

**Testimony of Michelle Accardi
National Board Certified Teacher
Director, Policy and Partnerships, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
Before the
United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
November 18, 2015**

Thank you Chairman Barrasso, Vice Chairman Tester, and distinguished committee members for the opportunity to speak on the Native Educator Support and Training, or NEST, Act. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a proud supporter of the NEST Act.

My name is Michelle Accardi and I am a National Board Certified Teacher. For fourteen years I was a special education teacher in New Mexico in the Albuquerque Public Schools. I also had the privilege of working with students as a teacher and consultant at two Bureau of Indian Education affiliated schools (BIE schools) on the Laguna and Zia Pueblos in New Mexico. In November of 2011, I became the Director of State Policy for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in Arlington, Virginia.

In my office in Arlington, I have a picture of my last class in Albuquerque that rests alongside a small piece of pottery. The pot was a farewell gift from Douglas and his grandparents. Douglas was a Native American student that I worked with for three years. He had faced many hardships in his young life and was being raised by his Grandparents. As much as they wanted to keep him close to his family and his roots in their community, his special needs could not be adequately addressed by the teachers there. They made the difficult choice to bring him to live in Albuquerque. I am proud to say that I was able to work with Douglas and help him to make great progress in his reading, math, and social skills. I still smile when I think of the jokes he loved to tell and how excited he would get when he was able to tell his grandmother that he had done well on a lesson. I am still sad when I think of how much he missed by not being able to stay in the community he loved, learning his traditions, culture, language, and family. Going and visiting home every few weekends simply was not the same. Native families should not have to relocate to find the best teachers for their child. As I work at the National Board to develop initiatives and policies to bring more Board Certified teachers into the classrooms that need them most, I see the butterfly pattern on that small pot and think of Douglas.

I thank you for the opportunity to bring you information about National Board Certification and our outreach to Native American educators and all educators who teach Native American students – and why the NEST Act is critical for expanding these efforts.

For 25 years, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has been at the forefront in establishing the highest measure of teaching excellence. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of the teaching profession for the benefit of all teachers and all students. The National Board's rigorous certification process defines, develops, and assesses quality teaching, with a proven connection to improved student learning and achievement. National Board Certification assures the public – parents, families, and communities – that the teachers who educate our children are experts in their field and have the skills to help all students learn.

More specifically, National Board Certification is an advanced credential which indicates that a teacher demonstrates high levels of content and pedagogical knowledge and skill for their specific area of teaching. Similar to professional boards in the fields of medicine, architecture, and engineering, the

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has established the standards and assessments to measure what effective teachers should know and be able to do in their classrooms. Board Certified teachers provide evidence that they are lifelong learners who are able to translate their knowledge to students.

Reflection is at the center of everything that a Board Certified teacher does. Every lesson can be improved, every child can learn more tomorrow. The certification process requires that teachers not only submit video of their teaching, but detailed analytic papers explaining their evidence that they are meeting the standards and reflecting on what they can do better. As I went through the process, I developed a laser-like focus on identifying what I did well and what I could improve the next time to ensure my students learning advanced. If I expect my students to improve every day, I must always be seeking ways to improve as their teacher.

Board certification emphasizes collaboration among peers and family and community engagement. Board-certified teachers develop relationships with the family members, community leaders, and other teachers and professionals who support that student. They also seek to collaborate with other expert teachers in their school to improve student learning, analogous to the natural and common consultations among medical specialists working with the same patient.

More than a decade of research from across the country confirms that students taught by Board-certified teachers learn more than students taught by other teachers. A study mandated by Congress and conducted by the National Research Council reached this conclusion in 2008 in its comprehensive review of studies of National Board Certification up until that time.¹ Estimates of the increase in learning by students of Board-certified teachers average an additional one to two months of learning gains.² The positive impact of having a Board-certified teacher is even greater for minority and low-income students.³

Earlier this year, two separate groups of independent researchers released new studies finding Board-certified teachers are more effective at advancing student learning than non-Board-certified teachers.⁴ To cite one of those studies, researchers Dan Goldhaber and James Cowan focused on Washington State: "Board-certified teachers are more effective than non-certified teachers with similar experience."⁵

¹ National Research Council, *Assessing Accomplished Teaching: Advanced-Level Certification Programs* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2008).

