that there are 105,000 (i.e., the number of schools in the nation) NBCTs by 2006.

Teaching has long been noted as a semi-profession due to its truncated training and unenforced standards, ill-defined body of knowledge, and less autonomy of practice. Professionalizing teaching will require more teachers using new knowledge about what works for student learning and leading their colleagues. It will also require policymakers, practitioners, and the public to recognize highly accomplished teachers. With the advent of the NBPTS, much can be done to fully professionalize teaching. Unfortunately, there are still fewer than 50,000 NBCTs nationwide (approximately 1.5 percent of America's teacher workforce) and most of them are not leading school improvement efforts, particularly in our highest-needs schools.

Assurance Company and member of the NBPTS® Board of Directors.

Over the past ten years, the state has raised teaching standards, improved teacher education, supported new teachers with state-funded mentoring programs, and enhanced professional development.

For example, the State Department of Education has launched a Master Teacher Project, in which three Master Teachers from each of six regions are selected from various content areas to provide ongoing staff development and training throughout the school year. In addition, over 8,000 teachers have successfully completed the Reading Literacy Professional Development Institute offered by the Oklahoma Commission on Teacher Preparation (OCTP). The Oklahoma Education Association has also requested \$500,000 for a professional development institute on helping teachers more effectively reach growing numbers of diverse students in the state's public school classrooms.

Local districts have initiated new efforts to improve teaching quality as well. One example is the Oklahoma City Public School District, which received a grant from the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices to increase the number of NBCTs in urban high schools. This project complements an effort by the Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation to encourage middle school teachers to pursue National Board Certification.

But these initiatives, while noteworthy, most likely will only influence change at the margins. More



Senator Susan Paddack

aggressive—even revolutionary—shifts in both teaching policies and programs are in order. Oklahoma teachers, especially its NBCTs, are rarely called upon to craft new approaches to strengthen their profession and the teaching they provide to children. This issue is not unique to Oklahoma. Five years ago, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) found that the unique voice of teacher leaders was “too seldom heard or their views even solicited” and urged education decision makers across the United States to “exploit a potentially splendid resource for reform . . . the experience, ideas, and capacity to lead of the nation’s school-teachers.”⁶ With the ninth largest population of NBCTs in the nation and 17 Milken winners since 2000, Oklahoma has an easily identifiable group of accomplished teachers to tap as leaders—and now is the time to do so.

Teachers and Teaching in Oklahoma

The NBCTs attending the Summit spoke proudly about their work and the students they serve. However, a number of them recognize serious barriers before them—and what needs to be done to professionalize their occupation so they can have a more powerful impact on students. In particular, the NBCTs highlighted the fact of how *isolated* they are as teachers, the *dire realities* many of them face in high-needs schools, the need for more *administrative support*, and what it will take to *professionalize teaching*.

De-isolating Teachers and Teaching

Dating back to the one-room schoolhouse, teachers have been accustomed to working in isolation with little to no interaction with their teaching peers. Even in today’s schools with large hallways and multiple grade levels, many teachers close their classroom

doors—both literally and figuratively—and work independently of their colleagues. At the Summit in March and through the follow-up listserv, this *lack of collaborative culture* surfaced as one of the greatest challenges to improving teaching quality. “I have taught for 20+ years,” said one NBCT, “and I still don’t know what other teachers are doing in my building.” The everyday stresses of lesson planning, student assessments, classroom management, paperwork, and other “administrivia” inhibit teachers’ ability to network and learn more about their peers’ strengths and interests. A lack of a common planning period is one reason for this isolation. Many colleagues that share the same grade level or subject area do not have the time to get together during the school day due to poor scheduling or lack of resources to cover classes.

On the other hand, some schools do provide a common planning period, yet the time can be used poorly. “At my school, we are working on developing grade-level teams,” an NBCT commented at the Summit. “We get to meet during the day, but right now we are consumed with paperwork rather than teamwork.” Other accomplished teachers experienced similar circumstances. “We have a team time each day,” a fellow Summit participant noted, “but a lot of the time is wasted. Time is not used to discuss student learning.” NBCTs—accustomed to focusing on their students’ growth and progress for their National Board portfolios—understand the importance of reflective practice, particularly with their peers. “I would love to do Japanese lesson studies,” suggested another NBCT, “where people come together and videotape lessons or observe them in person to discuss as a collaborative tool.” However, this type of collegial practice is not the norm in schools across Oklahoma.

