



Supporting and Staffing High-Needs Schools

*Recommendations from
South Carolina's
National Board Certified
Teachers[®]*

**Barnett Berry, Melissa Rasberry
and Ann Byrd**



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Great Public Schools for Every Child

**National Education
Association**



**Center for
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Teaching for Tomorrow

**The South Carolina
Education Association**

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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.

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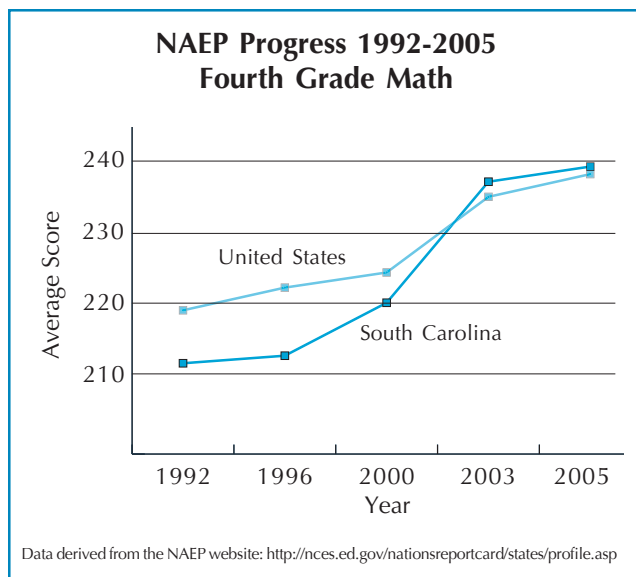
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Improving Public Education in South Carolina

South Carolinians have a right to be proud of their public schools. Over the last decade, the state's students have registered some of the highest gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—America's most rigorous and most consistent barometer of how much its students know about math, reading and science. In 1992 only 48 percent of South Carolina's 4th graders scored "basic" in math. By 2005, that number had skyrocketed to 81 percent.

South Carolina's students once scored well below the national average; today, they surpass their peers in other states in many areas.



In many respects South Carolina's educational system has come a long way, shepherded by both Democrat and Republican governors. Beginning in the early 1980s then-Governor Richard Riley, who later became the United States Secretary of Education under President Bill Clinton, established the state's Education Improvement Act, which was fueled by a one-cent increase in the state sales tax

and resulted in a wide variety of programs to improve teaching and learning. In the early 1990s, then-Governor Carroll Campbell signed the South Carolina School-to-Work Transition Act, which combined classroom learning with actual work site experience. In 1998, Governor Jim Hodges focused on three critical transition points in public education:



1) he promoted pre-school readiness with First Steps (a "public-private" program); 2) he established an education lottery that now has provided college scholarships for more than 100,000 students; and 3) he highlighted the importance of

teachers and quality teaching by passing legislation that provided National Board Certified Teachers® (NBCTs) with a \$7,500 salary supplement for the life of the National Board certificate and a loan program to cover the application fee, which was forgiven upon achievement.

The governor's focus on teachers and teaching was well-grounded. Over the last decade, study after study has confirmed what parents have always known: teachers are the most important factor affecting student achievement. Student success depends mostly on what teachers know about their content *and* how to teach it to diverse learners.¹

In South Carolina, much like the rest of the nation, poor and minority students are far less likely to be taught by a qualified teacher. Many of the state's rural school districts cannot hold their own in the increasingly competitive teacher labor market. As a result, far more teachers in the state's poorest schools do not have full state certification and do not meet the federal requirements of being highly qualified.



The long-standing school finance lawsuit, *Abbeville, et. al. v. State of South Carolina*, has brought this disheartening fact to light. At the trial, several expert witnesses talked about the revolving door of teacher attrition, which is often found in poor, underperforming schools. This constant turnover of new teachers perpetuates the problem of low student achievement. Schools in these communities, therefore, have a difficult time moving forward with long-term school improvement efforts.



In late 2005, Judge Thomas W. Cooper ruled in the case that the legislature needed to make deeper investments in “early childhood intervention programs designed to address the impact of poverty,” and also in highly accomplished teachers who can deliver these programs. While the state’s leading policymakers continue to debate how to close the state’s teaching quality gaps, the demand for quality teachers and expectations for what they know and can do escalate.

The NBPTS and South Carolina

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, created 20 years ago following the recommendations of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy’s Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, established a system of standards and assessments that identifies accomplished teachers. The Carnegie Forum, a bipartisan panel of policymakers, business leaders and educators, envisioned National Board Certification as a key lever to professionalizing teaching by codifying standards for accomplished teaching and spreading best practices to all of our nation’s schools.

