

**Third Annual Conference of the WI Leadership Network
May 2003**

SUMMARY FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS OF NBCTS

This document contains a summary of findings from two focus group interviews of NBCTs held at the Third Annual Conference of the Washington Initiative Leadership Network at the Sleeping Lady Retreat Center in May 2003. The purpose of conducting focus group interviews is two-fold: to gain insight into the teachers' beliefs and understandings related to our questions about the WI and leadership, and to provide the teachers an opportunity to hear from one another about their various perspectives on the issues.

One group consisted of newly-certified and first-time conference participants; there were 6 teachers in this group. The second group, 18 in total, consisted of returning conference participants. We had slightly different questions in mind for the two groups, outlined in more detail below. We asked first-timers to reflect on:

- ◆ their perceptions of the WI network and its value to them professionally and personally;
- ◆ their perceptions of any drawbacks associated with the network;
- ◆ any leadership opportunities that have arisen since becoming board certified;
- ◆ ways the WI has helped them through the process; and
- ◆ current support needs or desires.

In our meeting with the returning NBCTs, we asked them to share

- ◆ leadership opportunities they had pursued since the last conference, if any;
- ◆ the extent to which they consider themselves leaders;
- ◆ their most rewarding and challenging leadership experience to this point
- ◆ where in their leadership work they encounter resistance or backlash;
- ◆ how their views of leadership have shifted in the last year, and
- ◆ ways the WI has supported and could continue to support them.

The following sections contain sample focus group interview responses from both first-time and returning conference participants. We have organized the teachers' comments into the following categories:

- **Value and Benefits of Becoming Board Certified;**
- **Nature, Role and Importance of the Washington Initiative;**
- **Teacher Leadership as an NBCT;**
- **NBCTs' Vision for a Strengthened Profession;**
- **Sustained Leadership Network.**

The quotations are taken directly from the focus group discussions. Some have been lightly edited for clarity.

VALUE AND BENEFITS OF BECOMING BOARD CERTIFIED

This section highlights ways both newly-certified and more experienced NBCTs perceive the values and benefits of being a Board Certified classroom teacher.

In this comment, the teacher explains how important it was for her that the NB provide **a model of teaching excellence** – a vision – toward which she and others can strive:

It is a grassroots kind of reform effort that really clearly gives us a vision of what teaching excellence looks like. Frankly, I don't know that I ever had that. I have been teaching 12 years, and everybody has a different idea of what is going on. With the National Board process, someone has agreed on what accomplished, excellent teaching looks like, so you know what the vision is and you can help others reach it. It seems like there are so many different visions, and they change all the time. That is what I like – clear, convincing evidence of what teaching excellence is.

Becoming a NBCT has provided teachers with **new opportunities for professional growth that would otherwise not be available** to them, or has **opened their eyes to other aspects of teaching** that they would not have known they had an interest in, as these teachers described:

I was nominated and applied to become part of the Board itself, the National Board. I was not selected for it, but that was a pretty neat opportunity.

A high point for me after becoming a National Board Certified Teacher was I was recruited to be the president of the Washington Arts Education Association. It was a direct result of that, an honor of being recruited to work in a high board position, the art association. And obviously I will stay in the classroom because it is an association for teachers.

I had some real highs after meeting with my candidates and facilitator. Just a few questioning strategies, and you can see them move forward. I am really excited to see adults learn. [Adult learning] is a new interest area for me now.

A few teachers emphasized that with National Board certification comes an **increased level of confidence** related to teaching and leadership.

I was actually very actively involved prior to National Board certification, but I would say the knowledge and the experience of going through the process makes me understand a lot of different things, like the confidence piece. If you do the process in math, you will be working with your students in getting them prepared for the state test. I think the National Board certification is something that I will definitely be impressing upon math teachers. This is a really good thing to do because if you are sitting on that edge of traditional and non-traditional, this process I think will really help them get over that edge by evaluating what they did. They will be able to say yes, my students are getting what they need out of the material and in this manner. I think that is really important.

I've been involved in adopting new curricula. Having the confidence as a certified teacher to say this program will help you get there, and to convince the district that this is

the way you need to go, has been great. Some commentary by staff members suggest that people say they resent the NBCTs, but you have to brush those off.

