

**Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee**  
**“NCLB Reauthorization:**  
**Strategies for Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining High Quality Educators”**  
**March 6, 2007**  
**Testimony of Barbara Maguire**  
**Teacher and Math Instructional Facilitator**  
**Park Elementary School**  
**Casper, Wyoming**

Chairman Kennedy, Senator Enzi, and members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee:

It is truly an honor to share my experience as a teacher at this roundtable addressing Strategies for Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining High Quality Educators. I am a kindergarten teacher and mathematics instructional facilitator—I am living my dream.

Wyoming is in a unique position. Our state government provided funding a year ago to put programs into our schools which were designed to support and retain teachers. First, they funded a substantial pay raise. My district was able to fill 170 teaching positions between May and August of last year, largely due to the increase in pay. Many of those positions were new positions the legislature felt would increase student learning in our schools—instructional facilitators, tutors and mentors. Our district now supports an institute model of staff development, with intense training followed by regular support provided by the instructional facilitators in each school. Teachers are given continual support as new programs are implemented. In addition, instructional facilitators offer direct interventions for teachers who are struggling. Daily support, modeling and feedback from master teachers provide intensive, personal interactions designed for each teacher’s specific needs. Administrators and instructional facilitators work hand in hand to build a “culture of coaching” where all teachers work together to impact learning in their schools. In addition to instructional facilitators, a cadre of experienced mentors works very closely with teachers new to the profession. These mentors meet with groups of new teachers to work through common issues and concerns. The support of mentors and fellow teachers alleviates some of the sense of isolation felt by new teachers struggling to juggle the responsibilities and pressures they face in this time of high stakes testing. Through these programs, we have made strides in improving the conditions teachers face in our schools.

We are fortunate to have great financial support for public schools in Wyoming, but we face unique challenges as well. Our population of 510, 000 people is spread over 97,000 square miles. Many of our teachers work in rural communities, where isolation becomes a frustration. There are fewer colleagues with whom to work and many teachers are asked to teach in subject areas for which they are not well prepared. In addition, traveling to conferences or workshops is often limited because of the great distances involved. We must create our own professional development or bring it in to our communities at great cost.

In addition to the support of our legislature, a private foundation has come to the forefront in supporting professional development in our state. Throughout his adult life, John P “Jack” Ellbogen believed profoundly in the importance of quality education for all Americans. He also believed that quality classroom teaching was key to superior student learning. During the later years of his life he became most concerned over continuing international tests that showed American students were falling behind in learning and comprehension, especially in math and science. Observing this trend, he felt a strong obligation to get involved in the public school education process. His research indicated that the program for National Board Certification of teachers was considered a proven professional development vehicle to improve teaching skills. In March 2004 The John P. Ellbogen Foundation, led by Jack’s daughter Mary Ellbogen Garland, began a statewide initiative for Wyoming National Board Certification. This initiative provides funding for certification application fees, statewide workshops and support for candidates, and recognition and leadership development for National Board Certified Teachers.

To achieve National Board Certification a teacher must complete four portfolio entries, three of which are classroom based with videos and/or student work provided as part of the entry. In addition, the teacher must demonstrate content knowledge in response to six exercises developed for each certificate area. These ten exercises are evaluated based on evidence of accomplished teaching as defined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It is a rigorous process. Independent studies have shown that students of National Board Certified Teachers do better on standardized tests than students of non- National Board Certified Teachers. For example, students of National Board Certified Teachers score 7 to 15 percentage points higher on year-end tests than students of non- National Board Certified Teachers (D. Goldhaber, University of Washington) and students of National Board Certified Teachers showed learning gains equivalent to spending an extra month in school. (L. Vandervoort, Arizona State University) The research also shows that National Board Certified Teachers consistently outperform their peers in knowledge of subject matter, ability to adapt instruction and ability to create challenging and engaging lessons. (L. Bond, University of North Carolina, Greensboro)

Without hesitation I will say that the National Board Certification process is the most powerful professional development I’ve experienced in my 26 years as an educator. I critically examined my teaching, connecting the knowledge of my students’ individual needs to my instruction. I began to reflect on my practice, looking for strategies that were effective and changing those that were not. I became painfully aware that every decision I made had consequences, forcing me to be very deliberate in my decision-making. Most importantly, I learned how to analyze lessons ‘on the fly’ so that I could provide the most effective instruction possible for my students.

Currently I am a member of the Advisory Board of the Wyoming National Board Certification Initiative, as well as its lead workshop facilitator. Since 2004, the initiative has made great strides in promoting National Board Certification in our state. We have 77 National Board Certified Teachers in Wyoming and 197 teachers presently registered

as candidates. The work of the Initiative has created a National Board 'family'. Candidates come together at workshops in the summer or early fall to learn the specifics of the process and begin work on portfolios. A work session in January gives candidates another chance to come together to discuss teaching and learning. Many of Wyoming's NBCTs have worked together as candidate support providers to help those presently in the process. This work in collegial groups has helped to lessen the feeling of isolation so common in Wyoming. We are creating a network of teachers who understand the importance of continuing to challenge ourselves. We are helping good teachers become great teachers.

In addition to providing ongoing professional renewal through the National Board Certification process, the Initiative is dedicated to supporting leadership development for National Board Certified Teachers. For those needing a career advancement track, National Board Certification can open doors and provide opportunities for teachers to take leadership positions while remaining in the classroom. An annual incentive bonus coming from the state may also help retain good teachers, as it is only available to those in full time teaching positions.

Most professional development funded by my school district is based on student needs drawn from scores on state and local assessments. These opportunities are not responsive to the individual needs of students or teachers. The training tends to be impersonal and often ineffective, as teachers fail to see the connection between new learning and their students. National Board Certification addresses both student assessment data and the connection to the students. It comes from a teacher's inner desire to grow personally and professionally, rather than being driven by external demands. It requires teachers to analyze instruction and its effectiveness, and use personal knowledge of students along with assessment data to make decisions for teaching.

As evidenced by the National Board Certification process, the measure of a teacher cannot be made through test scores alone. While local, state and national assessments provide information about how we're doing, they cannot stand on their own. It is important to recognize our children and our teachers as individuals, and work to find ways to meet their unique needs. We know that we can learn new strategies and skills for teaching, but we must also value our teachers as artists, as they nurture the medium that is our youth.