In 1993-94, the NBPTS granted its first certificates, using state-of-the-art assessment techniques that “go far beyond multiple choice examinations” and “take into account the accumulated wisdom of teachers.”² In order to become National Board Certified, teachers, counselors, and librarians must complete a rigorous assessment that focuses on the impact of student learning through authentic teaching, documented accomplishments, and meeting national content standards.

The process, now available in 24 separate certification and grade level areas, is rigorous and takes more than 300-400 hours to complete. Fewer than 50 percent of first-time takers achieve National Board Certification. Of 3.4 million teachers nationwide, only about 55,000 are currently Board Certified.³

All states and the District of Columbia provide some sort of incentive for teachers to seek certification, with 31 states offering monetary rewards.⁴ South Carolina has provided some of the nation’s most progressive incentives. It is evident that these financial supplements matter because the state is home to almost 10 percent of all NBCTs in America—5,077—the third highest number in the country.

Many local districts are doing their part to encourage and support National Board Certification as well by offering incentives in addition to the state stipend for NBCTs. Currently, 59 of South Carolina’s 85 districts offer them. Several of the state’s lowest performing districts provide bonuses. While modest compared to those offered by their wealthier counterparts, rural, under-resourced districts like Jasper and McCormick do their best to provide NBCTs a supplement. Policymakers should not be surprised that the state’s 18 lowest performing districts with a total of about 3,600 teachers have only 132 NBCTs (3.7 percent).⁵



Salary supplements alone are not the only benefit of becoming a National Board Certified Teacher, however. Most notably, NBCTs have indicated that the certification process improved their teaching practice—and can serve as a critical professional development strategy for all teachers. As NBCT Louisa Jane Fleming from Pickens explained:

I know that the National Board process was invaluable for me. As a facilitator and presenter, I have seen the processes' positive effects on others and have marveled at the rapid growth in quality of practice and understanding of strategies to impact student learning, which are possible for candidates to attain as they prepare their portfolio and study for the assessment center.

The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA) has created a statewide infrastructure designed to create awareness of the certification process among policymakers, practitioners and the public. CERRA supports district liaisons for National Board Certification and works to advance teacher professionalism through an NBCT network of nearly 200 certified teachers, liaisons, and friends.



The South Carolina Education Association (The SCEA) promotes National Board Certification through its National Board support sessions for candidates. Session topics range from writing for the portfolio to technology tips with videotaping. The SCEA also supports teacher development through an Instructional Issues Conference and programs such as the Diverse Leaders of 2007, which introduce educators to leadership skills and provide networking opportunities for them.



The Positive Effects of NBCTs

Over the last several years, researchers have sought to determine the connections between the National Board process, teacher learning and student achievement. As with most social science research, the findings are somewhat mixed.⁶ But while results from research studies are critical to understanding the effects of NBCTs on student learning, so are the voices of NBCTs themselves. Constance Hill, an NBCT from Clarendon 1, describes how the National Board process has improved her practice:

The entire National Board process definitely made me a better, more reflective teacher. Student test scores went up, and my students showed some greater understanding of the importance of their classroom performance. Neither the experience nor my professional growth ended with my submission of a portfolio and the written test. I have fallen into the habits of reflecting on and constantly revising my lessons, deliberately planning for relevance in student choices, and engaging my students in the planning process.

Pat Hensley, an NBCT from Greenville, spoke directly to how the NBC process focused her teaching and contributed to her professionalism:

While preparing for National Board Certification, I read a lot of current research dealing with my area of certification that I had not done previously. Since then, I have stayed on top of current issues in my field that earlier I had cast aside with excuses that I was too busy or allowed other things to take priority. My research has helped me learn best practices to use in the classroom that make a stronger impact on student achievement that I did not do before going through the certification process.

Ann Nichols, an NBCT who teaches special education students at West Florence High School, is even more specific about how the process boosted her professionalism and is enhancing the state's teaching profession.

Until I completed the National Board process, I felt isolated from other educators as a special education teacher. Then I found my voice. [After going through the process], I was able to help develop a new state alternative assessment for special education students. I found myself using a keener sense of discernment about what works and what doesn't work, and what are considered "best practices" for students with disabilities. I learned to listen more to other teachers and experts in my field. And now my students continue to show progress and I can show you the data.

