

SERVE THE WORK



Becoming a Professional Learning Facilitator



NATIONAL BOARD
for Professional Teaching Standards®

Ben Lathrop, NBCT

INTRODUCTION

I'm an NBCT... Now What?

SINCE YOU'RE READING THIS, CHANCES ARE THAT YOU HAVE achieved National Board Certification. Whether you certified yesterday or 20 years ago, whether you took one year or five, whether you made one attempt or several--congratulations! You are an accomplished teacher. And you may be wondering, now what? How can I ensure that others have the opportunity to share this phenomenal experience?

Before we explore one answer to this question, it might be helpful to define a couple of terms. The first is "impostor syndrome." When I heard this term described at an advocacy training at the [National Board Headquarters](#) in Arlington, Va., I thought to myself: "There's a name for that?" The American Psychological Association defines [impostor syndrome](#) as "a pervasive feeling of self-doubt, insecurity and incompetence despite evidence that you are skilled and successful." I have struggled with such doubts and fears all my life, and apparently I am not alone.

The second is the "[halo effect](#)." This term came up at a training for Professional Learning Facilitators (PLFs) that I participated in a little less than a year after I certified. The trainer, [Linda Bauld](#), applied it in a way I hadn't considered--to describe what can happen when an NBCT is seen by candidates as a kind of model. "Since she achieved Certification," a candidate's thinking might go, "I am going to do everything just like she did." The problem with that sort of thinking, of course, is that it can detract from the kind of struggle and deep reflection that makes Board Certification such a valuable process for building confident, accomplished teaching.

Serve the work

You have endured that struggle and engaged in that reflection, and you have been deemed "accomplished." If you're like me, you had multiple motivations for pursuing Certification. Of course you wanted to become a better teacher for your students. Maybe your district or state offered a stipend. Perhaps you felt, at times, like an impostor and needed to prove to yourself that you're not a fraud. Maybe you wanted the respect of your colleagues--the benign side of the "halo effect." All of these considerations, and more, fueled my own pursuit of Certification. But as I prepared my final portfolio submissions, in my fifteenth year as a teacher, I realized that the process intersected with a goal I had set for myself at a silent retreat the previous summer, when I reflected on my vocation.

In my journal, I had written: “Serve the work.” I knew that it was time for me to expand beyond the walls of my classroom and school and do something for my profession, and I somehow knew that National Board Certification would give me an avenue for doing that.

“BECAUSE OF YOUR WORK, SOMEONE WILL BECOME A TEACHER, AND GO ON TO INSPIRE OTHERS. BUT WHAT IF YOU’RE CALLED TO EVEN MORE?”

Perhaps you have had a similar thought. You are already making a huge difference in the lives of your students. They are [reaping the benefits](#) of your hard work. Now what? Will your impact be limited to the students in your classroom? Certainly that would be enough. Because of your work, someone loves reading. Because of your work, someone will be the first in her family to go to college. Because of your work, someone will be inspired to be a teacher and go on to inspire others. But what if you’re called to even more? As an NBCT, you have a special opportunity to make our profession better.

How might you do this? There are several paths you could take. You could become an [advocate for National Board Certification](#) at the local, state, and/or national level, promoting policies that make it more feasible for more teachers to pursue Board Certification. You could work on engaging other NBCTs in your area, building or strengthening a [state network of accomplished teachers](#). You could consider [becoming an assessor](#) for the National Board. Or ... you could become a mentor or [professional learning facilitator](#),¹ helping guide others through the Certification process.

About this handbook

In my own enthusiasm about that process, I dove headfirst into the work of recruiting and supporting candidates about six months before I even

learned I had certified. I have no regrets about that; it has been immensely rewarding. Nevertheless, if you are considering serving the work in this way, I would like to say two things to you that I wish someone had said to me before I started. First, you’re not an impostor. No one is ever going to discover you’re a fraud, because you’re not: you are an accomplished teacher. You didn’t trick the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards into giving you a certificate, and you don’t have to prove anything to anyone else.

But second, you’re not an angel. You’re accomplished, not perfect, and you don’t have to wear a halo or live up to that impossible standard. You may find that other teachers have a newfound admiration for you. Enjoy that, but don’t promote it. Board Certification is difficult to achieve, but it’s not meant for only an elite few: with the right combination of hard work, time management, organization, and appropriate support, most committed teachers should be able to achieve it.

