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National Board Certified Teachers: Making a Difference in WA Classrooms

Why Undermine Reform That's Working?

The Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE), based at the University of Washington, recently released a paper encouraging questions about the state's investment in National Board Certification – specifically for our most challenging schools. With state revenue forecasts down and K-12 education budget cuts looming, the CRPE report uses contradictory, limited, and flawed data to undermine one of our state's most successful ongoing education reform efforts.

The Research Just Doesn't Meet Standard

The paper, "*What Does Washington State Get for Its Investment in Bonuses for Board Certified Teachers?*" packages existing research, along with a limited review of state teacher assignment data, to raise uncertainty about investing in accomplished teaching in high-poverty or "challenging" schools. There are several methodological limits to presenting information in this way. CRPE relied on a limited data set to make its assertions, specifically the use of:

- Only partial S-275 data on NBCTs
- Incomplete state data on NBCTs certified in 2010-11
- Data from just two points in time without the use of comparison groups

How Does This Paper Compare?

There are also several fundamental flaws in the CRPE findings when viewed alongside the June, 2010 Washington State Board of Education (SBE) Study conducted by the Center for Policy and Teaching (CTP), also based at the University of Washington, and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP).

In contrast to the CRPE review, the State Board of Education study used high-quality analysis of comprehensive data sets over **three years** (2007-8, 2008-9, & 2009-10), and included comparison groups. Notable differences in findings with the more detailed State Board of Education Study include the following:

- *Retention rates of NBCTs working in challenging schools are the same or higher than NBCTs statewide and higher than the other teachers in challenging schools. (p. 16)*
- *NBCTs in challenging schools have stayed in their school from one year to the next at rates greater than other teachers in challenging schools, and greater than or equal to NBCTs statewide...The challenging schools bonus appears to be a significant factor in retaining NBCTs in challenging schools (p. 23)*
- *When asked about factors contributing to staying at their school, more than three quarters (79 percent) indicated the challenging schools bonus significantly or moderately contributed to their decision to stay. (p. 23)*

- *In Year One...89 percent of the NBCTs...were already located in a challenging school, while 10 percent moved from a non-challenging school to a challenging school. In Years Two and Three, an even larger proportion of NBCTs in challenging schools stayed in the same challenging school from one year to the next (92 and 94 percent, respectively). (p. 23)*
- *The percentage of NBCTs from non-challenging schools who transferred into challenging schools in year 1, 2 and 3 was, respectively: 10.2%, 7.2% and 4.2%) (p. 24)*

Other Factors Not Considered

CRPE did not consider other important factors affecting teacher decisions about transferring to challenging schools. It does not take into consideration:

- The impact of the struggling economy
- Limited open teaching positions amidst massive budget cuts
- Uncertainty tied to new federal and state school improvement initiatives.

Furthermore, the CRPE paper frames an incorrect assertion about the legislative intent in creating the challenging schools bonus. Nowhere does State RCW 28A.405.415 specify a primary intent to have teachers from more affluent districts migrate into our most challenging schools.

While the SBE Study noted some demographic shift of NBCTs from non-challenging into challenging schools, the logical focus in districts across the state has been to grow National Board Certification within challenging schools. The state has seen such dramatic interest and success with National Board Certification in these schools – which usually have the least resources and the greatest teacher mobility.

One Example of NBCT Making A Difference

The Seattle School District has seen a 550% increase in the number of NBCTs since 2006, mostly in the district's most challenging schools. There has been a dramatic increase, as well, in the number of teachers of color seeking and attaining National Board Certification – with the majority teaching in challenging schools. *The CRPE report doesn't acknowledge the importance of investing in National Board Certification as a tool for improving teaching and learning in hardest-to-staff schools.*

Washington State is at a crucial juncture in its support for National Board Certification and accomplished teaching in challenging schools. Will the state continue on in its trajectory as a national model for improving teacher quality or will it undermine one of its great policy successes? *WEA reiterates its support for the National Board Certification process as the highest quality measure of accomplished teaching and the need to continue state support for base and challenging schools incentives.*

Washington policymakers need to put this CPRE paper in context: it distracts from our students in challenging schools who most need accomplished teachers. At best, the CPRE paper does reinforce a growing consensus that the legislature needs to fund a high-quality, non-partisan and non-interest-based study of the impact National Board Certification has on improved student learning, teacher mobility and retention, and teacher professional growth and leadership.