

**TESTIMONY FOR HELEN E. MARTIN  
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**House Education Committee  
House Bill 794**

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

Good morning, Chairman Roebuck, honorable members of the House Education Committee, staff, and guests. I am Helen Elizabeth Martin, National Board Certified Teacher, Founding Director of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and a candidate support provider for Temple University. For 32 years I taught science and mathematics at Unionville High School in Kennett Square, Chester County.

Today I would like to share with you a bit of the history of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and my involvement with it, the goal and the function of the board and how National Board Certification has affected the learning and achievement of my students and the students of the teachers which I am mentoring.

In 1981 through God's providence at the first launch of the Space Shuttle Columbia, I met Dr. Lewis Branscomb who was then Vice President and Chief Scientist of IBM and Chairman of the National Science Board. While we waited for the launch to take place, we discussed education. During the next five years, we carried on an occasional correspondence discussing education related issues. In late April of 1986, I received a large packet in the mail. When I opened it, I saw that it was a blue book entitled *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The packet also contained a note from Lew telling me that he had just chaired a Task Force whose job it was to respond to the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. In his note, Lew asked me to look over the document and comment. As I began to read the report, I became very excited with the vision for a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The report urged that teaching be made a true profession and suggested that teachers develop high and rigorous standards, assess their own and certify teachers who meet those standards. Before I had an opportunity to write a note to Lew to thank him for the report of the Task Force and share my comments with him, I received a call from the Carnegie Corporation asking me to be a Member of the Planning Group for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The first meeting of the Planning Group for the board was in October of 1986 in Washington D.C. I will never forget that first meeting. There were 34 individuals around a very large square table. Those around the table represented a complete cross-section of those most interested in education. The group included Republican Governor Tom Kean of New Jersey and Democrat Governor James Hunt of North Carolina chaired the meeting. Included in the group were the Presidents of the School Boards Association

and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Al Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers was there as was Mary Hatwood Futrell, then president of the National Education Association. At that first meeting, my assigned seat was between Al Shanker and Mary Futrell. I was not sure what would happen when both learned that I had resigned my union membership about ten years earlier! Dr. Lewis Branscomb was also at the table. In the spring of 1987, the Planning Group evolved into the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and I was honored to be a Founding Director and served in that capacity for the next seven years.

Our task was to bring into being this National Board. We invited experts to share with us the history and organization of certifying boards of architects and physicians. I was amazed to learn that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a heated discussion, which took place as to whether medicine was an art or a science. The question was asked, “Did a doctor really need to know anything to be a good doctor?” Of course, today we laugh at such a question. None of us, when facing a serious health issue, would consider consulting with a physician who was not board certified.

As we worked through the process we gradually realized our commission: To establish and maintain high and rigorous standards for teachers and certify teachers who meet such standards for the ultimate goal of improving student learning. We realized that only with highly skilled teachers could student learning be improved. It is through the capable and qualified teacher that the learning meets the student.

We began the process by developing qualifications of a highly skilled teacher and called these our Five Core Propositions. These 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.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

From these propositions, we then developed standards. We realized very early that the certification had to be based upon the developmental level of the students and also the subject matter taught. For example, a highly skilled elementary teacher may not be a highly skilled teacher of high school mathematics. The highly skilled high school English teacher may not be able to adequately teach a kindergartener or a first grader how to read. It also had to be a voluntary process in which teachers themselves sought excellence for the end goal of improving student learning.

I am honored that I was a part of the process from the beginning. You may recall that I said that when we started the process of establishing the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, we examined how the medical profession had done that very same thing and enabled the practice of medicine to become a true profession. I was delighted to learn at the 20th anniversary of the NBPTS in 2007 that the medical profession is now

examining the manner in which we teachers assess our own in hopes of improving their own certification!

After I fulfilled my term on the Board, I waited for five years and then pursued my National Board Certification. When I received my certification in 2000, I became the first member of that original Planning Group for the NBPTS to become a National Board Certified Teacher.

My students benefited from my involvement on the board and my pursuit of National Board Certification. As I worked on the national certification process and then ultimately my own certification, I began to reflect upon my practice in a much more structured manner than I had ever done before. I began to consider if I was reaching EVERY student and if I was selecting the BEST method possible to assist each student in learning. I also was forced to face academic deficiencies in my own background. I had begun my studies to teach as a mathematics major and had taught math for many years. My master's degree was in physical science and I had completed the equivalent of majors in chemistry and biology and in addition studied physics, astronomy, some geology, oceanography and philosophy of science. I was fascinated by meteorology and was self-taught in that area. As you can see, I had a very strong and broad background in science and mathematics. However, I had never had a course in historical geology and had no real interest in the subject. Nor did I have a strong working knowledge of the geological features on the west coast of the United States, even though I could have discussed the processes that probably formed them in great detail. National Board Certification forced me to do a very thorough self-examination and address these deficiencies in my own background.

Sadly, the year I earned my National Board Certification I required serious surgery and my surgeon directed me not to return to full-time classroom teaching. Since I retired, I have mentored teachers while they have gone through the certification process and worked to educate those in the southeastern part of the state about the value of National Board Certification. For the last 2 years I have been a candidate support provider for Temple, mentoring a number of teachers. Experienced teachers mentoring less experienced teachers is a leadership role for teachers envisioned from the very inception of the board. My 32 years of experience as a full-time classroom teacher and my professional achievement as a National Board Certified Teacher give me particular credibility when I work with teachers who are trying to improve their skills. I have been where they are now and have had to seek solutions to issues with which they are struggling. As I reviewed classroom videos of teachers for certification last week, one teacher noted, "I never called on any of the girls!" Another observed, "I never included the three students sitting on my right side!" A third teacher said, "I will need to do some serious study in paleontology as I prepare for my Assessment Center Activities for certification.

Currently in the adolescent/young adult science certificate, teachers are required to complete four portfolio entries which include teaching a major idea over time and analyzing student work, preparing video evidence of leading active scientific inquiry,

preparing video evidence of leading a whole class discussion to help students to understand a scientific concept and documenting accomplishments which contribute to student learning by illustrating their partnerships with students' families and community, and their own development as a learner and collaborator with other professionals. They then must go to a professional assessment center and demonstrate proficiency in content knowledge. The entire process takes around 400 hours to complete. It is to be considered a three-year process as each entry is scored separately and teachers who do not make an acceptable total score the first year may retake individual entries, which score below a stated level. The purpose of the board is not to weed the garden but to cultivate the crop of teachers and enable and encourage each teacher to perform at his or her highest level for the goal of improving student learning.

I am now preparing to renew my own certification as I believe in the process and I want to continue to mentor teachers as they work through the process. Why would one who is retired want to put herself through this again? Because I care about students and learning and I want to do all in my power to help and encourage teachers so that our students in Pennsylvania will be the best in the nation and the world. I firmly believe that teachers who are board certified increase student learning and increased student learning is what all of us want.

We want and need the best and the brightest teachers to help all of our students to learn. Research has shown that National Board Certification is a most effective way to improve student learning. For that reason, Pennsylvania should do all within its power to encourage teachers to volunteer to become National Board Certified Teachers. For this reason and to this end, I urge you to support the passage of House Bill 794. I believe that this legislation will help us to achieve the goal of improving our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.