



Third grade teacher Lisa Blazeovich gives an assessment test to a student at Corsini Elementary in Desert Hot Springs; Barry Wissman works with his second grade students.

this evidence. During the summer they will learn whether or not they were successful in their efforts. Teachers with National Board Certification in California earn \$5,000 for a four-year period if they work in low-performing schools.

#### Setting teachers up to succeed

Teachers voted in favor of the plan as a means of fulfilling their professional development requirement. Principal Kiela Bonelli, herself a National Board Certified teacher described as a “mover and shaker” by teachers, vowed to find funding so it wouldn’t cost them an arm and a leg.

Amazingly, she was successful. The cost of the full boards, \$2,500 per teacher, was paid for out of the school’s professional development funds, plus scholarship money she obtained from the California Department of Education. Take One is usually \$395 per person, but was reduced to \$370 with a group discount. Half of this amount was paid for with a grant from the Ford Foundation, and the rest came from site professional development money. In addition to providing nearly 100 percent funding for all, the principal

## Entire teaching staff attempts National Board Certification

**N**obody can accuse the teachers at Julius Corsini Elementary School of not aiming high. For their professional development this year, every single teacher worked toward National Board Certification.

The Title I campus with 900 students is located in Desert Hot Springs, an isolated, low-income community about 15 miles from Palm Springs. Some might say that the remote campus is located in the middle of nowhere. But thanks to the school’s 44 teachers, it is now officially on the map, having the distinction of being the only school in the nation where an entire staff has attempted National Board Certification at once.

The staff has been featured on a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) video that was used for promotional purposes, and was later posted on YouTube ([www.nbpts.org/products\\_and\\_services/take\\_one/take\\_one\\_video](http://www.nbpts.org/products_and_services/take_one/take_one_video)).

Seventeen of the teachers opted to go for their “full boards” this school year, while the rest decided to work on their National Board Certification over a three-year period, starting with “Take One” this year. (Teachers must be in the classroom for three years before they can enroll in the program to earn their full boards.)

Teachers, some of them in their first year of the profession, attempted certification in their individual areas of expertise, ranging from general education to English language development (ELD) to physical education. In accordance with the NBPTS guidelines, every teacher had to submit a video portfolio showing direct evidence of teaching along with essays describing, analyzing and reflecting on



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made sure every teacher had a laptop.

Palm Springs Teachers Association President Bev Bricker also got into the act. She went for her full boards in the category of early childhood education. (Before being elected full-time-release president, Bricker taught at the site.)

### A challenge that paid off

"We decided to do it because a lot of the professional development we've had didn't seem applicable, or else the presenter droned on and on, while tossing paper on the way out," explains second-grade teacher Barry Wissman, who has been in the classroom for four years. "This seemed like a good way to have relevant professional development."

But the process, relates Wissman, was incredibly stressful, especially for those (himself included) attempting full boards.

"I liken it to childbirth," he admits. "Halfway through the process I wondered what I had volunteered for. It was incredibly painful while I was doing it. But now that I'm done, I'm so happy I went through this process. It was a huge personal growth experience for me, even though it was some of the most difficult learning that I've ever done."

"There was a lot of soul-searching," he adds. "Now I'm much more certain of the things I'm doing and why I am doing them. It has made me a better teacher. A lot of the questions we asked ourselves are questions we should have been asking all along."

Lisa Blazeovich, a third-grade teacher and self-professed "lifelong learner," found the full-boards experience to be somewhat overwhelming at first. "When we first decided to do it, I thought it was exciting and awesome. But when that big box arrived it was like, 'Wow, what have I gotten myself into?' And of course, when I was done, I was really glad I had done it."

Going through the process has changed her teaching style to being more "child interactive" and focusing on having her students become independent learners and also a community of learners — much like teachers at the site.

### A team-building experience

"This experience really made us close and brought us together as a staff," says Blazeovich, who observes that teaching behind closed doors can be isolating.

The teachers were divided into professional learning communities for subject and



Teacher James Leon in class with fourth grader Miriam Cuevas.

grade-level collaboration. They also chose to work together on weekends and nights to collaborate, talk about "best practices" and give each other moral support. (For those who needed child care, the principal provided baby-sitting on campus.) They filmed and critiqued each other's videos. They shared crises and temporary setbacks when a computer crashed or a memory stick broke, resulting in lost video footage. Ultimately, they rallied and came together as a team.

Fifth-grade teacher Maribeth Petro, who took Take One of ELD, says she never would have undertaken such a tremendous challenge without strong support and encouragement from her peers and the convenience of having the program brought to her.

"When teachers get my age they have a comfort zone they don't want to go outside of," muses Petro, a teacher for 28 years. "But my goal has always been to stay forward-thinking. I want to be a lifelong learner. I want my students to be lifelong learners. So I'm not going to end with Take One. I'm going to keep going

and keep growing with this."

For her video, she filmed students doing a project in which they took photographs of "angles" they saw in everyday objects around the school site, such as playground equipment, trees or even shadows, and then identified them as right, acute or obtuse angles.

Petro says her favorite part of the process was "reflecting" on her teaching and her students.

"I've never had the opportunity to reflect deeply on those things before. But this program forces you to think about the good aspects of teaching and refreshes in your mind why you went into teaching. It makes you think about implementing curriculum in a way that kids understand. I want to be a student-centered teacher and not a curriculum-centered teacher. And Take One took me there."

Fourth-grade teacher James Leon took Take One in conjunction with being enrolled in a

master's program. He believes the National Board process will benefit his students, the majority of whom are at least two years behind grade level and English learners. In his video, he concentrated on language acquisition skills.

Leon says the process has given him more focus on lesson planning and trying new strategies, or going back to strategies he may have stepped away from during his two years as a teacher.

"I also see my job now as motivating kids,"

To find out more about National Board Certification visit [www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org).

says Leon. "I want them to see the big picture of why it is important for them to do well."

Leon also pushes himself to do well. He may have finished Take One, but he continues to constantly reflect on his craft.

"Because of this, I have had an opportunity to grow personally. Because of this, I can continue to become a better teacher." ❖