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B R I E F

National Board Certification Successfully Identifies Effective Teachers

In 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was created to identify national standards for teachers and offer certification for teachers who meet them. This voluntary program of national certification was launched as a response to a series of high profile reports in the mid-1980s that raised the alarm about the quality of the nation's schools and issued calls for reform. New research from the University of Washington and the Urban Institute provides the first large-scale evidence on whether or not NBPTS certification successfully identifies teachers who will raise student achievement.

Having a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) matters

The study's analysis of 3 years of comprehensive teacher and student data from North Carolina provides direct evidence that NBPTS is identifying and certifying teachers who will raise student achievement. Controlling for a wide range of variables, the researchers find that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs):

- ▶ Are more effective at raising student achievement than teachers who pursue, but fail to obtain, NBPTS certification.
- ▶ Are more effective at raising student achievement- outside of the year in which they apply- than teachers who do not pursue NBPTS certification.

- ▶ Have a greater impact with younger students.
- ▶ Have a greater impact with low-income students.

For example, learning gains in reading for students who had NBCTs rose to as much as 12 percent for the youngest students (3rd grade) and rose to 15 percent for low-income students. Students with NBCTs improved an average of 7 percent more on math and reading tests than students whose teachers had pursued but failed to gain NBPTS certification.

While it is clear that the NBPTS program is identifying effective teachers and conveys information above and beyond traditional state-based licensure scores, the study's findings do not suggest that the NBPTS certification process itself makes teachers more effective.

Becoming Board Certified

To obtain NBPTS certification, applicants undergo an extensive performance-based evaluation. The process consists of ten sub-assessments that include written examinations, lesson portfolios and classroom videos, and that focus on classroom practices, content and pedagogical knowledge, and community and professional involvement. The cost of application is \$2,300.

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Unanswered questions about cost

To date, the federal government and the states have made substantial financial investments in NBPTS. Over \$200 million in federal and private funds has been spent in support of NBPTS and its certification program since its inception. Additionally, states, local school districts and teachers have spent at least \$150 million on application fees and states and localities have spent millions more on various financial incentives for those who are successfully certified. Even if the NBPTS assessment effectively identifies teachers who raise student achievement, its high costs raises questions about whether or not the process is cost-effective. The answer depends in part on the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants (for whom the \$2,300 application fee must still be paid). More importantly, it depends on whether or not NBPTS certification affects a teacher's career path, helping to keep the best teachers in the classrooms where they are most needed. Additional research and data are needed to better understand the full costs of certifying teachers and the various incentives under which NBPTS certified teacher operate.

Studying NBPTS

These findings represent the second phase in a broader investigation of NBPTS certification. The first phase looked at who applies for and gains advanced teacher certification (Goldhaber, et al., 2004). Additional studies will address other topics, including the impact of NBPTS certification on teachers' career paths, the role of incentives in determining teaching assignments, and the role various sub assessments in the NBPTS assessment process play in identifying effective teachers.

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Further Details

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The Urban Institute's Education Policy Center (<http://epc.urban.org>) conducts research on education reforms involving such areas as accountability, school vouchers, standards, after-school programs, technology, and teacher quality.

Goldhaber, D., Perry, D. and Anthony, E. (2004). "National Board Certification: Who Applies and What Factors are Associated with Success?" The Urban Institute, Education Policy Center, Working Paper.