

What Works Clearinghouse



June 2009

WWC Quick Review of the Report “National Board Certification and Teacher Effectiveness: Evidence from a Random Assignment Experiment”[†]

What is this study about?

This study examined whether having a teacher with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification improves student achievement.

The study analyzed data on about 3,800 second through fifth grade students taught by 198 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Study data were from 2003–04 and 2004–05.

Each teacher who had applied for NBPTS certification was matched with a comparison teacher who taught the same grade at the same school but had not applied for certification. Classrooms of students were then randomly assigned to either the NBPTS applicant teacher or the comparison teacher.

The authors compared the test scores of students assigned to NBPTS-certified teachers and teachers who failed to receive NBPTS certification to those of students assigned to comparison teachers.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards

Strengths: The study is a well-implemented randomized controlled trial.

Features of NBPTS Certification

Teachers who have taught for at least three years submit a teaching portfolio and respond to essay questions to assess pedagogical knowledge

Portfolio submissions and essay responses are scored to determine whether an applicant passes

Unsuccessful applicants may retake any portfolio entries or essays; about two-thirds of applicants eventually meet certification requirements

Process can take from three months to several years to complete

What did the study authors report?

The study found no statistically significant differences between the math and language arts test scores of students assigned to NBPTS-certified teachers and those assigned to teachers who did not apply for NBPTS certification.

Students assigned to teachers who applied for and failed to receive NBPTS certification had lower test scores than students assigned to teachers who did not apply for certification, however. When controlling for student and classroom characteristics, the difference in math test scores was about one-sixth of a standard deviation (equivalent to moving a student from the 50th to the 43rd percentile). The difference in language arts test scores was about one-eighth of a standard deviation (equivalent to moving a student from the 50th to the 45th percentile).

[†]Cantrell, S., Fullerton, J., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2008). *National board certification and teacher effectiveness: Evidence from a random assignment experiment* (NBER Working Paper 14608). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.