This little handbook came about because of all the things I wish someone had told me before I stumbled into the role of “Professional Learning Facilitator,” a role that at the time I didn’t even know existed or had a name. I had gone through the Certification process mostly alone; I had an informal mentor but no support network--I didn’t even join a Facebook group. When I presented about Board Certification at our April staff meeting, just before submitting my final two components, I was so thrilled that eleven teachers at my school wanted to pursue Certification that it didn’t occur to me until well into the following school year that perhaps there might be some best practices for supporting them. There is a lot of information out there about these best practices, and many people providing excellent training for PLFs (some of whom I have since had the pleasure of meeting); at the time, I just didn’t know where to look. This handbook is not meant to replace any of those resources, but rather to provide a starting point--a doorway, if you will, into a hall with many other doors, behind which are treasure troves of knowledge and experience.

“BOARD CERTIFICATION IS DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE, BUT IT’S NOT MEANT FOR ONLY AN ELITE FEW: WITH THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF HARD WORK, TIME MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATION, AND APPROPRIATE SUPPORT, MOST COMMITTED TEACHERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE IT.”

¹ For the purposes of this handbook, a National Board “mentor” is an NBCT who works with one or more specific individuals, either remotely or in person, to provide guidance and support throughout the certification process, while a National Board “Professional Learning Facilitator” (PLF) is someone who works with a small group of candidates, usually with some regularity and with varying degrees of formality and structure. While “PLF” is used most frequently throughout this handbook, almost all of the practices and guidelines discussed here also apply to those in “mentoring” roles.

In this small book, you'll find the advice of NBCTs in just about every subject area, from all over the country, with years of experience as mentors and PLFs. You'll also find links to dozens of resources and materials, some designed to train PLFs and others designed to share with candidates.

Chapter 1 makes the case for why you should become a mentor or PLF; you'll hear from seasoned PLFs about the many benefits they have experienced. Chapter 2 discusses potential pitfalls for PLFs and offers sound advice about the major aspects of the work. Chapter 3 highlights some of the most respected and valuable resources available to NBCTs who want to engage in this work, and an appendix provides links to those resources and many more, organized by topic.

I hope that as a result of reading this, you'll avoid the mistakes I made, learn about the many resources available to you, be inspired to get trained, and ultimately make a difference not only in the lives of your students but also in the lives of your colleagues, and for our profession as a whole.

Ben Lathrop, NBCT - AYA/English Language Arts, 2018
National Board Fellow, 2019-2020

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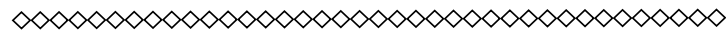
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CHAPTER ONE



‘WALK THE WALK’

Why You Should Be a Professional Learning Facilitator

ENRIQUE AND JOHN BOTH TAUGHT IN THE SAME HIGH school building. Both were National Board Certified Teachers--although John never got around to renewing his initial Certification. As the years went by, although he stayed in the field, John gradually lost interest in teaching. Once considered by his students and colleagues to be among the best teachers they knew, by the end of his career, it was pretty clear to everyone around him that he was just punching the clock. Years of dealing with difficult students and even more difficult adults had left him cynical and disillusioned.

Enrique, on the other hand, grew better and better at teaching as the years went by. Although he had his own struggles with students, administrators, and other teachers, Enrique continued pouring his energy into his classes and his learning community. He also invested in colleagues, mentoring both pre-service teachers and new hires. Moreover, he urged his colleagues to pursue National Board Certification and offered support to those who did. Now in his twenty-fourth year of teaching, Enrique's students and colleagues still consider him to be one of the best teachers they know.

How did these two teachers--both NBCTs, remember--end up on such different paths? There are probably numerous reasons, but undoubtedly Enrique's decision to take his own professional learning and invest in his colleagues played a significant role. The more we share our learning, the less likely we are to become stagnant like the Dead Sea, always taking in water with no outlet to keep it fresh.

Understanding the process

One of the best ways, then, for an NBCT to avoid stagnation and complacency--and to gain a better understanding of National Board Certification--is to become a Professional Learning Facilitator (PLF). Susan, an NBCT who works as an instructional coach in Maine, began serving as a PLF just a few years ago. Although she certified in 2015, her work as a PLF has given her new insight into the process. “I feel like I really understand the National Board process now,” Susan says. “I wish I had known all this when I went through the process!” Susan's experience is not

unique. To gather information for this handbook, PLFs across the country were surveyed in the fall of 2019. Nearly a third of those who responded to the survey expressed the same thought. Ernie, a PLF in Nevada, says she “gained a deeper understanding of how the 5 Core Propositions, the National Board Standards, and the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching support candidates through their connections.” Princess, a music teacher, says this work has “kept the NB standards fresh in my mind. When it was time for me to renew, I felt prepared writing-wise because I’ve never really stopped reading standards and looking at other candidates’ work.”

“BEING A PLF MAKES US WALK THE WALK AND TALK THE TALK! I REFLECT AND GROW EVERY-DAY BECAUSE OF THIS PROCESS AND WORKING WITH CANDIDATES.”

