

NATIONAL BOARD

for Professional Teaching Standards®

Luke Correia-Damude

Welcome back everyone to national board conversations. We are on episode three of this amazing podcast. Thanks for joining us again. Today's guest is Heather Mullins. She is a National Board certified teacher in North Carolina. What makes Heather a great guest? And what makes this episode extra beneficial for candidates and prospective candidates is that Heather is a chief academic officer for her district. So she's able to offer so much insight and she gives some incredible tips for candidates and prospective candidates. It's a really good episode for people that are looking just for bullet points of how they can make this journey smoother, what they can do to access more resources. I can't wait to share this episode with you. So without further ado, let's get right into it with Heather.

Heather Mullins

Hi, my name is Heather Mullins. I am a National Board certified teacher, in 2002. I've been in education for 25 years. I currently serve as the chief academic officer in Newton Conover city schools, which is in the Western part of North Carolina. And I have one son who's a senior in high school this year.

Luke Correia-Damude

Well, I'm sure your son's going to have some distinct stories to tell about his final year of high school with all this COVID pandemic stuff going on, but why don't we go back to not far after you were in high school, talk about how you became a teacher, what motivated you to become a teacher and then what also motivated you to do the National Board certification?

Heather Mullins

So I guess education's kind of been in my family blood for many generations. My great grandfather who was born in the 18 hundreds was a teacher. He taught in a one-room school house, like you'd see on little house on the Prairie. He always talked about the value of education. My mom was an educator, she was a third grade teacher. My dad was an educator. He was a high school, exceptional children's teacher. I had the good fortune as a child of going to a K-8 school with my mom for eight years. When I graduated from there I got the joy of going to school with my dad for four years. So, as a student, I spent 13 years with one of my parents in the school. I really never thought about doing anything else, to be honest with you.

Heather Mullins

I started thinking about being a teacher from a very young age and when I was in high school, I got a scholarship called the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Scholarship. It's a full scholarship for 400 high school seniors each year who choose to go into education as a profession. The stipulation is that you teach in North Carolina for four years and you have a zero balance at the end of that, those four years. I realized quickly that there was a lot to learn about being a great educator. And I was surrounded by fantastic teachers and fantastic administrators and I wanted to get better. So after seven years in the classroom, I decided to pursue my board certification. Really I wanted to grow as a teacher and I knew that I was getting to that point in my career where I've been teaching the same thing for several years. It started feeling very much like I've got this. And I think when you start feeling that sense of comfort, that's when you know, you've got to up your game. And so that's how I got to the point where I went for my National Board.

Luke Correia-Damude

That's great. So education is kind of a family business for you. Are your parents certified teachers or were they aware of the certification before you got it?

Heather Mullins

They had heard of it because at the time I pursued it, they were still teaching but neither of them had ever thought about trying to get their boards. So when I got it, they were thrilled because they knew what a difference that would make. In North Carolina board certified teachers get a 12% salary increase on top of their state salary. So it was not only quite the achievement and honor, but it was going to make a financial difference for my family as well.

Luke Correia-Damude

What is such an amazing part of getting this certification is it can really be a leg up for a lot of teachers. You've moved into a more administrative role, a guidance role. Tell me about how you transitioned and why you decided to transition.

Heather Mullins

It's an interesting story, actually. So I was a teacher in Hickory, North Carolina, and my principal at the time came to me and I had been doing some professional development for our staff and she said, I really would hate to lose you as a classroom teacher, but I think you could make a real difference in helping our teachers improve. If, if you're interested and honest to goodness, Luke, I'll tell you, I never ever aspired to do anything other than teach high school English. I honestly believed I would teach high school English for 30 plus years and retire, but I thought, what the, Hey, I'll throw my hat in the ring for this position, see what it's about... and I got it. The rest is sort of history so way leads onto way as you know, and that position led to another position to another position, to another degree, to another degree and now I'm the chief academic officer in a school district,

Luke Correia-Damude

Did the tools and teachings that you learned in your certification journey, inform your decisions to move up the ranks into administration within your educational career.

Heather Mullins

Oh, I would absolutely say without a doubt, first of all, going through the National Board process truly makes you a reflective practitioner. It really helps you kind of go back even after a long day and kind of reflect on why did I make this decision? What impact did it make? So I think that that process of going through writing my boards, definitely had an impact on every decision I made in every career move that I made. Moreover, going through the process and achieving the certification comes with a lot of prestige, especially in North Carolina. I can speak from the administrative lens that when we see national board certification on someone's application, we definitely put them toward the top of the pile. We definitely look at that as being a prestigious honor because we know the work that goes into that. But moreover, I think it really gave me the confidence of always knowing I was a good teacher and really feeling like that. Now I had something that said, you know, you really are among the best in the nation because you've achieved this. It was a great feeling of satisfaction and again, of confidence.

Luke Correia-Damude

Now I ask all the teachers on the podcast about an "aha moment". Was there a, a moment or a teaching, something that you found during your national board certification that really opened your mind and change your perspective on something?

Heather Mullins

The idea of always having that growth mindset and to realize in education, when you're starting to get comfortable, you're probably kind of got your blinders on and you're not really growing. So if you feel too comfortable, you're not growing because the magic happens right when you're in that area of discomfort, I think going through the national board certification process, it forces you to put yourself out there. You have to give your entries to people to read and to give you honest, critical, constructive feedback. You have to be able to take that and be able to look at yourself and go, you know, I've got room for growth or yeah, I could have done that better. I think having that mindset where no matter what field you're in or what level of education you have, or whether you're a teacher or a superintendent, that mindset really helps us to all be more effective.

