Agenda Topic: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Illinois Master Certificate

Materials: Diagram of NBPTS Certificate Structure
Graphs Showing Illinois Participation and Certification
Illinois Fee Subsidy Application
Maps Showing National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs)
And Current National Board Candidates

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Purposes of Agenda Item

• To inform the Board of the NBPTS certification process and examine issues relating to growth
• To trace the growth of Illinois NBPTS involvement over the last five years

Expected Outcomes of Agenda Item

• Expanded knowledge of NBPTS and Illinois National Board activities
• Understanding of current issues related to increased teacher participation
• Board input on future scope and direction of Illinois NBPTS activities

Background Information

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in response to the 1986 Carnegie report A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century. A Nation Prepared urged the teaching profession to set standards and certify teachers who met those standards. The next year the National Board was created. The organization is governed by a 63-member board of directors that includes classroom teachers, teacher-educators, leaders of teacher unions, and leaders of disciplinary and specialty organizations.

The threefold mission of NBPTS is to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do; to develop and operate a national, voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards; and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools. Guided by this mission, NBPTS
has created a comprehensive certification structure encompassing more than 30 certificates at six different developmental levels (Appendix A).

National Board’s two-part certification system employs sophisticated performance-based assessments that measure teachers’ performance against the standards in their area of practice. In the first part of the process, teachers develop school-site portfolios that typically contain six entries. These entries include actual student work and videotapes of classroom interactions. The most important part of each portfolio entry is the teacher’s written commentary analyzing elements of the learning experience and reflecting on ways in which they might strengthen their practice.

During the second part of the National Board process, teachers attend an assessment center where they complete four exercises that focus on content knowledge and the pedagogy they would use to successfully teach the specified content. Both the portfolio and assessment center exercises require teachers to demonstrate the skills and professional judgment that characterize their performance in the classroom.

All portfolio and assessment center exercises are scored by teachers who are currently practicing in the candidate’s own teaching field and have received extensive training in their role as assessors. A total score of 275 is required to earn certification. Teachers who score 274 or below may “bank” their scores and retake one or more entries during a two-year period that dates from the initial score notification.

Over the last decade, NBPTS has developed standards for almost all certificate areas and assessment packages for about two-thirds of the certificates. The 19 certificates currently available cover 87% of the country’s P-12 practitioners. To date, 9531 teachers have successfully completed the process and earned National Board certification.

Illinois growth has paralleled the national pattern with small numbers and slow growth in the early years and dramatic increases during the most recent three years. Appendix B traces the pattern of state growth from the first three teachers who earned certification in 1993-1994 to the current total of 185 Illinois National Board Certified Teachers.

The increase in numbers of National Board certified teachers is allowing researchers to address important questions that were unanswerable earlier. Results of the comprehensive Accomplished Teaching Validation Study conducted at the University of North Carolina affirm that the National Board certification process succeeds in its efforts to identify accomplished teachers. The study found that National Board teachers outperformed other teachers in 11 of 13 dimensions of teaching expertise. The study also found a positive correlation between the skill of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and
increased student achievement. Almost three-fourths (74%) of the work samples of students taught by NBCTs reflected a high level of comprehension of the concepts being taught, while only 29% of the work samples of students taught by other teachers showed a comparable level of comprehension.

**Illinois**

Illinois teachers have been involved in the National Board certification process since the first group of volunteers helped the organization field test its certification materials during the 1993-1994 school year. With no support services or knowledge of other participants, three Illinois teachers successfully developed portfolio entries and completed a two-day assessment center experience to become the first National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in the state. During the next school year, Palatine District 15 independently sponsored the successful efforts of two of its teachers.

The State Board of Education became involved in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in 1995-1996 when the agency first provided financial support to Illinois teachers seeking NBPTS certification. During the first three years of state involvement, the recruitment and support procedures were very informal and inconsistent, resulting in low levels of participation and erratic success rates.

However, interest in the program increased with the development of a recruiting brochure and, in late 1997, the adoption of legislation (105 ILCS 5/21-2) that established National Board certification as the only path to the Illinois Master Certificate, the top level of the new three-tiered licensure structure. Later legislation extended the validity of the Illinois Master Certificate to ten years, bringing it into alignment with the certificates issued by NBPTS.