The Dire Realities of High-Needs Schools

Accomplished teachers in high-needs schools would particularly appreciate a bit more reprieve from the excessive workload that they must shoulder. “I work in a high-needs school,” explained one NBCT, “and I would love not to do everyone else’s duties ... not the secretarial and administrative jobs like running the copy machine and calling for repairs. For weeks, we did not even have a working toilet because I didn’t have time to call it in.”

Working in high-needs schools creates other challenges as well. Many students come to school, as Sandi Bennett, NBCT from Oklahoma City, explained, “not ready to learn ... because they are



Representative Ann Coody

tired, stressed, and undernourished, with little healthy, physical activity in their daily lives.” Teachers must then find ways to meet these students’ emotional, physical, and academic needs, while also juggling their normal duties. Claudia Swisher, an NBCT from Norman, noted

that many teachers at high-needs schools are “in survival mode” and “have no energy for one more thing.”

Colleagues at other schools choose not to go to high-needs buildings for fear that their schedules will grow even more constrained with these demands. “I turned down a high-needs school job,” said one National Board educator, “because I do not earn enough money and need to moonlight to pay off my school loans.”

For those teachers already at high-needs schools, the cost of becoming an NBCT may seem out of their reach. As Beth Bley, NBCT from Putnam City Schools, noted:

I was the second NBCT at my high-needs school. I was really lucky to have the help of a colleague who had already earned a certificate. In most high-needs schools, with all its demands, there just are not enough resources of people and dollars available for teachers to try to obtain National Board Certification.

Another participant added, “There is definitely the perception that working in high-needs schools is less prestigious [than working in suburban schools]. The resources and buildings might not be as nice so we assume that teaching there isn’t so nice either.” Some NBCTs fear being forced to teach scripted curricula. “There are high-needs schools in which I would not teach,” admitted one NBCT. “I have the freedom in my current school to choose my curriculum. I would be happy to go to a high-needs school if I had the freedom to select the programs.”

Indeed, research has shown that recruiting and retaining teachers for high-needs schools requires that policymakers find ways to eliminate the stigma of working in them, made more acute by the fact that a growing share are labeled as failures by No Child Left Behind’s high-stakes accountability measures. Recent evidence suggests that negative school accountability labels and the accompanying pressures contribute significantly to chasing teachers away from such schools,⁷ and creating the paradox where measures intended to help students in these schools may in fact hurt their chances of being well-taught by accomplished educators. One administrator at the National Board Summit offered this alternative:

We need to change the way we talk about high-needs schools and not give people the impression that it is a real shame that teachers have to teach there. Rather, we need to let everyone know that it is a wonderful opportunity to grow professionally. What a great challenge!

Other NBCTs at the Summit expressed another challenge to staffing high-needs schools—personal fears about working in areas often characterized by high crime and poverty. “Because of fear, we don’t know what to do,” admitted one NBCT. “And quite frankly we may have trouble dealing with parents who are different from ourselves.” Indeed,



Superintendent Sandy Garrett

numerous others felt this same sense of being ill-prepared to reach students from diverse backgrounds. “We have general knowledge about children and their development, but we don’t receive specific

knowledge about their beliefs, customs, and learning styles. We need to have training that is much broader than we traditionally receive,” an NBCT suggested.

Administrative Support

Hard work and commitment are required by both teachers and administrators to establish strong partnerships that support successful schools. As one NBCT noted, “administrators and teachers must understand that collaborative cultures are a mindset.” But often both teacher and administrator preparation programs do not prepare educators to work together. As a result, teachers may not be understood, heard, or embraced by their administrators. Fortunately for Oklahoma’s educators, the

National Board Summit offered a valuable venue for NBCTs to initiate dialogue with principals and central office leaders about the challenges they face as well as potential solutions to counteract them.

Many accomplished teachers who attended the Summit shared their appreciation for the support of their school and district leaders. “My superintendent called and congratulated me for achieving National Board Certification. He was excited about having an NBCT and gave me the resources needed to make a difference,” stated one teacher leader. “I worked at an at-risk school in the past,” noted a fellow NBCT, “and watched it develop over 10 years with the help of a dynamic principal. Together with the staff’s help, that school drastically changed. We had to look at how we taught and look to the community to build partnerships. There was lots of collaboration ... with the principal facilitating, not telling us what to do.”