Others see National Board certification as a kind of **external validation** that can be very **empowering** as well as **lend credibility** to themselves and their profession:

I remember when I got my National Board certification, it was 2001. It was in the newspaper, it was in the ASB paper, it was announced on the radio, and it went in the board notes. People were saying congratulations, and it happened in November. In February we were still reading about it. Like wow! It was empowering, and yeah, I worked like heck to achieve it, but I never even assumed that people would care. I did it for myself, and it turned out to be this public ownership thing!

As a National Board Certified Teacher, I can say I proved myself as a teacher. I have that in my pocket. Before, some of the teachers say, well you self-limited yourself into an administrative position, were you really an effective teacher? I have had to say, you bet you I was effective!

Completing the National Board certification process also helps teachers be **more reflective** on what and how they are teaching and what and how their students are learning:

Through the NB process, you are really looking at what it is that you are doing, what is it that you are doing that is really working for kids, and what is best for kids. You are looking at yourself and you are looking at what you are doing. I think it is by far the best professional development I have ever been through.

Finally, becoming a NBCT is for some teachers an **opportunity to be their personal best**, for no one but themselves and their students, as described by this teacher:

I didn't become a National Board teacher to promote myself as a National Board teacher. I made this choice to improve myself as a teacher. As I got into it, other things fell into line. To me, the essence of what I am doing is good for me, I can become a better teacher in the classroom. Becoming a more effective leader within my immediate school, my district, region and state—I am open to all of these possibilities, and I embrace them and I want that. But I don't want to be doing it just as a National Board teacher. It is not like I have this stamp, and so now I am okay. It is one of the things that I have done, but it is not the absolutely defining thing of my life.

In sum, the teachers we spoke with at the conference seem to suggest that the rewards and satisfaction related to becoming board certified are largely intrinsic, and stem from their experience of growth against the highest standard in their profession.

NATURE, ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE WASHINGTON INITIATIVE

The comments in this section include teachers' reflections on the Washington Initiative – what it is, what it does for them, and the extent to which they think it is valuable or significant.

When asked about the purpose of the Initiative and how it has helped them, newly-certified teachers responded primarily with comments about the network. These teachers are grateful for the opportunity to **meet and talk with other teachers who have been through a similar experience**, and who view teaching and learning in similar ways.

The networking, the sharing of ideas, the common vision that any network of professionals provides has been beneficial. But I do think having all of us going through the same rigorous process, it makes us somewhat unique, and we are all on the same page. I think that is a huge thing that you don't always get in other professional groupings.

[I] think the purpose of the network is] building leadership and also infrastructure. Building the infrastructure and developing a means of maintaining that at the same time. Even if [the Initiative] went away, there would be that infrastructure. Things like this, networking, and actually meeting face to face and developing that network and that system where there will be a group that is committed.

Primarily [the Initiative] has provided more support. My district doesn't really even know what NB is, and just for somebody else to really know what it is and to understand, I think that is really important, so I think what we are doing is valued.

Before, I always saw myself as doing things alone, because no one else is willing to put in the extra hours to chit chat or to plan. Now I feel like I can speak out for other NBCTs who are willing to meet after hours or on weekends to plan something, just because we want to promote the profession. Now I am thinking of myself as a collaborator and not as an independent.

Other teachers described the WI and the network as being important in **providing them with information about leadership opportunities** in and around the state. The following are examples of ways the WI has assisted these teachers in finding such opportunities:

I didn't even realize that there would be all of these [leadership] opportunities. If it wasn't for the Washington Initiative, I don't know that I ever would have really known about them. I just looked at being certified as the goal. I didn't even see beyond the certification. But having reached it, both in the district as well as through this Initiative, I feel like there have been a number of opportunities. I have personally led a book study in my district, and then I was a presenter [at this leadership conference]. I am getting ideas about other things that I could do. I also teach at a community college and I think, oh I wonder if they have an ed program and maybe I could get involved in that? So yes, that is what this networking thing is all about.