Improving your practice

But most of these same PLFs, as well as others, were even more enthusiastic about what becoming a PLF did for their own teaching practice. Susan, for instance, adds that “the most important gains have been in the classroom. Being a PLF makes us ‘talk the talk and walk the walk!’ I reflect and grow every day because of this process and working with candidates.”

This captures what is perhaps the most significant benefit of becoming a PLF: Like the initial process of becoming an NBCT, working with candidates forces you to continue reflecting and growing. You can’t rest on your laurels, can’t become complacent, can’t stagnate. You have to walk the walk. Rana, an English teacher in Nevada, says the candidates she works with “inspire me to continue what I began and they continue to keep me thinking of different and creative ways to engage, provoke, and provide for my own students.”

Indeed, more than a third of survey respondents indicated that they had gained a better understanding of their own teaching practice or even strategies and ideas for teaching from their work with candidates. Rachel, a Nevada teacher who has worked with more than 30 candidates over the last few years, says it has given her “a better understanding of my own practice” and “an appreciation of the variety of teaching.” Similarly, Kimberly, a math teacher in Mississippi, says working with NBCT candidates has provided a “new way of looking at my own teaching.” And according

to Erik, an English teacher in Minnesota, PLF work has made him “a better teacher and a better person.”



Intangible benefits

Rana agrees. Working with candidates, she says, has made her better too, giving her “confidence, community, compassion, courage, continuance, conviction, and contentment.” Many PLFs say they receive such intangible benefits from the work. Jennifer, a middle-childhood generalist in North Carolina, describes a sense of “satisfaction from knowing I helped a colleague.” Jessica, a Nevada English instructor, is one of several teachers who say they appreciate the relationships and sense of community they have gained, the “friendship and strength for [what would be] a very frustrating career if you’re around the wrong kind of people.”

Others describe the sense of joy and satisfaction they receive from helping their colleagues. According to Linda, a consultant in St. Louis, “Working with National Board candidates is extremely rewarding and satisfying.” Alayna, a reading intervention teacher in Texas, echoes that sentiment when she describes “the joy of helping others gain a stronger sense of job performance and self reflection.”

Perhaps most profoundly, some teachers say this work has given them hope. “I think the main thing I’ve gained is a sense of hopefulness,” says Cheryl, an instructional coach in Oklahoma. “The quality of teachers I work with gives me hope for the future of education.”

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I myself have found this to be true. The candidates I have worked with, as well as many of the other teachers I have met as a result of becoming an NBCT and Professional Learning Facilitator, continually inspire me with their passion, curiosity, and creativity. Pursuing Board Certification kept me in the profession and made me a better teacher, but supporting candidates has motivated me to stay at the top of my game.

So why should you consider becoming a PLF? We have discussed three major benefits: (1) You’ll come to understand the Certification process from the inside out. This will (2) lead you to continue to reflect on your own practice and grow as a teacher, especially as you interact with other reflective teachers who are pursuing excellence in their profession. The community you build with those teachers will likely (3) provide an ongoing source of satisfaction and hope in the midst of an often difficult profession.

Are you ready to get started? Then read on. In the next chapter we will hear from seasoned PLFs about what works, what doesn’t, and what to avoid at all costs.

CHAPTER TWO



‘IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU’ What to Embrace, What to Avoid

AS A NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHER, YOU ARE probably seen by many, whether you know it yet or not, as an expert--an expert teacher, to be sure, but also an expert on the Certification process. Being seen as an expert is highly gratifying. It feels good when your peers come to you with questions and you can answer them based on your experience, knowledge, and expertise. It's especially nice to be thanked, and that is particularly true for teachers, who rarely get the gratitude we deserve. And when you have become part of someone's success story--when, for instance, an NBCT candidate you have been working with certifies--you feel like you deserve a pat on the back.

But if you want to be a successful PLF, you'll have to set aside that "expert" mantle, as nice as it may feel to wear it. Why? Because in the words of Claudia, adjunct college instructor in Oklahoma, this work is "not about you. It's about how best to support candidates." And being a guru is decidedly not the best way to support them.

Accomplished teachers know that children learn best when they are actively involved in the learning and prodded to think rather than simply listening to the "sage on the stage." Adult learners are no different. As retired Arizona teacher Bobbie puts it, "Candidates are really just adult examples of the kids in our classes--overachievers, disorganized, procrastinators, enablers, hard workers, those who are clueless, and know-it-alls...a microcosm of our real world." Like the students in your classes, the candidates you are working with may at times want you to answer all their questions. They may want you to tell them the "one best way" to do something. They may even want you to share your own work as a model they can emulate. You must resist!

