

National Board Certification

Cohort Program Planning Toolkit

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Cohort Planning Toolkit Overview

The Cohort Planning Toolkit is an optional resource designed to support programs with ideas and activities for designing a cohort experience to help educators pursue National Board certification. While the toolkit offers ready-made resources to inspire and guide program development, it is not intended to be prescriptive. Program designers are encouraged to adapt materials to fit their local context and needs. All resources within the toolkit are optional and should be carefully reviewed and revised to ensure alignment with your specific program and candidate goals.

Why Support National Board Certification?

More than two decades of [research](#) have proven that National Board certification has a significant and measurable impact on student learning, especially for students in high-need schools, as well as teacher practice, and teacher retention. [Studies show that Board certification supports:](#)

- **Increased student learning and achievement.** Research shows NBCTs are, on average, more effective than non-Board Certified teachers, particularly as instructors of high-need students. NBCTs produce an additional six to eight weeks of student learning and students taught by NBCTs demonstrate deeper learning than students in other classrooms. In addition, NBCTs report being more reflective and adjusting their practice to meet individual student needs.
- **Retention of high-quality teachers.** Research shows that NBCTs remain in the profession longer than their non-Board Certified colleagues, with one recent state analysis finding a turnover rate of just 4% for NBCTs, compared to 12.9% statewide in the 2021-2022 school year.
- **Effective mentoring of novice teachers.** Recent research finds that new teachers that are mentored by NBCTs exhibit “positive and meaningful improvement” in instructional practices and generate six months of additional student learning compared to new teachers mentored by those who are not Board Certified.
- **High-quality professional learning.** A survey by the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders found that 98% of NBCTs rank Board Certification as the most impactful professional learning experience they have had in their career, above even graduate programs.

Federal funding can be used to support teachers seeking National Board Certification: Title II-A of ESSA provides funding to states and districts for professional learning and offers flexibility in how they spend this money. This [document](#) describes how districts and schools can use U.S.

Department of Education grant funds – especially Title I, Part A, Title II, Part A and IDEA, Part B funds – for costs associated with pursuing, achieving, and maintaining National Board certification, as well as Board-related resources for beginning teachers.

Supporting National Board certification puts the most effective teachers in front of students and offers them deeper learning experiences. National Board certification provides an unparalleled professional development opportunity for teachers and often leads to salary advancement, which helps retain a diverse and accomplished teaching workforce. Supporting teachers to achieve National Board certification today will pay off in improved teaching and learning for years to come.

There are a number of states, districts, and organizations across the country that provide [incentives](#) and support to teachers pursuing National Board certification. If you're interested in learning more about the process for providing monetary support for candidates pursuing National Board certification, there are [resources](#) available for becoming a third-party payer.

Why Invest in a National Board Cohort Program?

In a recent multistate survey of schools piloting a cohort model for engaging teachers in analysis of National Board Standards, 97% of the teachers who engaged with the National Board Standards report that they improved their practice and better understood their students. Among those teachers 63% adjusted lesson plans to meet the needs of individual students, 54% gained or deepened knowledge in their subject areas, and 50% used data in new ways to assess student progress (Manzeske & Reese, 2017).

In addition, research has shown that National Board Professional Learning Facilitators (PLFs) that help teachers achieve National Board certification in a cohort-based model improve teaching among the cohort and foster a greater sense of community among teachers (Jaquith et al., 2016). The collaborative and connected nature of cohorts not only helps teachers analyze and reflect on student learning and their teaching practice, but also improves the learning environment, creating a culture where teachers feel that their development is valued, guided, and purposeful. This approach also avoids the likelihood that individuals struggle on their own, risking burnout.

Factors to Consider When Building a Cohort Program

There are many different ways to structure professional learning programs for teachers and counselors pursuing National Board certification.

Length of Program

In all certificate areas, candidates are required to complete four components: one computer-based assessment and three portfolio entries. Candidates must attempt each of the four components within the first three years of their candidacy. This means National Board candidates can choose to take one, two or three years to take the Component 1 assessment and submit all three portfolio components for National Board certification. Candidates have a five-year window to allow for retakes and to certify.

Programs should consider the order in which the candidates will proceed through each of the four components; considering local needs when selecting which and how many of the components to undertake each year. While there is no mandated scope and sequence for components, many programs are designed over two years.

