

# What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do

## National Board for Professional Teaching Standards®

### Introduction

In 1983, public concern about the state of American education was sharply heightened by the issuance of a federal report titled *A Nation at Risk*. The report provoked a wave of reform initiatives that engulfed the education community. Most of these programs, however, left out a critical element of the education equation: the classroom teacher.

If America is to have world-class schools, it must have a world-class teaching force. Many excellent teachers already work in the schools, but their work often goes unrecognized and unrewarded. As a consequence, many first-rate practitioners leave the schools, and others who could be exceptional teachers never consider teaching. Worse still, the knowledge and skills of the fine teachers who remain are often underutilized, their positive influence allowed only modest scope.

Three years after *A Nation at Risk*, in 1986, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession issued a pivotal report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. Its leading recommendation called for the establishment of a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The following year, this unique institution in the history of American education was born.

The *National Board's mission* is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by:

- ▶ maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do,
- ▶ providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, and
- ▶ advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers.

National Board Certification®, developed by teachers, with teachers, and for teachers, is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. Offered on a voluntary basis, it complements, not replaces, state licensing. While state licensing systems set entry-level standards for beginning teachers, National Board Certification has established advanced standards for experienced teachers.

Linked to these standards is a new generation of fair and trustworthy assessment processes that honor the complexities and demands of teaching. They focus on teacher work and the difficult issues that accomplished teachers confront on a regular basis. The NBPTS assessments for National Board Certification include having teachers construct a portfolio that represents an analysis of their classroom work and participate in exercises designed to tap the knowledge, skills, disposition and professional judgment that distinguish their practice.

At the time the National Board was founded in 1987, it was understood that a critical first task was the development of a policy that would spell out the National Board's vision of accomplished practice. In 1989, it issued its policy statement, *What Teachers Should Know And Be Able To Do*, which has served as a basis for all of the standards development work NBPTS has conducted. To this day, it remains the cornerstone of the system of National Board Certification and has served as a guide to school districts, states, colleges, universities and others with a strong interest in strengthening the initial and ongoing education of America's teachers. It also holds the promise of being a stimulus to self-reflection on the part of teachers at all levels of accomplishment as well as a catalyst for healthy debate and the forging of a new professional consensus on accomplished practice in each field of teaching.

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In this policy, the National Board presents its view of what teachers should know and be able to do—its convictions about what it values and believes should be honored in teaching. This expression of ideals guides all of the National Board's standards and assessment processes.

The fundamental requirements for proficient teaching are relatively clear: a broad grounding in the liberal arts and sciences; knowledge of the subjects to be taught, of the skills to be developed, and of the curricular arrangements and materials that organize and embody that content; knowledge of general and subject-specific methods for teaching and for evaluating student learning; knowledge of students and human development; skills in effectively teaching students from racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds; and the skills, capacities and dispositions to employ such knowledge wisely in the interest of students.

This enumeration suggests the broad base for expertise in teaching but conceals the complexities, uncertainties and dilemmas of the work. The formal knowledge teachers rely on accumulates steadily, yet provides insufficient guidance in many situations. Teaching ultimately requires judgment, improvisation, and conversation about means and ends. Human qualities, expert knowledge and skill, and professional commitment together compose excellence in this craft.

The National Board has led the vanguard effort to develop professional standards for elementary and secondary school teaching. The National Board Certified Teachers® stand for professionalism in the schools. The National Board's responsibility is not only to ensure that teachers who become National Board Certified meet its professional standards of commitment and competence, but also to maintain standards and assessments that are so well regarded that America's accomplished teachers will decide to seek National Board Certification.

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## Policy Position (Five Core Propositions)

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards seeks to identify and recognize teachers who effectively enhance student learning and demonstrate the high level of knowledge, skills, abilities and commitments reflected in the following five core propositions.

### 1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

Accomplished teachers are dedicated to making knowledge accessible to all students. They act on the belief that all students can learn. They treat students equitably, recognizing the individual differences that distinguish one student from another and taking account of these differences in their practice. They adjust their practice based on observation and knowledge of their students' interests, abilities, skills, knowledge, family circumstances and peer relationships.

Accomplished teachers understand how students develop and learn. They incorporate the prevailing theories of cognition and intelligence in their practice. They are aware of the influence of context and culture on behavior. They develop students' cognitive capacity and their respect for learning. Equally important, they foster students' self-esteem, motivation, character, civic responsibility and their respect for individual, cultural, religious and racial differences.

### 2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.

Accomplished teachers have a rich understanding of the subject(s) they teach and appreciate how knowledge in their subject is created, organized, linked to other disciplines and applied to real-world settings. While faithfully representing the collective wisdom of our culture and upholding the value of disciplinary knowledge, they also develop the critical and analytical capacities of their students.

Accomplished teachers command specialized knowledge of how to convey and reveal subject matter to students. They are aware of the preconceptions and background knowledge that students typically bring to each subject and of strategies and instructional materials that can be of assistance. They understand where difficulties are likely to arise and modify their practice accordingly. Their instructional repertoire allows them to create multiple paths to the subjects they teach, and they are adept at teaching students how to pose and solve their own problems.

### 3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

Accomplished teachers create, enrich, maintain and alter instructional settings to capture and sustain the interest of their students and to make the most effective use of time. They also are adept at engaging students and adults to assist their teaching and at enlisting their colleagues' knowledge and expertise to complement their own. Accomplished teachers command a range of generic instructional techniques, know when each is appropriate and can implement them as needed. They are as aware of ineffectual or damaging practice as they are devoted to elegant practice.

They know how to engage groups of students to ensure a disciplined learning environment, and how to organize instruction to allow the schools' goals for students to be met. They are adept at setting norms for social interaction among students and between students and teachers. They understand how to motivate students to learn and how to maintain their interest even in the face of temporary failure.

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Accomplished teachers can assess the progress of individual students as well as that of the class as a whole. They employ multiple methods for measuring student growth and understanding and can clearly explain student performance to parents.

#### 4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

Accomplished teachers are models of educated persons, exemplifying the virtues they seek to inspire in students -- curiosity, tolerance, honesty, fairness, respect for diversity and appreciation of cultural differences -- and the capacities that are prerequisites for intellectual growth: the ability to reason and take multiple perspectives to be creative and take risks, and to adopt an experimental and problem-solving orientation.

Accomplished teachers draw on their knowledge of human development, subject matter and instruction, and their understanding of their students to make principled judgments about sound practice. Their decisions are not only grounded in the literature, but also in their experience. They engage in lifelong learning which they seek to encourage in their students.

Striving to strengthen their teaching, accomplished teachers critically examine their practice, seek to expand their repertoire, deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgment and adapt their teaching to new findings, ideas and theories.

#### 5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

Accomplished teachers contribute to the effectiveness of the school by working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development. They can evaluate school progress and the allocation of school resources in light of their understanding of state and local educational objectives. They are knowledgeable about specialized school and community resources that can be engaged for their students' benefit, and are skilled at employing such resources as needed.

Accomplished teachers find ways to work collaboratively and creatively with parents, engaging them productively in the work of the school.