The PLFs who responded to the 2019 survey created to gather information for this handbook were asked about the most important advice they would give to someone new at mentoring candidates, as well as the biggest mistake a new PLF was likely to make. Some clear themes emerged from their responses. The most frequently repeated piece of advice could be summed up in the words of Linda, a consultant in St. Louis: "Do not try to give so much help that their work becomes partly yours." Similarly, the most common mistake those surveyed warned against was "over-coaching."

Ask questions

Seasoned PLFs agree that the ability to ask probing questions is a crucial skill for PLFs and can mitigate the tendency to help too much. Whether it means pursuing formal training in [cognitive coaching](#), or simply applying your classroom questioning practices in a new way, PLFs must "learn to ask 'coaching'-type questions that spark candidates' thinking rather than provide direct answers," says Bobbie, adding that they must avoid "giving explicit ANSWERS rather than asking questions that spark thinking and discussion." Pam, a Library and Media Specialist in Kentucky, echoes that advice: "Be prepared to listen without interjecting personal responses and practice questioning techniques," she says. And Nevada teacher Rachel agrees that asking questions is generally better than answering them--and especially better than answering questions based on one's own experience. "Remember that candidates don't have to follow your path," she says. "They must make their own path."

"REMEMBER THAT CANDIDATES DON'T HAVE TO FOLLOW YOUR PATH. THEY MUST MAKE THEIR OWN PATH."

Anne, a project facilitator in Nevada, also notes the importance of helping candidates find their own way. "Be open to different avenues and approaches for completing the work," she says. "Just because it isn't the way YOU approached boards doesn't mean the way that candidate is approaching it is wrong. They are working through it in a way that works for them." In other words, there are many roads that lead to Destination Certification. "Don't insert yourself," advises Claudia. "The journey belongs to the candidate. Ask questions. Describe what you see or don't see in candidates' work."

The candidates' work is their work--that's an especially important point. "Understand that you are there to FACILITATE the process of growth and discovery, not to do the work for the candidates," says Ann, an educational director in Virginia.

Know the material

Another major theme of the advice offered by PLFs centered on the importance of familiarity with The National Board materials. “Not reading the directions carefully, or ignoring the standards” is one of the most basic mistakes a new PLF might make, according to Jessica. After all, even if you shouldn’t act like an expert, you have to actually be one; otherwise, how will you know what questions to ask candidates? “Study the standards and study the directions and study the rubrics,” says Cheryl, instructional coach from Oklahoma. (That includes instructions beyond your own, Bobbie adds.)

One way to become more familiar with these materials, several PLFs suggested, is to go through a program like [NEA’s Jump Start](#), a three-day training designed for candidates just getting started. Even if that program isn’t available in your state, though, remember that the instructions, standards and rubrics for every certificate area are available to anyone on the [National Board’s website](#).

“STUDY THE STANDARDS AND STUDY THE DIRECTIONS, AND STUDY THE RUBRIC.”

In addition to the standards, instructions and rubrics, PLFs should also be familiar with the [Guide to National Board Certification](#) and the [General Portfolio Instructions](#), says Tammy, an instructor at the University of Mississippi. And Juliana, an exceptional needs teacher in Nevada, adds that PLFs should understand the [Body of Knowledge](#) (the National Board’s blanket term for [The Five Core Propositions](#), the Standards, and the [Architecture of Accomplished Teaching](#)) well enough to help candidates understand it. “Candidates should prioritize understanding the Body of Knowledge and embodying it,” Juliana advises. “Understanding this structure increases their ability to grow from their candidacy journey.”

Other PLFs mentioned the importance of making oneself available to candidates and responding quickly to requests for help, being patient and honest, and sharing organizational and time management strategies. “Let them see what you did for organization, and to help you keep track of time,” says Jennifer, a North Carolina teacher. “Be an encourager!”

Set clear boundaries

Although some PLFs like Jennifer stressed the importance of being available, others identified a lack of boundaries as a potential pitfall new PLFs should avoid. One reason to set boundaries relates to the mistake of “overcoaching” mentioned above. PLFs need to be clear from the beginning about what they will and will not do. For example, it is important to let candidates know that you will not assess a portfolio entry by giving it a score or telling them you think it is “good enough” to certify. You should also be clear about how much assistance you are willing and able to give. “As teachers we want all our students to be successful,” points out Susan, an instructional coach in Maine, “but don’t ‘over-help’ or they won’t learn all they can!” Similarly, Clara, a retired Science teacher and long-time PLF in Florida, warns against “giving too much guidance” and saying things like “I can fix your entry.” Melissa, a library specialist in Mississippi, cautions new PLFs against “being ‘too nice’ and letting candidates rely on the mentor instead of reading NB instructions--spoon-feeding candidates.”