How NBCTs Can Make a Difference in High-Needs Schools

While NBCTs are more likely to improve student learning, they are *not* more likely to be teaching our nation's most challenging students and in its high-needs schools. In a well-publicized six-state study, researchers found that NBCTs are disproportionately underrepresented in the neediest schools. For example, only 19 percent of NBCTs teach in schools ranked in the bottom one-third of their respective state's accountability rating system.⁷ They are also far less likely to be teaching in schools that primarily serve low-income and minority students. In South Carolina, only about 10 percent (or 400) of the state's NBCTs are teaching in the 300 schools rated as below average or unsatisfactory.⁸

This maldistribution problem has caused policymakers to question the current incentives offered to National Board Certified Teachers.

However, recent research on NBCTs indicates that policy proposals that reward only those NBCTs who work in state-identified, low-performing schools are too simplistic and could well be counterproductive. First of all, a 2005 national survey of NBCTs found overwhelmingly that financial incentives alone will not lure these accomplished



teachers to hard-to-staff schools. The study scientifically sampled almost 2,000 NBCTs from the six states with the largest numbers of NBCTs in 2005 (California, Florida,

Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina). The NBCTs' responses were loud and clear: the keys to recruiting them to high-needs schools rested on: 1) strong principal leadership, 2) a collegial staff with a shared teaching philosophy, 3) adequate resources necessary to teach, and 4) a supportive and active parent community. These factors were far more powerful determinants of whether they would teach in a challenging school than financial incentives.⁹

According to research led by Gary Sykes, NBCTs have the potential to become a powerful "organizational resource." The study, which drew upon surveys of teachers and case studies in Ohio and in South Carolina, revealed that the National Board process supports teacher leadership. But while the research revealed that NBCTs were more likely to share their expertise than other "similar" teachers in their buildings, they often were thwarted by principals who did not understand the National Board process.¹⁰

Fortunately, the problems identified in the Sykes study are not insurmountable. NBCTs in all schools—particularly in high-needs communities—



can have a tremendous impact on student achievement, if provided the necessary support and resources. Consider the rural school known as D. F. Walker Elementary in the Edenton-Chowan school district of North Carolina. This small community grew its own NBCTs and then deployed them for systematic school improvements. To date, Walker has 85 percent of its students meeting grade-level standards, has become a North Carolina School of Distinction, and has met 20 of 21 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets under No Child Left Behind. Over 50 percent of the faculty are NBCTs and notably, so are the principal and assistant principal. In fact, Principal Sheila Evans was the district's first NBCT. Under her leadership, teaching is made "public" as teachers watch and review each other's classroom instruction. The National Board standards underpin the school's teacher evaluation and professional development processes. Board certified teachers are specifically assigned to support the school's novice and under-prepared educators. Grade level teams meet for 90 minutes per week during the school day. Because of their leadership, the superintendent expects the school's NBCTs to voice their professional opinions and present best practices to their local school board.¹¹



D. F. Walker is a story of teacher professionalism and of administrators who created conditions that made it possible for teachers and students in high-poverty schools to thrive. Too often, teaching policies are developed without this level of understanding about the realities of classrooms, teachers and students. We believe policymakers can deepen their understanding and fine-tune their policy

decisions by tapping into the expertise of accomplished teachers, just as Walker has accomplished.

The Voices of NBCTs in South Carolina

On August 5, 2006, more than 300 South Carolina NBCTs assembled in Columbia at a policy summit to address the vexing problem of recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers in high-needs schools. Before this summit, the NBCTs read a number of background papers and research summaries. During the summit, they listened to the state's leading policymakers and other educators articulate their views on the issues at hand and then participated in highly-structured, small-group work sessions. Facilitated by specially-prepared teacher leaders, the NBCTs analyzed the facts, grounded them in their own classroom experiences and then developed preliminary ideas about what needed to be done.

Following the summit, they remain connected via an electronic listserv where they refine and supplement their ideas on recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers in high-needs schools. What the NBCTs said about barriers and possible solutions is focused, insightful and provocative. Their knowledge of classrooms, the students they teach and the communities in which they work clearly provides a powerful context for the recommendations that are assembled herein.

What follows is a list of ideas and recommendations that, if heeded, could solve South Carolina's staffing problems in high-needs schools. While it is unlikely that all of these ideas and actions can be implemented immediately, we urge policymakers to give close attention to the proposals because only a comprehensive set of solutions can solve the complex problem of supporting and staffing high-needs schools.



Supporting and Staffing High-Needs Schools: The Recommendations

South Carolina NBCTs at the summit developed a comprehensive set of 27 recommendations, organized by five themes. The NBCTs called for: 1) “growing our own” NBCTs in high-needs schools; 2) recruiting accomplished teachers to high-needs schools with an array of incentives and supports; 3) providing high-quality professional development; 4) capitalizing on NBCTs’ talents to support beginning teachers; and 5) promoting teacher leadership in order to transform education policy.

