



February 2, 2016

Dear State Board Members,

The Arkansas State Teachers Association (ASTA) is Arkansas's non-union professional association for school employees offering educators liability insurance, legal services, professional development, advocacy and more. We are the fastest-growing education organization in the state serving thousands of public school employees.

Two education policy actions that are occurring nearly simultaneously spurred a flurry of questions and comments from ASTA members last week. We feel it's important you understand the perspectives of Arkansas teachers as you make decisions that impact these valued professionals and their students.

As you are well aware, last week the Governor announced an increased financial commitment to and expansion of the Teach for America (TFA) program. We understand the critical and positive roles TFA educators play in the schools where they serve. TFA is one of many alternative pathways to the classroom for degreed professionals and ASTA is supportive of the important work they do. When you work with districts and educators across Arkansas as we do, you learn all too quickly there is a need for such alternatives. For example, there are many classrooms in high need areas staffed with permanent substitutes that more than likely have little to no necessary content expertise. Studies have shown that TFA members have made huge gains for precisely this demographic, and we look forward to seeing the impact they can make.

The juxtaposition that initiated comments from ASTA members occurred as educators were informed that while commitment and support for TFA was increasing, the commitment and support for National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) incentives was in jeopardy. According to a 2012 article posted on the Arkansas Department of Education website, research has "found that students taught by National Board-Certified Teachers score better on achievement tests than students whose teachers are not Board-certified. Other studies have identified improved teacher retention and improved school culture as additional positive impacts associated with National Board Certification." The article also states, "in contrast to the usual pattern of high-achieving teachers gravitating to more easily served districts, nearly 50 percent of National Board Certified Teachers serve in high-need schools." The article goes on to describe the impact NBCT teachers have on our Nation's most fragile students. The full text of this article can be found online:

http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/HR_and_Educator_Effectiveness/HR_EducatorEffectiveness/NBCTs/2012_NBPTS_National_Press_Release.pdf

Although we are supportive of the promising work TFA can do for Arkansas, educators want to know why Arkansas's NBCTs are not receiving similar support. While the need for alternative paths to the classroom exists, there is also a need to incentivize and retain our most experienced and successful teachers who have put forth the time and effort to become more effective educators by pursuing the highest form of certification possible. From what we understand, the NBCT certification process is currently the only statewide program that does just this. Research shows us that the single biggest factor in securing success for students is an excellent teacher. Arkansas depends on these teachers and needs to enthusiastically support them.



We must strike a compromise that makes room for both of these highly needed programs in a manner that does not force high performing educators to lose incentive pay because they have made a long-term commitment to the classroom and continued learning and growth. We should be balancing the merits of existing programs with new programs to ensure success for all of Arkansas's students.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Michele Linch

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