



NBPTS mentor Bayyinah Abdul-Aleem and one of her mentees, NBPTS-certified special education teacher Darlene Schaffer, at Samuel H. Daroff Elementary School in West Philadelphia.

AN UNCOMPROMISING LOOK IN THE MIRROR:

Are You as Good in the Classroom as You Think You Are?

College offers national board certification

With 10 years teaching experience, a master's degree and more than 30 credits under her belt, Nicole Foley, who teaches English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) at Gotwal Elementary School in the Norristown (Pa.) Area School District, thought she was doing a good job of reaching each of her students. But then she saw a video of herself in the classroom and realized she could do better by focusing more attention on her students who need more help while simultaneously not ignoring those students who are progressing well.

It's like the Oscars for teachers.

Special education teacher Darlene Shaffer, another 10-year teaching veteran, had a similar video moment. “I realized when I was facing one student I wasn’t seeing what was going on elsewhere in the classroom,” says Shaffer, who teaches at Samuel H. Daroff Elementary School in West Philadelphia. “I found that I needed to try even more various strategies to reach some of my students who I thought I was reaching sufficiently but wasn’t.”

These skilled, seasoned teachers experienced such revelations thanks to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards program, a rigorous teaching standards and voluntary assessment process created to develop master teachers. Last December, 44 teachers in schools between Philadelphia and Harrisburg earned their NBPTS certifications—the first teachers to do so with the aid and support of the College of Education’s Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE).

“It’s like the Oscars for teachers,” says Gail Tillery, a 2002 board-certified British literature high school teacher from Cumming, Ga. Last year she mentored two successful Temple program candidates and this year is mentoring Foley, who is also the mother of two young children. “It’s a most strenuous undertaking,” says Tillery. “People with PhDs who went for the national boards have told me they’d rather do a PhD.”

“I cried a lot because it is beyond hard, but the impact on your kids is indescribable. I’m a completely different teacher, light-years ahead of where I was when I started this process. I *get* how to get them to understand it.”

There can be a significant financial benefit—almost all school districts pay certified teachers additional monies, with the average bonus about \$2,000 per year. The Philadelphia School District pays an additional \$3,500 annually and the private Milton Hershey School, a relatively small school with an impressive roster of 16 nationally certified teachers, pays \$5,000.

But, financial incentives aside, the chief reasons for putting yourself through what amounts to a combined pedagogical Marine boot camp and therapy couch session is to significantly improve yourself and your students. In elevating the teaching culture, the program has a powerful impact on both the board-certified teachers and their students. Four of the last eight national teachers of the year hold board certification. Also, congressionally mandated research released by the National Research Council of the National Academies last summer indicates students taught by national board-certified teachers score higher gains on achievement tests than those taught by non-certified teachers.



Created in 2006 through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Temple's CTE is part of the Urban Education Collaborative in the College of Education. In addition to Temple, three other universities—Duquesne, Gannon and East Stroudsburg—offer NBPTS programs in other regions of the state.

Three years ago Gov. Ed Rendell launched the program as part of his education initiative. Compared to other states, Pennsylvania has a paucity of NBPTS-certified teachers. There are nearly 74,000 nationwide—representing just 2 percent of all teachers—but only 496 in Pennsylvania. That total includes the 44 Temple program candidates who received certification in December, along with 78 successful candidates supported by the other three Pennsylvania universities—an 80 percent increase in Pennsylvania teachers achieving certification annually thanks to the creation of the four NBPTS programs. This academic year alone more than 170 candidates are attempting to achieve certification through Temple's CTE program.

How, you might be wondering, does NBPTS certification differ from the master's-plus-30 credits you might have?

“With college courses or professional development sessions, someone is talking to you and giving you information that may or may not apply to your teaching,” says Christine Sadjian-Peacock, Temple's regional coordinator for the program and a retired Philadelphia high school principal. “A lot if it you'll never use.”



Christine Sadjian-Peacock,
Temple's NBPTS regional coordinator

Achieving National Board Certification

To qualify for national board certification, candidates must provide evidence of accomplished teaching in the following ways:

Submission of a portfolio that includes four entries that demonstrate how the candidate meets the national board standards:

- Two entries, including videotapes of selected portions of lessons, and written analysis of those lessons demonstrating the ability to meet the needs of each child in the class

- One entry that demonstrates the candidate's ability to analyze student work over time

- One entry that demonstrates the candidate's ability to work with parents, community members and colleagues—as a lifelong learner, leader and collaborator—and evidence of how those efforts impact student learning

Responding to six timed, open-ended online prompts that demonstrate the candidate's depth and breadth of content knowledge in any one of 25 different subject content areas.