1. “Growing Our Own” NBCTs in High-Needs Schools

There are many reasons why most high-needs schools do not have the same percentage of National Board Certified Teachers as schools in more affluent communities. For starters, urban and rural schools are often filled with organizational challenges typically not found in suburban schools. Classes are frequently crowded and instructional resources are often lacking. Consequently, many accomplished teachers do not want to work there. According to one NBCT at the summit, “In order to get the teachers, you must have resources and small class sizes. The students need a lot of attention and are ‘very needy.’”



Poor ratings on school accountability systems have been shown to repel good teachers from teaching in high-needs schools as well. As another summit claimed, “The problem in recruiting us [accomplished teachers] is the reputation of these high-needs communities.” Often hard-to-staff schools do not have the resources or tools to overcome negative publicity. One NBCT teaching in a similar school stated that districts with high-needs schools could use “technical support” in developing public relations packages. He believed that “NBCTs should be part of the PR teams.”

Unfortunately, teachers who possess the knowledge and skills to attempt National Board Certification often do not have the time to do so when teaching in high-needs schools. Most do not have the video equipment and computers essential for preparing the portfolio either. These problems are exacerbated by the lack of understanding and appreciation for the certification process. An NBCT from the summit said it well, “In my district, principals and administrators don’t know what the National Board process is so they don’t value it.”

That is the why South Carolina NBCTs attending the summit call for:

- 1A. Requiring schools with a below-average or unsatisfactory rating to include the recruitment and support of National Board Certification in their Strategic Plans for Improvement.
- 1B. Rewarding Title I schools with additional state funding for every NBCT hired or grown.
- 1C. Providing resources for NBCT mentors in high-needs schools and offering additional professional development and technical assistance for candidates, including:



- automatic forgiveness of full assessment fees for completing the NBC process;
- one additional planning period during the semester that candidates' portfolios are due;
- two days of release time during the year(s) of candidacy;
- at least five hours of in-service/staff development for NBC preparation;
- special equipment (e.g., videotaping, laptops); and
- incentives for schools to support organized cohorts of National Board candidates.

1D. Promoting when and where low-performing schools are making progress to counter negative news stories often highlighted in the media and discussed by policymakers.

"The poorer counties are unable to keep teachers without National Board, so the problems of high turnover and low retention are inherent in their conditions. It's a 'Catch-22.' These impoverished areas generally produce students who may not be able to rise above their circumstances and therefore, their students fail to interest businesses, communities and resources. The few who are gifted or talented in these communities usually find a way out and do not return. The communities either remain as they were years ago or continue in a downward spiral. How can you convince a teacher who has earned National Board Certification and is living in her own hometown—a place which has many benefits because it was the place where she found financial, emotional and moral support for her thriving career—to leave that place and go to an environment where education cannot be the top priority because the people cannot afford for it to be? They need jobs, groceries, medicines and gasoline first. Can you find a way to convince these teachers that it's worth leaving their established lives behind to provide for the less fortunate? The next question is: what will it cost us, in the long run, if we do NOT tend to the less fortunate by way of education?"
—Ann Nichols, NBCT, Florence

2. *Recruiting Accomplished Teachers to High-Needs Schools with an Array of Incentives and Supports*

Both the research and the South Carolina "teacher specialist" experience reveal that monetary incentives—even large ones—are insufficient to recruit and retain good teachers in high-needs schools. This does *not* mean that policymakers shouldn't offer financial incentives for NBCTs in high-needs schools that go beyond the current \$7,500 bonus. In August 2005, a Teacher Salary Schedule Revision Task Force, created at the request of the South Carolina Association of School Administrators, called for additional incentives for teachers who serve as mentors, teach a critical subject area or teach in a critical geographic area.

Like other people, teachers are motivated by money. Summit participants called for varied incentives, however, due to the varied needs of teachers. For example, while some educators are forced to moonlight to support themselves, others need help paying tuition bills for their children who are close to entering college. Still more would appreciate the availability of paid sabbaticals.

The importance of teacher working conditions—in addition to these financial incentives—cannot be underestimated, however. In 2004, the South Carolina Department of Education and CERRA sponsored a teacher working conditions survey, to which over 15,000 teachers responded. The survey and ensuing analyses, conducted by the Center for Teaching Quality, found stunning effects of working conditions on both teacher retention and student achievement.¹²



For example, data analyses revealed a statistical correlation between several working conditions and the teacher retention rate for the 2003-04 school year. While teachers indicated that time and empowerment were central in their abilities to help students learn, a collegial atmosphere (32 percent) and being led by a principal with a strong instructional emphasis (26 percent) mattered most in their decisions about whether to stay in their current school. Teachers valued school settings where they were not isolated but instead worked together with leadership that support their efforts. They also reported that they need more time to work with colleagues and would like to be involved in making decisions that impact classroom instruction.

