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A Proposed Multi-Tiered University-School Partnership for a National Board Certification Cohort

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Addressing Teacher Attrition

There is a critical issue of teacher retention and attrition rates in the United States. High rates of teacher turnover and increased student enrollments have created detrimental teacher shortages across K-12 schools (Garcia & Wess, 2019). A main cause of attrition within the teacher labor market is linked to burnout that teachers experience while being on the job (Brunsting et al., 2014). Common reasons for burnout are linked to minimal career advancement opportunities, low pay, the declining respect of teachers, and the lack of teacher participation in decision making (Pressley, 2021; Pucella, 2011). Consequently, policymakers, district leaders, and school administrators search for ways to retain highly qualified teachers who are at risk of leaving the education workforce permanently.

However, there is an existing policy solution to combat these common reasons of attrition and increase the retention of highly qualified teachers. This prestigious professional development policy is referred to as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is a nationally established professional development opportunity to recognize highly effective teachers. Through state and local district policies, the NBPTS advances teacher career opportunities, provides additional compensation, and establishes a highly respected certification for teachers who successfully complete this professional development (NBPTS, 2020). As a result, there have been many studies conducted on the effectiveness of National Board Certification as it increases teacher quality in producing stronger student outcomes (Belson et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2001; Wasburn et al., 2012). Furthermore, National Board Certified Teachers demonstrate higher teacher retention rates upon completion of the professional development (Pucella, 2011). Yet inequity exists within school districts for support on how teachers can successfully earn the certification.

This is exemplified in teacher access to support networks, financial incentives, and quality of information influences the amount of teacher candidates successfully achieving National Board certification. Additionally, school districts vary with NBPTS reimbursement costs, salary step increase, and professional cohorts for candidates. This is an issue that can be addressed by school district leadership and university teacher preparation programs. To ensure high quality teacher retention rates across all school districts, there needs to be equitable opportunities for teachers to pursue the advanced NBPTS certification.

The purpose of this conceptual article is to leverage research on effective partnerships, NBPTS certification, and propose an NBPTS university and school district partnership to establish a collaborative professional development school cohort for teachers wanting to pursue certification. Specifically, this proposal recommends the personnel in teacher education, district leadership, and school leadership needed in this multi-tier partnership for a NBPTS professional development cohort. The rationale for the National Board Certification for Teachers and the need for a partnership between university teacher preparation programs and school districts will also be discussed.

The National Board Certification for Teachers Professional Standards

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was established in 1987 and is supported by the U.S. Department of Education and private funding (NBPTS, 2019). Its mission is to operate a national voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet its rigorous standards of teaching performance (Pershey, 2001). Teacher candidates that undergo this voluntary assessment analyze and reflect on their teaching. There are 25 certificate areas that have their specific set of standards; however, all candidates show evidence of teaching practice. The evidence of teaching practice includes family involvement, collaboration with colleagues, and data that reflect student academic achievement (NBPTS, 2019).

The National Board Certification, is a substantial and unique professional development opportunity for teachers for several reasons. First, the National Board Certification process is voluntary. Teachers are bombarded with forced professional development from the state, district, and school administration (Blase et al., 1986). The National Board Certification is an elected professional development choice for those teachers who wish to pursue this advanced certification. Second, the National Board Certification is differentiated to specific teacher roles. The 25 certificate options include different content, student age, and are inclusive of resource teachers such as special education teachers (NBPTS, 2019). For example, an elementary special education teacher has a unique NBPTS certificate area that differs from an elementary general education math teacher. Both teachers may teach 5th grade math, but they have specific standards that are tailored for their specific teaching position and student population. Therefore, the National Board Certification is appropriate due to its professional development relevance specifically designed for teachers' concentration and grade-level area. Third, the National Board Certification is grounded in years of national education research (Belson et al., 2015; Kelley et al., 2001; Wasburn et al., 2012).

The NBPTS standards, assessments, and core propositions are grounded in years of education research. It is a well-established national professional learning opportunity for teachers (NBPTS, 2019).

Additionally, there are many benefits to teachers from earning their National Board Certification. Teachers exemplified professional pride, were recognized for their outstanding teaching practice, had new leadership opportunities, and higher salaries (Shapiro, 1995). Petty and colleagues (2019) revealed that there was a statistical significance on teachers' reported growth because of the National Board Certification. These areas of growth included leadership, effective instruction, and subject mastery. Additionally, National Board Certified teachers exemplify professional pride, are recognized in their communities for their outstanding teaching practice, have leadership roles and responsibilities, and often have higher salaries due to their certification completion (Shapiro, 1995).

