

NBPTS 2021 JAMES A. KELLY AWARDS CEREMONY

April 9, 2021

Barnett Berry, Research Professor
University of South Carolina

Good evening everyone. I am profoundly honored to receive the 2021 NBPTS James A Kelly Award. Profoundly is the right word. Deep rooted. Intensity of feeling. Thank you so very much.

If I have done any good to advance teaching, it is because I have learned so much from so many accomplished teachers, particularly NBCTs. You have offered me countless opportunities to watch you teach, ask you questions, and listen to what you know works — or what does not.

Also, if I have done anything good to spur teaching's long, arduous march toward professionalization, it is because of mighty mentors — Art Wise and Linda Darling-Hammond — with whom I continue to work today.

And it was because of Art and Linda that I met the venerable Jim Kelly — whose extraordinary leadership and political acumen established the National Board. Today it has become the bedrock for the promise and prospects for teacher professionalism in American public education.

Professionalism is in large part about how professionals use a codified body of knowledge in the best interest of their clients. It is about professionals establishing and enforcing standards for their field.

The National Board, and its 34-year history, has done much beginning with Jim and now today with Peggy Brookins, to professionalize teaching in America so that every child has access to the educational opportunity that they deserve. Closing the achievement gap does not happen without closing the teaching quality gap. And the teaching quality gap does not close until our most accomplished teachers lead their profession.

This evening has offered me many gifts, and a pause for both thinking back and moving forward.

Over the last several months Jim and I have had these Zoom conversations (yes, Zoom is now a noun, verb, and adjective). I came across the notes from an interview I conducted with Jim, almost 20 years ago, for a formal study of NBCTS and high need schools. We talked about what he said then, and what he is thinking now.

Back in 2003, Jim talked about how the NB process would:

1. *Improve teaching* as accomplished teachers use a “common pedagogical language for collective action for their students.”
2. *Accelerate student achievement*, and “while it will take time, it will be proven;” and
3. *Transform the profession* as NBCTs take on “enriched professional roles” without leaving the classrooms, including their work as teaching principals.

So where are we today? Where do we need to go tomorrow?

Improving teaching. We have over 128,000 NBCTs and a remarkable 2,500 certified this year in the midst of the pandemic. However, this represents about 4 percent of our nation’s professional workforce of over 3 million strong (with the fact that 90 percent of all doctors are board certified).

Yet, Jim reminded me of the “immense indirect impact” of the standards and the process has been “underappreciated” as they have infiltrated teacher education, teaching evaluation, and professional learning systems. The ATLAS library of more than 1,400 cases covering most subjects, grades and school settings has been a “brilliant move.” The NB has done remarkable work over the years to support teachers in de-privatizing their teaching and going public with their practice. The isolation of teachers from each other in the “eggcrate” organizational structure of schools has long tamped down professionalism.

Accelerating student achievement. Jim reminded me that, in the early years, National Board had run into the “stonewall of the obsession” over standardized achievement tests when its assessments sought to measure much more than what was on annual multiple choice exams. However, a growing [body of evidence](#) — emerging in the mid-2000s and still developing — has pointed to the influence of NBCTs on improving student test scores. It took time, but Jim has proven to be a bit of soothsayer. But the National Board continues to have its naysayers. Winning them over will require better use of the evidence, but also considerable political maneuvering.

Transforming the profession. Twenty-six states recognize NBCTs with financial rewards. Some come. So, go. But let’s face it. We do not pay NBCTs nearly enough — even in states like Montana and North Carolina that offer a 12 percent annual stipend. In North Carolina, the average salary for the average NBCT lands at about \$60,000. The highest paid high school football coach in Texas makes almost \$160,000 a year.

Only about 10 states, by my count, now offer additional compensation for NBCTs to teach in high need schools. But more importantly, NBCTs are not utilized enough. From a project I am working on now with NBCTs (including with Melissa Collins), we are learning of the innovations teachers are discovering or using in the face of the pandemic-induced disruptions of schooling. But administrators continue to not know how to capitalize on accomplished teachers.

We have many roadmaps to reimaging schooling so teachers can and will lead. I have been involved with y’all in so many ways to create them over the years. Here are three: (1) the NCTAF report (1996); (2) the NBPTS summits on high need schools, in partnership with the National Education Association (mid-2000s); (3) the future of the profession from our *TEACHING 2030* team (early 2010s).

Let me close with a few thoughts about the future of the National Board and NBCTs.

NBCTs as a team sport. Rightfully so, the NB assessment process is about identifying highly accomplished teachers. However, at the end of the day, teaching is a team sport. Perhaps we need an *add-on certificate for teacher teams* to demonstrate how they transform (not just turnaround) high need schools. The still nascent Teacher Powered Schools movement is good place to start. However, there are only 150 of them. And we do not have a way yet to document their effectiveness with common metrics and how team-based teaching, led by teachers, make a difference in student learning and other important outcomes.

NBCTs for deeper learning for the Future of Work. Business leaders are calling for a new kind of schooling, with a focus less on standardized test scores and more on deeper learning and the soft skills young people need to develop for the jobs of tomorrow that do not exist today. You know. The kind of education where educators do not address numeracy and literacy without well-being as well as academic achievement without adaptive thinking, collaboration, communication.

NBCTs deliver on this different kind of student learning. We have yet to make this explicit. Perhaps we need to recognize NBCTs when they develop and use these skills with performance assessments that show students applying knowledge in nonroutine ways or in creating ways to use the science of learning to integrate social-emotional learning into the academic core. Perhaps we can build on the micro-credentialing movement in teacher learning — something I know Terry Holliday and Peggy are interested in pursuing.

NBCTs in a reimagined education profession. Perhaps now is the moment to reinvent not just the teaching profession, but the education professions. Influential think tanks, including Linda's, are drawing on evidence to advance whole child, whole community education, and in both red and blue states. How can we think of NBCTs as central to this movement, drawing on their content-specific pedagogical expertise, but also their knowledge of child, family, and community? Think about the roles the NBCTs, with time and space, might have to work with social workers and afterschool providers.

Think about every student having access to NBCTs because we have broken down the silos of the 1-teacher and 30-student per classroom model of schooling (see Art's brilliant 2004 essay, "[Teaching Teams](#)"). Think about the progress the profession of nursing has made and the differentiated roles different kinds of nurses play in the larger healthcare ecosystem. [New roles](#) for nurses required new payment systems to recognize and value them. Perhaps now is time for the sixth proposition of the NBPTS. Perhaps now is time to focus not just on a few more teacher leaders but on a system of leading teachers with NBCTs as the driving force for the new normal of schooling in the aftermath of the pandemic.

When we were visiting last month, I reminded Jim of the most powerful idea I heard him utter.

The highest paid anybody in a public school system should be a practicing teacher.

Think about that. Jim reminded me the of "logic" of this proposition:

You cannot profess the value of something that is supposed to be predominant and invest less in it.

This should be our North Star. All social movements, including the professionalization of teaching, involve mobilizing resources and mass participation as well as raising consciousness including among our fellow teachers. We have more technical, but also considerable political, work to do. I believe we need to develop deeper alliances with business leaders and parents as well as administrators. The work of professionalizing teaching was never supposed to be a sprint. It is a marathon. We still have our running shoes on, and we are moving forward.

With my heart wide open I cannot thank you enough for this honor and the opportunity to stand side by side with you— as we said in our NCTAF days — to advance teaching as the profession that makes all others possible.