This is why South Carolina NBCTs attending the summit call for:

- 2A. Offering preparation and incentives for cohorts of NBCTs to move to high-needs schools as a team.
- 2B. Providing NBCTs with additional incentives for teaching 3-5 years in high-needs schools, including: housing subsidies, transportation and gas allowances, signing and retention bonuses, salary supplements, moving expenses and college loan forgiveness for teachers and/or their families.
- 2C. Providing NBCTs in high-needs schools opportunities for paid sabbaticals and additional release time.
- 2D. Ensuring targeted state funding to high-needs schools so that all teachers have supportive working conditions, including: small class sizes (15 students or fewer), state-of-the-art technology and adequate facilities and resources.

- 2E. Guaranteeing a \$7,500 yearly state supplement for the life of the NBCT certificate and providing an additional state incentive of \$5,000 per year for NBCTs for teaching in at-risk schools.

“We need to make the profession financially attractive enough not only to get teachers through the door initially but also to keep them in the schoolhouse in the long term. Consider: a sixth year teacher in my district, one of the better paying in the state, earns about \$4,000 more in his/her sixth year than in his/her first. A southern attorney on the other hand can expect to make \$15,000 a year more after working for five years in a *small* firm and \$30,000 more in a *large* firm. Figures are comparable—probably more striking, in fact—for physicians. Do we have a shortage of lawyers? Of physicians? Do we have trouble retaining *them* over the long haul? I rest my case. Doctors and many attorneys have really tough jobs, but the good ones stay in their chosen professions because they are compensated at a level that makes all the hard stuff bearable over the course of a career. Can we say the same of education? My feeling is that if teachers were paid enough to make up for the long hours, the difficult working conditions, and the lack of power regarding policy decisions that affect them, we would have more than enough teachers, even in places like Dillon and Allendale and Kingstree. As it is, we lose close to half of new teachers in this state after five years. Why? It’s not because they aren’t good people. It’s not because they don’t know their material. It’s not because they can’t teach. That’s the message that our policymakers need to hear.”

—Edwin C. Epps, Ed. D., NBCT, Spartanburg

3. Providing High-Quality Professional Development

Even accomplished teachers need support because high-quality teaching is complex and demanding. In fact, educators often talk about the need for “cultural competency”—meaning the skills necessary to reach out and teach students from diverse backgrounds, whose family and community lives are very different from their own. As one summit NBCT noted:



For me, cultural differences are a barrier. I had a child read “chest of drawers” in a story and he did not know what it meant. I asked him, “What do you keep clothes in?” and he replied, “a cardboard box.” It was then that I realized I needed to back up and get to know this child better.

Learning how to work effectively with special needs students and second language learners is also an issue. According to the 2004 South Carolina Working Conditions Survey, only 14 percent of the state’s teachers reported receiving at least ten hours of professional development over the past two years in working with special education students. Less than 30 percent felt strongly that they were prepared to work with students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). A mere 4 percent reported receiving ten hours or more of professional development in working with students who are Limited English Proficient and only 14 percent reported being engaged in professional development that could help them close achievement gaps.

These findings support an earlier study, conducted in 2003 by Georgia State University and the Center for Teaching Quality, which found that South Carolina teachers experience a number of glaring professional development problems. For example, only 34 percent of the state’s teachers noted that professional development activities were led by teachers. And just 45 percent reported that their professional development was “reform-related” while 50 percent claimed that professional development felt more like a “lecture.”¹³

NBCTs want the kind of professional development that research evidence has defined as *effective*—job-embedded, focused on student work, and done in collaboration with peers. Researchers have shown that teachers need more control of their own



professional development. However, only 53 percent of South Carolina’s teachers, according to the 2004 South Carolina Working Conditions Survey, agreed that they “assist” in determining the content of their professional development. When teachers complain about professional development, it is because they see the offerings as “irrelevant.”

At the summit, NBCTs talked a great deal about the power of the full National Board Certification process as a professional development tool, as well as the potential of *Take One!*—a product available from NBPTS consisting of a single classroom-based portfolio entry. *Take One!* is designed as job-embedded professional development that builds learning communities in schools and strengthens collaboration among educators.

