



# Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers for High-Needs Schools:

*Insights from NBCT Summits  
and Other Policy Initiatives*

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**T**he facts are daunting: Poor children and those of color are far less likely to be taught by qualified teachers—no matter how the term “qualified teacher” is defined. **Studies consistently show that teachers who are better trained, more experienced, and licensed in the subjects they teach are more likely to be teaching in more affluent schools, serving more academically advantaged students.**<sup>1</sup> The same is true for teachers who generate higher student test scores as well as those who earn National Board Certification.<sup>2</sup> Addressing the maldistribution of qualified teachers may be the most vexing public school problem facing America’s policymakers today.

Much like in other fields (e.g., business, health care, or the military), a range of incentives are sometimes used to compensate people for tackling challenging teaching assignments and jobs. Some policymakers recognize that incentives are needed to compensate teachers more when they agree to work in high-needs schools, but many states still lack such policies. According to the latest survey by *Education Week*, only 17 states offer incentives of any kind for teachers to teach in high-needs schools.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, policymakers should be concerned about where the most accomplished teachers—like National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs)—are teaching. The vast majority of NBCT incentives, while important in encouraging and recognizing accomplished teachers are generally divorced from efforts to make the distribution of top-flight teachers more equitable.<sup>4</sup> With several research studies showing that few NBCTs teach in high-needs schools,<sup>5</sup> it is unfortunate but not surprising that Georgia policymakers recently passed a policy eliminating across-the-board salary incentives for these accomplished teachers and *only* rewarding them a 10 percent salary increase if they work in a school that has been on the state’s roster of low-performing schools for two or more consecutive years.

## The Teacher Incentive Landscape

As teacher shortages have escalated, school districts have explored varying types of incentive programs. For example, over the last several years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) and the State of Arkansas have designed programs with multiple financial elements to attract teachers to high-needs schools and subjects. Additionally, the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program and the New York Teaching Fellows Program were created to entice non-traditional recruits into challenging schools. Efforts like these have produced, in retail parlance, a great deal of “curb appeal” for certain high-needs districts, but for incentive programs to be truly successful, they must be based on the multiple factors that influence teachers’ decisions about where to practice their profession.

The issues are not simple—and often myths get in the way of the facts. One pervasive myth that hobbles many recruitment and retention efforts is that financial incentives are the silver bullet solution for high-needs schools. Bess Keller’s fascinating *Education Week* story of five Cleveland teachers revealed the significance of other factors in teachers’ decision-making. The article

highlighted how **special preparation for urban teaching, support from more experienced colleagues,** and schools that offered **opportunities for knowing students better** (i.e., through more flexible schedules and advisory classes) all played an important role in recruiting and retaining them. New teacher retention improves when history majors—like mid-career switcher Allison Hauserman—are not expected to teach special education, as she was initially assigned to do.<sup>6</sup>

### **Incentive Programs for Teachers in High-Needs Schools or Subjects**

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.), the school district offers a variety of incentives to attract and retain quality teachers to their FOCUS (Finding Opportunities, Creating Unparalleled Success) schools. For example, any educator can receive up to \$3,000 in signing bonuses for working in these high-needs schools, while master teachers with a demonstrated record of success can earn an additional \$2,500 in retention bonuses. Another \$1,400 can be earned based on high academic change or achievement levels by students on several state tests.

The State Teacher Assistance Resource (STAR) Program of Arkansas provides two years of forgivable loans in a four-year program for teacher education students willing to teach math, science, special education, or foreign languages. The normal \$3,000 loan forgiveness for each year is doubled to \$6,000, if the student is willing to teach one of these high-needs subjects in an area of the state that has a critical shortage of teachers. A total of 465 students were funded in 2006-07, up from 264 students in 2004-05.

For the most part, few teacher recruitment and retention policies and programs have been formally studied or evaluated.<sup>7</sup> In writing this paper, staff of the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) investigated a number of current efforts and found that most incentive programs—including federal and state teacher scholarships and salary differentials for high-needs subject area teachers—contained no management information systems that could provide policymakers with the data they need on program effectiveness.

One example is “Mission Possible” in Guilford County (N.C.). Through this program, the district pays algebra teachers up to \$14,000 more if they teach in high-needs schools and their students “show solid progress on state exams.” Unfortunately, it is unknown whether data are collected on how this investment impacts the numbers of teaching applicants. In fact, the administrator we contacted was “not sure” if the district “tracked the numbers” from year to year. This experience is not unique and underscores the need for more solid research.

The U.S. Department of Education recently launched its \$99 million Teacher Incentive Fund designed to recruit and retain teachers for high-needs schools and to pay them more for higher student performance. This federal program has funded 34 states and school district programs thus far, including Denver where the teachers’ union and school administrators have co-created a comprehensive incentive package that focuses on redesigning the teacher development system.

## New Solutions

Over the last 24 months—with support from the National Education Association and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards—over 2,000 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) from North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Washington examined teacher recruitment and retention research and participated in structured dialogues with leading policymakers from their states. Summits were organized for NBCTs in Mississippi and Wisconsin as well (this paper was completed prior to the Mississippi summit and before the release of the Wisconsin summit report). After studying the research, teacher leaders from the five states developed a comprehensive set of policy recommendations based on both evidence and their unique experiences—many in high-needs schools. The collective voices of these NBCTs have made a

difference in several of the states, but much more needs to be done. In this paper we draw on the best available empirical evidence, key case studies, and the insights from some of the nation's most accomplished teachers to suggest how we may build on the foundation of existing programs. Let's start with the research evidence.