“The Policy Summit on Supporting and Staffing High-Needs Schools was an exceptional experience for all involved. I was especially thrilled to see so many classroom teachers finally have a meaningful vehicle to voice their ideas and thoughts about what needs to be done to not only initially staff high-needs schools but also keep the momentum going. As an administrator and Nationally Board Certified Teacher, I believe this type of collaboration is what truly makes a difference in education and is essential in our effort to continue to grow as a progressive state. The teachers had great ideas about what needs to happen now that we have ‘grown’ so many of our own NBCTs in Oklahoma. The key to continued success is to utilize their talents to the fullest.”

—Michele Sneed, NBCT, Principal,
Seminole Public Schools

The significant roles that NBCTs and other teacher leaders can serve are recognized by a number of administrators, approximately 100 of whom attended the Summit and asserted the value of NBCTs. One principal reported:

There are many benefits of having an NBCT at your school site—strong leadership skills, desire for more continuous professional growth, writing ability, and a willingness to seek out grants. NBCTs look at students differently, too. They are most concerned about why students aren’t learning.

While a number of NBCTs praised administrators, like the ones previously mentioned, for supporting them to help students learn, a fair number at the Summit expressed concerns about the general lack of collaboration between teachers and administrators. As one NBCT noted, “I know a lot of principals who do not communicate with their teachers ... [they do not] tell them what is planned or listen to their ideas. They are very top-down. Lack of communication is then a huge problem.”

We suspect that much of the lack of administrative support mentioned by some NBCTs can be attributed to the workload of school leaders, rather than disinterest. Administrators, like classroom teachers, face a growing list of roles and responsibilities that demand more and more of their time and attention. Issues like those raised by NBCTs can serve as catalysts for more collective thinking about how to better communicate and collaborate with administrators to promote teaching and learning. The National Board Summit began those efforts and offered accomplished teachers a venue to express their concerns. The mere presence of so many school leaders indicated a strong interest and desire in bridging the gap between teachers and administrators to better serve the students of Oklahoma.

The Keys to Professionalizing Teaching

Much of the policy discourse swirling around recruiting and retaining teachers for high-needs schools rests on faulty assumptions. For some

policymakers, financial incentives are assumed to be the key to recruit qualified teachers to high-needs schools and then motivating them to raise student test scores. The key, in fact, is professionalizing teaching. Beth Bley, in recalling a conversation with an administrator about high-needs schools and teaching effectively in them, asserted how important it is to give teachers a chance to serve students in ways they know best:

[The administrator] asked me to explain what makes students want to perform for me. It's simple ... relationships, relationships, relationships. I believe our profession is about the relationships with our students first and foremost. It's because of this love for our students that we strive to do all we can. I don't push myself to learn because of any benefit it would have to me (other than the satisfaction of knowing I'm doing all I can for my kids). I push myself because I truly believe that these kids deserve that from me.

A number of Oklahoma NBCTs are painfully aware that teaching has not been a self-regulating occupation, and teachers have little control over who enters classrooms with what kind of preparation. They recognize that the most accomplished teachers have little say-so when it comes to what content is taught, what teaching methods are used, and how students are assessed, as well how teachers are educated, licensed, developed, paid, and held accountable. Heather Sparks, an NBCT from Oklahoma City, further explains what teacher professionalism is all about—and the key role that the National Board Certification process can play in improving teaching and learning. She notes:

I believe the current culture in Oklahoma views only some teachers as professionals—those teachers who are considered “outstanding” because they not only have excellent content knowledge and can assist students

in acquiring that knowledge, but they also go the extra mile to really know their students and the communities in which they live. They have earned the respect of the community through their practice. Any one of us can name teachers for whom we have the utmost respect, as well as those who fail to earn our respect. I think the majority of teachers, however, fall in yet another group: capable and caring but unclear about their path to professionalism.

To staff high-needs schools, the NBCTs participating in the Summit recognize that more must be done to clearly articulate what it takes to be a *good teacher* and what it takes to support *good teaching*. *The voice of teacher leaders should be heeded and valued when considering how to support and staff high-needs schools.* Unfortunately, many educators across Oklahoma often do not feel that they are treated as professionals. The time is now for policymakers to utilize the wisdom and experience of these accomplished teachers to make a difference for the children who need them the most. The NBCTs are ready to be heard. Claudia Swisher said it well:

Every teacher who wants to contribute to the profession needs to step up, find her passion, and take risks. We can't wait to be invited just because we have “NBCT” behind our names. If anything, that means we have a greater responsibility to contribute.

