Blue Valley Educators Achieve Board Certification

If someone were to ask you to voluntarily go through a rigorous process to prove you were an effective professional, would you?

If it meant going through a one- to three-year process requiring you to document your professional work – through writing numerous essays, undergoing assessment exercises, recording videos of you performing at work – all of it requiring you to think about what you do in your work and why you do it, would you do it?

Last year four teachers from Blue Valley USD 229 decided to do go through such a process in the form of national board certification.

The educators - Courtney Bowles, Mary Livingston, William Smithyman, and Richard Wilson - recently found out they were successful and are now National Board Certified Teachers.

These four were among 20 Kansas educators who went through the rigorous journey a year ago. Throughout the fall and spring they worked on gathering the portfolio materials, recording students’ work in the classroom, showing they were, indeed, effective teachers. In March, they sent the materials off to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, where a team of at least a dozen peers – other accomplished practicing teachers – reviewed their work.

They are among the 8,600 teachers across the country who went through the process last year and have had to wait from spring until nearly the end of the year to find out if they were successful.

All Kansas teachers seeking certification are eligible to receive help from a center at Emporia State University which assists teachers working toward national certification. Bowles and Livingston were among the 17 teachers who took advantage of this support.

“This process of board certification is very much like how a doctor becomes certified in a special area,” said Dr. Roger Caswell, director of ESU’s Great Plains Center for National Teacher Certification. “This is voluntary – no state, school district, or program is demanding them to go through this process.”

While the national board process is often misunderstood to mean a teacher passed a test or was nominated for the award, Caswell explained the certification is a different kind of honor. Teachers must submit extensive documentation of their instruction, including videos of their students at work in the classroom.

The accomplishment of national board certification benefits the teachers, the schools they work in, and studies have shown NBCTs improves student learning.

“Teachers pursuing National Board Certification reflect daily on their effectiveness as defined by how well their students learn, which is a major goal of the National Board,” said Phil Bennett, Dean of The Teachers College at ESU. “Emporia State University and The Teachers College congratulate the teachers who have met this benchmark of excellence that is achieved only by the most skilled educators!”

More information about ESU’s program can be found at www.emporia.edu/jones/nbpts/.