## The Evidence on Financial Incentives

Policymakers assume that financial incentives are critical to recruiting and retaining teachers for high-needs schools. Based on the research, they are right—but only partially right. For example, several recent investigations conclude that higher teacher salaries improve the quality of teachers who enter a school district<sup>8</sup> and serve as important incentives in keeping them there.<sup>9</sup> Several labor economists have shown that financial incentives can make high-needs schools more attractive to more qualified teachers. No one should be surprised, yet these

### The NBCT Policy Summits on Staffing and Supporting High-Needs Schools

Beginning in the summer of 2005, the National Education Association—in collaboration with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards—initiated a series of state policy summits on how to recruit and retain teachers for high-needs schools. The summits, held in North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Washington, connected over 2,000 National Board Certified Teachers with leading policymakers—giving them a chance to study the issues and begin a much needed dialogue on how to craft the most viable solutions to one of the most vexing problems in public education. Before each of the state summits, the NBCTs read a number of background papers and research summaries. At the summit, they listened to the

state's leading policymakers and fellow educators articulate their views on the issues at hand and then participated in highly structured, small group work sessions. Facilitated by specially trained National Board Certified Teachers, the teacher leaders analyzed the facts, grounded themselves in their own classroom experiences, and then developed preliminary ideas about what needed to be done. After the summit, they remained connected and continued the conversation via a moderated web-based study group where they continued to refine their thinking and provide more details regarding how and why certain recruitment and retention strategies would or would not work.

studies leave a lot of unanswered questions, especially in terms of “how much is enough?” One researcher suggests a 50 percent salary bonus is needed to motivate teachers to move to a high-needs school,<sup>10</sup> while another suggests a program that offered \$1,800 retention bonuses to math and science teachers was sufficient to keep them from leaving.<sup>11</sup>

Last year the Center for Teaching Quality surveyed all teachers in three Alabama school districts and found that 36 percent indicated their willingness to teach in a high-needs school. For these “willing” movers, the school district would have to pay them at least \$5,000-\$10,000 more.<sup>12</sup> However, money was not the key factor in their decision-making. As described later, a complex web of working conditions and teacher preparation factors weighed in much more heavily.

### *Money is Necessary, But Clearly Not Sufficient*

At best, the research reveals that money is necessary but not sufficient. Two teacher recruitment programs illustrate this point. Several years ago, South Carolina tried to recruit “teacher specialists” for the state’s weakest schools, and despite an \$18,000 bonus, the state attracted only 20 percent of the 500 teachers they needed in the first year of the program and only 40 percent after three years.

Interviews with officials revealed that some teachers who applied were not qualified and others would not move to the high-needs schools because of **location, lack of administrative support, poor working conditions, and a lack of preparation** for the challenging work required.<sup>13</sup>

The Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program, a much heralded effort launched in 1998-1999, has dispelled the myth that mid-career recruits with subject matter degrees and no teacher education are willing and able to teach effectively in high-needs schools. Intended to address the state’s teacher quality and supply problems and signed into law with a \$60 million endowment, the program offered mid-career switchers a \$20,000 signing bonus but less than 100 hours of training. Although designed to attract 500 recruits per year, less than 200 qualified participants entered the program.

The Massachusetts program was created to serve 13 high-needs districts; however, most recruits did not actually teach in those districts. By 2002, 41 percent of recruits taught in high-needs areas, but more than 50 percent taught in the state’s highest-scoring districts. Furthermore, attrition among the bonus recipients has been much higher than national averages. By the third year of the program, 46 percent of all recruits had left, while 55 percent of recruits in the high-needs districts were no longer teaching. The training initiative, modeled after the Teach for America program, offered

Recruitment initiatives should include both financial and non-financial incentives.

only a few weeks of preparation, and researchers uncovered that in-service mentoring was “spotty.” By 2003, the state had spent more than \$900,000 to attract and train 74 recruits who were no longer serving public schools. For those who stayed, only 10 percent of their principals rated them above average compared to all of the teachers at their school.<sup>14</sup>

The Massachusetts experience illustrates Richard Ingersoll’s analysis of national teacher survey data. He

found that teachers who leave because of job dissatisfaction do so not only because of low salaries, but also as a result of **poor support from school administrators, lack of student motivation, little teacher influence over decision-making, and student discipline problems.**<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the importance of teaching and learning conditions in recruiting and retaining individuals for challenging assignments cannot be overstated. One does not have to look any further than the struggle the military has had in attracting recruits to the armed services since soldiers’ “working conditions” have changed significantly over the past few years.

## The Evidence on Working Conditions

Evidence continues to mount that teacher working conditions directly affect the success or failure of efforts to adequately staff high-needs schools. In a recent large-scale study, California teachers reported three major reasons for leaving teaching: an inadequate system, bureaucratic impediments, and lack of collegial support. For these former teachers an *inadequate system* meant poor professional development, a lack of textbooks, and too little time to plan lessons. *Bureaucratic impediments* referred to excessive paperwork, too many unnecessary classroom interruptions, or too many restrictions on how administrators and policymakers expected them to teach. The *lack of collegial support* meant that they did not have “a strong team” to draw on at their school, and there was too little trust and respect among the staff.<sup>16</sup>

School leadership is an important factor in teacher retention.