“With the knowledge that NBCTs possess, their collaboration and support of work within their schools and districts is invaluable. Currently, their influence lies primarily from one teacher to another. But think about how much they could contribute to the overall effectiveness and growth of the school if they were given—and were willing to accept—the opportunity to provide whole school support. For example, NBCTs should lead and participate on committees, present instructional strategies to fellow faculty members, and serve as sponsors of school-wide initiatives. Indeed, they have much to share with our students and our schools.”

—Dr. Linda Everett, Associate Executive Director,
Cooperative Council for
Oklahoma School Administration

The Recommendations

Discussion at the National Board Summit on Supporting and Staffing High-Needs Schools in Oklahoma City focused on a variety of topics pertinent to the lives of today's educators. Teachers and administrators worked collaboratively in ten breakout sessions to generate recommendations for recruiting and retaining exemplary teachers in these hard-to-staff schools. The following policy solutions were generated for consideration by school, district, and state policymakers. More than anything else, the NBCTs and administrators attending the Summit called for special training and incentives for working in high-needs schools as well as more focused efforts to grow accomplished teachers in the schools that need them the most. What follows are 23 provocative recommendations, organized in five domains, from some of Oklahoma's finest educators on how to staff and support high-needs schools.

1. *Special training and incentives are needed for teaching and leading in high-needs schools*

NBCTs know how to teach effectively, but they may not have all the tools and experiences to do so in every teaching context. They still need support to become highly accomplished in school districts and communities different from their own. All one has to do is imagine the new skills that a cardiologist who has only worked at the University of Oklahoma Medical Center will need before being sent to work as a general practitioner in an under-resourced public health clinic in Pushmataha County. Like the cardiologist, NBCTs may have the "right stuff" for leadership in their field, but they may not have the knowledge of community and local culture that will enable them to teach effectively and to work well with their colleagues.

Also, in many high-needs schools, teachers are often forced to teach a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum and attend mandatory professional development sessions that may not be useful to them and the students they teach. As one NBCT suggested, "policymakers need to earmark professional development funds so that more teachers can receive training in specific programs that are meaningful and relative to their needs." These accomplished teachers desire choice,



NBPTS President Joe Aguerreberre

networking, time for collaboration, and administrative support for their professional development.

Administrators in high-needs schools need to know a great deal more about *distributive leadership* and ways to support all teachers. For instance, the school leaders at the Summit expressed interest in better utilizing the skills and talents of their teaching staffs in leadership roles, such as mentors, committee chairs, and professional development providers; however, they readily admitted that they needed help to make this process smooth and efficient.

Additionally, many NBCTs lamented that oftentimes their principals did not provide a vision, occasionally did not listen carefully to concerns of others, and sometimes did not know how to involve teachers and community in the decision-making process. Recent research has made clear that effective school leaders set direction, establish high expectations, use data to track progress and performance, and develop teachers with the necessary support they need to succeed. To accomplish this, "neither superintendents nor principals can do the whole leadership task by themselves."⁸ NBCTs and

other accomplished teachers cannot have a positive impact on any school—much less a high-needs school—unless they are given the latitude to use their expertise. The NBCTs and administrators at the Oklahoma Summit call for:

- 1A. Funding, developing, and implementing newly designed, research-based training to prepare all teachers in high-needs schools to teach diverse students with special attention to issues of poverty, regional cultures, and tolerance;
- 1B. Ensuring that teachers in high-needs schools are empowered to choose the teaching practices to be observed, mentored or shared;
- 1C. Offering teachers in high-needs schools an additional five days of professional development;
- 1D. Providing teachers in high-needs schools research-based content and flexibility to investigate the specific needs of their schools;
- 1E. Ensuring time during the school day for collaboration and building connections in the community; and
- 1F. Creating a special training program for administrators so they understand the potential of NBCTs and other accomplished teachers for school improvement and can more effectively utilize them and distribute their influence and ideas.