The establishment in early 1998 of a 25-member NBPTS Design Team composed of teacher educators, P-12 administrators, representatives of the two teacher unions, Regional Office of Education staff, National Board Certified Teachers, and representatives of parent, professional and business organizations was a major step towards developing more formal recruitment and support procedures. Over the last three years, as increased state funding has been made available for the program, this advisory group has formulated policy recommendations addressing the equitable allocation of resources and has worked to expand support for the National Board certification process throughout the state. Design Team members have also developed criteria for determining fee support and participate in the review of submitted applications.

Interest in the program was also stimulated by a provision in the recertification requirements that allows teachers who complete the National Board process but do not earn certification to apply the experience toward the fulfillment of the renewal requirements for one five-year cycle of a Standard Certificate. This
provision acknowledges the work and commitment needed to complete the demanding process and makes the NBPTS process an attractive recertification option.

As a result of these actions, the number of Illinois teachers seeking certification has more than doubled each year since 1996. Appendix B illustrates the dramatic increase in participation and in the number of Illinois teachers earning certification over the last five years. The 98 Illinois teachers who achieved National Board certification in November 2000 brought the state total to 185. Only nine states exceed this total, and each of those has large, long-established incentive programs.

**Features of the Illinois National Board Certification Process**

The State Board of Education has introduced several activities to assist and support candidates seeking National Board certification. Payment of a substantial application fee, workshops and training modules that explain the National Board process and the assignment of qualified mentors to candidates illustrate the commitment of the agency to the rigor and quality of national certification.

**Application Fee**

The $2300 NBPTS candidate fee is a barrier for most teachers and districts. In many states, participation is often limited to teachers in the few districts that can afford to cover the candidate fees. In an effort to make National Board candidacy possible for teachers throughout Illinois, the State Board of Education coordinates a fee assistance program that utilizes federal, state, and private funds. During the current academic year, the Illinois Business Roundtable contributed $200,000 and the Illinois Education Association and Illinois Federation of Teachers each provided $25,000 to help cover the candidate fees for the approximately 435 Illinois teachers seeking National Board certification. Three Regional Offices of Education regularly cosponsor candidates in their service area. In FY01, nearly $600,000 of state funds in concert with the monies provided by the Roundtable and the teacher unions as well as federal matching dollars have been used to support the applications of this year’s candidates.

Teachers applying to the State Board for fee assistance complete an application that includes three short essays (Appendix C). A panel composed mainly of National Board teachers reviews the application and makes a recommendation on whether the teacher should be offered support. In past years, the State Board has paid the entire fee for teachers whose applications are favorably reviewed. However, the NBPTS Design Team has recommended that starting with the 2001-2002 cycle, teachers should pay the initial $300 non-refundable payment. This is consistent with practices of most states.
Mentoring/Workshops

State Board staff work with National Board Certified Teachers to design and deliver mentor training and support services to teachers seeking certification. All current candidates are invited to participate in three one-day workshops that address various aspects of the certification process. The workshops allow current candidates to meet and work with teachers who have already earned certification. The FY 2001 appropriation of $1,075,000 allows the State Board to cover the travel expenses of candidates and mentors and to provide substitute reimbursement to districts. The State Board also facilitates the establishment of mentoring networks throughout the state.

Stipends

Illinois is one of 39 states that have enacted financial incentives for teachers earning National Board certification. The Illinois Teaching Excellence Program (105 ILCS 5/21-27) created in 1999 and funded the next year established a one-time $3000 stipend for holders of Master Certificates employed by an Illinois school district. Since September 2000, the State Board of Education has transferred $216,000 to school districts to cover the payment of stipends to 72 teachers. The 98 Illinois teachers who earned National Board certification in November 2000 are just beginning to apply for their Master Certificates and submit the documentation required for the stipend. More than $600,000 must be set aside from the current appropriation to pay the stipends for these newly certified teachers and for previously certified teachers (i.e., prior to November 2000) who have not yet applied for the stipend.

Although provisions of the 1999 Teaching Excellence legislation allow Master Certificate holders to receive compensation for mentoring, Illinois National Board teachers have generously shared their expertise previous to any system of payment. Last year, $500 honoraria were awarded to 37 teachers who had provided 30 or more hours mentoring National Board candidates. Prior to 2000, mentors served without compensation.

The FY01 appropriation provides mentor support consistent with the provisions of the Teaching Excellence legislation, with teachers who provide 60 hours of mentoring qualifying for $1000 compensation. Further, National Board teachers who worked with educators in low-performing schools in the 2000 Summer Bridges Program were compensated at a level that exceeded the legislation’s provisions. The agency is refining a tracking system to assure mentors working in low-performing, high-poverty schools receive appropriate compensation.
Score Banking

NBPTS allows teachers who do not earn certification on their first attempt to “bank” their scores and retake exercises on which their score was below 2.75. For the last three years, the State Board has operated under a policy recommended by the NBPTS Design Team that assigns top priority to paying the candidate fees for first-time candidates. If funding is available for retakes, the agency will underwrite the cost of retaking one or two entries per candidate.