However, inequity of the National Board policy exists across school districts. Although some states have a policy on a financial incentive award when teachers earn the certification, the opportunities on how to achieve certification is inequitable. Teacher access to support networks, financial incentives, and quality of information influence the amount of teacher candidates successfully achieving National Board certification. Currently, school districts vary with National Board reimbursement costs, salary step increase, and professional cohorts for candidates. To ensure high quality teacher retention rates across the whole state, there needs to be equitable opportunities for teachers to pursue this advanced certification. This can be done through a university-school district partnership. The partnership establishes a professional collaborative community that helps teachers achieve National Board Certification. A NBPTS cohort consists of the reimbursement of the National Board Certification cost and a professional learning community where teacher candidates pursuing certification can collaborate with each other. (NBPTS, 2019). This NBPTS cohort would be established by a university and school district partnership.

University and School District Partnerships

The concept of forming university and school district partnerships is a cornerstone of education policies. For the purposes of this paper, universities will be defined as teacher education preparation programs in higher education and school districts will be defined as the district professional development leadership team and their participating teachers. The goal of university and school district partnerships is an appealing one. It

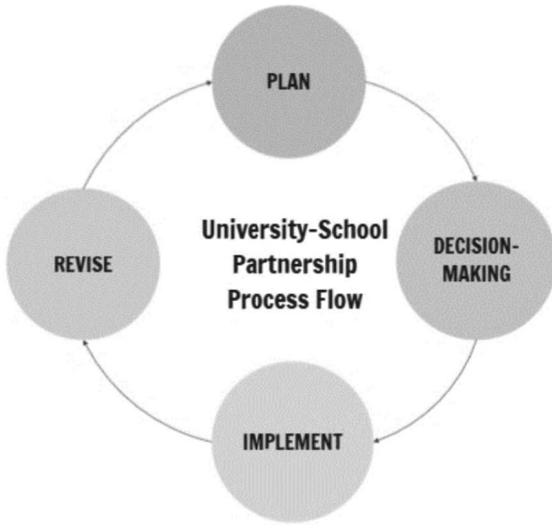


Figure 1: University-School Partnership Process Flow

Note. Adapted from Gardner (2011), “Characteristic collaborative processes in school-university partnerships”.

includes forming a partnership to foster increased teacher professional development that impacts student achievement. However, partnerships are rarely easy. The collaborative process adapts as people and circumstances continuously change. Therefore, the day-to-day collaboration process needs to be further investigated to retain a viable partnership. Guided by The National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Nine Essentials (2008), a foundation for implementing a professional development school is now synthesized using previous research

from Gardner (2011) and Burns and colleagues (2016).

The first characteristic of a strong partnership is that it exists for reasons that make sense to that specific professional development so that it is mutually beneficial for both groups of participants (Gardner, 2011). If this preliminary condition is not met, the partnership’s professional development is only stimulated by the grant funding. This may lead to disconnected interest in the activities from both university and school district participants. For example, a NBPTS professional development cohort must have specific structural support and a guided mission that is specific to advancing teacher candidates to NBPTS certification.

Second, partnerships are stronger when all seven components of effective professional collaboration are put in place (Burns et al., 2016). These seven components consist of: (1) A shared,

comprehensive mission dedicated to equity for improved PreK-12 student learning and educational renewal; (2) Designated partnership sites with articulated agreements; (3) Shared governance with dedicated resources that foster sustainability and renewal for the partnership; (4) Clinical practice at the core of teaching and learning; (5) Active engagement in the school and local community; (6) intentional and explicit commitment to the professional learning of stakeholders; and (7) shared commitment to research and innovation through deliberate investigation and dissemination.

Structurally, these components can be categorized into tiered personnel that participate in the university-school partnership. These participants consist of: (a) top executive leaders; (b) a middle line of leaders; (c) an operating core of workers; (d) a working structure that supports the operating core with expertise; and (e) a support staff that enables the operating core (Mintzberg, 1983). Across these five structural functions, effective education professional development research must also be considered. Each structural personnel function will contribute the same effective professional development qualities of a content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and intensity, and collective participation. These partnership structures and effective professional development components are to be used as guides for building an efficient collaboration for a professional development cohort.