This process makes you stop and reflect on why you are doing what you are doing.

“But the NBPTS process is similar to a doctor getting board certification. You basically spend an entire year analyzing your own teaching practices, showing evidence of how you meet the rigorous NBPTS standards, reflecting on what you do and determining how your teaching impacts student learning.”

It is a demanding process that takes between 200 to 400 hours over the course of a year to complete. Nationally, less than 40 percent of first-year candidates achieve certification—although candidates have three years to achieve certification. While a minimum of three years’ teaching experience is required, most candidates have between five and 10 years of experience.

While teachers can attempt to qualify for certification on their own, CTE provides workshops, supervised workshops, mentoring and other assistance. In Pennsylvania the \$2,500 certification fee currently is completely covered by federal and state grants.

The process begins with the first of eight voluntary CTE workshops that begin in the early summer and extend through the following April. The workshops focus on issues pertinent to passing board certification, including such subjects as

analyzing student work and writing with both in-depth analysis and reflection on your own teaching practices. Then, beginning in the fall semester, teachers begin working on four portfolio submissions—including two that incorporate video-taped class sessions—that demonstrate their ability to meet the national board’s high standards for teaching practice and reaching each of their students. The final component is an online examination that measures competency in any one of 25 content areas.

One portfolio submission requires a 15-segment lesson plan that demonstrates you both meet NBPTS practice standards and documents your students are reaching achievement goals. That can be measured in a variety of ways. For example, says Sadjian-Peacock, if you were teaching a writing concept you could select three students who represent the range of your class’s abilities and present two writing samples for each child—one as a baseline example before the lesson began and another sample after eight weeks of teaching that particular writing skill.

As a result of the process, certification candidate Amy McKelvey, a 10-year teacher in the Central Dauphin School District who teaches elementary school band and orchestra, is heightening her awareness of her students’ likes and dislikes “to help them with their success by focusing on things they are enjoying.” She had her students list their personal interests and then had them match up with their peers with similar interests. She thus discovered a lot of her students loved rock music and others were interested in movie themes, so she’s charted





some music for each genre and is having them play it.

Foley, the Norristown ESOL teacher whose students are all Hispanic, is also concentrating on trying to bring her students' families and even the outside community together in a collaborative effort to support her students by helping to establish both an after-school program for homework help and a parents' resource center.

Critical to this process are the volunteer mentors—educators who have already received NBPTS certification and are willing to work closely with one or more candidates to help them achieve certification. Providing both friendly support and a critical eye, approximately 40 mentors are currently mentoring the CTE's 170-plus candidates this year.

Each Monday, for example, Tillery e-mails Foley, asking how she is doing and suggests ways to enhance written portfolio materials she has sent to Tillery for her review. "I don't know a thing about ESOL," says Tillery, "but if she can make me understand her practice, make me see what she's doing with her kids, a NBPTS reader will see it as well.

"Last Monday I was critiquing her entry and wrote: 'Nicole, you're losing me in paragraph 10. Pull back and answer the question: What are you doing here?'"

"Gail is fantastic," raves Foley. "The process," she adds, "really makes you push yourself to look at instructional data and see which students are getting what you're teaching and which aren't. 'I've tried this, it's not working, what do I do next?'"

Repeatedly, both mentors and candidates talk about the reflective nature of the process as the hallmark of the program. "Sometimes it's uncomfortable to really examine what you are doing and discover it's not going the way you think it would, but it's also nice to get positive reinforcement for things you are doing that do work," says McKelvey. "We think we

know where our strengths are, but this really allows you to take a microscope to what you are doing in order to really see where your strengths and weaknesses are," adds Schaffer, who earned certification this past December.

Even her mentor, Bayyinah Abdul-Aleem, a teaching coach in the Philadelphia School District with a quarter century of teaching experience found the process enlightening when she achieved certification three years ago. "The whole practice of engaging students, presenting materials and upholding standards of instruction becomes so ingrained in your day-to-day practice that you do them unconsciously," she says, "but this process makes you stop and reflect on why you are doing what you are doing.

"I'm a better mentor of new teachers now."

While it is possible to obtain board certification without going through the CTE program, Schaffer can't imagine doing it without the program's support or Abdul-Aleem's mentoring. "She was very supportive and nurturing, and even met me at my school several times. It's a unique process. Without her support I probably wouldn't have made it."

Ready to take your teaching to the next level?

If you want to enrich your teaching, improve your students' success, become a leader in education and elevate the teaching profession, please contact:

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Pennsylvania Department of Education

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For more information on the program, go to:

www.temple.edu/education/CTE.