Technology is another alternative for delivering effective professional development. NBCTs, who use tech tools more often in their classrooms or take part in virtual communities like CTQ’s Teacher Leaders Network, recognize the potential of the Internet as a vehicle to spread teaching expertise. As one summit NBCT explained, “Webcams can be utilized so that teachers can see other accomplished teachers in action.” So while NBCTs are not equally distributed across all districts, they can still help others—either virtually or face-to-face.



That is why South Carolina NBCTs attending the summit call for:

- 3A. Creating a statewide professional support network, using the expertise of NBCTs and drawing on the NBPTS Core Propositions, to assess schools' strengths and needs and then select best practices for school improvement.
- 3B. Restructuring the school calendar in high-need schools so all teachers have job-embedded, team-driven professional development, with a guaranteed two additional days at the start of the school year, two days between semesters and one day at the end of the year for reflection and collaboration.
- 3C. Establishing *Take One!* as a high-priority professional development activity for subject, grade level, or interdisciplinary teams.
- 3D. Scheduling early dismissal or late arrival for students in high-needs schools to enable teacher peer collaboration 10 times a year unencumbered by district or administration mandates.
- 3E. Providing funding to high-needs districts to offer virtual classrooms for students who need instruction in courses not available at their school and to expand teaching expertise across schools.
- 3F. Funding a virtual and face-to-face teacher exchange program that will allow NBCTs and non-NBCTs to share teaching expertise in and for high-needs schools.
- 3G. Providing state funding for special projects that enable teachers and parents to collaborate,

with specific training in community engagement and cultural competence.

"One way my school has worked to give teachers time during the school day to have true professional development is to provide periodic sub coverage. Each month, our principal hires subs for 2 days to cover an entire grade level for 3 hours. For example, on Monday, subs cover kindergarten from 8:00am-11:00am and kindergarten teachers meet to plan, study, and align standards to instruction, examine student work samples and discuss expectations. From 11:00am-2:00pm, the subs cover first grade. The same is done on Tuesday for 2nd and 3rd grade. When our principal has trouble getting enough subs, he uses our assistants throughout the school, our assistant principal, etc. It is amazing how much growth we see in ourselves (and as a result, in our students) from simply being given 3 hours each month. Of course, we spend time in addition to that planning together. But we feel honored as professionals and empowered when our administrator is willing to create collaboration opportunities within the school day. Yes, we realize how lucky we are to have such a supportive principal."

—Stephanie Seay, NBCT,
Spartanburg School District Five

4. *Rethinking Current Supports for New Teachers and Capitalizing on the Talents and Commitments of NBCTs*

South Carolina is one of 17 states nationwide that has created and funded a statewide induction program. The Assisting, Developing and Evaluating Professional Teaching [ADEPT] system, which sets standards and guidelines for districts in supporting new teachers, is funded by the state at approximately \$2,000,000 annually, averaging \$640 per induction teacher in FY06. Research has shown, however, that effective induction programs, such as the model designed by the Santa Cruz New Teacher Center, cost about \$6,000 per novice.

New teachers most often need support in managing their classrooms, dealing with the complex issues of curriculum pacing and lesson planning, creating fair and reliable assessments, finding and using engaging



materials for the specific content course they teach, and developing strategies for connecting and working with parents and families. Critical elements of high-quality, new teacher induction programs include: 1) pairing new teachers with trained mentors in similar grades and subject areas; 2) reducing novice work load and structuring teaching schedules to provide common planning time; 3) providing release time for both the mentor and novice for observations and analysis; and 4) offering ongoing professional development relevant to the needs of novice teachers.¹⁴ South Carolina's revised *Mentoring and Induction Guidelines* were given final approval by the State Board of Education on Sept. 13, 2006. These guidelines address the mentoring and induction programs for every district in South Carolina and include the support elements mentioned above. Unfortunately, the General Assembly has not yet provided funding for the necessary training and ongoing support needed to implement these guidelines.



Many NBCTs at the summit expressed an interest in working as “master” teachers with an “apprentice” in the same classroom for a year. They believe that they have a lot to offer and that novices would learn a great deal about teaching and learning from this arrangement. Unfortunately, most beginning teachers are not currently receiving this level of intense support. In fact, the 2004 working conditions survey revealed considerable variation across the state in the quality of induction programs. Almost half of novices and three-quarters of mentors report meeting at least once per week. However, this finding is offset by the high proportion of new teachers indicating that they *never* receive

support from their mentors. Almost half of new teachers (46 percent) never saw their mentors teach, and one-third report that they *never* planned instruction with their mentors during or outside of the school day.

According to the survey results, novice high school teachers were less likely to plan instruction with their mentors. Summit participants agreed with this finding. As one NBCT noted, “I was a mentor but I had no time to meet with my mentee, even though she was on the same hall with me. We only spoke in passing. The biggest barrier was finding common planning time.” Another summit NBCT asserted that “the biggest barrier is the lack of understanding—especially among administrators—about what mentoring is all about.”