Third, the university and school district partners must communicate and meet on a regular basis. This continuous engagement between partners is crucial to develop strong relationships with each other. Formative assessments and evaluations further develop evolving outcome goals and ensure that the partners continue learning together. Gardner (2011) posits that the engagement of university and school partners follows the process of planning, decision-making, implementation, and revising (see Figure 1). Within this process flow, evaluations are embedded throughout to which all partners must adhere.

Lastly, successful university-school partnerships with these effective characteristics take time. The formation of stable partnerships develops over time while adhering to these research-based

Table 1: University-School Partnerships for Teacher Professional Development

Components	Characteristics	Rationale
1. A shared, comprehensive mission dedicated to equity for improved PreK-12 student learning and educational renewal	1. The context of the specific professional development goal is initially met.	1. The partnership is not just vitalized by grant funding and the interest of the specific professional development is preliminary.
2. Designated partnership sites with articulated agreements		
3. Shared governance with dedicated resources that foster sustainability and renewal for the partnership	2. Five structures of workers: executive leaders, middle line leaders, operating core of workers, workers with expertise in professional development area, support staff.	2. All contribute the same effective professional development qualities of a content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and intensity, and collective participation.
4. Clinical practice at the core of teaching and learning	3. Process flow of planning, decision-making, implementation, and revising.	3. University and school district partners communicate and meet on a regular basis to develop relationships with each other.
5. Active engagement in the school and local community		
6. Intentional and explicit commitment to the professional learning of stakeholders	4. Partnership requires time.	4. A university-school district partnership remains sustainable when continuous collaboration occurs.
7. Shared commitment to research and innovation through deliberate investigation and dissemination		

Note. Components, characteristics, and rationale expand on NAPDS (2008) nine essentials for university-school partnerships.

functions. A university-school district partnership remains sustainable when this continuous collaboration occurs. The rationale for these four characteristics of a university-school partnership can be summarized in Table 1.

The NBPTS cohort's multi-tier structure is sustainable due to each tier participating in the essential stages of professional development: planning, decision-making, and implementing. The tiers deploy them to make permanent

changes as needed and they do not have to rely on a single higher structure for advancement. As a result, this is a tremendous partnership challenge and requires effective communication. However, the multi-tier structure partnership

A Proposed Multi-Tier University-School Partnership for a NBPTS Cohort

In order to improve teacher retention and reap the benefits of NBPTS, a framework is now proposed with a university-school multi-tier personnel partnership. At each university and school organization there are people that are tasked with specific responsibilities and roles. A partnership between these organizations must also have these essential functions that are shared collaboratively. After reviewing Gardner (2011)'s three partnership structure models, a multi-tier structure is chosen for a sustainable university-school NBPTS partnership. A multi-tier university-school professional development partnership consists of three tiers of professionals: a) executive leaders; b) middle-level leaders; and c) operatives. Figure 2 further elaborates the specific university and school district professional positions found in each of these structural tiers.

Each tier of professionals participates in the process flow of the collaborative cohort's planning, decision-making, and implementation. Table 2 proposes how this multi-tier structure is explicit to the process of building a NBPTS professional development cohort.

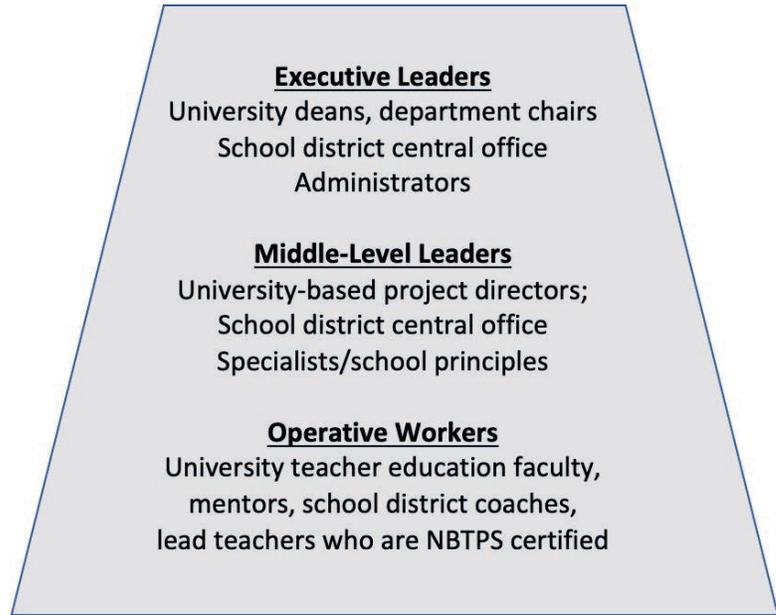


Figure 2: Professional Structural Tier for a NBPTS cohort

Note. This figure is adapted from Gardner (2011)'s "Characteristic collaborative processes in school-university partnerships."

