

"On My Mind" is an op-ed column for personal, controversial, provocative commentary.

Quality control mechanisms abound in our society to guarantee to the general public that competent professionals are handling critical services. We license doctors and lawyers; we recognize optical shops that we trust; the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval used to be a major factor in what housewives purchased. In education, we recognize teaching and library credentials, accredit schools, reward excellence through distinguished school recognition, and give local, state, or national awards to outstanding individuals.

In our own field, we now have National Board Certification (NBC). I remember well the wonderful group of professionals who met with National Boards for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) officials to create the standards for NBC of library media specialists. We dreamed and tried to design a framework upon which exceptional professionals in our field would be recognized nationally as the cream of the crop. Now the process has begun. School library media specialists (SLMSs) are being certified, and, as a worried parent, one begins to ask questions about the end results. "What hath god (very small g) wrought?"

1. If we asked the faculties, administration, and parents to rate if the services of SLMSs certified by NBPTS were absolutely indispensable to their school's achievement program, what would be the result? And its corollary: If the budget was really tight, and the faculty could retain only one specialist on staff whom they considered indispensable, what percent would choose a library media professional recognized by NBPTS?
2. What is the future of NBPTS recognition if candidates have to pay their own expenses and there is no salary differential?

3. Realistically, how many people try to qualify when there is only a certificate of recognition as the end result?
3. Are efforts going forward to make NBPTS recognition equal to a national credential recognized in all states?
4. When pass rates for NBC approach 90 percent, what does that say about the process of recognizing only the best? How do board passing rates compare to other quality control mechanisms, such as the bar exam for lawyers?
5. How many states will continue to be willing to provide the financial incentives for SLMSs to take the exam and to provide long-term salary benefits?
6. What safeguards are in place to prevent NBC from turning into a business rather than a true professional improvement organization?
7. What is the research track record of the impact that NBPTS recognition has had on teaching and learning?
8. What percent of those who take National Boards are active in their state and national library and media organizations? If not, why not? And its corollary: Should any person not active in state and national library and media organizations over their career be deserving of recognition?
9. Under further scrutiny, how many of those who pass National Boards exhibit true leadership and creativity in their jobs as compared to those who can just write and document well?
10. If a stranger to the school were to do the lunchroom test—sitting at random tables to ask students how they feel about their library and its contribution—how many NBC library media teachers would receive high accolades? ●

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