NBCTs want to contribute to their profession in many ways. However, mentoring novices is probably the highest on their list of *things to do*. An eloquent summit participant put it this way, “Individual teachers need to view an induction-level teacher as everyone’s responsibility—as you know, it takes a village to raise a teacher who will be successful and stay in teaching.” On the other hand, as her colleague was so quick to point out, “Mentoring requires a relationship, and relationship-building requires time. Relationship-building also requires special skills that some folks don’t have and haven’t been trained to develop.”

That is why South Carolina NBCTs attending the summit call for:

- 4A. Funding fully the state-wide mentoring program so that all new teachers receive quality support and training in areas such as: cultural competence, classroom management, content-specific pedagogy, and time management.



- 4B. Requiring at least 35 percent of all eligible teachers and 100 percent of all administrators in high-needs schools to receive state-mandated mentor training.
- 4C. Providing mentor and induction teachers with common planning and adequate release time during the regular school day as well as a three-day retreat prior to the beginning of the school year, with release from non-instructional duties.
- 4D. Providing mentors with a minimum of a \$500 stipend per novice teacher, plus 10 hours a month to assist them.
- 4E. Establishing local and state virtual communities of new teachers in high-needs schools for questions and responses monitored by trained mentors, as well as a statewide listserv that serves as a support group for mentors and mentees.
- 4F. Ensuring that mentors and novices share the same content area and are in close physical proximity in the school building.
- 4G. Identifying and hiring highly-qualified and specially-trained NBCTs to serve as *mentor leaders* who support 10 mentor/mentee teams for a maximum of three years. [Note: These NBCTs would be able to return to their current teaching assignments after their three years of service. The \$7,500 supplement should be paid throughout the three-year period.]



- 4H. Reducing class sizes by 20 percent for first- and second-year teachers in high-needs schools.

5. Promoting Teacher Leadership and Transforming Policy

In the 2001 report, *Redefining the Teacher as Leader*, a task force organized by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) found that the unique voice of teacher leaders is “too seldom heard or their views even solicited,” and urged education decision makers to “exploit a potentially splendid resource for reform . . . the experience, ideas and capacity to lead of the nation’s schoolteachers.” As NBCT Nancy Flanagan, a founding member of the Teacher Leaders Network, asserted: “Making substantive connections between policymakers and teachers is the holy grail of teacher leadership.”

NBCTs have much to offer in terms of policy development but few are able to apply their expertise to directly affect teaching and learning in their schools. For example, the 2004 working conditions survey in South Carolina revealed that only 29 percent of teachers agree that they have a role in the hiring of new teachers at their schools. Only 7 percent of the state’s teachers report that they have a “strong” role in deciding how the school budget will be spent. Yet while these percentages indicate low levels of teacher involvement in decision-making, results from the same survey found that empowerment was a significant predictor of AYP status for South Carolina schools. In fact, for every one empowerment point increase on the survey, schools were 4.75 times more likely to achieve AYP. Teachers identified empowerment as the most important factor in improving student learning of all five working conditions domains.



The NBCTs at the South Carolina summit were quick to point out that principals had too limited an understanding of teacher leadership and its implications for improving schools. They also regretted how infrequently local and state policymakers considered their expertise in making policy for their profession and the students they serve. As one NBCT stated, “Teachers are not in on policymaking. Currently, it is a top-down system. It will take an institutional change and involvement of teachers in policymaking to make a difference.”

A fellow NBCT would like to see “an educational rally for the opening day of the state’s General Assembly with the intention of: 1) raising awareness of major public education issues and 2) increasing educators’ knowledge of the political processes.” Our best teachers possess vital knowledge about students and how they learn—and because of this knowledge, they can provide much needed leadership for the changes critical to improving public education. But, as the IEL report concluded, their unique voice is “too seldom heard or their views even solicited.”

That is why South Carolina NBCTs attending the summit call for:

- 5A. Promoting shared decision-making models in high-needs schools to ensure that teachers have an active and equal voice in policymaking decisions.
- 5B. Preparing principals to cultivate and sustain teacher leadership.
- 5C. Including NBCTs (and other master teachers) as well as administrators and legislators on policymaking teams at every level (school, district, state).