“AS TEACHERS WE WANT ALL OUR STUDENTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL BUT DON’T ‘OVER-HELP’ OR THEY WON’T LEARN ALL THEY CAN.”

In addition to boundaries on the types of help you can offer, it is important to set boundaries to guard your time. “I think it is easy to take on too much as a teacher,” says Deb, a kindergarten instructor in Minnesota. “Knowing your current obligations and establishing how much time you have to offer this program before you launch it is important. Setting clear expectations with the candidates will allow you to feel good about the program and the guidance you are providing without feeling like you are consumed with the amount of time you spend working with candidates.” Similarly, Lauren, a special education teacher in Louisiana, cautions prospective PLFs against “being too generous with their time... I love being an NBCT and I am super enthusiastic about people going through the process. However, being thoughtful about how you’re spending your time with candidates is important. Set those expectations clearly.” Lauren adds that some state NBCT networks, including hers, require candidates who want to work with a PLF to sign a [formal agreement](#).

Rita, a mentor and induction coordinator in New York, also recommends spelling things out in a written agreement. “Remember who is the candidate and who is the mentor,” she says. “Define your role and responsibilities as the mentor and theirs as the candidates, put it in writing and share it with your candidates.” That written plan should include “how much individual attention you will provide to each candidate’s written work (i.e. ‘I will read each component X times’),” Pam says. “Hold yourself accountable.”

Finally, PLFs should set boundaries on their emotional investment in candidates. “Mentoring can be a heavy burden if you take it personally,” Pam says. “You must find a way to release the process back to the candidate and trust that you have done your best to shepherd them through their journey.” This is especially important when it comes to certifying. “A new mentor may be overly invested in the candidate’s Certification status, and lose sight of the inherent value in the process,” Ann says. When a candidate doesn’t certify on the first try--and that will certainly happen with some of the candidates you work with--you might feel crushed if you haven’t set appropriate emotional boundaries. Rachel, a PLF with the Nevada State Education Association, also cautions against “too much focus on [certifying or not certifying] instead of the growth journey.” More broadly, emotional boundaries are closely connected with the two other kinds of boundaries discussed above. “Ultimately, the candidates have to do the work, explains Amanda, an engineering teacher in Mississippi. “It can be painful to watch someone procrastinate, but there is nothing you can do besides encourage them!”

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You are not a model

While all of us would agree that candidates, like students, should do their own work, many people, including me, find it helpful to look at exemplars and models when completing a major project. When I have access to a model, I never have any intention of copying it. I just want to see how the final product should look. I often use models and exemplars with my students for the same reason. Not surprisingly, NBCT candidates often ask for exemplars of portfolio entries.

However, apart from some general exemplars of analytical and reflective writing in the [General Portfolio Instructions](#) and the many videos showing accomplished practice in the [ATLAS² video library](#), the The National Board does not provide much in the way of exemplars. One reason for this may be philosophical. [The Policy Guidelines for Ethical Candidate Support](#) stress that “there are multiple paths to Certification” and that “candidates are solely responsible for the creation of their Certification materials.” According to the Guidelines, PLFs should “communicate high expectations that encourage self-discovery. . . . [and] ask questions that probe ideas and help candidates clarify their views and beliefs.” These guidelines, and the decision not to provide exemplars, may reflect a concern that doing so could limit exploration and self-discovery.

Whether or not you agree philosophically with this decision, as a PLF you must resist any requests from candidates to let them see your own portfolio entries. The Guidelines are reasonably clear about that: “PLFs do not present their own submissions or teaching practices as models of correct practice.”

“A NEW MENTOR MIGHT TELL A CANDIDATE TO DO THINGS EXACTLY THE SAME WAY HE/SHE DID IT. THAT IS A MISTAKE.”

In the survey responses, the most strongly worded advice about pitfalls cautioned potential PLFs against presenting their own work--or their own experience, for that matter--as a model to candidates. “A new mentor might tell a candidate to do things exactly the same way he/she did it,”

2 ATLAS cases are drawn from National Board Certification entries submitted prior to 2014 and are not examples of entries from the current certification assessment. National Board’s assessment was revised in 2014 and current entries have new structure, requirements and instructions. However, these cases provide good examples of an unedited video, the teacher’s written reflection about the lesson, and related instructional materials.

says Cheryl. “That is a mistake. The mentor needs to remember that the directions and the rubrics are what is important for the candidates. There is no one way to achieve National Board Certification.” Similarly, Bobbie warns against “referring to ‘when I did ____, I ____’ . . . leading candidates to think there is only ONE way to respond.”