Sequence of Components

When deciding which component(s) should be the initial focus of the program, consideration should be given to the fit between the component(s) and local needs. The [Determine Your Path: Planning Guide](#) might be a helpful resource in deciding the component sequence based on the focus of each component.

Here is a brief description of each component:

- **Component 1: Content Knowledge:** A computer-based assessment that requires candidates to demonstrate their understanding of content knowledge and pedagogical practices for teaching that content.
- **Component 2: Differentiation in Instruction:** This classroom-based component requires that candidates gather and analyze information about individual students' strengths and needs and use that information to design and implement instruction to advance student learning and achievement.
- **Component 3: Teaching Practice and Learning Environment:** This classroom-based component requires video recordings of interactions between the candidate and their students. The candidates also submit a written commentary in which they describe, analyze, and reflect on their teaching and interactions with students.
- **Component 4: Effective and Reflective Practitioner:** This component requires candidates to demonstrate evidence of their abilities as an effective and reflective practitioner in developing and applying knowledge of their students; their use of assessments to effectively plan for and positively impact their students' learning; and their collaboration to advance students' learning and growth.

Program Format

While there are many ways to support teachers' through National Board certification, teachers consistently share the benefits of working on their certification in a collaborative cohort. As mentioned earlier, the collaborative nature of cohorts improves teaching practice and school culture, encourages deeper reflection on student learning, and reduces the risk of burnout. The

resources to follow provide support for planning cohort logistics, structure, communication and facilitation.

[Homeroom for Candidate Support](#) offers you several ways to utilize Homeroom, our National Board resource hub, to build your candidate support program and support candidates throughout the process. The [Using Homeroom Cheat Sheet](#) can also serve as a resource to identify the key steps and resources to support the candidate journey.

Ethical Candidate Support

Good candidate support is honest yet non-judgmental. It is constructive, professional, and knowledgeable.

National Board program leaders, PLFs, and mentors cannot make choices for candidates or create evidence for them. Instead, they remain sensitive to the emotional needs of candidates while asking questions that encourage them to present their evidence more clearly. National Board program leaders, PLFs, and mentors show candidates how to create organizational systems so they can manage their own certification process. They locate resources so candidates can meet technological demands, and they offer models of feedback so candidates can broaden and deepen their analytical abilities. Successful program leaders, PLFs, and mentors contribute to the professional development that candidates experience as they take their journey through the documentation of accomplished teaching to the achievement of National Board certification. The thoughtful design and ethical implementation of candidate support in all its aspects can create an intellectual environment that is both inspiring and empowering for candidates.

This [document](#) provides guidelines to increase awareness of the issues and actions related to ethical candidate support. Observing these guidelines will allow program leaders, PLFs, and mentors to assist candidates while maintaining the rigorous nature of National Board certification, protecting the secure processes of the National Board assessment, and upholding the high integrity of the National Board.

Note:

- Both candidates and PLFs share responsibility for understanding and honoring these guidelines.
- Consider holding a meeting with your candidates early in the process to discuss ethical candidate facilitation.

Logistics for Cohorts

As you build your program, below are some logistical considerations:

- When will candidate support take place? How frequently will the sessions take place?
- Who determines the structure and content of the candidate support sessions?

- Will all meetings happen during the school day or will there be evening or weekend meetings?
- Can the cohort sessions be embedded in existing professional development structures?
- Do you want your sessions to be in-person, virtual, or hybrid?
- Do teachers have release time to work on their components?
- Will candidates have the following:
 - o Access to a high-quality video camera and microphones?
 - o Technological support for recording classroom lessons
 - o Technological support for editing those videos down to the required time
 - o Technological support for uploading components and artifacts for submission

You can find a more detailed cohort logistics planning tool [here](#).

Possible Topics or Strategies for Cohort Sessions

Once program leaders have decided what order to introduce the teacher cohort to the four components, the content can be organized in a way that best supports your teachers. Some possible topics or strategies for cohort sessions could include:

- Introduction to National Board Certification, Five Core Propositions, and National Board Standards
- Introduction to Component Requirements
- Connecting Standards, Component Instructions, and Rubrics
- Planning and preparation for component
- Analyzing student work
- Writing for National Board Certification
- Peer Feedback Sessions

Program Facilitation and Support

As you move further along in your planning you will need to answer the following questions:

- What is your target ratio of candidates for each Professional Learning Facilitator (PLF) and mentor?
- How will PLFs be selected?
- When will PLFs selection occur?
- How will PLFs be trained and supported?
- What will the training for PLFs include?
- When will training for PLFs occur?
- How will PLFs maintain quality service? Who will be monitoring them and when?
- How will you ensure that PLFs adhere to ethical candidate support?
- How will feedback be provided to the PLFs and mentors?

