

The University of Southern Mississippi

AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL BOARD  
CERTIFIED TEACHERS' BELIEFS, PERCEPTIONS, AND ATTITUDES  
REGARDING THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE NATIONAL BOARD  
CERTIFICATION PROCESS

by

Leslie Walter Thompson

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the College of Education and Psychology  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2004

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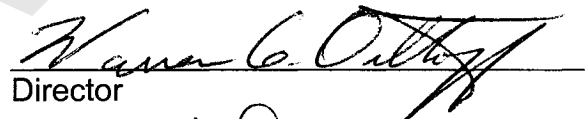
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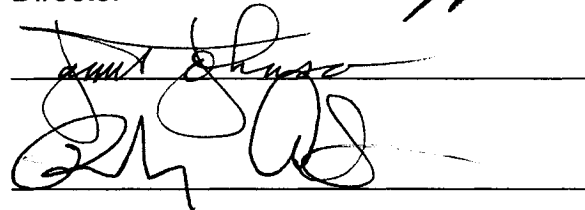
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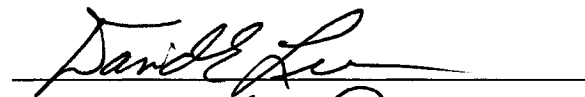
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Director





  
Dean, College of Education and  
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## ABSTRACT

### AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHERS' BELIEFS, PERCEPTIONS, AND ATTITUDES REGARDING THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION PROCESS

by Leslie Walter Thompson

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This study examined Mississippi National Board Certified Teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes regarding their experiences with the National Board Certification Process. A total of 194 participants out of a total of 491 Mississippi National Board Certified Teachers whose e-mail addresses were available on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards website completed the survey. Teachers answered the 41 question web based Mississippi National Board Certified Teachers' Survey, which included two open-ended questions asking how they felt the process could be improved, and the reasons they chose to seek National Board Certification.

Analysis of the data revealed that overall National Board Teachers feel the process is a worthwhile professional development experience and that overall their experiences with the process were favorable. Likewise, National Board Teachers expressed that various constituents were supportive, and involvement

in an organized support group assisted them in completing the certification process. Further analysis of the data revealed that becoming Board Certified enhanced interactions with various constituents.

The data revealed that the variable age had an inverse significant relationship with the variables comprising the dimension of professional development. In addition, the variable years teaching was also found to have an inverse significant relationship with the variables comprising the dimension of support received. The results also indicated that teachers with higher educational degrees manifested significantly different means in support received and enhanced interactions.

The results of this study indicate that overall teachers are satisfied with the certification process but that the National Board Office should conduct further research allowing National Board Teachers the opportunity to answer more open-ended questions regarding their experiences with the process. In addition, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Office may want to further question National Board Teachers to discover what areas of the process were not as positive as others in order to refine the process as a whole.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“A remarkable revolution is in progress in our thinking about good schools and good teaching: Educators are showing an increasingly keen interest in the objective, scientific analysis of attitudes and practices that affect student achievement” (Davis & Thomas, 1989, p. 1). “For the past two decades, Americans have recognized the growing challenges facing public education and have considered a host of ideas, programs, and strategies to enhance teaching and learning in schools” (American Federation of Teachers & The National Education Association, 2002, p. 7). According to research, there are many specific teacher characteristics that directly correlate with higher student achievement and directly result in effective teaching. These characteristics include:

- Strong interpersonal skills
- Being able to establish good relationships with students
- Showing care and acceptance of all students
- Demonstrating interest and enthusiasm
- Creating an effective group and cooperative atmosphere
- Involving students in planning and learning
- Listening (Davis & Thomas, 1989).

In order to identify teachers who possess or desire these characteristics and make them come alive in the classroom, the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards (NBPTS) developed a cutting-edge, performance based assessment and standards they feel an accomplished teacher should be able to demonstrate on a daily basis in the classroom. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was created in 1987, in response to *A Nation at Risk*, and the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. This task force, consisting of a group of educators and educational stakeholders, “is rooted in the belief that the single most important action this country can take to improve schools and student learning is to strengthen teaching” ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)). Its 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 into American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers” (American Federation of Teachers & The National Education Association, 2002, p. 7). “National Board Certification is shaping reforms that build quality assurance and professional accountability into the teaching profession” ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)). The National Board Certification assessment process examines how a teacher plans, teaches, and analyzes student work, making sure to engage in a reflection process to meet the needs of the students (American Federation of Teachers and The National Education Agency, 2002).

