

Professional Teaching Standards: what does it mean for the technology teacher?

An interview with **Michael Jensen**, technology facilitator at Paonia High School, Colorado, and chair of the Vocational Education Standards Committee for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the USA

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Q *What is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)?*

A The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is a non-profit, independent organisation whose purpose is to improve student learning in America's schools by developing a new system of advanced, voluntary certification for teachers from elementary, middle and secondary schools. The National Board will establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, as well as Board-certify teachers that can meet those standards.

Q *Will the National Board have an effect on technology teachers in the long run?*

A Yes, for the first time the field will have a rich description that can guide teacher education and ongoing professional development. National Board certification will be a way for technology teachers to be recognised for highly accomplished practice. A National Board certificate will attest that a teacher has been judged by his or her peers as one who is a highly accomplished teacher who can make sound professional judgements about students' best interests and act effectively on those judgements.

Q *What are the time lines for all this activity?*

A In general, the National Board has completed Phase I of its work, which was initial policy development. Currently, Phase II, Research & Development, is fully under way, which includes the establishment of standards in each certificate field, the design and field testing of compatible assessment exercises and the creation of an operating system that can administer for reliable and trustworthy assessments on a national scale. Phase III, Operation of National Board Certification, has begun with NBPTS offering two middle grades certificates during the 94-95 school year. Phase II should be by the end of the decade and Phase III is, of course, ongoing.

Q *You are the Chairperson of a committee working on activities for technology teachers. What are you attempting to accomplish?*

A The Vocational Education Standards Committee of the National Board is in the process of identifying what vocational teachers should know and be able to do for National Board certification — that is, defining those critical aspects of practice that distinguish the

work of excellent teachers. In this process the committee is seeking to identify the aspects of practice that are common across all vocational education fields as well as important aspects of practice that distinguish highly accomplished technology education teachers from highly accomplished Agriculture Education teachers. I know that many in the profession of technology education have some difficulties in being included in a melting pot of vocational education, since technology education has been an active part of the general education curriculum. Whatever one's philosophy, the National Board is providing an opportunity for highly accomplished teachers of technology education to become Board-certified and be acknowledged for the specialty of their practice alongside highly accomplished teachers of all disciplines in education.

Q *What direction is this work taking?*

A Thus far, the committee is trying to capture a new vision in education by seeking the broad scopes of cutting-edge programs that are applied, learning oriented and integrated with all the subject areas of the school. Technology education has a uniqueness due to its broad-based approach to curriculum and the programs in application learning that interfaces well with the vision of this committee. The integration of applied learning and the emergence of vocational education subjects into the total school curriculum is being discussed in the standards work to determine what highly accomplished teachers know and are able to do. A distinctive aspect of this committee, comprised of representatives of all vocational disciplines, is identifying the commonalities among the cutting-edge programs and the differences that make us exclusive to our fields. Many of the new trends toward the educational setting such as the school-to-work transition, industry-based education, career major options, and several others are being digested in order to form a future picture for the standards work.

Q *When all this work is completed, how will technology teachers be able to prepare themselves for this?*

A I'm not sure this answer will help, but I know from being on the vocational committee that all assessment exercises must promote the National Board's vision of highly accomplished teaching, adequately assess a candidate's depth and breadth of subject matter

knowledge, examine a teacher's decision-making ability, employ rich and meaningful contexts, and engage teachers in authentic activities that are representative of teachers' real experiences and practice. I should mention to those who are new to the field of technology education that a teacher must have at least three years' teaching experience before they can apply for Board certification. Generally speaking, the National Board will provide guidelines when applying for Board certification that will outline the assessment methods and their component parts.

Q As a technology teacher, what draws your attention to working on such a project?

A Although technology education has had a set of standards for evaluating programs, and all related aspects of programs in place, I find that universally there is no common gauge for the teachers that can make or break a program. The National Board certification will offer teachers to show their commitment to lifelong education, reflective practice and professional development. One may even see a deeper thrust toward involvement in professional organisations in order to keep as current with curriculum change. The incentives for becoming a National Board certified teacher are tremendous as this certification will attract new teachers to education, hold on to the good ones, provide mobility between states and enhance the status of educators. Some states are providing the cost of getting Board certified and other states are granting monetary bonuses for teachers that achieve Board certification. For the highly accomplished technology teachers in our profession, and there are many, they should be afforded an opportunity to be a great teacher in the teaching profession and be granted all the privileges that accompany Board certification.

Q Will this hinder our profession?

A I currently see Board certification as a growth opportunity. The teaching profession as a whole will grow. I also see some states that are positioning themselves by providing incentives for teachers to become Board certified, thereby increasing the odds that they can establish a highly professional teaching force. This is speculation on my part, but we could see the same competition occurring in the field of teaching that occurs in recruiting doctors to communities, which would be better for the profession on the whole. The National

Board certification will require teachers to reflect upon their practice and be active in the professional development of themselves; this aspect alone should provide a large impact upon the International Technology Education Association as a professional growth organisation. Speculatively speaking, the ITEA will see a growth in membership as highly accomplished teachers seek renewal in curriculum and practice.

Q How can we expect to strengthen our profession as a result of this work?

A For the first time in the history of education, we will have agreement on the essentials of exemplary practice, and the ability to hold on to and attract stronger teachers. A positive effect on the public's attention toward the demands and complexity of excellent teaching will occur and in turn provide community backing for programs. Board certification will lead to a rational and proactive means for organising and managing schools with greater autonomy, responsibility and competition for highly accomplished teachers. In particular, I would expect the profession of technology education to be inundated with highly accomplished teachers and their exemplary programs.