I became a facilitator with the WEA [*Washington Education Association*] for prospective NB candidates, and then when my candidates were absorbed into the Initiative, I became a facilitator for the Initiative. I also participated in Terry Bergeson's Professional Development Leadership Cadre that met in the winter of 2002 to design a professional development module for teachers in the state.

I am on the OSPI art assessment team – I think it is AALT, so it must be the Art Assessment Leadership Team. We are in essence creating the art prompts for the test that are similar to the WASL. That is a result of my involvement with these retreats.

I had an opportunity this year to go through the process of the Washington Initiative grant and because of that, I have been working with PLU as a facilitator. As a result of that, I was invited to attend their faculty retreat. They are rethinking and restructuring their education department, and they are interested in our input.

For districts where the numbers of NBCTs are small, the WI and the network makes the NBCTs there feel **supported and connected to what is happening around the state**, as this teacher describes:

In my case, along with Jeanne, the speaker's bureau and making some actual presentations about National Board in my district has been great. I am the only National Board teacher in my district, and so I got quite a bit of support in that. I didn't really get much support from the district, because they had no idea what to do. It was Sue Yerian from PLU who has really taken on this project personally and professionally and has given me a lot of opportunities for leadership. Between Jeanne and Sue, we have 10 candidates this year and so I am pretty excited about helping them out.

Finally, as in the previous comment, Jeanne Harmon was mentioned numerous times as crucial in helping these teachers keep up with current goings-on around the state. It is also important to note, as the second quote indicates, that the **vision and role of the network director** for the WI is a key dimension among the kinds of support the WI has provided.

Our facilitator really helped me a lot. Ever since I first thought about doing National Board and all the way through the process, if I ever needed anything, she was there. And Jeanne Harmon and all of the information that she sends out is great. She makes sure that we are aware of what is going on on the other side of the state. I am from Eastern Washington, and so we are kind of disconnected and she makes sure that we know.

After certification, certainly the Initiative and Jeanne Harmon have been very instrumental. I would say she clearly has a vision herself that she is sharing and helping us to see. I couldn't have dealt with that vision last year because I was just dealing with the one vision. I think she does an outstanding job of disseminating information and kind of moving us into recognizing that now you have a role here that maybe you want to juggle and step up to, if you want to. I think that is very cool.

First, I think Jeanne has been critical. I don't understand a lot of things that are going on, and Jeanne helped me understand this policy, or who to talk to about things. She has been like my left arm in a lot of things. She will just listen to me vent for 10 minutes about my frustration or my pitfall that I just had or something and she will say, okay, what is it you are going to do next? I need that. The second thing is that when I say I am a National Board teacher in Washington, I feel like I have all of these people here with me at the table. When I was leading in my district, I was alone.

This section illustrates that the teachers feel supported and valued by the WI. They appreciate the sharing of resources, ideas, and a common vision. The comments also point to a key attribute to making the network powerful: active and informed leadership.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP AS AN NBCT

In this section we provide examples of ways the NBCTs talked about leadership. While the teachers who were newly-certified and first-time participants at the conference were just beginning to explore leadership opportunities, those who were returning and more experienced described a variety of leadership experiences and situations. In the following section, we have grouped the teachers' comments into three areas:

- ◆ A Lesson Learned About Effective Leadership;
- ◆ Challenges and Constraints; and
- ◆ Experiences of Growth as Leaders.

A Lesson Learned About Effective Leadership

The comments in this first section illustrate how teachers in the focus groups have not only engaged in meaningful leadership work but have also learned what it means—for them—to be effective leaders. Each teacher alluded to the importance of **collaboration and empowering other teachers** as a means to building teacher leadership.

It seems like [leadership] relates to that sixth core proposition about building a community of professionals, because if you are a leader by yourself, you are not empowering people around you. As leaders, we are not the point person out front, rather we are more enabling support. We are involved at times as the point person, but we don't think of ourselves as always the apex. You are working to be a part of this great community of energized and interested people, and sometimes it just takes somebody else to listen and help others to see their strengths. Suddenly, they are advocates and they are involved. They have found out a little piece of the pizza and they are going for it. That is the way that I think we support and become advocates. I think that is where the magic is.

I see myself as the leader, but not anymore than anyone else in my building. As a matter of fact, in Seattle we are supposed to have building leadership teams and we told the teachers that our whole staff was our building leadership team. Everybody on it has leadership roles.

