Early Childhood / Generalist
Middle Childhood / Generalist

Adolescence and Young Adulthood / English Language Arts
Early Adolescence / English Language Arts
Early Childhood through Young Adulthood / Library Media
Early and Middle Childhood / Literacy: Reading-Language Arts

Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood / Career & Technical Education
Adolescence and Young Adulthood / Mathematics
Adolescence and Young Adulthood / Science
Early Adolescence / Science

Adolescence and Young Adulthood / Social Studies-History
Early Adolescence / Social Studies-History
Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood / World Languages Other than English

Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood / Art
Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood / Music
Early and Middle Childhood / Music

Early Childhood through Young Adulthood / Exceptional Needs Specialist
The following National Board Certified Teachers contributed to Working Wisdom: A Guide to Accomplished Teaching:

Sandra Ames  
Heather Caswell  
Roger Caswell  
Stacy Cordes  
Connie Foster  
Jennifer Gessley  
Theresa Grospitch  
Susie Harrison  
Cheryl Kerns  
Pat Mairs  
Jamie Manhart  
Fred Nelson  
Linda Olson  
Juli O’Mealy  
Alvin Peters  
Beth Pope  
Gayle Ross  
Jerrilee Shuman  
Sheryl Smith  
Debra Stewart  
Karen Tritt  
Marilyn Vaughan  
Bruce Wellman

EDITORS

Alvin Peters, NBCT  
Director, Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification  
Emporia State University

Dr. Roger Caswell, NBCT  
Director (2006-2012), Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification  
Emporia State University

Linda Sobieski  
Director (1995-2006), Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification  
Emporia State University

Andrew Davis, NBCT  
Wichita Public Schools
Introduction

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was founded in 1987 in order to achieve the following mission:

To advance the quality of teaching and learning by

- maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do,
- providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, and
- advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers.

National Board Certification has proven itself to be a valid and reliable method of identifying the nation’s accomplished teachers, with the added benefit of providing candidates with a professional development experience many rate as the best they have ever experienced. They also note, however, that it took a great deal of time—usually the first six weeks to three months of their candidacy, working with their standards, collecting evidence, and drafting portfolio entries—before everything clicked and they suddenly “got it.” Here are some examples of what they “got.”

- An understanding of what the National Board is assessing and measuring vs. what “I” want them to assess and measure.
- The National Board’s concept of “quality teaching” (as defined by NBPTS standards) vs. a collection of definitions for quality, some directly contradicting others, based for the most part on idiosyncratic experience.
- The ability to understand what really matters when demonstrating accomplished teaching vs. good stories that make me feel good about myself but don’t represent productive work.
- The difference between convincing evidence vs. relevant but unconvincing evidence.
- An engagement in critical self-analysis based on high and rigorous standards that lead to better teaching—regardless of how “good” I was before I began.
- An understanding that, for the National Board, the only thing that ultimately matters is improved student learning.
- An understanding that National Board certification is a designation they are working hard to earn, vs. an award or recognition they hope to win.

Our first goal in developing this guide was to help National Board candidates “get it” sooner rather than later: if a candidate would normally have “gotten it” in six weeks, we want the candidate to “get it” in three; if it would have taken three months, we hope to reduce the time to a month-and-a-half. It will still require a great deal of effort on a candidate’s part to “get it,” but it is our hope, by drawing on the wisdom and experience of National Board Certified Teachers, we will mark a path candidates can follow in an attempt to steer this professional growth experience in its intended direction a little sooner than might otherwise be possible.
Our second goal is to encourage school districts throughout Kansas to use this resource as a companion to the Note-Taking Guides developed by NBPTS and published on their web site in order to enhance their own staff development activities. All teachers, whether they are working toward National Board Certification or not, can improve the quality of their work if they have a better understanding of the factors related to accomplished teaching. For example, it is not enough to simply assert that knowledge of students matters. An accomplished teacher knows and understands:

- why knowledge of students matters;
- the kind of knowledge about students that is most relevant to a specific teaching assignment;
- how to efficiently and effectively collect that knowledge; and,
- how to use that knowledge to build and/or strengthen instructional skills and abilities that will in turn contribute to improved student learning.

This same level of understanding is also crucial in goal setting and forming meaningful connections between goals, planning, structuring of instructional sequence, formative and summative assessments, analysis, reflection—and the list goes on and on.

