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CERTIFYING THE FACTS

Education Foundation Calls for Release of Study on Board Certified Teachers

The Education Consumers Foundation (ECF) today called on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to release the Sanders, Alston, and Wright study of NBPTS-certified teachers.

The study was commissioned by NBPTS in January of 2002 in response to growing questions about whether NBPTS-certified teachers produce greater student achievement gain than their non-certified colleagues. The reported findings raise doubt about the validity of the NBPTS credential and the educational value of the tens of millions per year now spent on salary bonuses for NBPTS-certified teachers.

According to a May 12 report in *Education Week*, Sanders, *et al*, found virtually no difference in student achievement gains between NBPTS-certified teachers and teachers without such certification.

“The National Board needs to do the right thing,” said ECF President Dr. J. E. Stone. “The results of this study have been in their hands for over a year. If there was a question about Sanders’ methodology, NBPTS should have made the report public, stated its critique, and let readers judge for themselves.” Thus far, NBPTS has released only an overview and a critique of Sanders’ methodology, but not the study itself.

The Foundation has good reason to care. In May of 2002, Dr. Stone released a brief report on the value-added teacher-effect scores earned by NBPTS-certified teachers in Tennessee. He concluded that they differed little from other teachers in the same school districts—essentially the same finding that the Sanders study is reported to contain.

Within days after it gained national attention, Stone’s study was subjected to an unprecedented *ad hoc* review by a panel of researchers appointed by the Education Commission of the States (ECS).

The panel dismissed Stone’s call for an independent review of NBPTS certification and a halt in new certifications: “The reviewers are unanimous in asserting that the conclusions reached by [the researcher] . . . are completely unsupported by the study.” In a cover letter accompanying the September 2002 release of the panel’s report, ECS President Ted Sanders said, “If the study was sound, it would have significantly diminished confidence in NBPTS.”

“Perhaps diminished confidence was warranted,” said Stone. The ECS and its blue ribbon panel are responsible for reassuring policymakers that the Tennessee findings meant nothing. Because of their actions, NBPTS has been permitted to triple the number of certified teachers to its present 47,500, and typical state-funded salary enhancements are in the neighborhood of \$5,000 per year. States are making very substantial long-term commitments to this program every day and it is still unsupported by hard evidence.”

“If anyone wonders how fads spread and why educational research never finds answers until it is too late, they should examine this example,” said Stone. “Organizations like ECS have an inherent conflict of interest. They try to serve both education’s providers and its consumers—so they offer no clear guidance until an innovation has undeniably failed. In doing so, they serve the interests of those who seek continued funding and ignore the interests of those who furnish the money and the children. Consumers need watchdogs that bark, not ones that worry about how their reports will be received by the education industry.”

In 2004, three large studies were said to have found solid support for NBPTS certification: *Can Teacher Quality Be Effectively Assessed* by Goldhaber and Anthony, *National Board Certified Teachers and Their Students’ Achievement* by Vandevoot, Amrein-Beardsley, and Berliner, and *Is National Board Certification an Effective Signal of Teacher Quality?* by Cavalluzzo.

However, contrary to the triumphant tone of their press releases, all found statistically significant but educationally trivial differences between NBPTS-certified teachers and their peers (see Cunningham & Stone, 2005: <http://www.education-consumers.com/Cunningham-Stone.pdf>). “The failure of the news releases to distinguish between ‘statistical significance’ and practical or educational significance was simply misleading,” Stone said; “yet ECS and other such organizations failed to alert policymakers.”

“The Board needs to release the Sanders study and release it now,” said Stone. “At this point, NBPTS certification has been tested repeatedly and found to account for little difference in student achievement. Enough has been wasted on a program that accounts for barely-detectable differences in student achievement. Far more effective alternatives are available.”

The Education Consumers Foundation is a nonprofit consumer organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia. It gathers and disseminates information about education policy and practice on behalf of parents, taxpayers, and their elected representatives primarily via its website: www.education-consumers.com.