From 1987 through 1992, The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards “focused on the critical policy, research and development work that

would lay the foundation for National Board Certification, which was offered, for the first time, in two certificate areas during the 1993-94 school year”

([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)). The year long process consists of two interrelated parts: 1) the professional portfolio entries and 2) the written assessment center exercises.

There are currently 24 different certificates available that are based on the National Board Standards. The National Board has developed standards in each of the 24 fields and defines what accomplished teaching is. All National Board standards are based on the Five Core Propositions for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, and serve as the basis for National Board Certification. The Five Core Propositions rest on a fundamental philosophical foundation and outline what the National Board values in teaching.

The Five Core Propositions state that:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities. ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org))

The National Board Certification process is open to any fully licensed individual with three or more years of teaching experience in either a public or private school. The certification process is rigorous, and research studies show

that the passing rate for National Board Professional Teaching Standard candidates from 1987 through 1997 was about 25% (Pershey, 2001). As a result of this statistic, many state and local school districts initiated programs of instruction, mentoring, and support for National Board candidates. The support initiative began in 1997 when there were only 912 National Board Certified Teachers in the United States. "By 1999, the National Board roster had grown to 4,804, including candidates certified that year" (Pershey, 2001, p. 201). According to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards website, Mississippi currently has 1,761 National Board Certified Teachers, and ranks sixth in the total number of certified teachers in the United States.

The state of Mississippi offers candidates a support system through the Mississippi World Class Teaching Program. The program, housed at Mississippi State University, works to recruit and assist candidates for National Board Certification throughout the entire state. There are several universities throughout the state that participate in this program. These universities include: The University of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi, Jackson State University, and Delta State University. The purpose of the Mississippi World Class Teaching Program is "to support teachers in analyzing their professional practices according to national standards for advanced teacher certification and to impact student achievement through quality instruction based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards" (Mississippi World Class Teaching Program, The University of Southern Mississippi, [www.terminat.otr.usm.edu/webteam/teachingprogram/index.html](http://www.terminat.otr.usm.edu/webteam/teachingprogram/index.html)). The

Mississippi World-Class Teaching Program (WCTP) was established by legislation at Mississippi State University in 1996 and is funded by the Mississippi legislature through the Mississippi Department of Education. The program is based on the premise of the National Writing Project that “the best teacher of a teacher is another teacher.”

According to research from the pilot year (1996-1997), 54% of the participants achieved National Board certified as a result of the Mississippi World-Class Teaching Program. This is an increase of 45% from previous years passing rate ([www.terminat.otr.usm.edu/webteam/teachingprogram/index.html](http://www.terminat.otr.usm.edu/webteam/teachingprogram/index.html)). Services offered to candidates range from orientation to full support for pre-candidates, candidates, and extended support for National Board Certified Teachers in Mississippi.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to empirically assess the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of Mississippi National Board Certified Teachers regarding their experiences with the National Board Certification process. This study also attempted to determine the type of support received, if the certification process was a worthwhile professional development experience, and if becoming Nationally Board Certified enhanced interactions with various constituents.

#### Research Objectives

1. To establish external validity by independently replicating, as closely as possible, earlier studies regarding the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of National Board Certified Teachers.

2. To identify and empirically explore dimensions that have previously gone unresearched. These dimensions include the benefit(s) or detriment(s) of participating in an organized support group, and the effect of the National Board Certification process upon teacher interactions with various constituents.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study and applied to the target population of National Board Certified Teachers in Mississippi:

#### Research Question #1:

Will study participants agree that the National Board Certification process is a worthwhile professional development experience?

#### Research Question #2:

Will study participants rate their overall experiences with the National Board Certification process as generally favorable?

#### Research Question #3:

Will study participants report the perception that teachers, administrators, and district officials were generally supportive of their efforts during the certification process?

#### Research Question #4:

Will study participants report that involvement in an organized support group assisted in completing the certification process?



