



# 40 Teachers Pursue National Board Certification at Georgia Elementary School

At Stonewall Tell Elementary School in College Park, Georgia, 40 certified teachers are actively in the process of pursuing National Board Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. National Board Certification is the highest level of credentialing that a teacher can achieve and is based upon the NBPTS mission of advancing the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. It provides a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, advocating related educational reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education, and capitalizes on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers. In collaboration with Dr. Elletta Denson, a teacher at Stonewall Tell Elementary School, the first African-American National Board Certified Teacher in the State of Georgia, and the 2008 U.S. Department of Education's American Star of Teaching Award Recipient, Shannon Flounnory, Principal of Stonewall Tell Elementary School, was committed to rigorous standards to increase student achievement. This meant that teachers would have to achieve high standards as well.

In the spring of 2007, Mr. Flounnory admired a professional development opportunity after it was presented to him by Dr. Elletta Denson, a long time acquaintance and 4th grade teacher at Stonewall Tell Elementary. It was known as TAKE I and was offered through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The timing could not have been better as for the first time in the history of Stonewall Tell Elementary School, fourteen new teachers were added to the staff in one year to accommodate the rapidly growing student population of 1100 plus students for the following year. This was a great way to ensure that everyone was on the same page instructionally. The understanding between Mr. Flounnory and Dr. Denson was that he would introduce it to the staff and that she would design and implement the process as a "school-wide" comprehensive "job-

embedded" process that would be performance-based. By her design, every staff meeting was transformed into a professional learning experience to include increasing teacher's knowledge of student achievement data disaggregation, culturally proficient instructional practices, varying instructional styles to accommodate student learning styles, and the acceptance of teacher and administrative responsibility for student achievement to name a few. After working with the staff for a few months for the purposes of evaluating the need for change, both Flounnory and Denson then worked on funding for the initiative. TAKE I allowed for teachers to complete one entry for National Board Certification for the purposes of exposing them to the rigorous standards. Additionally, teachers learned the art of backwards design and curriculum alignment to national standards. During the 2007-08 school year, 71 teachers and 3 administrators successfully completed this process with a 0% attrition rate, thus making Stonewall Tell Elementary School the largest cohort in the nation to complete this rigorous process.

Although both Flounnory and Denson were amazed at the school wide transformation in pedagogies and commitment to student learning, they were even more amazed at the number of teachers that wanted

to pursue full National Board Certification on a voluntary basis as a result of their experience through TAKE I. Although securing the funding for TAKE I at \$395 per teacher was not easy, Mr. Flounnory knew that securing the funding for full National Board Certification at \$2500.00 per teacher would be almost impossible. Nonetheless, based upon his observations of how teachers at Stonewall Tell Elementary were transforming, he made it his personal commitment to them to exhaust every avenue in finding a way to make this happen. No where in the country has this ever been attempted at a local school level. Hundreds of letters were written in solicitation of funding. Finally, through various sources, the plan came together. The funding for the teachers



Shannon A. Flounnory, Principal  
Stonewall Tell Elementary School



Dr. Elletta Denson, NBCT  
Candidate Support Provider  
Stonewall Tell Elementary School

was secured in its entirety again making Stonewall Tell Elementary School the largest cohort ever to pursue full National Board Certification.

According to Flounnory, "This is a very small investment for our community considering that our community's teachers will be among the most highly skilled anywhere." The five core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are 1) Teachers are committed to students and their learning 2) Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students 3) Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning 4) Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience and 5) Teachers are members of professional learning communities. These propositions are consistent with the beliefs of Stonewall Tell Elementary School and represent the school's belief that student achievement rests primarily with the teachers that teach the students. Flounnory goes on to say, "High levels of parental involvement would be an outstanding asset, but if we don't get it, then we still have a responsibility to the students in which we serve."

Again, Dr. Denson was called upon to develop and implement a "job-embedded" professional learning plan for the staff as a mechanism for not only providing candidate support for National Board Candidates, but for the purposes of "enhancing and building" upon the knowledge gained by the entire staff during the previous year. One example of the transformation that has occurred is that instead of having discussions of some students not achieving standards, discussions now are of why this is so and what Stonewall Tell educators should be doing to address the deficits. The level of the professional learning plan and the creation of the teacher resource room by Dr. Denson created a unique environment in which teachers would not have to leave the building for candidate support. Along with Heavenly Montgomery (NBPTS advanced candidate), Lisa Sinon (NBCT/Candidate Support Provider), and Mary Bolar (Asst. Principal/ Candidate Support Provider), Dr. Denson and Mr. Flounnory established the role of teachers at Stonewall Tell as leaders, learners and collaborators. Under this design, the level of professional learning for teachers at Stonewall Tell Elementary School is commensurate with the degree of professional learning that may

have been designed by school districts across the country that have specific departments devoted to National Board Candidate Support.

On March 30, 2009, 40 candidates submitted initial portfolios to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards for evaluations. The evaluations will include a total of ten entries, six of which will be assessments that they must take over the summer. The others include a video of a classroom lesson as well as other written forms of performance based assessments. Through these processes, the culture of the school has been transformed into one that reinforces the notion that student academic achievement still remains the primary focus of public education.



Mary L. Bolar, Asst. Principal  
Candidate Support Provider  
Stonewall Tell Elementary School



Lisa Sinon, NBCT  
Candidate Support Provider  
Stonewall Tell Elementary School

#### National Board Candidates

- Danielle Arnold
- Carolyn Johnson
- Heather Woods
- LeMetra Campbell
- Denise Muller
- Amber French
- Martha Arrington
- Carvil Phillips
- Barbara Dennard
- Marquila Mack
- Laura Jones
- Amanda Parks
- Charla Fields
- Patricia Gray
- Kisha Walker
- Tonya Moore
- Angela Williams
- Deborah Blackley
- Karriteshia Hooks
- Elese Wilcox
- LaShawna McCoy
- Nikki Rakestraw
- Sigrunn Underwood
- Terrica Sloan
- Mary Winston
- Carol Chester
- Ryan Lisbon
- Margaret Dean
- Clatrina Lane
- Tiffany Camp
- Juliette Lawrence
- Chadwick Dow
- Yvonne Lane
- Tatiana Dillahunt
- Alarie Williams
- Leisha Fordham
- Gina Brewer
- Ronda Jones
- Suzette Hinds
- Heavenly Montgomery