2. *Growing your own NBCTs should be a priority*

Most high-needs schools are not conducive to recruiting or developing NBCTs. For one, many of

these schools are in isolated rural communities and will inevitably have difficulty in attracting teachers from afar, no matter the incentives. In addition, high-needs schools often serve students who bring a range of academic as well as socioeconomic challenges to their classroom, and in doing so, face an incredible array of demands. Teachers in these schools must spend even more time with their students. Consequently, they have even less opportunity to spend the time necessary to complete the rigorous and laborious NBC[®] assessment process. The principals in these schools may want to provide support to their teach-



NBCT Roslynn Rayford

ers; however, as school and district leaders at the National Board Summit indicated, the structures and funding may not be in place to make these environments conducive for self-reflection. The quality time needed for prospective NBCTs to plan and write just does not exist in many high-needs schools. Summit participants call for:

- 2A. Awarding \$15,000 for every NBCT a high-needs school develops so that administrators and teachers can create new professional development opportunities and spur increases in the numbers of accomplished teachers;
- 2B. Developing professional learning communities in high-needs schools where NBCTs there can recruit and coach prospective NBCTs;

- 2C. Creating a network (including a virtual one) where NBCTs can offer assistance to the development of new NBCTs in high-needs schools; and
- 2D. Supporting the development of training designed and provided by NBCTs for administrators, school board members, and university professors on the NBC process as well as how to support and utilize NBCTs.

3. *Salary incentives, while solely insufficient, are still important*

NBCTs, like other teachers and professionals, expect professional compensation. Other fields typically provide additional or supplemental pay for taking on tough assignments. Teachers, who do not enter teaching to become wealthy, still expect to be treated respectfully. Additional salary for teaching in high-needs schools is one way accomplished teachers can be afforded the respect they deserve. The Summit's NBCTs and administrators call for:

- 3A. Providing a \$15,000 salary increase that counts toward retirement for NBCTs who are “grown” or recruited to work in a high-needs school; and
- 3B. Offering an additional 20% salary supplement (above the district schedule) for all NBCTs who remain teaching in a high-needs school for five years.

4. *Incentives must include but also go beyond additional financial compensation*

NBCTs, like other teachers and professionals, value and need salaries that reflect their efforts and accomplishments. According to a recent analysis, Okla-

homa ranked 50th in the nation based on its average teacher salary of \$35,061.⁹ But as research has consistently shown, the NBCTs of Oklahoma do not see money as a primary motivator for moving to a high-needs school, nor do they see it as a motivating force for them to teach more effectively there. Kevin McDonald, an NBCT from Edmond said, “There is a huge misconception in Oklahoma that teachers are only after more money for their paychecks. What many fail to understand is that teachers often want two other things: 1) the resources to provide for their students; and 2) the professional respect extended through incentives.”

“When teachers’ attempts to do what is best for their students constantly comes under attack, it is no wonder that teachers eagerly look to incentives, particularly in a state where there is little community prestige placed on being an educator. However, to think that only additional money will lead to teachers willingly supplanting their lives from one setting to another (particularly the perceived challenges of a high-needs school) shows a certain short-sightedness and a continued misunderstanding about what it means to truly treat teachers like professionals. For NBCTs, there must be a culture of professionalism and a sense that the administration and community will trust that they know what is best for students—or will work diligently to discover what is best if they do not readily have the tools. But without the support of those around them or the financial resources to do what is necessary for their students, NBCTs will not simply sacrifice themselves to frustrating situations where their diligent work leads to little change not because of the teacher or the students but because of the shortcomings of the support network around them.”

—Kevin McDonald, NBCT,
Oklahoma Summit Listserv Moderator,
Edmond Public Schools

Because Oklahoma NBCTs value the ability to lead from the classroom through collegial relationships with their peers, they would like to see a commitment from state policymakers and school leaders to address the *real issues* of staffing high-needs schools. The NBCTs and administrators attending the Oklahoma Summit call for:

- 4A. Lowering class sizes and creating smaller “client” loads so teachers can better know high-needs students and their families;
- 4B. Providing funding for paraprofessionals so that teachers can offer more individual attention to high-needs students;
- 4C. Offering non-salary incentives (such as early retirement packages, 100% tuition reimbursement, mortgage interest reduction plans) to encourage a wide range of teachers who have different career and lifestyle needs to work in high-needs schools;
- 4D. Granting additional resources and materials so that teachers can create more diverse learning opportunities for high-needs students;
- 4E. Guaranteeing team planning time for at least 45 minutes per day so that teachers can collectively address the difficult challenges that many high-needs students bring to their classrooms;
- 4F. Awarding NBCTs who teach in (or move to) high-needs schools a \$5,000 annual budget for the purchase of student resources that can enhance their instructional program; and
- 4G. Affording NBCTs who teach in (or move to) high-needs schools opportunities to design their own curriculum (with accountability provisions), with the expectation that they share lessons learned with other teachers and administrators.