These findings mirrored the Center for Teaching Quality’s research on working conditions, including a recent Alabama survey.<sup>17</sup> When teachers were asked to identify the most important factor in retaining classroom teachers, “supportive school leadership” (39 percent) clearly trumped “salary and benefits” (22 percent). The teachers who said they were unwilling to teach in a high-needs school were far more likely to believe that their school leaders would not support them, overall working conditions would not allow them to be successful, and they were not sufficiently prepared to teach students in these challenging schools.<sup>18</sup>

Recent research on National Board Certified Teachers has similar conclusions. A six-state survey found overwhelmingly that financial incentives alone will not lure these accomplished teachers to low-performing schools. Other factors such as **strong principal leadership, a collegial staff with a shared teaching philosophy, adequate resources necessary to teach, and a supportive and active parent community** were far more powerful determinants. The research—which examined the impact of NBCTs in low-performing schools—surfaced a larger set of issues related to recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers in high-needs schools.<sup>19</sup> For example, many administrators knew very little about NBCTs or how to utilize them as leaders. Some were threatened by teacher leadership. In other cases, district transfer policies allowed teachers to put in their time at high-needs schools and then “move to greener school pastures once they have accrued a modest amount of seniority.”<sup>20</sup>

## Insights from the Nation’s Highly Accomplished Teachers

Across the five states participating in the NBCT policy summits—North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Washington—2,000 NBCTs laid out a comprehensive list of 142 specific policy recommendations that, if implemented, could significantly alleviate the nation’s problems in staffing high-needs schools. Not surprisingly, their proposals overlapped, suggesting a powerful consensus among these highly accomplished teachers. Their ideas, built from both their review of the research and their own day-to-day experiences in schools, can be summarized and organized by five major recommendations.

### *The Recommendations*

#### **1. Transform the teaching and learning conditions in high-needs schools.**

Because accomplished teachers know a great deal about how to teach, they are cognizant of the conditions needed to help all students meet high academic standards. “Teaching high-needs students is a whole different world,” said Jane Jordan Jaeger, NBCT from Mt. Healthy, Ohio. NBCTs recognize that preschool education, social services supports, and technological tools are critical “levelers” that help assure every student can meet 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market and civic demands. The NBCTs are aware of the research on the positive influence of early childhood education for high-needs students.<sup>21</sup> They also know they need to teach all students well, including the ones whose

parents work two jobs or struggle with literacy themselves. The NBCTs reported having to teach more students with behavioral and social challenges in recent years—which calls for new strategies and alliances with a range of other local and state agencies. In addition, they have dealt with a dearth of up-to-date technology and an inadequate infrastructure for introducing students to 21<sup>st</sup> century tools.

Many NBCTs would teach in a high-needs school if they had a reasonable student load.

For most NBCTs, these resource issues come to mind when considering the possibility of teaching in high-needs schools. But the critical issue of class size is even more important to them: many

NBCTs would teach in a high-needs school if they had a reasonable student load. Unfortunately, according to a recent statewide teaching and learning conditions survey conducted by the Center for Teaching Quality in Ohio, only 39 percent of teachers reported that the number of students they teach is reasonable if they are to help all of their students succeed.<sup>22</sup> As Jaya Neal, NBCT from Cleveland, noted, “Resources are not distributed equitably. There are schools with everything and schools with nothing. The quality of education is sometimes determined by zip code.”

The NBCTs at the policy summits embrace accountability, but they find that their state’s high-stakes testing programs and the accompanying No Child Left Behind structures do not adequately recognize growth in student achievement and can be insulting to them as professionals. In fact, the majority believes that the current system of testing and incentives based on proficiency does little to encourage effective teaching. This system can consequently discourage teachers from moving to high-needs

schools, where challenges are greater and bonuses more difficult to earn.

Business leaders from across the nation call for teachers to help their students compete with peers from Japan, China, and Singapore as well as many European nations. However, teachers in those nations tend to have 10-20 hours per week to collaborate with their colleagues “inside the work day” on planning activities, observing lessons, and analyzing student work samples.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, in a recent statewide survey over 83 percent of Washington teachers reported that they have less than two hours per week to devote to learning with their colleagues.<sup>24</sup> Even when teachers can find the time to collaborate and review each other’s practices, outsiders often do not trust them to do the right thing. According to Kathy Gadowski, an NBCT from Ohio, “administrators and the public need to know that teachers aren’t just working when they are with kids ... they are working when they collaborate too.”

These real discrepancies in high-needs schools and their more affluent peers are why the NBCTs from the state policy summits made the following recommendations:

- Washington NBCTs called for restructuring the student day to have a continuous three-hour block per week for teacher-led collaboration to improve student learning (e.g., lesson study, observation of accomplished teachers and developing assessments).
- NBCTs in Ohio called for universal access to preschool taught by licensed early childhood

specialists and incentives for specially trained teacher leaders to work with families to bridge the gap between home and school.

- South Carolina NBCTs supported targeted state funding to ensure that challenging schools had supportive working conditions for teachers, including access to state-of-the-art technology and adequate facilities and resources.
- NBCTs from Ohio proposed calculating teacher-student ratio based on *actual* students per classroom (rather than averages), with the PreK-3 standard of one “highly qualified” teacher for every 18 students in high-needs schools.
- Oklahoma’s NBCTs recommended granting additional resources and materials to high-needs schools so that teachers can create more diverse learning opportunities for their students.