Table 2: Framework for Multi-Tier NBPTS Professional Development Cohort

Tiers	Professionals	Collaborative Process	Actions
1. Executive leaders	University deans/department chairs; School district central office administrators	Plan	Engaged in macro <i>planning</i> NBPTS professional development cohort;
		Implement	Setting up initial <i>implementation</i> .
		Decision-Making/ Revise	Refining while <i>reviewing</i> continuous research of its effectiveness. Find and <i>adjust</i> funding for NBPTS cohort; <i>evaluation</i> of cohort
2. Middle-Level leaders	University based project directors; and school district central office specialists/ school principals	Plan	Ensure teacher candidates and operatives have <i>time</i> and <i>space</i> to participate in the NBPTS cohort.
		Implement	<i>Collaborate</i> to implement key functions: Providing technical NBPTS expertise and support in schools
		Decision-Making/ Revise	Employing continuous <i>research</i> on the cohort's effectiveness; <i>developing</i> cohort policies for teacher candidates
3. Operatives	University teacher educator faculty, mentors, school district coaches, teacher leaders who have already successfully earned NBPTS certification Collaboration of operatives are the closest to NBPTS teacher candidates and are most likely to affect cohort's results.	Planning	Collaborate the planning cohort meeting (i.e., determining the cohort schedule, each session's objectives).
		Implement	Implementation of NBPTS cohort by directly <i>leading</i> sessions and <i>guiding</i> participating teacher candidates
		Decision-Making/Revise	In the cohort, decide when to <i>unpack</i> NBPTS standards, <i>providing</i> an overview of each NBPTS portfolio, <i>facilitating</i> peer writing sessions

is well-situated because the executive leaders who develop the funding are engaged in the professional development process. If each structure of university-school partners can collaborate during the implementation process, then the partnership can be flexible for cohort changes and adjust systems of support. In addition, the multi-tier structure is sustainable for a NBPTS cohort because it is the only structural configuration that presents the possibility for renewing the university partner. This counters the typical university-school model where the university is deployed to “fix” the school partner. This is only possible when executive leadership is involved in the entire process of: planning, decision-making, and implementation; before they embark on the cohort’s evaluation. If the executive leaders just provide funding and “sign the checks”, then the university-school multi-tier partnership will not be viable. Instead, a viable partnership at the executive level has shown that university leaders can use this partnership to renew its technical core of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Conclusion

Due to the increasing teacher attrition rate, it is crucial that policy initiatives are put into place to retain high quality teachers. The NBPTS cohort is one policy initiative that can attempt to effectively increase teacher retention through a multi-tier university-school partnership. The National Board Certification cohort is a unique professional development opportunity due to its individualized approach and teacher choice enrollment. Through this proposed multi-tier university and school partnership, teachers could benefit from increased access to pursue NBPTS certification. Participating in this proposed NBPTS cohort may lead to increased teacher leadership, a reflective professional learning community, and career advancement that would add to the longevity of their teaching career (Petty et al., 2019; Purcella, 2011; Wasburn et al., 2014). Additionally, it is predicted that it can also lead to stronger university-school district relationships through efficient implementation when guided by NAPDS nine essentials. With a foundation in NAPDS essentials, a university-school partnership offers a strong bridge between teacher education and student outcomes that is guided by evidenced based professional development school models (NAPDS, 2021).

If this policy initiative is not fully addressed by university teacher preparation programs and its neighboring school districts, we will continue to lose highly qualified K-12 teachers who are permanently leaving the teaching profession. The number of qualified teachers will continue to drastically decline while the rate of students entering the K-12 public schools continues to rise. It is imperative to make these necessary policy changes to increase sustainable university-school partnerships, while decreasing the teacher attrition rate.

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