I see myself in my building stepping back from a leadership role. Because I got into National Board, I was really out there all the time, but since I have been certified, I have kind of stepped back in my building and so that others can take responsibilities. Also I have these other things now that are outside of my own school, and there are only so many hours in the day.

Challenges and Constraints

In this sub-section we provide several examples of the “down-side” of leadership—the barriers and challenges that NBCTs face as they have engaged in leadership roles. Almost every teacher in the returning focus group shared an experience they had as an NBCT that was difficult – whether or not it had to do with leadership.

We organized the teachers' comments around the following three themes:

- ◆ School or District Context;
- ◆ Professional Status; and
- ◆ Other Constraints.

School or District Context

In a few cases, NBCTs reported **feeling “used” for ends they didn’t support** or believe in, as this teacher describes:

My school is very traditional and currently we have some NSF projects being taught at the high schools in our area. The first years are stumbling blocks in any new programs, and so there are some difficulties with students failing and things. So our department sees this as a great opportunity to skim their best kids and bring them to us, to bring in better students to our building. He is using the fact that I am a National Board Certified Teacher in his presentation to convince these parents that they should bring their kids to our building. I tell kids, if they talk to me, that you are better off where you are, because it matches National Board standards and helps those teachers teach more the way the National Board wants them to teach. So it is kind of a double-edged sword, because I feel very uncomfortable that he is using my name in that manner, when I don’t promote our program. That is something that I thought would never come up. That is kind of a negative thing about it, because I feel uncomfortable about that, and I feel like I should make a stand somehow, but there is no good way of doing it.

In the next comment, the teacher doesn’t relate a particular instance as in the previous example, but expresses **hopelessness about her ability to make a difference** in the face of what she perceives as nearly insurmountable obstacles:

I have always been a leader in my district and in the school, but I get tired of being used. It is like, people want to use me for their own agendas sometimes and I am put in this position where it gets lonely. I feel like I am out there alone sometimes. I don’t know who I can go to and kind of talk about the support I need. Sometimes I want to pull back in my leadership world and take a breather, take a break, instead of always fighting so many battles or being the spokesperson. I don’t want to be the only voice.

While the previous teacher laments feeling ineffective as a leader and the need to take a break, the next comment illustrates a different answer to the limits and frustrations of teacher leadership. This teacher raised an issue that resulted in a discussion of leading change from the classroom. Becoming certified, and the leadership activities that she has engaged in since, have convinced her that **becoming an administrator is the best – if not only – way to make change**.

The National Board is actually pushing me out of the classroom to pursue my masters in administration. I think change starts there. I don’t think I can make the change that I want at the classroom level because you are fighting that leadership. What I see as change and where it needs to go for effective practice will start in the administrative position.

Some teachers voiced concern about a **lack of support from their school or district administrations**, and that while they believe as NBCTs they have much to offer, their school leaders are unwilling to accept (or are not interested in) their contribution:

With confidence comes a downside, which is that nobody wants to hear what you say. I for one will no longer settle for poor leadership practices of people in the school. I fought bad practices and lost. I had to stop fighting if I wanted to keep teaching. I can still make a difference in the classroom with the kids. I had to find a different way of doing it,

because I couldn't fight his leadership and that was definitely a down thing. I don't know if there is resolution to that. I agree, there is new confidence with NBC, you sort of feel compelled to stand up for what is right, but the downside is nobody really wants to hear about it.

We had a schedule change, and so the certified teachers went in to our administrator to try to talk about best practice, and we were not listened to. It was kind of bottom line, this is what we will do because those directives came from the central office administration. But then I found out that later on that she was raving about those certified teachers that she had at a national conference. That is not right.

In this next passage, a teacher describes both the **down-side and the up-side** of her leadership experience from the perspective of **teaching in a small school district**:

The low point in a small district is we don't have the opportunities that people have in large districts. From the outside you are viewed as living your leadership. You don't get student teachers in our district. You don't get special assignments. You don't get even recognition in the same way, because it is a small district. But I can absolutely change the curriculum in my district in my position. Over a 2 year period we can switch everything because I have 4 people to work with; I have only 3 people to convince. Leadership, and what your real leadership can bring, depends on where you want to be in education and what your potential is.