Most Washington teachers have less than two hours a week for learning with colleagues.

## 2. Prepare and support teachers for the specific challenges posed by working in high-needs schools.

The variety of students’ needs, on top of large class loads, make teaching difficult in high-needs schools. Shelly Hanahan, an NBCT from Upper Arlington, Ohio, with 22 years of classroom experience, said it well:

*Teachers are faced with learners that are as diverse as ever, including those who do not speak English as their primary language and those with learning or emotional disabilities, hearing impairments, or those who are medically fragile. We must teach them all.*



Many teachers enter the classroom unprepared to work with high-needs students. NBCTs may have the “right stuff” for teaching in their current school, but they may not have the knowledge of community and culturally relevant pedagogy that will enable them to teach effectively and to work well with their students and colleagues.” We have general knowledge about children and their development,” said an NBCT from the Oklahoma summit, “but we don’t receive specific knowledge about their beliefs, customs, and learning styles. We need to have training that is much broader than we traditionally receive.” Consequently, the need for ongoing professional development becomes a top priority.

Data from CTQ’s 2006 teaching and learning conditions survey in Ohio suggest that this need is not being met in most schools.<sup>25</sup> Only 21 percent of teachers reported to have 10 or more hours of professional development over the last two years in closing achievement gaps. North Carolina’s 2006 survey of teaching and learning conditions, also conducted by CTQ, found that over 60 percent of the state’s teachers are now teaching second language learners; yet, only 9 percent have had more than 10 hours of professional development in working with these students.<sup>26</sup> The NBCTs emphasized the fact that many teachers do not want to teach in schools where they cannot be successful. They know what it takes to be effective—but most professional development programs do not provide them with what they need.

NBCTs want the kind of professional development that research evidence has defined as *effective*—job-embedded, focused on student work, and done in

collaboration with peers. A study conducted in 2003 by Georgia State University and the Center for Teaching Quality revealed, however, that South Carolina teachers experience a number of glaring professional development problems. For example, only 34 percent of the state’s teachers noted that professional development activities were led by teachers. And just 45 percent reported that their professional development was “reform related” while 50 percent claimed that professional development felt more like a “lecture.”<sup>27</sup>

Mentoring and induction programs for novices encounter challenges as well. “There is no time to go in-depth with mentoring,” reported one Washington NBCT. “And we certainly cannot go deep enough in pedagogy.” Her colleague added, “There is a lack of quality in mentor pairing too. In fact, a lot of district administrators just put a body with a body.” While NBCTs in Washington more frequently serve as mentors and are much more likely to report feeling comfortable with managing diverse learning needs and preparing students for state assessments,<sup>28</sup> new teacher mentoring still has a long way to go.

Teachers need to be prepared and supported to teach in high-needs schools so this is why the summit NBCTs recommended the following strategies:

- South Carolina and Washington NBCTs both called for fully funding the state-wide mentoring program so that all new teachers receive quality support and training in areas such as cultural competence and differentiated instruction.

More professional development in cultural competence is needed.

- Oklahoma NBCTs proposed providing teachers in high-needs schools with research-based content and flexibility to investigate the specific needs of their schools.
- Oklahoma NBCTs also recommended that every teacher education program require all prospective teachers to complete at least one quality, sustained field experience in a high-needs school so they could be better prepared for handling the challenges, if they choose to work there.

### 3. Recruit and develop administrators who can draw on the expertise of specially-prepared teacher leaders.

Regrettably, too few administrators know how to support teachers' efforts to educate all children at high levels, or, how to nurture teacher leaders. At the Washington policy summit, one NBCT lamented:

*I teach in a high-needs school. Since I started there, I've had 14 administrators. They don't know how to support us ... don't understand what National Board Certification is all about. They do not have the right training. The administrators must be educated.*

A number of other NBCTs at the summits reported that their principals were threatened by their leadership potential. Some, like Georgia Abeyounis from rural North Carolina, spoke about feeling “yoked” by school administrators who forced them to teach “rigid six-point lesson plans that fail to take into account their expertise and knowledge of their students' academic and social needs.” Accomplished

NBCTs have much to offer in teacher leadership.

teachers like Ms. Abeyounis expressed their concerns with this rigidity and stated that they do not want to teach in a school where their expertise is not valued and respected.

Many NBCTs are ready to lead as teacher educators for pre-service teachers, mentors for novices, and coaches for their struggling colleagues. Most want more time to spread their expertise in using data, developing powerful assessments, creating adaptive curricula for diverse learners, and reaching out to parents. However, there are often no pathways for them to do so. Most school districts do not have the resources to release NBCTs for leadership roles. And when the resources *are* available, district leaders often lack the training and experience to maximize NBCTs' leadership potential.

Yet, while most NBCTs want to lead, many may not know how to do so. The National Board assessment process does not “test” for teacher leadership skills, and policymakers should not assume that all NBCTs are ready and willing to take on leadership roles in areas like coaching their peers or mentoring novices. An eloquent NBCT from South Carolina put it this way, “Individual teachers

need to view a [novice] teacher as everyone's responsibility—as you know, it takes a village to raise a teacher who will be successful and stay in teaching.”

On the other hand, as her colleague was so quick to point out, “Mentoring requires a relationship, and relationship-building requires time. Relationship-building also requires special skills that some folks don't have and haven't been trained to develop.”