5. *Aligning programs and opportunities*

Oklahoma has a great deal of sound teacher policy upon which to build. For example, the Master

Teacher Project and the Literacy First Professional Development Institute offer strategic programs, opportunities, and resources to leverage the policy solutions generated herein. Indeed, much of what accomplished educators propose in order to staff high-needs schools can be realized by becoming more strategic and opportunistic. The NBCTs and administrators attending the Oklahoma Summit call for:



NBCTs Ellen Kay Rodriguez and Tobi Thompson

- 5A. Encouraging the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation and Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education to align university-based master’s degree programs with NBC core propositions and standards;
- 5B. Recommending that every teacher education program require all prospective teachers to complete at least one sustained field experience in a high-needs school, and all university faculty and cooperating teachers to complete professional development based on National Board core propositions and standards;
- 5C. Aligning school districts’ current teacher evaluation criteria with standards consistent with National Board requirements; and
- 5D. Requiring all school districts develop a five-year plan to grow NBCTs, consisting of candidate and administrative support, and, aligning current state mentoring efforts so that new

teachers are encouraged to develop the skills necessary to become Board Certified.

Conclusion

If policymakers want to ensure that NBCTs and other accomplished teachers are recruited and retained in the state's high-needs schools, then they must go beyond the simple solutions reflected in recent Georgia legislation and in the narrowly defined "pay-for-performance" ideas currently touted across the nation. Salary incentives alone will not get the job done. NBCTs have much to offer our struggling schools, and they are clearly part of the answer to these schools' teaching quality problems.

"I would welcome the opportunity to have any legislator come to spend extended time with me in my class and come to know my 'at risk' students and the challenges they face along with the effects those challenges have on their ability to learn. I believe that legislators, in general, are sometimes out of touch with schools and our students. Well meaning as they are, so many of the policies they are making do not positively impact my students. I would like an opportunity to advocate for my precious students and their needs."

—Sandi Bennett, NBCT,
Oklahoma City Public Schools

Even so, a number of intertwined policies and practices must be in place if we expect to realize the potential of NBCTs to improve high-needs schools. A comprehensive approach is needed, one that takes into account the working conditions that Oklahoma's NBCTs tell us are necessary to attract, promote, and sustain quality teaching in a school. These conditions include the following: 1) skillful administrators who know how to lead school improvement and support teacher leadership; 2) sufficient curriculum resources needed to engage and teach students; 3) a high quality results-driven professional development program; and 4) the time for teachers to reflect collaboratively on student data and their own teaching practice, searching for the most effective strategies to reach every child.

Oklahoma has the capacity to ensure that all students have an accomplished teacher in every class, every day. But to do so will require ceasing the "blame game" where teachers are often criticized by policymakers and the media for not teaching effectively, and parents are often criticized by teachers for not sending their students to school ready to learn. As Sandi Bennett explained:

It would seem that rather than setting up sides to blame ... that is, teacher vs. home ... this is a perfect moment in time for us to grab a leadership role and to try to spread this idea of professionalism. Schools will have to change to accommodate our changing role and policymakers need to help us do so.

Thirty-six years ago, America developed the expertise and wherewithal to send a man to the moon. Doing so required the use of reliable data and evidence, sustainable plans, actions driven by professionals in the field, and a great deal of political will. Recruiting, developing, and retaining accomplished teachers for our highest-needs schools will require no less. While the solutions will not require rocket science, there *is* a science to putting the pieces of the teaching quality puzzle together. NBCTs have demonstrated their teaching prowess through a rigorous assessment process. They know their students and the communities in which they teach. They understand what makes schools work for children. Administrators at the Summit demonstrated their interest in and commitment to engaging these accomplished educators in the decision-making process. Policymakers would be wise to listen to and learn from these talented educators in Oklahoma—NBCTs and administrators alike—as they search for better ways to close the teaching quality and achievement gaps that exist in all of our school communities.