Professional Status

Professional status and occupational norms emerged as a very strong theme in our discussions with the teachers. That is, the **norm of egalitarianism**, and the **desire not to be "marked" as having a special status among peers** stood out as very important issues for both the new and returning teachers.

Several voiced concern that teachers who are not Board Certified view the process as elitist, and that NBCTs somehow believe they are better teachers than those who are not certified. These teachers worry that other teachers see The National Board as exacerbating status differences between teachers, as expressed here:

When I first got my National Board, I was in the faculty room, and people that I really valued and really appreciated right in front of me said things like NB is such a stupid thing, it is not fair, we have to get our masters and you can just do it because you want recognition. I think the fact that everybody has the ability to try to get their National Board and not everybody probably will get it leads to a perception of elitism that is really negative. People think you just did it because you want everybody to think you are a better teacher than us. Then, my principal asked me to do something in a faculty meeting, and I know for a fact that one teacher told her colleagues that the only reason they asked you to do that is because you are a National Board teacher. I have just as much ability, so that nobody could ask me, and that kind of thing. But it really didn't have anything to do with any of them, and it was a personal reason for me.

I am on the language arts curriculum adoption meeting committee now, and people are saying we don't want you on that committee because none of us want to work as hard as you do. If you are in charge of what is going to be adopted, we don't want to have to be like you. You dedicate yourself and put in extra hours, but we don't want to have to do the things you are doing.

Sometimes you get into equity and access issues. In our school district, we had 3 days release time for writing for all of our candidates that the superintendent granted out of a little kitty. The assistant sup found out about it, and as a result, it was taken out. And the issue was you can't do that for National Board teachers if you are not going to do it for everyone who gets a master's, and for everyone who is in this or that program. So to me, it was fear again, fear of the union, fear of rejection. We had something that we lost.

One teacher warned that **NBCTs shouldn't be too quick to celebrate their success** when it can seem to others as simply a greater willingness to "jump through hoops:"

In Advanced Placement, it isn't whether the kid passes the AP exam that makes a difference, or her success in college, it is *how* you take an AP class. But on the flipside, I think that when we celebrate having gone through the hoops too much and not focus on the process, that causes some of the resentment for the non-hoop go'ers. I think the process is good. I learned a lot, and I think it could be used in lots of ways. I just think we have to be careful.

As one teacher put it, "If you are by yourself, you keep your head low." In general, we found a tension in the teachers' comments around the issue of recognition. While they acknowledge that what they have done is important and should be celebrated, they also work within an occupational culture that discourages special attention and frowns upon status differentials.

In this next comment, a teacher expressed exasperation over her **failing efforts to bring attention to recent NBCTs** in her district:

I have been working since November to try to get the two people in our district who just got their National Board certification some recognition and it still hasn't happened. I discovered that the SEA has money to do something, and it seems like it is at the bottom of everybody's priority list. Last year we were recognized in June at the last board meeting, and I have written everyone and said June is too late.

In some school contexts, there may be an **"up-side" to not standing out** as an NBCT. For this next teacher, not being recognized as special in any way leveled the field among her peers, thereby diminishing any perceptions of unfairness or elitism:

Because I work in a school where there is no recognition and no stipend for being a National Board certified teacher, I think my colleagues are open to whatever contribution I bring to our team. Some of the opportunities that I get because I am an NBCT and am able to share with them, they actually welcome. They want to get more information and want to become an NBCT. I think because I am not getting extra days and I am not getting a stipend, they think "Wow, she is coming with these qualities that she is willing to share and willing to be a team worker."

Other Constraints

We include the following comment because we believe it illustrates an important issue facing teacher leaders. Teachers are sometimes thrust into leadership positions for which they may or may not be prepared. There are **risks associated with different leadership roles**; teachers may not realize initially that they are in over their heads. The

challenge lies in knowing how to prepare for all of the different roles and the potential concomitant hazards one might face as a teacher leader.