### A Comprehensive Approach in Chattanooga

Perhaps the most powerful effort to staff high-needs schools can be found in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In 2000, a local think tank report revealed that nine of the state's 20 lowest-performing elementary schools were in Chattanooga's Hamilton County school district. On average, only 12 percent of third-graders in these nine schools could read at or above grade level. As a result of this news, the school district, along with the Benwood Foundation and the Public Education Foundation (PEF), forged the Benwood Initiative to address the problem—not with a silver bullet, but with a comprehensive set of solutions.

The alliance quickly learned that like most urban schools, these nine underperforming schools were staffed by “young, inexperienced, and, in some cases, marginal teachers.” Fueled by the leadership of an innovative superintendent and almost \$10 million in grants (from Benwood, PEF, and the Osborne Foundation), the reform group set out to create a robust set of teacher development strategies.

For starters, the reformers sought to entice the district's teachers with the highest student scores to the Benwood schools through bonus money. They found some willing to transfer but not nearly enough. What they eventually learned is that the best approach to staffing and supporting high-needs schools must include: **preparing more effective administrators, using multiple measures to identify quality teachers, cultivating and capitalizing on teacher**

**leadership, and developing talent from within.**

To be sure, the annual bonuses of \$5,000 for those with high student test scores became an important incentive, but it was an insufficient enticement. For Benwood teachers, the opportunity to work with visionary principals and to participate in collegial professional learning communities were the keys to their moving to and remaining at these high-needs schools.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, the district began to use portfolios of student work and lesson plans to identify its best teachers to teach in the Benwood schools. The Osborne Foundation funded a Fellows program to provide a Master's Degree in Urban Education to Benwood teachers, which deepened the skills of those on staff. The school district launched a new leadership program for teachers, and several schools eliminated assistant principal positions in order to fund teacher-coach leadership roles. Professional development was converted from one-shot workshops to job-embedded activities led by teachers at the Benwood schools.

Due to this comprehensive support approach, the Benwood schools are no longer low-performing. By 2005, third grade reading proficiency scores increased to 74 percent (up from 53 percent in 2003), while fifth grade reached 80 percent (up from 62 percent). Improvements in math scores were equally impressive—with third and fifth grade scores increasing to 62 percent (up from 50 percent in 2003) and 76 percent (up from 57 percent) respectively.<sup>30</sup>

To recruit and develop teacher leaders as well as administrators who will support them, the NBCTs from the policy summits developed the following recommendations:

- NBCTs in North Carolina called for university-based education administration programs to engage NBCTs or other accomplished teachers in training future principals and suggested school districts fund 11-month school leader positions for these teacher leaders to assist in curriculum support, professional development, and other school improvement efforts.
- Washington NBCTs called for creating a new salary schedule that establishes different levels of teacher mastery with accompanying compensation and professional growth opportunities, including roles for accomplished teachers to lead professional learning communities and leverage powerful student learning data from authentic accountability systems.
- Washington NBCTs also recommended providing incentives for administrators to complete a *Take One!* entry so that they could become more familiar with the power and potential of the certification process.
- Ohio's NBCTs went a step further and proposed the establishment of a leadership academy within each district to prepare teachers and new administrators for successful collaborative leadership.

#### 4. Create a menu of recruitment incentives, but focus on growing teaching expertise within high-needs schools.

A number of NBCTs have witnessed firsthand that monetary incentives—even large ones—are insufficient to recruit and retain good teachers in high-needs schools. Supportive principals, freedom to use professional judgment, and a guarantee to work with like-minded and similarly-skilled colleagues means more to good teachers than extra pay.

This does *not* mean that policymakers shouldn't offer financial incentives for NBCTs to teach in high-needs schools. The National Board assessment process is a powerful professional development tool and could drive the right kind of teacher recruitment and preparation in the nation's most challenging schools. However, the process needs to be promoted among all teachers. While states like North Carolina offer a 12 percent annual salary increase and South Carolina offers a flat \$7,500 for the life of the certificate, the

NBCTs believe that additional financial incentives should be offered to NBCTs who also teach in high-needs schools.

The summit NBCTs were in general agreement that the *last thing* policymakers should do is develop a *single* incentive to attract accomplished teachers to high-needs schools. They instead focused on creating a menu of recruitment incentives to match the specific needs of different teachers. The needs of an accomplished, single, 25-year-old teacher education graduate may be very different from those of a 58-

Summit NBCTs created a menu of incentives to match specific needs of different teachers.

year-old mid-career switcher and from those of the 45-year-old veteran who has taught successfully for 22 years but now has three children in college. The NBCTs also recognized that life circumstances and geography can limit teacher recruitment to their state's more rural, isolated schools.

The best strategy then may be to “grow your own” accomplished teachers from within high-needs schools. For those teachers already at high-needs schools, however, the cost of becoming an NBCT may seem out of their reach. As Beth Bley, NBCT from Putnam City Schools in Oklahoma, noted:

*I was the second NBCT at my high-needs school. I was really lucky to have the help of a colleague who had already earned a certificate. In most high-needs*

*schools, with all its demands, there just are not enough resources of people and dollars available for teachers to try to obtain National Board Certification.*

To support accomplished teachers like Ms. Bley to pursue certification and entice other high-quality professionals to work in high-needs schools, the summit NBCTs recommended the following:

- NBCTs from all five summit states recommended that states offer special financial incentives and supports to high-needs schools that grow increasing numbers of NBCTs. For example, North Carolina's NBCTs proposed awarding an additional 1.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff position for every new NBCT hired or “grown” in high-needs schools.

