



Arkansas Teachers for National Board Certification

"A coalition of National Board Certified Teachers dedicated to advancing accomplished teaching in Arkansas"

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To the Honorable Members of the Joint Education Committee:

Good afternoon, my name is Nancy Fancyboy. I am a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT). I teach 1st grade in the Beebe School District where I earned my NB certification. I am here speaking on behalf of the National Board's state affiliate Arkansas Teachers for National Board Certification (ATNBC) and I am speaking on behalf of ATNBC against the proposed rules changes governing the National Board program in Arkansas.

First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today, and for your time and your service to our state. Serving on the education committees shows your level of commitment to doing what is best for our students. I, too, am steadfast in my commitment to doing what is best for the students of Arkansas and to influence others to do the same. ATNBC fervently believes the NB program could be a key solution to the education gaps we have in our state—the inconsistencies we have even in schools within the same districts. Superintendent Janie Darr from Rogers states, *"These teachers make a tremendous impact on student learning and serve as leaders in best professional practice in our district. They are focused on improving student achievement and help us achieve our mission of "creating an educational environment where all belong, all learn, and all achieve."*

When we talk about the intent of the original laws that brought the NB program to our state, we cannot discount the intent of those legislators from the late 1990's and early 2000's to plant the seeds of what they envisioned would become a teaching force of NB certified teachers. I am honored to say that my brother, former Rep. David Choate, was one of those legislators, and while we may greatly differ in political philosophy, we do not differ on the fact that all students deserve to have the best teachers, and that when all students have the best teachers, everything will improve—including the economies of the poorest areas of our state. The original intent to make this initiative the growing success it has become far outweighs the financial shortfall ADE predicts. We must find other ways to fund this program, because it is one of the most successful education programs we have in the state. It is a program to be proud of and one that the National Board itself looks to as a successful model.

The state, of course, has the responsibility to verify the return on the large investment it has made in the program. The questions that must be asked to determine that are: When NBCTs certify are they staying in the classroom for maximum student impact or using their credential to promote themselves into different positions? Are NBCTs staying in the schools where they are needed most? According to a study by Dr. Darylnn Cast, an NBCT and former Arkansas educator, the answer to both questions is yes. She conducted her doctoral dissertation study in 2012 to assess the Arkansas NBCTs' perceptions on the program's effectiveness at fostering quality teachers for Arkansas classrooms. The data strongly supports a high retention rate of NBCTs in Arkansas. 84% of NBCTs remained in the school district they were teaching in when they certified and 94% continued in a teaching capacity. Additionally, these NBCTs tended to teach in largely rural school districts with a SE level of 50% or more. These outcomes are proven by Gretchen Wilkes an NBCT who teaches in the Farmington School District. Ms. Wilkes states, *"Receiving the yearly NBCT bonus has allowed me to continue teaching in a district that I love, despite the fact the annual salary is \$10,000 less than larger districts nearby. It pays for my ongoing professional development, and is helping pay my son's tuition at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. I worked hard to earn these advanced credentials and am proud to be an NBCT."*

So what would happen if the incentives were removed? While ATNBC realizes the proposed rule change is not to entirely remove the incentives, the proposal does remove them for many NBCTs who are not yet eligible for renewal. If an NBCT is not eligible for renewal (now known as "maintenance of certificate,") this year, they will no longer receive a bonus. This is an abrupt financial change for NBCTs who were counting on that bonus to pay for college education either for themselves or their children. It will put a financial hardship on many teachers. Heather Staggs of Westside Elementary says, *"The extra money also allows me extra time to work with college students and [on] lesson plans rather than rush to a second job like I use to do. I no longer have to have a summer job and this allows me to attend workshops and participate in training [in the summer]. I am so thankful that Arkansas provided extra money for NBC process (I received the grant that paid for my NBC) and that they offer \$5,000 a year because I would have never had the opportunity to become an NBCT or obtain my master's degree without this funding."*

For those who have already renewed, this news is disappointing as well. If a candidate has already renewed under the 10-year certificate, their bonus will be phased out gradually. They will fall under the 5-4-3-2-1 phase-out, as outlined in the proposed rule change. Angel Ellington of Fayetteville just renewed her certification this year. She said *"I am deeply disheartened by this proposal. If the ADE had only told us, I would have spent my holidays and twenty weekends working toward graduate work that would have given me a lane change in my pay."*

MeMe Hagers of Fayetteville runs one of two National Board candidate support sites in Northwest Arkansas. She is concerned that if renewed NBCTs do not receive the bonus, they will not renew. Ms. Hagers commented, *"NBCTs show their merit by earning the certification. Your generous bonus is a reflection of the effort and dedication that NBCTs put into their craft and their students. Every year when I receive my annual bonus I feel valued, appreciated and validated!...If NBCTs don't have the \$5,000 annual bonus, I feel sure that almost no one will renew. Renewal is expensive and rigorous. [The state] bonus, this incentive is working!"*

And she is right about NBCTs not renewing. All we have to do is look at our neighbor, Oklahoma, to see what would happen if incentives are removed. In four years, the number of new/renewing NBCTs went from 224 to 20 (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, State Profiles OK, 2013). Of course, this happened as a result of removing all incentives, including fee scholarships, which ADE is not proposing. However, how much will our number of NBCTs drop as a result of phasing out the renewal bonus? And keep in mind that with the new 5-year plan, the overall added income of these teachers will be significantly less. We foresee many teachers either not pursuing NB certification or leaving the classroom after the 10 years in order to match the level of income the bonus afforded them. ATNBC feels the loss in numbers would be substantial and harm the overall strength of the program. It would essentially choke the life out of the program. ATNBC vehemently opposes the proposed rule change of section 6.04 as presented by ADE.

Within the United States and in Arkansas, there is a consensus that teacher quality is the most important school-based variable in determining how well a child learns. There are many studies to support this premise, and it suggests where investments should be made if policy-makers are really serious about student learning. It also explains why policymakers and the public should care about what it means to be an effective teacher and what it takes to create and sustain a highly-accomplished teaching workforce.

In the last 3-years, Arkansas has experienced a 23.88% increase of National Board Certified Teachers. Our national rankings are: 7th in the percentage of growth; 12th in the total number of NBCTs; and 6th in the percent of teachers who are NB certified. Even with those outstanding statistics, the total number of Arkansas teachers who are NB certified is only 8.21%. You know, we do not question that a doctor is board-certified, because board certification is almost universal in the medical profession. What would your level of confidence be if only 8.21% of the doctors in Arkansas were board certified? We are

steadily gaining ground in making board certification the standard for Arkansas teachers, but ADE's proposal would have us take huge leaps backwards.

Delaying action on the changes ADE proposes in the rules governing the National Board financial support will give all stakeholders time to research possible solutions in securing funding to support this successful initiative. If Arkansas is to continue as a leader in education, highly-accomplished Board-certified teachers must be the norm, not the 8.21% exception. NBCTs are recognized in the profession as highly-credentialed and should not be apologetic or seen as 'money-hungry' in asking to be compensated for achieving the gold standard in teaching. It is well-deserved.

Therefore, ATNBC recommends that action be delayed on all proposed rules changes to allow National Board Certified Teachers, ADE and legislators to work collaboratively in developing a workable and financially responsible solution for all, and one that has the most positive impact on our students.

With Kindest Regards,

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