As a PLF, then, you’ll have to walk a fine line. On the one hand, your experience is relevant and important. Undoubtedly, some of the candidates you work with will have been inspired by your story to pursue Certification. On the other hand, your past experience must take a back seat to the candidates’ present experience. Patricia, a social studies teacher in New Mexico, suggests a balanced approach. “It is appropriate at times to share some examples from your story as examples; however, the focus should be on the candidate and his/her journey,” she says. Ernie’s advice echoes Patricia’s. “Avoid sharing details of your experience,” she says. “Perhaps describing how you felt when you received scores is fine, but avoid saying, ‘When I certified, I did . . . and then I did . . .’”

This chapter has examined just a few of the most common mistakes novice PLFs might likely make; you will find that there is much more to learn. In the third and final chapter, we will explore some of the resources that experienced PLFs have found most helpful--for candidates and also for their own professional growth in this work. But as you’re getting started, if you focus on (1) asking questions, (2) getting really familiar with the material, (3) setting appropriate boundaries, and (4) resisting the tendency to use your own experience as a model, you will be well on your way.

CHAPTER THREE



‘SO MANY DOCUMENTS’ Resources for Mentors and PLFs

SOMEWHERE ALONG YOUR JOURNEY TO NATIONAL BOARD Certification, you probably started to feel overwhelmed by the vastness of the information available to you. For example, you remembered seeing a particular rule or guideline somewhere--but where was it? In the instructions for a particular component? If so, which part? Or was it in the General Portfolio Instructions? Or did you see it on one of the seemingly innumerable forms you had to submit with your portfolio? Or perhaps in a discussion on the Facebook group?

“There are so many NB documents,” says Bobbie, middle childhood generalist and retired Arizona teacher, “and it’s difficult for new candidates to navigate through them.” That is no less true when it comes to PLF work. I remember hearing a trainer describe the National Board candidate support landscape as the “Wild West.” Indeed, years ago, the National Board had a formalized “train the trainer” model for NBCTs who wanted to help support candidates, but in the last decade or so, especially with the rise of social media and other digital technologies, candidate support has become very decentralized, organic, and flexible. Because there are so many different individuals and groups--many of them excellent, and some not even on the National Board’s radar--developing various models and practices for PLFs, it can be difficult to know where to start.

The PLFs surveyed for this handbook were asked to list resources that they had found particularly helpful. The three resources most frequently mentioned were (1) two [Canvas courses](#), “Preparing for National Board Certification for PLFs” (“PLF 3”) and “Professional Learning Facilitator Training” (“PLF 2”); (2) the National Board [website](#); and 3) the [National Board Certified Teacher](#) group on Facebook. This chapter will discuss each of those resources in some detail, followed by brief descriptions of additional resources that are available.



Canvas Courses

In 2019, the National Board Resource Center located at Stanford University (NBRC at Stanford) made many of its materials available to candidates and PLFs everywhere in the form of an online course on a platform called Canvas. The NBRC at Stanford is operated and staffed by NBCTs, and its mission is to help “teachers and administrators learn about ways to use National Board Certification to advance professional practice and promote teaching quality in schools by providing information and support at its sessions at Stanford and through related outreach throughout the state.”

This course, Preparing for National Board Certification, is available both as a [self-paced course](#) for candidates (“Candidate 2”) and as a [template](#) that PLFs can adapt (“PLF 3”). Organized around the four components, PLF 3 is ideal for PLFs and mentors working with candidates, particularly those offering virtual facilitation or mentoring. This course is [free and available on Canvas Commons](#). PLFs can download the course, adapt it to make it their own, and add students.

“I am so excited to use these quality materials from Stanford!” says Susan, instructional coach from Maine. “I just can’t believe they are sharing this with us!” Tammy, an instructor at the University of Mississippi, is equally enthusiastic about the course. “I’ve attended facilitator trainings all over the country and gathered a ton of wonderful resources,” she says, “the most important being the Canvas course from Stanford.”

The second course, “[Professional Learning Facilitator Training](#)” (“PLF 2”) was developed in partnership with an instructional design team composed of National Board Certified Teachers, National Education Association, NBRC at Stanford, and the American Institute of Research. The course covers topics such as working with adult learners, facilitating with an equity lens, ethical facilitation, understanding scoring, and providing effective feedback. Although originally designed as an in-person training, the Canvas version of the course may be used by individuals or groups who want to develop best practices as PLFs or mentors.

Deb, a kindergarten teacher from Minnesota, called the PLF training on Canvas “the best resource I have seen. . . It is very comprehensive and was created by the experts!”

Along with “Professional Learning Facilitator Training” and the two versions of “Preparing for National Board Certification,” the National Board is now offering four [additional courses on Canvas](#) that may be of interest to PLFs.