It is important to remember that the suggestions included in this resource will not replace the insight and effort a National Board candidate must apply to the individual work as the candidate goes through the candidacy process nor guarantee success. The information in this resource is based on the writers’ various personal experiences with the NBPTS certification process. There is much more a candidate will have to address and provide in the way of information, supporting documents, instructional artifacts, etc. for each entry. The guidance authors provide here is, from their experience, what will help candidates overcome their greatest challenges in regard to developing and submitting strong entries–entries focused on the tasks of accomplished teaching and learning, and show evidence of meeting the NBPTS standards.

**Support for National Board Candidates**

We have titled this resource *Working Wisdom: A Guide to Accomplished Teaching* for two specific reasons. First, and most importantly, the suggestions included in it have worked for the National Board Certified Teachers who made them. Second, these suggestions reflect the wisdom of the NBCTs who made them. By wisdom, we mean something very specific: a clear and convincing understanding of both the ends (National Board Certification) and the means (how to achieve that Certification) of the candidacy process. In other words, following the advice presented here has the potential to increase candidates’ respective understandings of what they should be most concerned with, why they should be concerned with it, and how they should act on that understanding. This vision of the “big picture” is essential to help candidates use their time efficiently and effectively.

**Assumptions**

We make three assumptions about National Board Candidates who choose to use this document for assistance in their pursuit of National Board Certification:

- You have read and studied the standards for your certificate area.
You have read and studied the instructions for each portfolio entry for your certificate area.

You have read and studied the rubrics and Note-Taking Guide provided in the Scoring Guide for your certificate area.

Note: The Portfolio Instructions and the Scoring Guide can be found by going to the downloads section of the NBPTS Website (www.nbpts.org), finding your certificate area, and following the appropriate link to the desired destination.

Getting Started

Once you have completed the three tasks listed above, the “working wisdom” of a National Board Certified Teacher can be of help to you. There are many ways to use these suggestions, but here are what we believe will be the most helpful.

If you haven’t already printed out the “Composing Written Commentary” section from your portfolio entry instructions, do so now. Then sit down with (1) that document, (2) a copy of the standards for your certificate area, and (3) the corresponding section (by both certificate area and portfolio entry number) of this booklet.

You will notice a series of italicized questions in your portfolio instructions. The Note-Taking Guide was designed to help you collect the clear, consistent, and convincing evidence you will include in your response to each of these questions, while the suggestions in this booklet will both help clarify what is meant by “clear, consistent, and convincing” and make very specific suggestions regarding how to collect that evidence.

Begin by identifying the suggestions from Working Wisdom that both relate to a specific prompt in your portfolio instructions and appear to offer you the most fruitful use of your time.

It is important to remember not all suggestions will be equally helpful to all candidates. Each contributor has offered suggestions for gathering evidence to support a candidate’s decision of how to possibly respond effectively to these prompts. The candidate should use whatever combination of those suggestions that will best help answer the prompts in a manner that is clear, consistent, and convincing for the reality of the candidate’s own classroom and journey through the National Board process.

The candidate must remember there is limited space in which to respond to each prompt; therefore, all information cannot be included because all information is not equally compelling for the reality of the candidate’s own classroom. The suggestions provided in this resource serve as a possible guide for responding to the written commentary prompts for each portfolio entry.

In any certificate area, a candidate must use professional judgment to select the best evidence possible to include in a portfolio entry rather than just the relevant evidence. Merely relevant evidence just fills space and compels an assessor to ask “So what?” Best evidence, however, is convincing and compels an assessor to smile and nod in agreement. It is the same experience you have as a teacher when a student “gets it,” and you are amazed that someone so young has such significant understanding.

Always aim for amazement.
What? So What? and Now What?

The prompts for the written commentary in each portfolio should lead the candidate to three types of thinking: description, analysis, and reflection. All three are essential to providing a clear, consistent, and convincing written response. To aid in this thinking, the candidate could review the written commentary to determine if the following three questions have been addressed:


Other Staff Development Activities

It is impossible to predict how a grade level, team, department, school, and/or school district might want to use this resource to enhance staff development activities. The best uses of it will undoubtedly be found in the nexus between a particular set of student needs and the creativity of someone trying to meet those needs—not in an introduction written in an office far from the real lives of students and teachers. Still, there are some suggestions that can be made to help teachers and school leaders find that nexus for themselves and use it to their advantage.