### Utilizing NBCTs to Grow Talented Teachers in North Carolina

At DF Walker Elementary, the principal and a growing cadre of NBCTs (currently about 40 percent of the faculty who are eligible for certification) have created a community of learners who continue to make steady gains in meeting grade level standards. Walker has received the title of “North Carolina School of Distinction” in previous years. In 2006-07, the school was named a “North Carolina School of Character.”

At the elementary school, National Board standards undergird the school's teacher evaluation and professional development processes. The principal—who also is an NBCT—works in partnership with the faculty to create a professional learning community where teachers individualize instruction. Teaching is made public as teachers watch and review each other's instruction. All teachers are expected (and

supported) to become NBCTs. The superintendent, the school board, and community leaders have come to understand and embrace what it means for teachers to achieve National Board Certification.

The case of DF Walker reveals clearly how “growing your own” NBCTs may be the most effective strategy for recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers for hard-to-staff, low-performing schools. Concomitantly, the professional learning community at Walker is not the result of the mere presence of a few NBCTs or other accomplished teachers who have accepted incentives to work in a chronically low-performing school. Walker is the result of a “top-down/bottom-up” commitment to create the conditions that advance teacher and student learning and success in high-poverty schools.

- Washington NBCTs called for offering an additional stipend of 20 percent (or a minimum of \$10,000) per year to accomplished teachers who teach in high-needs schools.
- NBCTs from South Carolina called for providing accomplished teachers with a menu of possible incentives for teaching 3-5 years in high-needs schools, including housing subsidies, transportation and gas allowances, signing and retention bonuses, salary supplements, moving expenses and college loan forgiveness for teachers and/or their families.
- South Carolina NBCTs also called for offering preparation and incentives for cohorts of NBCTs to move to high-needs schools as a team.

##### **5. Build awareness among policymakers, practitioners, and the public about the importance of National Board Certification for high-needs schools.**

The vexing problems of staffing high-needs schools are solvable. Over 2,000 highly accomplished teachers have crafted a number of potential policy recommendations based on research evidence and their experience. However, too few policies acknowledge what NBCTs know and can do—both in determining appropriate instructional strategies and in shaping policies and programs that will successfully recruit and retain good teachers for our most challenging teaching and learning environments. Strong outreach efforts to local and state policymakers are required.

Accomplished teachers cannot lead if colleagues, administrators, policymakers, and the public do not know how and why they are effective. Researchers have found that when NBCTs are present in a critical mass at one school, their teaching talent can “spill over” to other teachers. However, it is one thing for teachers to pass muster as NBCTs; it is another for their knowledge and skills to be recognized, used, and spread.<sup>31</sup>

Too few policies acknowledge what NBCTs know and can do.

A number of obstacles keep many NBCTs and other accomplished teachers from influencing their teaching colleagues as well as administrators and policymakers. In some cases, attitudes are a serious barrier. As Mary McClellan, an NBCT and K-12 science coordinator from Issaquah, Washington, noted:

*The work needed to be done to provide all students the highest level of learning is huge. I think that one of the pieces that would facilitate getting this task done for students would be a culture shift that would actually promote teacher leadership ... that accomplished teachers would actually be seen by administrators and school board members as teacher leaders and instructional experts—vital parts of the leadership of schools and districts.*

This is why the NBCTs from the policy summits recommended the following strategies for building awareness:

- NBCTs of North Carolina called for teachers to lead the way by hosting local summits to elevate the importance of National Board Certification and share the findings of the state convenings.

- North Carolina NBCTs also suggested that each state-elected public official and/or lawmaker spend time with them and other accomplished teachers in school settings and at the policy table.
- The Oklahoma and Washington NBCT summit cohorts recommended the development of training designed and provided by accomplished teachers to educate administrators, school board members, and university professors (to name a few) on the National Board process as well as supporting and utilizing NBCTs in schools.

## Conclusions

Both research and insights from some of the nation's most accomplished teachers reveal that salary incentives alone will not suffice to attract and retain good teachers for high-needs schools. Working conditions matter—and most notably, access to good principals and skilled colleagues, lower class sizes and smaller student loads, high quality professional development, and classroom resources needed to help students meet high academic standards are critically important. Even if accomplished teachers can be enticed to teach in struggling schools, they alone cannot be the sole answer to the teaching quality problems found there. One thing is certain: there is no silver bullet for staffing and supporting high-needs schools, but both the research and ideas described herein suggest that policymakers can find real solutions for the real problems they face.

There is no silver bullet for staffing and supporting high-needs schools.

The NBCTs call for investments in early childhood education, technology, and teacher-student ratios that allow good teachers to be effective in challenging circumstances. They also call for more support for preparation, induction, and professional development programs that specially train teachers for high-needs schools. The NBCTs realize that these teacher development approaches can be taken to scale if new incentives and teacher leadership systems are created—and a new breed of administrators are developed who can take advantage of and help spread teaching expertise. Financial rewards are needed to entice teachers to tough schools, but a large menu of incentives will be necessary to attract and retain the best ones. Incentives are also needed to bring cohorts of accomplished and promising teachers to high-needs schools, as well as to grow them from within. Without building awareness among policymakers, practitioners, and the public about what good teaching looks like in high-needs schools and the importance of National Board Certification for them, little progress will be made.