For example, “[PLF 1: Introduction to National Board Certification \(Facilitators\)](#)” is a collection of resources and guided learning activities for individuals or groups who may not be NBCTs but are interested in supporting educators pursuing Board Certification, and who need a high-level overview of the National Board Standards and certification process. There are also candidate and PLF versions of a course focused on Maintenance of Certification (MOC).

“THE PLF TRAINING ON CANVAS IS THE BEST RESOURCE I HAVE SEEN... IT IS VERY COMPREHENSIVE, AND WAS CREATED BY EXPERTS.”

National Board website

It might seem obvious, but [nbpts.org](#) is one of the best resources for helping candidates understand and work through the Certification process, as well as for mentoring and facilitating. As Bobbie admits, however, it “can also be difficult to navigate.”

One of the things I remember finding confusing as a candidate is that sometimes I was told to visit [boardcertifiedteachers.org](#) or [accomplished-teacher.org](#), while other times I was directed to [nbpts.org](#). The first link is actually just a redirect to the Certification overview page of the nbpts.org, while the second link houses the National Board’s manifesto, [What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do](#) (now also [available in Spanish](#)), but it took me a while to figure that out.

For the purposes of helping candidates, the home page, [nbpts.org](#), is probably the best place to start. The two buttons in the center of the home page provide the most important pathways for candidates. “[View Standards](#)” takes you to a page where you can read the Five Core Propositions, access the What book (referenced above), learn about the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching, and view the standards for any subject area by clicking on a drop-down menu.

As candidates progress through their portfolio writing, it’s easy for them to focus on simply answering the questions and looking at the rubrics

and forget to continually review and reference the five core propositions and the standards—especially the standards, since they are very long and detailed. But these are the basis for everything, so it is vitally important to keep bringing candidates back here.



The second button, “[Get Certified](#),” takes you to the Certification overview page. In addition to a full overview of the process, candidates can access many other resources from this page, including information on getting started and creating and accessing accounts. The bottom half of that page is the Candidate Center, and the first link there takes you to what is arguably the most important page for candidates, the one you should have them bookmark—[First Time and Returning Candidate Resources](#). This is where candidates can go to access all of the major documents they will need—especially guides, instructions and forms.

There are many, many more resources available on the National Board’s web site, including Certification [information by state](#), [policy and advocacy guidelines](#), and [resources for candidate support](#). But sometimes less is more.

Facebook group

While there are multiple Facebook groups and pages devoted to National Board Certification, including the [The National Board’s official Facebook page](#), the largest and most active group seems to be [National Board Certified Teacher](#), co-administered by Mitch Goodkin and Bobbie Faulkner, author of the *What Works!* guides to National Board Certification. This

is a private group with more than 10,000 members and is open to NBCTs and those interested in becoming NBCTs. Given the size of the group, it's not uncommon to post a question or request and get dozens of responses within minutes. "I follow Bobbie Faulkner on FB," says Linda, a consultant in St. Louis. "She has a lot of wisdom to share." Jennifer, a generalist in North Carolina, agrees. "I really liked the Facebook groups when I was doing my NBCT--so I make sure to share those with candidates," she says.

In addition to that group and others, such as [My National Board for Teachers](#) (a public group), there are pages and groups devoted to most (if not all) certificate areas, pages and groups for various state networks, and a [group for accomplished minority educators](#). There is even a [group created specifically for PLFs](#).

Other resources

On top of the Stanford courses, the National Board website, and Facebook, the PLFs who responded to the survey mentioned the following resources as especially helpful:

- The [What Works!](#) books. Although this is not a free resource (and also not an official publication of the National Board), many PLFs recommend these books for use with candidates. The books have been around for years but were updated in 2016 to reflect major changes in the certification process. Volume 1 covers Components 1 and 2, while Volume 2 focuses on Components 3 and 4. Each volume is available for \$20 on Amazon. "Bobbie Faulkner's books were instrumental in helping me organize how to share information with candidates," says Ernie, a program director in Nevada.
- [State networks](#). Many states have official or unofficial networks of NBCTs, with widely varying budgets and degrees of formal organization. As a PLF, you should be connected with whatever network exists in your state and help get candidates connected to it. Networks often provide training for mentors and PLFs in addition to various kinds of support for candidates. You can learn more about your state's network by clicking on your state on the National Board's [interactive map](#). "I think if your state has a network, relying on the collective and team is wise," says Lauren, exceptional needs specialist in New Orleans. "As NBCTs, we have so many things we are involved in outside of mentoring candidates and it is important to work smarter, not harder."