Research Question #5:

Will study participants report that becoming board certified enhanced their interactions with various constituents?

Research Question #6:

Will there be a relationship between the reported perception of the National Board process and the variables of age, gender, years of teaching experience, and highest level of education?

Definition of Terms

Mississippi World Class Teacher Program – The Mississippi World Class Teacher Program (MWCTP) is an organized candidate support group and program at Mississippi State University that recruits and supports National Board Certification candidates and is facilitated by National Board Certified Teachers. There are several universities in Mississippi who participate in this support program. The universities are The University of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi, Jackson State University, and Delta State University. This program is funded by the Mississippi Legislature through the Mississippi Department of Education and is designed to “support teachers in analyzing their professional practices according to national standards for advanced teacher certification and to impact student achievement through quality instruction based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards” (Mississippi World Class Teaching Program, The University of Southern Mississippi, [www.terminat.otr.usm.edu/webteam/teachingprogram/index.html](http://www.terminat.otr.usm.edu/webteam/teachingprogram/index.html)).

National Board Certification – National Board Certification is a voluntary two-part year-long process that identifies teachers who have met the highest standards established for the teaching profession. The evaluation consists of an extensive series of performance-based assessments for teachers, which includes Teaching Portfolios, student work samples, videotapes and thorough analyses of the candidates' classroom teaching and student learning. To complete the National Board Certification process, teachers must also complete a series of written exercises that analyze the depth of their knowledge. National Board Certification demonstrates that a teacher has been judged by their peers as one who is accomplished, makes sound professional judgments about student learning, and acts effectively on those judgments (National Board Professional Teaching Standards, 2002). The fee for National Board Certification is \$2300.

National Board Certified Teacher – A National Board Certified Teacher is an individual who has successfully completed the two-part National Board assessment and therefore has demonstrated mastery and integration of both content and pedagogical knowledge.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) – The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was created in 1987 to “establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, to develop and operate a national voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards, and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools” (National Board Professional Teaching Standards, 2002).

### Delimitation

This study was conducted using the following delimitation:

1. This study was delimited to Mississippi Elementary and Secondary School National Board Certified Teachers whose e-mail addresses are accessible on the NBPTS website.

### Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The teachers involved in this study provided true and accurate information.
2. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards keeps an accurate and updated list of current NBC teachers for the state of Mississippi.

### Justification of the Study

There are four principal justifications for this empirical inquiry into the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of Mississippi National Board Certified Teachers regarding their experiences with the National Board Certification process. Each justification is discussed in turn in the paragraphs and pages that follow.

Most of the formal education our children experience results from interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. As a result of this process, teachers play a critical role in passing on knowledge and societal values (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1995). "Since schools are a people industry and at one time or

another affect the lives of the nation's children, educational institutions must answer to the public for the successes and failures of the system" (Wallin, 1998, p. 14).

First, President George W. Bush challenged the American public school system to hire teachers who are highly qualified in their particular subject matter area. This initiative, known as "No Child Left Behind," requires that all states place only the most highly qualified teachers in every public school classroom by the year 2005. The National Board Certification process lends itself to this undertaking in that it requires teachers to demonstrate and then integrate specific content and pedagogical knowledge into the classroom. The certification process "also requires that teachers possess a repertoire of instructional strategies to help all students meet high standards" (The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, 2002, p.8). "Since the creation of National Board Certification, subject matter competency has been a central component of the certification process. Content knowledge exams are required in all certificate areas and for all grade levels. Furthermore, the National Board's subject matter competency exam is the most rigorous and in-depth assessment in the teaching profession" ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)). As a result, it is supposed that these standards set forth by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are highly consistent with the President's mandate to place only highly qualified teachers in public school classrooms and, to leave no child behind. This study determined if Board Certified Teachers feel the certification process is a worthwhile professional development experience, and is worthy of

the extensive time and commitment. In addition, this study may serve to reinforce the notion that becoming Board Certified fulfills the President's mandate and meets the federal definition of a "Highly Qualified" teacher as described in the No Child Left Behind Act.