The NBCTs with whom we worked in developing this paper offered numerous examples of how their ideas could be realized or where they saw pieces of them already in place. When it comes to solutions for staffing and supporting high-needs schools, these accomplished teachers pull no punches. It is time for our nation's policymakers to listen to the experts—those who effectively serve our nation's schools and students everyday.

## Epilogue

Since the first policy summit in North Carolina in August 2005, the NBCTs from all five states have worked diligently with union leaders and other invested stakeholders to spread their messages to educational administrators, policymakers, and civic groups. Through presentations at diverse venues, these teacher leaders have demonstrated that they have the skill and the will to solve the challenging issue of recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers to high-needs schools.

### North Carolina

The North Carolina NBCT policy summit has resulted in numerous productive outcomes. For example, several bills have been introduced, which support the recommendations generated by the NBCTs who attended the event. HB 1506 is being reviewed and if passed, would create an NBCT Fellows Pilot Program to recruit candidates in high-needs schools across the state. SB 1479, which passed both the Senate and the House, will now provide: additional support to high-needs schools, including stipends for NBCTs who serve as non-administrative instructional leaders; academic freedom for accomplished teachers to use research-based practices that go beyond the standard course of study; increased teacher positions to reduce class size; incentives to attract NBCTs; and extended 11-month contracts for teacher leaders to assist with curriculum and professional development. On a local level, teacher leaders have organized several events to shed light on the issue of recruiting and retaining

accomplished teachers for high-needs schools. Local summits were convened in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Asheville-Buncombe, Vance, and Caldwell counties.

### Ohio

Since the November 2007 summit in Columbus, both houses of the legislature in Ohio have restored the annual NBCT stipend from \$1,000 to the previous amount of \$2,500. As of the 2007-08 school year, all National Board teachers will receive \$2,500, as long as they are still in their first ten-year cycle of certification. Early reports indicate that the summit report has also improved legislators' understanding and focus on the link between quality teacher learning and student achievement, which could mean more money for professional development in the state. In addition,

The Ohio legislature has restored the NBCT annual stipend to \$2,500.

the Educator Standards Board, in conjunction with the State Board of Education, are putting the final touches on the Master Teacher definition (which is required by law), and it appears that

National Board Certification will be accepted as one of two routes to Master Teacher designation.

### Oklahoma

The NBCTs of Oklahoma provided strong recommendations to improve education for all of the state's children. Since the summit, several attempts have been made to pass legislation in support of stronger mentoring programs for novice teachers; however, the bills have not successfully navigated through the policy-making process. Efforts were fruitful in raising awareness about the need to "grow our own" NBCTs in high-needs schools. According



to SB 586, a minimum of 25 percent of all candidates now recruited for National Board Certification must teach at schools on the state's school improvement list or have more than 50 percent of students who qualify for the free and reduced price lunch program.

### South Carolina

Recommendations developed by NBCTs in South Carolina have been considered by the state legislature. These accomplished teachers suggested that the state provide funding to high-needs districts to offer virtual classrooms for students who need instruction in courses not available at their school. A bill passed during the 2007 session that will allow students to earn up to three online credits per academic year. To encourage participation in the National Board process, another summit recommendation advocated for automatic forgiveness of full assessment fees for candidates from high-needs schools, even if they did not achieve certification. New proviso language was added to the budget to support this proposal. In June 2007, NBCTs showed their collective advocacy prowess by banding together to uphold the state's National Board program. Through phone calls and email exchanges, hundreds of teacher leaders successfully convinced both the House and Senate to override the Governor's veto, which would have eliminated support for the program. Votes in both chambers were unanimous in support of the National Board program.

South Carolina  
NBCTs banded  
together for political  
advocacy.

### Washington

NBCTs from Washington have faced uneasiness and uncertainty every two years, holding out hope for renewal of their \$3,500 certification bonus during the biennial budget sessions. Due to the support garnered at the Seattle summit, National Board Certified Teachers lobbied in collaboration with their representatives from the Washington Education Association not only to increase their bonus, but also to institutionalize it as well. On May 9, 2007, Governor Gregoire signed HB 2262 into statute, which provided all NBCTs a bonus of \$5,000

(increased annually with inflation) for the ten years of the certificate and an additional \$5,000 for those National Board Certified teachers willing to work in high-needs schools (currently defined

as schools with 70 percent or higher free/reduced lunch). Since this bill was passed, the state has seen a surge in the candidate pool. According to preliminary numbers, the candidates have doubled in number to more than 1,300 in one year. Many of these interested teachers come from schools that meet the high-needs designation.

The work at the NBCT summits was merely a starting point towards recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers for high-needs schools. Much more time and effort needs to be committed to turning their visions into realities. Perhaps North Carolina summit keynote speaker Carolyn Banks said it best, "A thousand-mile journey has begun toward placing our best teachers in the schools that need them the most."

### Key Recommendations from the NBCT Policy Summits

*Please note:* This chart was created prior to the Mississippi summit and before the release of the Wisconsin summit report; therefore, their findings are not included here.