This teacher describes two situations she was thrust into, one in which she found herself feeling triumphant and one in which she felt great discomfort. Through both, she became aware of the high stakes involved in her increased visibility:

I had to testify at the House, and after I walked out, I had representatives and senators stopping me and asking for my time. As an educator, that never happens. I was like on this high. I even joked to my superintendent that my head wouldn't fit back in the building; we needed to go meet somewhere else! It was like I never felt that before. Anyway, we had had some great conversations, because of my role, some people wanted to give me their input. Three months later, at my last A-Plus meeting, I had to stop a motion, and I didn't know how. The thing ended up getting pushed through, and it shouldn't have happened. It is a bad decision in my opinion and actually all of the policy makers are now telling me it was a bad decision. I didn't know what to do, ultimately, and so I felt incompetent as a leader, very incompetent. And I am still working on that. My pond used to be my district, and now it is the State, and everything I do gets seen.

In summary, the nature of the school and district contexts and extant occupational norms within which teachers work can seriously constrain teachers' ability and desire to engage in leadership. Additionally, the potential risks associated with some leadership roles are difficult to prepare for and can constrain teachers' sense of confidence and competence as leaders.

Experiences of Growth as Leaders

This section highlights ways NBCTs have **evolved as leaders**. For some teachers, taking on **new responsibilities** in their school or district has been an exciting challenge. For others, reaching out to state politicians, becoming a representative on a state or national committees, or teaching courses in higher education has become their **new sphere of influence**. Here are a few examples:

I certified the year before this year, and the first year afterwards I just kind of sat back and decided to take some time to just relax a bit. This year I have gotten more into it, and I am working with Jeanne on some training video tapes for the next group coming out. I will do a lot of staff development in my district and my building, which I had done before, but now it is different. I feel a little more confident in what I do. I told my husband that if I certified, I would go get my administrative credential. I will get started on that. Part of it is just mental or psychological. I feel like I can do this.

I actually took a back seat and just relaxed after last year's WASL, but I did start teaching at the college. I wanted to wait until I came here before I planned anything. I got together with my staff development director who called me and wanted a day where I could actually talk to the rest of the staff or the people who were interested in National Board. She would like to do some kind of clock-hour thing. I guess I haven't really looked for [leadership opportunities], more they have come to me.

I am an adjunct professor at PLU and I do a couple of things. I teach regular pre-service classroom courses, children's literature, and technology in the classroom. I also started teaching the professional certification process for a couple of school districts and have been involved in the PLU partners this year. It takes a lot of meetings, staying connected

with the university, staying on the cutting edge of education, knowing what is going on out there, instead of just sitting in my classroom trying to research articles somewhere. NB certification has really helped me in that regard.

My state involvement all happened in the last 6 months. I was appointed by the governor to the A-Plus commission, overseeing assessment for the state. And then we were talking about speaking for the bills, and so I do that frequently, National Board bills. So those are my huge State pieces, other than OSPI and Teaching America.

I responded to one [of Jeanne's emails] and now I am joining a committee that is going to help design the items for the State reading assessment in the third grade. There are probably other things that are a result of Jeanne's network through us.

I got a grant from my school and we are studying Understanding by Design and once we got through the UBD process enough, we actually came up with lots of items and lessons for the group.

From these comments we learned that nearly all of the teachers we spoke with described some kind of leadership opportunity and growth, from the classroom to the statehouse. We also learned that newly-certified teachers often start small, and are less likely to jump into something the year just after being certified. However, based on the comments of the more experienced NBCTs, it doesn't take long for them to move into bigger spheres of responsibility and influence.

NBCT'S VISION FOR A STRENGTHENED PROFESSION AND A SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP NETWORK

The statements in this final section come primarily from the returning, more experienced teachers. These teachers described what they believe is necessary to continue the momentum of the leadership and other work made possible by the WI to improve teaching and learning across the state of Washington.

The following comments reflect the NBCTs' perception that, **due in large part to the WI**, there is now a **greater awareness of the National Board**, and that as the numbers of NBCTs grow, so will interest and acceptance.

When we certified, people didn't really know what it was. Now that the initiative has been run for a few years, it has made this big difference. I was talking to my student teacher that I just got, and she said getting certified is her goal. Wow, that is your goal? Well great, you are in the right spot. But that is a big change. I think that animosity among colleagues is going to exist and it still exists. I hear it often, but it is getting to be that that is more the outlier than the common, because of the interest.