Luke Correia-Damude

So in your current position, in the district, you actually have input into the hiring of teachers and administrators?

Heather Mullins

Yeah. So in my role, I am over all curriculum and instruction in the district K-12, but we are a small district. So we also have a hand in kind of helping vet some potential candidates or folks who turn in their resumes. So we definitely look at the national board designation as something that helps candidates stand apart when they submit their resumes.

Luke Correia-Damude

Right. You knew exactly where I was going with that. So tell me what about seeing that NBCT at the end of their name perks your interest when you're looking for candidates?

Heather Mullins

Well, having gone through the process myself, I understand that going for national boards, just signing your name on the line and saying, "I'm going to try to do this," demonstrates that somebody wants to grow professionally. My director of technology and accountability has her boards, my instructional technology facilitator has her boards. We have principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches in this district that have their boards. So I think that these folks all have this kind of reverence for the National Board. We've all gone through this process of reflection and demonstrating mastery of our craft. So we really respect that. Whether I've ever met you or not, if I know you're board certified, I'm already going to have some preconceived notions as to the kind of educator that you are,

Luke Correia-Damude

In North Carolina, particularly, there is a lot of opportunity. There is a lot of incentive. There is a lot of programs to help people achieve this. Can you tell me what the state is offering for candidates?

Heather Mullins

North Carolina still does pay a 12% salary increase for any teacher who receives his or their National Board Certification, as long as they are still remain in a teaching role, you can get a national board loan. We have lots of universities in North Carolina that offer free National Board support. Appalachian State University offers free national board support to candidates. Appalachian state is the university in the nation that is number one in National Board certified teachers who are graduates from that university regionally. We do have what's called Regional Educational Service Alliances or RESA. I know that many States in the United States have RESAs and I know they offer lots of professional support with National Board certification as well.

Luke Correia-Damude

We talked about maybe doing some tips for success from Heather. Were you able to jot down a couple of those?

Heather Mullins

I have, yes. We have talked a little bit about these already, some of them, but not all of them. So let me give them to you. Okay.

Luke Correia-Damude

Okay. I'm ready. Hit me with them.

Heather Mullins

I think the first tip would be, have a growth mindset, be excited about constructive feedback. This whole process is about your growth because your growth is going to impact what your students get in your classroom.

Heather Mullins

Number two, I would say, build a timeline early and stick to it and understand that each step is going to take you longer than you think. So plan for that, plan for those revisions.

Heather Mullins

And that's number three, build revision time into your timeline. When I supported national board certified teachers and those seeking their national board certification years ago, when I first left the classroom, that was the biggest mistake that folks made was they didn't build that revision time into their timeline.

Heather Mullins

So number four would be, get readers, get lots of readers. You want content readers that are in your content area that are content specialists. You want educators outside of your content for pedagogy and for structures about how you instruct students and how you facilitate instruction and the quality of your assignments that you give. Get noneducators to read for you. That helps with readability. They can tell you and pinpoint things in your writing that can help you be more succinct or help you clarify. So make sure also that you tell your readers exactly what they're reading for. Like, Luke, I want you to read for content, John, I want you to read for readability. So that way folks know exactly what they're looking for.

Heather Mullins

I guess my number five, one would be probably the most important and it would be don't go it alone. Find a support system, you know, work with a colleague, talk a colleague into going through the process with you. I think one of the most powerful parts of my experience was that my next door colleague who also taught English, we agreed we would do this together. Being able to chew over some of the language, what do they want from this? or what do you think? Being able to share, you know, I'm thinking about writing about this, I'm thinking about videoing this. That was so very powerful. So finding your people. I also had a chance to work with a couple of different consortium groups when I was writing and to get feedback from other folks, going through the process, as well as those who had completed the journey. I think those are the five things that led to my success, that rejuvenated me and filled me with energy. I would tell anybody going through their boards, if they do those five things, they have a high probability of being successful.

Luke Correia-Damude

Where can candidates and prospective candidates go to find resources and tools that can help them along their journey?

Heather Mullins

The thing I would do is I would really encourage anyone who is seeking their National Board certification to get on the National Board website. They have got so many resources, videos, support documents that you can review that are just outstanding resources. I would really also encourage folks to look at their districts and see what their districts offer in terms of support, because most districts do value National Board certification and do offer support in many different ways.

Luke Correia-Damude

Before we sign off. I thought maybe you could just give a little word of advice or some encouragement to all these candidates listening that are on their journey or all these prospective candidates that are listening and planning to start their journey.

Heather Mullins

To you listeners out there who have already achieved your national board certification or who are attempting national board certification. You have my utmost respect. The fact that you've taken on this challenge speaks volumes about you as a learner, as a teacher and as a leader in education. So I would say, keep your chin up one step at a time, write that next page, make that next edit, get that next video completed. Just look at this as what can I mark off the list and slowly but surely you will get there. It is an outstanding feeling to be National Board certified and I look forward to welcoming each of you into the fold.

Luke Correia-Damude

Heather Mullins, everyone. What an amazing episode, what a wealth of knowledge she is. So many tools, tips and pieces of advice that she's given you. So thanks for being part of this national board conversation on Heather. As Heather said, check out the website for more information on national board certification. That's www.nbpts.org. This is Luke Correia-Damude signing off for now. Talk to you soon, everyone.