Standards Matter

By bringing standards from the National Board into grade level, team, department, school, and/or school district staff development activities, we can begin to raise teachers and school leaders’ expectations of quality. One of the most important things a teacher must “get” before able to demonstrate accomplished teaching is a clear sense of what National Board “quality” is. The same principle applies to groups of teachers as well. Reading and discussing the standards can help teachers clarify expectations for themselves and their students, increase rigor without just piling the work on higher and deeper, and strengthen relationships between schools and their external stakeholders—particularly with parents and community partners—in ways that lead to significantly improved student learning. Dumping all of the standards for a specific certificate area on a group of teachers and school leaders, however, is much like telling employees that the beatings will continue until morale improves. Each set of standards is much too comprehensive to be approached in this manner.

Start Small

We recommend, to the greatest extent possible, staff development with the standards be done in small groups of teachers and school leaders with related professional needs and interests, and the standards used meet the specific needs of the participants involved. This will rarely, if ever, lead to a one-size-fits-all staff development program.

For example, the Adolescent Young Adult/English Language Arts certificate area consists of 16 standards. Standard II: Knowledge of English Language Arts, is made up of at least 26 elements, ranging from “Teachers understand the nature of motivation—including both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards—and that understanding allows them to engage students through deliberately and strategically crafted language experiences” to “Literature is understood as an expression of human creativity that evolves over time and can describe intellectual currents, social forces, and innovations.”

Members of a high school language arts department that consists of relatively inexperienced teachers could spend a year’s worth of work developing their skills in either of these two elements from Standard II and still have much work to do. Effective school leaders will
recognize such an inexperienced group might need mentors to help them fully understand how to motivate all students, rather than those most like themselves, or that focusing on “literature as an expression of human creativity” is by no means an excuse to ignore conventions. Making wisdom work is not easy and requires experienced guidance, not trial by fire.

For a department consisting primarily of successful teachers with significant experience, however, such intense focus on either or even both of these elements could well be a waste of valuable time and erode staff morale. This group might be better served by linking the two elements from Standard II above with an element from Standard IV: Fairness, Equity, and Diversity, “Teachers appreciate and build on the diversity and commonalities they find within their classroom” and an element from Standard V: Learning Environment, “Teachers help students value what they have learned by providing the opportunity for them to apply their learning beyond the classroom.” Or their experience might lead them in an entirely different direction.

Most high school language arts departments, however, represent a mix of experience that makes these two extremes seem rather simplistic—and the same can be said of most groups of teachers in most schools. What really matters is that the teachers involved identify their needs and focus on those standards that will help them best meet those needs. This is where effective school leaders are critical, whether in the role of superintendent, curriculum coordinator, director of staff development, principal, grade level or team leader, department chair, mentor, or good friend. Since most teachers are not pursuing National Board Certification, it is unrealistic to expect them to study the standards for their respective areas of certification to the same extent as would a candidate. Helping the teacher identify the connections among the needs of individual teachers, the needs of students, and the standards sets the stage for significant staff development that matters on a practical level for teachers. It is also critical that school leaders recognize when their “help” ceases to be helpful, and the best thing they can do is get out of the way of good work being accomplished.

Once these connections have been identified, this resource can provide helpful suggestions for specific staff development experiences that could range from self-contained, single-day sessions to on-going experiences that last an entire school year or even longer.

All teachers need to know and understand certain things:

- they need to use significant knowledge and understanding of their students to enhance the quality of their instruction;
- they need to have mastered the content for which they are responsible; they need to establish rigorous and worthwhile goals for their students;
- they need to engage in effective instructional design and create a learning environment that fosters student engagement;
- they need to simultaneously use assessments to both document and enhance student learning;
- they need to make concern for diversity a natural way to engage students rather than an imposition foisted on them by some external force;
- they need to view the establishment of meaningful partnerships with their students’ families and other concerned, external stakeholders within their school communities as fundamental job requirements; and,
- they need to engage in recursive, systematic reflection and critical analysis of their work.
Working Wisdom: A Guide to Accomplished Teaching is designed to provide educators with specific suggestions that will help them know and understand “these things.” We hope you find it useful.

**Alvin Peters**, NBCT  
Director, Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification  
Emporia State University

**Dr. Roger Caswell**, NBCT  
Director (2006-2012),  
Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification  
Emporia State University

**Linda Sobieski**  
Director (1995-2006),  
Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification  
Emporia State University

**Andrew Davis**, NBCT  
Wichita Public Schools