“NBCTs are a valuable resource. However, we have not been fully utilized because we are not organized as a collective voice. We are often invited for this or that chat, but the summit this summer is the only arena that has acknowledged NBCTs as a means of forward movement in the field of education. NBCTs, as a collective group, have the potential to be one of the clearest voices speaking for positive change in public education. As a member of SCEA and NEA I believe the more venues we have sending positive messages the better. Policymakers need to hear our issues, concerns and ideas as often as possible. A collective voice speaking the same message is most difficult to ignore.”

—Angela Cooper, NBCT, Columbia

Conclusion

If South Carolina wants to continue to build upon its momentum for educational improvement, policymakers must make supporting and staffing high-needs schools a priority. While the efforts of policymakers to link NBCT incentives and school reform agendas are understandable, as H.L. Mencken once wrote, “For every complex problem there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.” Policies that address the staffing problems of low-performing schools solely through salary incentives or forced assignments are “simple solutions” that ignore the complex conditions that have made it so difficult to recruit and retain expert teachers in the past. Research studies and the insights of accomplished teachers who have helped turn around struggling schools confirm that any effort to recruit and retain NBCTs or other accomplished teachers for hard-to-staff schools must be part of a comprehensive plan—not a separate or stand-alone strategy.

The work of CTQ with NBCTs, especially those involved in the Teacher Leaders Network, has taught us that accomplished teachers do not seek to avoid challenging schools and assignments. As expert teachers, they know their content, how to teach children, and how to connect with communi-



ties. They also know what it takes to turn around under-performing, hard-to-staff schools. They are hopeful but they are not naïve.

The challenges facing high-needs schools are complex; therefore, the plan to reform them must be comprehensive. Programs should be established within these under-resourced school communities to encourage and support teachers through the National Board process, an intensive assessment that demands analyses of student test score data and classroom work as well as instructional improvement. In addition, incentives and supports should be put in place to recruit—and retain—teachers in these schools. Equally important should be the financial (e.g., signing bonuses, college loan forgiveness, etc.) and non-financial (e.g., small class size, innovative technology tools, etc.) rewards for committing to work with high-needs students. Quality professional development and effective new teacher mentoring should be commonplace, not rare. And, of course, the expertise of talented teacher

leaders, such as NBCTs, should be tapped for school improvement and decision-making.

Indeed, silver bullets are not the answer. South Carolinians from all walks of life—from Columbia to Greenwood to Estill—must commit themselves to ensuring a quality teacher for every child in every classroom in every school in the state. Taking the ideas of some of the state’s best teachers and transforming them from recommendation to reality will move the state one step closer to the public education system that policymakers, practitioners, and the public seek.



Notes

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Biographies

Angela Cooper

Angela Cooper is an instructional facilitator at Hyatt Park Elementary in Richland School District One. In 2001, she became National Board Certified as an Exceptional Needs Specialist. She was selected as Richland One Teacher of the Year in 2003-04 and a finalist for State Teacher of the Year in 2004-05.

Edwin (Ed) Epps

Edwin Epps is a National Board Certified Teacher with more than 30 years of experience in the classroom. A former president of the SC Council of Teachers of English and former coordinator of the SC Writing Project, Ed teaches English and creative writing at Spartanburg High School. He is also a lead instructor for the SC Department of Education's Program for Alternative Certification of Educators.

Louisa Jane Fleming

Louisa Jane Fleming is a science teacher at Liberty High School in Pickens County. The NBCT in Science/Adolescence and Young Adulthood has received numerous honors, including the Presidential Award for middle and high school science, the Tandy/Radio Shack National Teacher of the Year Award, and the South Carolina Physical Science Teacher of the Year Award.

Pat Hensley

Pat Hensley currently teaches special education students at Mauldin High School. In 2002, she became National Board Certified as an Exceptional Needs Specialist. Pat has been honored as her school's Teacher of the Year and a top 10 finalist for Greenville County School District Teacher of the Year.

Constance Hill

Constance Hill has taught for more than 20 years in South Carolina, with two of those years dedicated as a Teacher Specialist. Constance achieved National Board Certification in English Language Arts/Adolescence and Young Adulthood in 2003. Presently, she teaches English for grades 9-12 at Scott's Branch High School in Clarendon One.

Ann Nichols

Ann Nichols works at West Florence High School in Florence Public School District One as a teacher of students with profound mental disabilities. She earned National Board Certification in 2000 as an Exceptional Needs Specialist. Ann is an active member of The SCEA and participates in activities that support candidates for National Board Certification.

Stephanie Seay

Stephanie Seay achieved National Board Certification as an Early Childhood Generalist in 2000. Prior to becoming South Carolina's Teacher of the Year in 2006, Stephanie taught kindergarten at Wellford Elementary in Spartanburg Five. She has also served as an adjunct professor and mentor to early childhood education students at Presbyterian College.



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