In past years no special services have been offered to those Illinois teachers who need to retake portions of the NBPTS assessment. However, this year an expansion of services allows teachers unsuccessful on a limited number of assessment components to receive support in preparation for their retake(s). In February, State Board sponsored the first Banker’s Workshop to address the special needs of this group. Assistance from Board certified teachers was provided and advice on portfolio development was offered. Staff will track these candidates through the retake process to determine if the new services helped teachers achieve national certification.

Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action, and Communications

Policy Issues

The following issues have been identified as a stimulus for discussion. No recommendations for action are provided at this time.

1. Goals for the Illinois NBPTS Program

During the past five years, Illinois has embraced the NBPTS standards and process through its policies, budget and educational infrastructure. These actions were insightful because the NBPTS has become much more than a way to identify and acknowledge outstanding teachers. Participants and observers agree that the NBPTS process is arguably the most valuable of all professional development experiences. Moreover, as National Board certified teachers become more numerous, their role as change agents for the school culture is becoming increasingly apparent.

However, the Illinois NBPTS initiative has evolved without clearly defined goals or measures for its success. Do we believe that the program should increase in size by a specific percentage each year? Should our success be judged on the percent of candidates who are successful in achieving National Board certification, or on the number of participants? Do we want to have an NBPTS teacher in every county? In every district? In every school? In every class?
Are there more strategic goals that should be addressed? Should we nurture the development of National Board certified teachers in certain kinds of districts, such as those with low achievement or large numbers of at risk students? Are there teacher roles, such as consulting teachers, mentors, and teacher-educators, through which NBPTS teachers could have a particular impact?

Illinois can take pride in the growth of its NBPTS initiative. However, the number of teachers who have been certified is a very small portion of the eligible teaching corps. It is time to think about what our goals will be and what it will take to achieve them.

2. Incentives

The Illinois legislature has provided $3,000 stipends and recertification credit for the NBPTS process. However, as goals are established for the initiative, it will be important to consider whether these incentives are sufficient.

Many states assure annual salary increases for Board certified teachers, several others provide up to ten years of annual bonuses not tied to the salary structure, and some states offer one-time stipends of $10,000 or more.

Any Illinois action in this regard could substantially increase the budget for the initiative. How does this initiative compare to other teacher quality priorities?

3. Participation in the NBPTS Program

In any plan for continued growth, the current patterns of participation, the mechanisms for providing teachers with information prior to their decision to seek certification, and the most effective ways to deliver services need to be examined.

Geographic Disparities - Major disparities in participation levels exist across the state. Almost two-thirds of the 185 Illinois NBCTs are clustered in Cook, Kane, DuPage, McHenry, Lake, and Will Counties, while 63 of the state’s 102 counties have no nationally certified teachers (Appendix D).

The distribution patterns of 2000-2001 candidates suggest that the disparate levels of participation are increasing. Despite the doubling of applicant numbers this year, the participation outside of Cook County did not increase. The major recruitment efforts by District 299 largely account for the increase in Illinois numbers for 2000-2001. The Chicago Public Schools Recertification and Professional Standards Division recruited 200 candidates, and the Chicago Teachers’ Union Quest Center is working with an additional 27 CPS teachers. A generous incentive package in Palatine District 15 also contributed to the
concentration of candidates in the state’s most populous county. This year 70% of the Illinois candidates teach in Cook County.

While a high participation level anywhere in the state is encouraging, this powerful vehicle for professional growth and improved student achievement should be available and encouraged throughout the state. Multi-county areas in the western, southern, and southeastern parts of Illinois remain untouched by the National Board process. Active measures will be needed if the positive impact of NBCTs in Illinois classrooms is to become a statewide reality.

**Underrepresented Groups** - In addition to regional differences in participation levels, some other populations remain underrepresented in the NBPTS pool. Prior to the large scale involvement of District 299 this year, participation of minority teachers and teachers from academically at risk schools were very low. Teachers belonging to one or both of these categories probably constitute less than 10% of the current Illinois National Board Certified Teachers. In addition, the participation by secondary teachers remains consistently low across the state.