I think as more people find out, it helps to change, and the Initiative is an influence. In our little area where we live, we started off with me plus 3 other teachers in my school district, and there were none in the other two outlying school districts. Now last year, we had 8 candidates just from my school district. I am part of the Speaker's Bureau, and so I went out and did talks and I recruited 30 people from the neighboring school district, all at once. It is going to be amazing for next year to have that many people to collaborate with in our area, and if we should be so fortunate as to certify all of our current candidates, we will be changing from 3 to 15 in our immediate area, and that is huge!

I was a person that sat in the WEA booth and talked to people about the National Board project. Most of the people that came up said that someone from the Speaker's Bureau or somebody from the Initiative came to our school and told us about this. I already know all about it, I just want to get some more information. I was very surprised in how many people already had knowledge of it and were just coming to talk. Obviously the word is getting out.

I think there is some safety in numbers too, because for a long time, I was the only one at my school, and then we changed principals. I think that was some help, but now we have 2 National Board certified teachers, 2 in the process and 2 more beginning the process and that is a huge group of people.

Not only are more teachers and administrators becoming more aware of National Board, but school board members, as well, as described by this teacher:

I am seeing a shift. I am in a very large school district and we have 3 National Board certified teachers and I was the first one to get to do the process. Our school board and our superintendent have changed. The school board now is asking the question: How are we going to get highly qualified teachers in the classroom? I am part of that focus group and I am saying, National Board is how – it is one way that we can get highly qualified teachers. That is really powerful when you get your school board and your superintendent on board. The school board is actually a connection to the community.

Several teachers discussed the **need to continue the network** so that it can be a **political force** in the state, as these comments illustrate:

We have to be more aggressive in keeping the network and being a force for change. There is so much power in what we do and who we are, but I don't think we are still as powerful as we need to be. Vancouver is down in that southwest corner of the state. And in Eastern Washington, our rural districts, we had to pull everybody in and we are really a good force here. Pending this political situation right now, I think we really do have to be a lot more aggressive than we have been in taking up leadership roles and bringing it to the legislature. We need to say to the governor, if you are really an education governor, then you've got to start showing that.

When push comes to shove, if you've got influence, you better use it. I am serious. Because if that is going to make politicians take me seriously, then I am going to use that to make Washington State a better place for kids. Yes, it is not the only thing that I have done in my career, heavens no. But I will tell you, I am going to use that influence as much as I can to push what we know is important. There were 25,000 of us in Olympia or 22,000 and 5000 in Eastern Washington. I was proud that I am trying to use my influence, and I was proud to be among those teachers, because it is important. We don't want to be always patting ourselves on the back as a National Board certified teachers, but I think that we have to have this network, we have to be focused, and we have to use that influence in the best way that we know how. I think that we all would agree that if we are going to reform education in the state, where is it going to start? In the classroom with the teachers.

Other teachers mentioned the **core propositions of the National Board** – and the 6th just introduced¹ – as key elements in shaping the future of the network:

¹ The Washington Initiative focused this leadership conference around what they termed the “6th core proposition” for NBCTs: leadership and influence.

This leadership piece – the 6th proposition – is really big. And the opportunity for us to get together annually is great. Is there some grant out there that can be written to continue this, because that would be horrible if it went away.

I think we should try to find how we can apply these 5 core propositions, rather than promoting National Board. We need to be promoting what we see as accomplished teaching, and we need to look at how to organize ourselves within our network.

Finally, the teachers agreed that maintaining the network and having a well-connected, visionary leader must be part of the “next thing:”

I think there has to be a next thing. And I can't say that strongly enough, because the grant ends next year. If we don't have a next, this will end, and I think that is really critical. How do I know who to go to about something? Because of this network. If we lose that, that scares me. The second issue is we need a visionary like Jeanne. When I am down in Olympia, there is this advocacy day where all of the special populations come down one day a month and take over and lobby. Imagine if it was us or just teachers down there talking about one common goal. We don't have that other than the WEA doing compensation, which is not what we are really focusing on. **We need someone to help us with that.**