

**TESTIMONY OF CHRIS DOWNEY
NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHER**

**House Education Committee
House Bill 1045**

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

Good morning, Chairman Roebuck, honorable members of the House Education Committee, staff, and guests. My name is Craig Downey, and I am honored to speak with you this morning. I have been teaching for 16 years. I have earned a Masters degree in 2000 and became Board Certified in 2006. I am one of two Board Certified teachers in my district. After completing the process in 2006, I began to work as a mentor for other candidates in 2007. I support these candidates through the Center of Excellence at East Stroudsburg University. I believe in the value of the process as well as the certification.

I began my journey toward National Board Certification when my friends at East Stroudsburg University prompted me to become a candidate. I knew very little about the process, but my love of learning and curiosity got the best of me. My cohort included a third grade teacher, a guidance counselor and a career and technical education teacher. We discovered, together, that the process was rigorous. We worked to understand the process, grasp the National Teaching Standards, and complete the four entries over a year and a half period. The rigor was intense. We communicated constantly, not only during the class period, but through e-mail and phone conversation. I read the process takes 200-400 hours. I believe that is accurate.

The time was worthwhile. Each hour was spent advancing my craft as a teacher, studying my students, and developing strategies to advance learning in my classroom and school. I studied hours of video footage of my teaching. I shared that footage with my cohort, and later with my school. Watching myself helped me to dissect my actions in the classroom and reflect upon my decisions. I planned lessons based on the National Teaching Standards; standards that have become second nature after the process. Above all, I reflected upon my craft, my teaching, and my students. This reflection has helped me to become a better teacher. I know my students have benefited, as I have studied my progress as a teacher through their achievement.

The rigor of this program is designed, I believe, to leave a lasting impression on each candidate. Two out of the four candidates were successful in my cohort, but all four were positive about the impact on our teaching and the achievement of our students. I will never forget the nervous discussion we had the night we had our portfolio packing party. Each of us discussed how the process had a profound impact on our teaching, whether we were certified or not.

Becoming a Nationally Board Certified Teacher has profoundly changed the way I teach. I try to make an impact on every student in my classroom and in my school. I

began looking at the scores of our school achievement tests. I noticed that my school (2/3 economically impoverished, 65% Latino and nearly 15% special needs) was having difficulty in reading comprehension. I devised a plan with my partners at Lincoln Elementary utilizing the expertise from our friends at East Stroudsburg University. The model was designed based upon National Board propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subject areas they teach and know 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.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

We regrouped the students; planned instruction based upon student needs and charted their achievement. Our model for student success has now spread throughout the school, the district, and we have even presented at a national conference.

I feel strongly about the National Board Certification process and how it positively affects student learning. I began mentoring NBCT candidates a year ago. I stress the five propositions. I have seen growth in teachers, and I have noticed their dedication enriched.

National Board Certified teachers are validated in the practices, and become refocused on what matters in a classroom. We can make a difference in the state of Pennsylvania. Research is clear that NBCTs have a measurable impact on student learning, an impact that can spread through a school and a district. Teachers are dedicated to students and their learning, but they need a model and support to think systematically about their practice, time to reflect on teaching and a guide to rededicate themselves to their practice. The National Board Certification process can provide a roadmap for teachers to help students become more successful.