A great starting point in answering those questions is to determine the number of Board-certified teachers available to act as PLFs. Your Board-certified teachers can lead the cohorts' professional learning sessions, helping teachers analyze and reflect upon their practice.

To have a conversation with potential PLFs on the benefits of you can use the e-Book

- **e-Book:** [Serve the Work: Becoming a Professional Learning Facilitator](#)

It is possible to start a new program without the expertise of Board-certified teachers. In this case, we recommend calling on teachers who have expressed a deep commitment to continued professional growth and teacher leaders interested in promoting collaborative professional learning opportunities. Perhaps there are teachers already engaged in instructional rounds to observe teacher practices and encourage discussion and reflection. The goal is to encourage teachers to take ownership of their professional growth and develop skills and expertise.

In addition to the resources above, we have a Canvas course that has resources and guided learning activities for individuals or groups interested in supporting educators pursuing Board certification who need a deeper dive into the National Board Standards and certification process. Register [here](#).

To help set expectations and norms between candidates and PLFs, you may want to consider a [candidate/facilitator and mentor agreement](#).

If you would be interested in participating in a PLF training, please share your contact information [here](#). We will reach out with opportunities to participate. It is recommended PLFs attend trainings hosted by state or national programs, for example, the [Stanford National Board Resource Center](#). The Stanford National Board Resource Center offers customized training to meet localized programming needs in a virtual format.

Resources: Cohort Facilitation

There are a number of resources available to support you as you build your program. Some of these resources are designed for facilitators; others are resources for individual candidates that can be repurposed for cohort planning and facilitation.

A couple of notes:

- The facilitation slides do not have the National Board logo. This is intentional as it hopefully makes it more seamless for adding your own logo and branding to the slides, if preferred.
- These resources are yours to adapt based on local needs.
- You may see some content repeated in different presentations. That is by design to reinforce and support learning.

Year One

Five Core Propositions

Similar to medicine's Hippocratic Oath, the National Board Five Core Propositions are held in common by teachers of all grade levels and disciplines and underscore the accomplished teacher's commitment to advancing student learning and achievement. Together, the propositions form the basis of all National Board Standards, which describe how teachers enact the Propositions in particular content areas and with students of particular developmental levels,

and serve as the foundation for Board certification. These propositions were written by teachers for teachers.

Facilitation Resources

What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do articulates the National Board's Five Core Propositions for teaching.

- [What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(English\)](#)
- [What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(Spanish\)](#)

Facilitation Guide for *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*: This guide offers a framework for engaging with the Five Core Propositions in professional learning communities, departments, schools, or districts.

- [Facilitation Guide for What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(English\)](#)
- [Facilitation Guide for What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(Spanish\)](#)

National Board Standards

National Board Standards define what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do in 25 certificate areas. They cover 16 different subject areas and four developmental levels and are applicable to most teachers in U.S. public schools. National Board Standards are developed by committees of outstanding educators who are broadly representative of accomplished professionals in their field.

Facilitation Resources

- [Introduction to the National Board Standards Slides](#)
- National Board Standards Studies: The Standard Studies are a reorganization of the Certificate Area Standards created for the National Board Certification process. The Studies group Standards or sections of Standards across common themes to facilitate professional learning for all teachers. The [facilitation guidance includes](#) an overview of how the Standards Studies were developed and some examples of use. This document also includes links to each Study, and the National Board Resource Alignment. You can find the following standard studies [here](#): Advocacy, Assessment, Collaboration, Content Knowledge, Equity, Instructional Practice, Knowledge of Students, Leadership, Learning, Environment, Reflection, and Student Agency.

Introduction to National Board Certification

Facilitation Resources

- [Introduction to National Board Certification: Facilitation Slides](#)

Candidate Resources

- [Overview and Quick Start Guide](#)

Component 2

Component 2 - Differentiation in Instruction: [Component 2: Overview Video](#)

This portfolio entry requires that candidates gather and analyze information about individual students' strengths and needs and use that information to design and implement instruction to

advance student learning and achievement. Candidates will submit selected student work samples that demonstrate the students' growth over time and a written commentary that analyzes instructional choices.