² Strategic Data Project (2012). SDP Human Capital Diagnostic: Los Angeles Unified School District. Center for Education Policy Research, Harvard University.

³ LCavalluzzo, L.C. (2004). Is National Board Certification an effective signal of teacher quality? The CNA Corporation; D. Goldhaber and E. Anthony, "Can teacher quality be effectively assessed?" *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 89, no. 1 (2007): 134-50.

⁴ J. Cowan and D. Goldhaber, *National Board Certification and Teacher Effectiveness: Evidence from Washington* (Bothell, Wash.: The Center for Data and Research, University of Washington, 2015), http://www.cedr.us/papers/working/CEDR%20WP%202015-3_NBPTS%20Cert.pdf; L. Cavalluzzo et al., *From Large Urban to Small Rural Schools: An Empirical Study of National Board Certification and Teaching Effectiveness* (Arlington, Va.: CAN Analysis and Solutions, 2015), https://web.mail.comcast.net/service/home/~/?auth=co&loc=en_US&id=400532&part=2.

⁵ J. Cowan and D. Goldhaber, *National Board Certification and Teacher Effectiveness: Evidence from Washington* (Bothell, Wash.: The Center for Data and Research, University of Washington, 2015), http://www.cedr.us/papers/working/CEDR%20WP%202015-3_NBPTS%20Cert.pdf.

Unfortunately, currently, there are only approximately 10 Board-certified teachers in BIE-affiliated schools nationwide. In contrast, as of November 2015, more than 110,000 teachers across the nation have achieved National Board Certification, including 152 Board-certified teachers in Montana, 585 Board-certified teachers in Wyoming, and 969 Board-certified teachers in New Mexico.

We all know the tremendous struggles faced by Native American students and that students at BIE schools historically have lower graduation rates and lower scores on national and state assessments than many of their counterparts in public schools.

To help address these inequities, in 2014, the National Board began a partnership with the Bureau of Indian Education to help teachers in BIE-affiliated schools become Board certified. The effort overall is designed to make Board Certification the norm among BIE teachers. More specifically, this project aims to support the BIE in reaching its goal of 1,000 Board certified teachers in BIE schools by the year 2020. Such a magnitude of accomplished teachers would constitute a critical mass leading the learning of BIE students to high levels.

Any plan to grow the number of NBCTs must address the challenges and contexts of the schools themselves. For the BIE, the challenges of rural schools coupled with the logistical, pedagogical, and cultural advantages of having students taught by members of their community lead to a clear principle guiding this project's work. This project will support BIE teachers in the development and validation of their knowledge and skills—setting a clear pathway toward Board certification.

The BIE is providing funding for candidate fee support, bonuses for certification component completion and salary increases for teachers who achieve certification. The BIE is also providing funding for mentoring and support of candidates for National Board Certification.

In addition, the initiative provides support to increase the instructional capacity of teachers who are not yet eligible or ready for certification. For instance, the National Board is providing teachers in BIE schools with access to videos and reflective papers of Board-certified teachers through a newly-launched ATLAS online library. By fostering a dialogue among all 4,000 BIE teachers and supporting teachers in their pre-service and early-career development, the initiative builds a self-sustaining culture of professional learning and peer support. Professional development of existing staff, supported by resources from the National Board, is a critical strategy in this work given the difficulty BIE faces in attracting teachers and principals to remote locations.

In short, the project is creating an expectation and a pathway for teachers in BIE-affiliated schools to achieve certification, which includes support and resources for achieving this goal.

After the first year of the project, I'm happy to report that more than 350 teachers in BIE-affiliated schools have begun their journey towards board certification and are regularly participating in mentoring sessions led by Board-certified teachers to increase their instructional capacity, ultimately benefiting the students in these schools.

This work is off to a promising start. The NEST Act is critical to accelerating these efforts and expanding their impact on teachers and students. The National Board is particularly pleased that the bill provides support for teachers to pursue Board certification and recognize teachers that have achieved Board certification through additional compensation, both of which encourage more teachers to strengthen

their teaching so it meets the profession's high standards. The bill, through promoting Board certification among teachers in BIE-affiliated schools, helps to strengthen teaching and learning in tribal schools and other schools with high concentrations of Native American students.

On behalf of the National Board, I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding these critical issues and I'm happy to take any questions.