RECOMMENDATION	STATE				
<b>Transform the teaching and learning conditions in high-needs schools.</b>					
Provide funding to high-needs districts to offer virtual classrooms for students who need instruction in courses not available.				SC	
Provide universal access to preschool and all-day kindergarten taught by licensed early childhood specialists.		OH			WA
Allocate supplemental curricular resources and additional paraprofessionals to high-needs schools so that teachers can differentiate instruction for their diverse students.			OK		WA
Schedule protected, uninterrupted, common planning time (e.g., through regular planning periods, early dismissal or late arrival times, substitute coverage, etc.) so colleagues can share ideas, plan/observe lessons, and assess student work.	NC	OH	OK	SC	WA
Provide all teachers with the technology to maintain instructional standards, parent communication, and professional development.	NC	OH			
Change the formula for calculating class size to reflect real numbers of students in classrooms rather than averages (e.g., with a maximum of 18 students at the elementary level and 22 students per period at the middle and high school levels).	NC	OH	OK	SC	WA
Invest in strategies to eliminate the stigma of working in a low-performing school and continue to provide financial bonuses for growth as well as proficiency.	NC				
<b>Prepare and support teachers for the specific challenges posed by working in high-needs schools.</b>					
Offer ongoing support and financial assistance for people from diverse populations enrolled in teacher preparation programs.					WA
Recommend that teacher education programs require at least one sustained field experience in a high-needs school.		OH	OK		
Encourage institutions of higher education to align university-based master's degree programs with National Board standards.			OK		
Give NBCTs and other accomplished teachers the flexibility to use research-based practices that go beyond scripted curricula.	NC		OK		
Provide mentor and induction teachers (years one and two) with common planning and adequate release time during the regular school day, as well as release from non-instructional duties.		OH		SC	WA
Offer additional teacher-driven, job-embedded professional development that addresses second language learners, special education, and culturally relevant teaching.	NC	OH	OK		WA

### Key Recommendations from the NBCT Policy Summits (*continued*)

*Please note:* This chart was created prior to the Mississippi summit and before the release of the Wisconsin summit report; therefore, their findings are not included here.

RECOMMENDATION	STATE				
<b>Prepare and support teachers for the specific challenges posed by working in high-needs schools. (<i>continued</i>)</b>					
Encourage teachers and administrators to attempt a <i>Take One!</i> entry as a high-priority professional development activity.				SC	WA
Provide incentives and professional development for teachers and families to co-develop engagement strategies.		OH		SC	WA
Fund a virtual and face-to-face teacher exchange program that will allow NBCTs and non-NBCTs to share teaching expertise in and for high-needs schools.				SC	
Provide opportunities for new and/or underprepared (e.g., lateral entry) teachers to team-teach with NBCTs.	NC	OH			
<b>Recruit and develop administrators who can draw on the expertise of specially-prepared teacher leaders.</b>					
Incorporate coursework on teacher leadership into certification programs for new administrators and ensure that they understand and can apply the NBPTS five core propositions in supporting teacher leadership.	NC	OH	OK	SC	WA
Provide incentives to recruit experienced principals to lead high-needs schools.					WA
Provide incentives to higher education for the express purpose of hiring NBCTs or other accomplished teachers to provide training to university faculty and prospective teachers and administrators.	NC		OK		
Allow NBCTs to serve as full-time mentors, coaches, or other instructional leadership positions without losing their bonuses.	NC	OH			
Create and fund 11-month positions for NBCTs to assist with curriculum, professional development, and other leadership tasks.	NC	OH			WA
Promote shared decision-making models and include NBCTs and other accomplished teachers with administrators and legislators on policy-making teams at every level (school, district, state).	NC	OH		SC	
<b>Create a menu of recruitment incentives, but focus on growing teaching expertise within high-needs schools.</b>					
Offer preparation and incentives for cohorts of NBCTs to move to high-needs schools as a team.				SC	

**Key Recommendations from the NBCT Policy Summits (continued)**

*Please note:* This chart was created prior to the Mississippi summit and before the release of the Wisconsin summit report; therefore, their findings are not included here.

RECOMMENDATION	STATE				
<b>Create a menu of recruitment incentives, but focus on growing teaching expertise within high-needs schools. (continued)</b>					
Create an array of incentives to recruit NBCTs and other accomplished teachers to teach in high-needs schools, including retention bonuses, relocation reimbursement, tuition-free advanced degrees at state universities, housing subsidies (mortgage reduction, teacher housing villages, etc.), paid sabbaticals, state income tax credits, state university scholarships for children of recruited and retained teachers, and early retirement incentives.	NC	OH	OK	SC	WA
Award NBCTs who teach in (or move to) high-needs schools a \$5,000 annual budget for the purchase of student resources that can enhance their instructional program.			OK		
Allocate to every high-needs school additional staff and/or funding for every new NBCT hired or “grown” in that school so that administrators and teachers can create new professional development opportunities and spur increases in the number of accomplished teachers.	NC	OH	OK	SC	WA
Create a virtual and face-to-face support network where NBCTs can offer assistance to National Board candidates.		OH	OK	SC	WA
Require all school districts to develop a five-year growth plan for new NBCTs.			OK		
<b>Build awareness among policymakers, practitioners, and the public about the importance of National Board Certification for high-needs schools.</b>					
Hold a local or regional summit for the purpose of sharing the findings of the state summit with the school administrators, policymakers, teachers, and members of the community.	NC				
Expect each state-elected public official and/or lawmaker to spend time learning from and with NBCTs and other accomplished teachers in school settings and at the policy table.	NC		OK		WA

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