This component counts towards 15% of the total score.

Facilitation resources

- [Component 2: Facilitation Slides](#)

Candidate Resources

- [Component 2: Planning Guide](#)

Component 3

Component 3 - Teaching Practice and Learning Environment: [Overview Video](#)

This portfolio entry requires video recordings of interactions between you and your students and among your students. You will also submit a written commentary in which you describe, analyze and reflect on the impact of your teaching on your students.

This component counts towards 30% of the total score.

Facilitation Resources

- [Component 3: Facilitation Slides](#)

Candidate Resources

- [Component 3: Planning Guide](#)
- [ATLAS 4 Candidates \(registration link\)](#)
- [ATLAS Reflection Questions](#)

Writing for National Board Certification

Facilitation Resources

- [Writing About Your Practice](#)
- ATLAS 4 Candidates: Candidates have access to four free ATLAS cases. These cases can be used by mentors, candidate support providers and candidates. The ATLAS platform provides teachers with access to a sample of video cases and written commentary. These video cases show National Board Certified Teachers at work in the classroom. [Upon registering](#), you will have access to four cases that represent each of the National Board's developmental levels in a variety of instructional settings. Candidates can also receive access to ATLAS 4 Candidates [here](#).
 - o [ATLAS Resource for Candidate Support Programs](#)
 - o [ATLAS Reflection Questions](#)
 - o [ATLAS: Facilitation Slides](#)
 - o Note: Candidates and those providing support to candidates may use these video cases while working towards their National Board certification; however, all ATLAS cases are drawn from National Board certification entries submitted prior to 2014 and are not examples of entries from the current certification assessment. The National Board's assessment was revised in 2014 and current entries have a new structure, requirements, and instructions. These cases can,

however, help in the candidate journey because they are good examples of an unedited video, the teacher's written commentary about the lesson, and related instructional materials.

Candidate Resources

- [Three Types of Writing Activity](#)
- [ATLAS 4 Candidates](#) (registration link)
- [ATLAS Reflection Questions](#)

Year Two

Five Core Propositions

Facilitation Resources

What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do articulates the National Board's Five Core Propositions for teaching.

- [What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(English\)](#)
- [What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(Spanish\)](#)

Facilitation Guides for *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*: This guide offers a framework for engaging with the Five Core Propositions in professional learning communities, departments, schools, or districts.

- [Facilitation Guide for What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(English\)](#)
- [Facilitation Guide for What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do \(Spanish\)](#)

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National Board Standards define what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do in 25 certificate areas. They cover 16 different subject areas and four developmental levels and apply to most teachers in U.S. public schools. National Board Standards are developed by committees of outstanding educators who are broadly representative of accomplished professionals in their field.

Facilitation Resources

- [Introduction to the National Board Standards: Facilitation Slides](#)

Understanding Your Scores

Facilitation Resources

- [Understanding your Scores and Feedback: Facilitation Slides](#)

Candidate Resources

- [Understanding Your Scores and Feedback](#)

Component 4

Component 4 - Effective and Reflective Practitioner: [Component 4: Overview Video](#)

This portfolio entry requires candidates to gather information from a variety of sources about a class of students and demonstrate their knowledge of assessments and assessment practices to effectively plan for and positively impact student learning. They will provide evidence of collaboration with families, the community, and colleagues and the candidate's contributions to learning communities to advance student growth.

This component counts toward 15% of the final score.

Facilitation Resources

- [Component 4: Facilitation Slides](#)

Candidate Resources

- [Component 4: Planning Guide](#)

Component 1**Component 1 - Content Knowledge: [Overview Video](#)**

A computer-based assessment that requires you to demonstrate your understanding of content knowledge and pedagogical practices for teaching your content area. You must demonstrate knowledge of developmentally appropriate content, which is necessary for teaching across the full range and ability level of your chosen certificate area.

This component counts for 40% of the total score.

Facilitation Resources

- [Component 1: Facilitation Slides](#)

Candidate Resources

- [Component 1: Planning Guide](#)

To receive National Board information and updates on candidate support facilitation resources, share your information [here](#).