Notes

1. High-needs schools are characterized by a mixture of interrelated student, teacher, and community factors, such as disproportionate numbers of students performing below grade level and students who move frequently from school to school. Other factors include large percentages of students who are second language learners or who come from single-parent or low-income families. Low-wealth communities that cannot afford to provide up-to-date school facilities and equipment, such as new technologies for students and teachers to have equitable access to teaching and learning resources, are also characteristic of high-needs schools. Still more factors include staffing patterns associated with disproportionate numbers of new, inexperienced, or alternative route teachers, high teacher turnover rates, and low percentages of well-prepared, experienced (e.g., National Board Certified) teachers.

At the Oklahoma NBCT Summit, high-needs schools were identified as schools on the state school improvement list as well as schools with 20%+ of student population in poverty as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

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3. Oklahoma is ranked ninth in the nation in terms of total NBCTs as of Nov. 29, 2005.
4. Rotherham, A. (2005, March 30). "Give Credit Where It's Due: Putting Nationally Certified Teachers Into the Classrooms That Need Them Most." *Education Week*, 24(29), 48.
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8. Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. University of Minnesota: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.
 9. See <http://sde.state.ok.us/publ/Investing/FactsFinances.html>.

Biographies

The Center for Teaching Quality would like to thank the following National Board Certified Teachers for their input and feedback about the policy recommendations:

Sandra Bennett

Sandra Bennett received her National Board Certification in Adolescence and Young Adulthood Science. Currently, she works as an integrated science-health career educator in an outreach program serving pregnant and parenting teenagers at Emerson High School in Oklahoma City Public Schools. In 2005, Sandra was honored with the Margaret Mead Award by the Oklahoma Alternative Education Association. More recently, she was named to the USA Today All-USA Teacher Team with her co-teaching colleague, Gene Williams.

Beth Bley

Twenty-year veteran Beth Bley teaches first grade at Overholser Elementary School in the Putnam City School District. She has a master's degree in education and certifications in early childhood education, elementary education, mild/moderate disabilities, severe disabilities, and reading. She has worked on numerous curriculum and technology committees in her school and district, including serving as the current chairperson of the Overholser Title I committee. Beth achieved National Board Certification as an Early Childhood Generalist in 2005.

Robyn Hilger

Robyn Hilger earned her bachelor's degree in instrumental music education from Oklahoma City University. Upon graduation, she began working in Oklahoma City Schools. In September 2005, she was selected as the Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year. This honor earned her the title as the Oklahoma Ambassador for Teaching during the 2005-06 school year. Robyn also achieved National Board Certification in Early Adolescence/Young Adulthood Music in 2005. Presently, she teaches band and orchestra at Belle Isle Enterprise Middle School in Oklahoma City.

Kevin McDonald

Kevin McDonald works for Edmond Public Schools where he currently teaches sophomore and junior English at Edmond Memorial High School. In 2002, he earned National Board status in Adolescence/Young Adulthood English and Language Arts. His leadership experience includes serving as a trainer for National Board candidates and moderating the post-Summit chat listserv discussions. During the 2003-04 school year, he was selected as the Guthrie Public Schools Teacher of the Year.

Michele Sneed

Michele Sneed is a Middle Childhood Generalist, who achieved National Board Certification in 1999. A graduate of East Central University, she received her bachelor's in elementary education and her master's in education, with a concentration on elementary administration. Michele taught kindergarten, third grade, and fifth grade for seventeen years before becoming a school administrator. Currently, she is the principal of Seminole Middle School in the Seminole Public Schools System.

Heather Sparks

Heather Sparks has taught for 14 years, thirteen of which have been in the Oklahoma City Public Schools. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a master's degree in elementary education from Oklahoma City University. Most recently, she finished certification in intermediate math. In her spare time, she facilitates courses and workshops for Oklahoma Schools Attuned, Oklahoma Teachers Improving Mathematics in Middle Schools (OTIMMS), and the Middle Level Math Professional Development Institute (PDI).

Claudia Swisher

As a 33-year veteran of the teaching profession, Claudia Swisher has taught every grade level in public education in Indiana, Iowa, and Oklahoma. Her current assignment is as instructor of an elective course, which she developed and nurtured, called "Reading for Pleasure." She has been the Norman Teacher of the Year and a finalist for Oklahoma TOY. Her current responsibilities include serving as a regional coordinator for ELO, providing support groups for National Board candidates, and working with the National Writing Project E-team, reading and responding online to summer institute participants around the country.

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