- [Jump Start](#). Since 2002, NEA affiliates at various sites around the country have partnered with NBCTs to offer this introductory intensive course for candidates who have registered and are ready to get started. In some cases it also provides year-long candidate support. Ernie recommends that PLFs should, if they can, "work through National Board's/NEA's JumpStart program to better understand how to support candidates understanding of how they need to be well versed in all three documents [5 Core Propositions, the National Board Standards, and the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching]."
- The [World Class Teaching Program \(WCTP\)](#). Like Stanford's National Board Resource Center, The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) offers two programs. The first is a state program that resulted from collaboration with Stanford and hosts a variety of resources collected from candidate support programs throughout the state that granted permission for use. The second is a [national program](#), available beginning in August 2020. This program does not contain any Stanford resources or resources from other candidate support programs, instead using resources created by the University of Mississippi's World Class Teaching Program. Both programs include various levels of mentoring and candidate support. "The WCTP has been a wonderful tool," says Kellie, an exceptional needs teacher in Mississippi.
- [Assessing National Board portfolios for Pearson](#). A small percentage of survey respondents had experience being a National Board assessor and expressed the value of that experience in helping candidates. "I was fortunate to have scored three times for the National Board back when there were Entries and not Components," says Linda. "Nothing could have been more valuable in working with candidates."

In conclusion

Clearly, there is no shortage of resources available both to candidates and to NBCTs who want to support candidates in the role of PLF or mentor. In this short book, I've attempted to gather information about some of the best resources in one place, along with **advice** and **inspiration** from great teachers who have been doing this work for years.

If you decide to take your learning one step further and **serve the work** in this way, know that you will be part of a large and growing community of wonderful people who will be happy to listen and offer whatever support they can. Best wishes!

APPENDIX



Quick Links for PLFs and Mentors

All of the resources mentioned throughout the handbook, plus several additional resources, are linked below. The links are organized alphabetically under four headings: (1) Important Pages on the nbpts.org, (2) Facebook Resources, (3) Training Resources, and (4) Miscellaneous Resources. These sections are followed by an evaluation form about this handbook. Please complete the evaluation at a time that seems appropriate to you; your responses will be used to inform future editions. If you find that a link no longer works, please contact April Jones at ajones@nbpts.org.

Section 1: Important Pages on NBPTS.org:

- [Advocacy for National Board Certification](#)
- [Architecture of Accomplished Teaching](#)
- [ATLAS](#)
- [Body of Knowledge](#)
- [Candidate Support Providers](#)
- [First Time and Returning Candidate Resources](#)
- [The Five Core Propositions](#)
- [General Portfolio Instructions](#)
- [Guide to National Board Certification](#)
- [In Your State \(Interactive Map\)](#)
- [National Board Certification: Overview](#)
- [NB Connect Application](#)
- [Policy Guidelines for Ethical Candidate Support](#)
- [Recruitment and Candidate Support](#)
- [Scoring Guide](#)
- [What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do](#)

Section 2: Facebook Resources

- [My National Board for Teachers \(Public Facebook Group\)](#)
- [National Board Certified Teacher \(Private Facebook Group\)](#)
- [National Board Network of Accomplished Minority Educators \(Public Facebook Group\)](#)
- [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards \(Official Facebook Page\)](#)
- [NBCT Networks - The National Board Official \(Private Facebook Groups\)](#)
- [Professional Learning Facilitators for The National Board \(Private\)](#)

Section 3: Training Resources

- [Canvas Course: Preparing for National Board Certification \(NBRC\)](#)
- [Canvas Course: Professional Learning Facilitator Training \(NBRC\)](#)
- [National Board Resource Center](#)
- [NEA's National Board Jump Start](#)
- [World Class Teaching Program \(WCTP\)](#)

Section 4: Miscellaneous Resources

- [Become a National Board Assessor](#)
- [Candidate Mentor Pilot Program Toolkit](#)
- [National Board Participant Agreement](#)
- [Reflections on Cognitive Coaching](#)
- [What Works! Books by Bobbie Faulkner](#)

[Evaluation: Please offer feedback on this handbook](#)

Endnotes

1 For the purposes of this handbook, a National Board “mentor” is an NBCT who works with one or more specific individuals, either remotely or in person, to provide guidance and support throughout the certification process, while a National Board “Professional Learning Facilitator” (PLF) is someone who works with a small group of candidates, usually with some regularity and with varying degrees of formality and structure. While “PLF” is used most frequently throughout this handbook, almost all of the practices and guidelines discussed here also apply to those in “mentoring” roles.

2 ATLAS cases are drawn from National Board Certification entries submitted prior to 2014 and are not examples of entries from the current certification assessment. National Board’s assessment was revised in 2014 and current entries have new structure, requirements and instructions. However, these cases provide good examples of an unedited video, the teacher’s written reflection about the lesson, and related instructional materials.