**Informed Decision Making** - Few Illinois teachers know enough about the NBPTS certification process to make informed decisions about whether they would like to participate. The application packet sent to teachers who respond to the recruitment brochure contains a great deal of background information, but for too many teachers the magnitude of the task ahead becomes clear only with the arrival of THE BOX, the very large (24”x14”x8”) red and blue container in which the portfolio materials arrive and in which the completed portfolio is submitted for evaluation.

A precandidacy system that adequately conveys information to teachers considering the National Board certification process exists at this time only in District 299. The most logical and cost effective path to a statewide precandidacy system is to train large numbers of currently certified teachers to provide informational sessions through Regional Offices of Education or higher education institutions. Two sessions held last summer in Sangamon and DuPage Counties cosponsored by the State Board and the Regional Offices of Education were initial steps in this effort. A more ambitious statewide meeting that combines presentation and mentor training is being planned for this summer.

4. **Support for NBPTS Candidates**

Designing and delivering support services has become increasingly challenging as participation has doubled each of the last three years. Almost all of the state candidates take advantage of the workshops, pushing the attendance beyond optimal levels. The value of the workshops lies mainly in the ability of mentors to work with current candidates in small groups, a mode of interaction that is difficult
at meetings where participants number between 60 and 120. Offering smaller workshops perhaps based on certificate fields rather than geographic regions, would be beneficial to participants, but would require more staff time.

The availability of mentors for NBPTS candidates, one of the critical elements of a support system, is also becoming a problem as a result of the increasing number of candidates. In addition, there is increasing competition for the services of those teachers who have been National Board certified, with individual districts or organizations willing and able to pay substantially more than the State Board is able to do.

Some states have successfully used colleges and universities to deliver support services to National Board candidates. This has potential as an alternative or supplement to our current system and, in fact, several Illinois institutions are already providing support programs for NBPTS candidates, combining NBPTS activities with a graduate program leading to a master's degree. Further exploration of this concept is warranted; however, it will be important to ensure that the cost to teachers is not arbitrarily increased by making a degree program the only source of support.

5. Advanced Leadership Opportunities

In its 1996 policy framework for the improvement of teacher preparation, certification and continuing professional development, the State Board concluded that classroom teachers need to be able to earn advanced certification that will recognize teaching sophistication and allow them to assume instructional leadership roles without moving into administration. In 1997, the General Assembly enacted a three-tier certification system, with the top tier -- the Master Certificate - linked to the NBPTS standards and process.

As the NBPTS initiative has grown, National Board certified teachers have been recruited by universities and districts able to offer competitive salaries. However, there has been no leadership from the state about new roles that might be created to take advantage of the expertise and commitment these teachers have demonstrated.

Budget Issues

For several years, the State Board's initiative for National Board certification was funded at $75,000. In FY01, the appropriation was increased to $1.075 million, largely to pay the stipends to holders of the Master Certificate. The FY02 budget requests an additional $1 million to support program expansion, including application fees, stipends, mentoring, and training workshops. Expenses to support the Design Team, travel for candidates and mentors, reimbursements to
districts for substitute expenses, and marketing and publication costs also come from the state appropriation. The preponderance of these funds, however, is devoted to fulfilling the obligations of the 1999 Teaching Excellence legislation - i.e., the stipends.

State funds are supplemented with the generous support provided by the Illinois Business Roundtable, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and the Illinois Education Association. These entities have assured level funding for candidates in the 2001-2002 candidate class.

Federal funds also represent a critical contribution to the State Board effort. The original Illinois’ federal allocation for 2000-2001 was only $99,000; however, this was increased to $321,000. The agency has been informed that the state’s 2001-2002 federal allocation will again be $99,000. Discussions with representatives of the National Board suggest that an increase beyond this level is very unlikely next year.

Future revenue needs are contingent upon the State Board’s determination of the program’s future. With 435 applicants in 2000-2001, services that have contributed to the state’s past success must be reconsidered. The funds, for instance, necessary to provide mentors and workshops to candidates are constrained because of the large number in the applicant pool.

Legislative Action

No legislative action is needed at this time.

Communications

The program makes few demands on the agency’s communication resources. The graphics division is involved annually with the production of the recruitment brochure, and items are developed for the Superintendent’s Bulletin, the website, and other regular information exchanges.

Superintendent’s Recommendations

The Board should provide guidance and input to staff concerning the future of this initiative. Members should request a report from staff in January 2002 that describes options available to the agency that would assure the continued increase of Master teachers but reduce the Board’s service commitment.