

NATIONAL BOARD

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Luke Correia-Damude:

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us once again for national board conversations. My name is Luke. Correia-Damude, your host for this podcast about education, certification and, the journey along the way. Today, we're going to talk maintenance of certification. Our guest is Colleen McDonald, who is a celebrated educator in New York state. She has decades of experience with helping teachers and supporting them along their journey. She's also a co-founder of the Classroom Academy, which is a residency for people that are pursuing teaching and education. It's a really incredible place. Colleen is a perfect guest to discuss maintenance of certification with because she has successfully renewed her certification once and is currently pursuing maintenance of certification. So she has a lot of insight into this journey and this process, and I'm so excited to talk to her. So without further ado, let's jump right in. Here we go. Hi, Colleen. How are you?

Colleen McDonald:

Great, Luke. Thanks for having me today.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Thanks for coming on air. I guess we'll call it air, on the internet airwaves at least. Where am I reaching you?

Colleen McDonald:

I am in upstate New York on the Vermont border. Not far from Saratoga Springs.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Sounds like a great place to spend some quarantine time, right?

Colleen McDonald:

It is. It's nice and remote, rural.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Well, why don't you introduce yourself to our audience and tell us a little bit about yourself.

Colleen McDonald:

My name is Colleen McDonald. I'm a National Board certified teacher. I retired in New York state after a 32 year career in public education, and I'm currently pursuing my maintenance of certification. I certified with National Board in 2002. So I did the renewal process about 10 years after that. Now I am up for that again. So I'm pursuing the new process of maintenance of certification, and I'm very excited to be here.

Luke Correia-Damude:

So 2002... That was quite a few years ago now that you got your initial certification, right.

Colleen McDonald:

Let's not talk about the number of years Luke (laughing)

Luke Correia-Damude:

I guess I only wanted to start there and sort of rewind back to when you decided you wanted to become a national board certified teacher

Colleen McDonald:

I spent part of my career in administration. Then I went back to the classroom because I didn't really feel that I was having the impact and direct touch on students that I wanted to have. So I decided to go back to the classroom after I did, I was working with a team of teachers and one of them heard about a program in New York state called the Albert Shanker grant, which allowed you to pursue national board certification. I guess you could say they roped me into doing it with them, I didn't know a lot about it, but it sounded like some really good professional learning and professional growth. I actually didn't certify the first year that I submitted and I ended up the only one of the three doing some retakes the following year and certifying that year.

Luke Correia-Damude:

In that following year, did you feel like you gained something from doing the second round

Colleen McDonald:

It was really a deep dive the second year, it was the most impactful on my thinking and my professional growth at that time. Hopefully no one will do the math, I was about 40 years old and I had never really failed at anything that I had put my mind to. So this was the first time that I had really actively sought something and fell short. It sent me reeling a little bit from that. When I really started digging down into it in the second year and looking at what I did wrong, or what I could do better, I guess, is a better way to phrase it, where I had missed the Mark either in the standards or the directions or the prompts and what they were asking me to think about that was when I did my really heavy reflection. It was really up to me to do the digging and figuring out and it was in that process that I really came to understand some of the things that I had missed and some of the things that were really important to me, and for me to think about for my students' growth,

Luke Correia-Damude:

So you've retired, you said, and, and you've got your kind of "gold watch" from education and all that, but I guess no rest for the wicked, you've decided to go right back in and do your maintenance of certification. Tell me what the inspiration was for that?

Colleen McDonald:

Well, the interesting thing is my original certification was good for 10 years and then I did the renewal process and that was challenging, but so rewarding in terms of professional growth. It made me really look at what I was contributing to my school community, as well as to my students and how I was positively impacting student learning based on everything that I was embodying from National Board. So that process, while it was very different than the original certification process made me really look at what I was doing with that growth and knowledge over the 10 years and how I was still applying it. So fast forward eight more years, I've since retired, and I'm still working with teachers both in New York state, as well as in other States, and this is such a challenging time. I felt that the renewal process was so beneficial that it really made sense to continue that learning with the new maintenance of certification process.

Luke Correia-Damude:

There's no financial incentive for you because you've retired. Maybe you can talk about what financial incentives do exist for certified teachers in your state? Also maybe why it doesn't matter to you, and you're still doing it even as a retired teacher?

Colleen McDonald:

In New York state, we do have the Albert Shanker grant still, which covers the teacher who is pursuing, they apply for the grant. They have to be a tenured teacher in New York state, and then they pay for their first component. It doesn't matter which component they choose to do first, but they pay for that

first one that they pursue. Then the Shanker grant, if it's awarded to them, covers the next three components. When they finish the process, whether or not they certify doesn't matter, they, as long as they finish and complete the process, they can be reimbursed for that first component cost. So it's a great professional growth opportunity for teachers in New York state. So that's one. New York state is a union state so each district is governed by its individually negotiated contract language. So it differs tremendously throughout the state. In some districts, teachers actually get doctoral level pay for having national board certification in the state. You can also take it for graduate credit and almost every district in the state offers some kind of monetary compensation for additional graduate credit. That usually you get for the life of your time in that district with all that aside, it's the best professional development I think hands down I've ever done and so the reward other than financial is just in getting better at what you really care about and you want to do better at.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Now. You're in a unique position in that you have taken the time to renew your certification the old way about 10 years ago and now you're doing your maintenance of certification, which is this new method. Maybe talk to me about how you're seeing some differences. What are you liking better? What do you miss about the old way? Tell me about this new maintenance of certification process.