Second, this independent study elicited valuable information from the known population of National Board Certified Teachers within the state of Mississippi in an effort to assist the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards improve and refine their certification process. To date, only a hand full of studies have been conducted regarding National Board Certified Teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about the process since its inception in 1987. Furthermore, the limited number of studies conducted have been directed or sponsored by the NBPTS. As a result of this obvious connection and affiliation, respondents may not have been completely honest and forthcoming in reporting their true beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the National Board Certification process.

Third, and perhaps even more importantly, this study generated empirical data that can be used to determine whether or not the more than \$109 million in federal money that has been earmarked since 1987 to design the assessments used to identify these highly skilled teachers is worthwhile and beneficial (Archer, 2002). In simple terms, this study determined whether or not the Board Certification process is a viable method for identifying and placing highly qualified teachers in public school classrooms as mandated by No Child Left Behind. To the extent that the National Board Certification Process is viewed and accepted

by teachers themselves as a worthwhile professional development endeavor that enhances classroom competency, then valuable time and taxpayer money may be conserved by adopting in its entirety, or at least in part, existing assessment standards such as those in question. If, however, teachers do not perceive the National Board Certification Process as a worthwhile professional development endeavor that enhances their competence, then perhaps federal money would be more wisely spent developing other assessment paradigms. Briefly summarized, this study will determine if the National Board Certification Process lends itself to becoming an effective means of certifying and identifying highly qualified teachers.

Lastly, in addition to \$109 million dollars provided by the federal government, many states and individual school districts across the country invest a great deal of taxpayer money in the certification process. For example, Mississippi currently boasts approximately 1,761 National Board Certified Teachers and has reimbursed each of those teachers the \$2,300 assessment fee, whether or not the teacher was successful in his/her efforts to become certified. Additionally, the Mississippi Legislature has enacted statutory provisions to supplement the annual salary of National Board Certified Teachers who are employed by a local school district with a \$6,000 bonus per year for the life of the 10-year National Board teaching certificate ([www.mde.k12.ms.us/public/gbx.htm](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/public/gbx.htm)). This \$6,000 a year supplement per teacher roughly equates to an approximate annual amount of \$10.6 million (1,761 NBCT x \$6,000 year bonus). In addition, the state of Mississippi has also

reimbursed these 1,761 teachers the \$2,300 assessment fee which, to date, totals approximately \$4 million (1,761 NBCT x \$2,300 assessment fee). Thus, an important issue arises from this fact that will, in part, be answered by this empirical inquiry - whether or not the time and money that is being invested by state governments and local school districts is an endeavor that can be regarded by teachers as beneficial and worthwhile. "Indeed, a growing consensus among researchers and policymakers alike is that the time has come for the national board to prove its worth" (Archer, 2002, p.1). Therefore, this study serves as a justification for the state of Mississippi, the Mississippi Legislature, local school districts, and taxpayers that teachers are truly satisfied with the substantial investment in time and money, and the professional development they receive.

"A time of tightened budgets and heightened accountability is bringing new pressure to bear on education initiatives to show that the National Board can produce results. And for the first time, a handful of states now boast enough board certified teachers to allow for large-scale studies on their impact" (Archer, 2002, p. 1). Recognizing this, it was the intent of this study to empirically assess the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of Mississippi National Board Certified Teachers' regarding their experiences with the National Board Certification process, as well as attempted to determine the type of support received, if the certification process was a worthwhile professional development experience, and if becoming Nationally Board Certified enhanced interactions with various constituents.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter was designed to offer a review of the literature and research related to National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) and their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the entire National Board Certification process. The chapter was also concerned with any difficulties or obstacles these teachers may have faced during the year long process. The following review of literature was offered in the areas including the history behind the creation of The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the National Board Certification (NBC) process, incentives to becoming Nationally Board Certified, and current research concerning studies of National Board Certified Teachers beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes.

#### History of the Creation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

“Teaching is at the heart of education, so one of the most important actions the nation can take to improve education is to strengthen the teaching profession” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, general information, [www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)). In the 1980’s, the status of the American public school system was the subject of great social/policy debate. This arduous and significant debate highlighted by the report *A Nation at Risk*, released in 1983 by the United States Department of Education National Commission on Excellence in Education, called for sweeping reform in the United States educational system. This blue ribbon commission was established to analyze the “widespread public