Colleen McDonald:

So what I like about the new process is that it's much more focused. There's two pieces of it that you focus on. One is what you're doing with the thinking and the growth and the mindset since you last renewed. So with me, I'm doing a lot of work with coaching of teachers and professional learning for teachers. So it's not direct classroom related. The second component though, is they actually ask you to relate it directly back to your certification area and to do that, I needed to borrow a ninth grade English class, which falls within my certification area of early adolescent, English, language arts. So I have now borrowed and I'm, co-teaching a ninth grade English class. It's been six years since I was directly in the classroom working with students. So it is exciting, engaging, and sometimes absolutely overwhelming. I completely forgot what Sunday nights were like and how you had this ball in the pit of your stomach about, am I ready for tomorrow morning? Or, do I have everything I need? Is everything in order and layered on top of that, the virtual or hybrid environment has been so positive, but wow, it has just really built in me a sense of renewed empathy and understanding for the challenges of the teachers I'm working with on the professional learning side just what they're facing every single day.

Luke Correia-Damude:

What resources and tools are you personally using for this maintenance of certification journey? You're on your own path, even though you are doing a lot of helping of other teachers and other candidates, where are you going to get your support?

Colleen McDonald:

I'm actually co-facilitating a brand new virtual group for teachers who are pursuing certification or maintenance of certification. We have 10 teachers in our cohort group, and then also National Board is offering a tremendous number of resources. I participated in some of their webinars. There's lots of great information and there's lots of great people who are involved in that, who, when all one thousand people sign into the webinar and you see all those names in the chat, there's definitely opportunities to reconnect with people that you've worked with previously.

Luke Correia-Damude:

How can teachers find these resources like the webinars and things like that? Where can they go to get these tools and these reference materials?

Colleen McDonald:

So National Board has a fabulous page on their website. You can always go to the National Board website. If you look at first time or returning candidates, there is a wealth of information there as well as a page, completely dedicated to COVID-19 and what is shifting and adjusting as we learn more and more about the challenges of pursuing certification or maintenance of certification in the time of COVID-19.

Luke Correia-Damude:

How did becoming a national board certified teacher make a difference in your student learning?

Colleen McDonald:

Wow, that's such a big question, Luke,

Luke Correia-Damude:

Take a bite off, a small piece of it maybe.

Colleen McDonald:

I think one of the really biggest learnings that I had of becoming a National Board certified teacher was the absolute importance of listening and really listening, especially to parents. When I graduated college and went into my first teaching position, it was long before I had children of my own, so I was not a parent and many parents probably would find this obnoxious, but I believed that because I had all these great courses on behavioral science and how to modify behavior and what to do in the classroom, that I could better tell parents how to support their children in the educational journey. So fast forward, Oh, you know, 15 years, and I learned a lot and certainly becoming a parent helped with that learning as well. The National Board process really emphasized the idea of two way communication. It was through that real exploration of the two way communication that I realized that I thought I was a really good communicator, but when I took a 30,000 foot view of my communication, I realized it was me telling, not sharing, information with parents and I, or the school community wasn't really being an active listener. So I started several things through the National Board process to really develop that two-way communication in terms of emailing parents and phone calls. I actually instituted a project where students wrote me a reflective letter about what they liked about the class, or didn't like about the class and things they thought really helped them and things they thought hindered their learning. Then I asked parents to contribute their own voice to that letter. It was amazing the information that I got, and I really came to fully understand and respect that we were working in concert for these children and that these parents were my best allies and they knew their child better than I could ever hope to know their child.

New Speaker:

So by listening to them and really hearing their hopes and dreams and concerns and frustrations led me to develop a way of communicating and teamwork, a sense of teamwork around the student's growth. That probably was one of the most impactful things for student learning because the parents felt that they were being listened to, that their position and thoughts were being respected and that they were contributing to their child's growth. So we started pulling the wagon in the same direction and there was no blame anymore. It was nobody's fault that this child was doing something that was maybe not the best educational decision. It was. How can we work together to help this student make better decisions and get them on track.

Luke Correia-Damude:

Listening... One of the most powerful resources at our disposal and truly a huge tool for change and growth. I think this is a perfect thought to end on, and, I thank you for listening to the podcast. Thank you to Coleen for joining us and thank you audience for listening. It's such a pleasure for me to be able

to talk to these incredible teachers about their craft and this calling. We couldn't do it without listeners and the support of National Board. Please go and check the website we were telling you about in the podcast today. It's www.nbpts.org. Our next episode is coming at you very shortly, in the meantime, keep your ears open, keep listening and thank you so much. My name is Luke Correia-Damude and we'll talk soon.