ABSTRACT

LYNCH, JAMEE OSBORN. The Leadership Influence of National Board Certified Teachers in Elementary Schools. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance Fusarelli.)

This qualitative multiple case study focused on describing the leadership influence of National Board certified teachers in three elementary schools. The study explored how National Board certified teachers exert leadership influence on building-level school improvement and change, and it provides a detailed picture of leadership roles among National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) in three elementary schools in North Carolina school district. The study also provides an analysis on the school factors that seem to serve as either drivers or restrainers in supporting the leadership of National Board certified teachers. Study outcomes illuminate school factors and conditions that nurture and sustain teacher leadership.

The study was undertaken using data collected from online surveys, school visits, school achievement data, community profile data, and individual and small focus group interviews. Overarching themes and conclusions were derived from analysis of interviews, school descriptions, community profiles, and school demographic and achievement data. Overall, the study found that National Board certified teachers tend to be teacher leaders, and leadership skills are not necessarily developed through the National Board certification process. Key findings were the critical role of principals in creating a school culture that fosters and supports teacher leaders; the finding that the leadership influence of NBCTs can be found in many arenas and is not necessarily tied to formal leadership roles, and that existing school structures and policy create barriers to deeper, richer teacher leadership roles.
The study includes implications and recommendations for policy makers, practitioners, and further research.
The Leadership Influence of National Board Certified Teachers in Elementary Schools

by

Jamee Lynch

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

The completion of this dissertation reflects many hours, weeks, and years. I could not have taken on the challenges of a doctoral program without my husband, John Lynch. His unflagging love, support, and commitment are truly the ‘wind beneath my wings.’ I would also like to thank my daughter, Victoria Sosa, for believing in me and encouraging me to always aspire to excellence. Victoria has truly grown up during the years I spent completing this work, so her imprint is strong on the process and the final product.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for being my role models throughout my life. They have supported me in every endeavor and goal, and have always been the quiet cheerleaders in the background as I have embraced every personal and professional challenge in my life.
BIOGRAPHY

The author of this study, Jamee Osborn Lynch, was born on March 22, 1961 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is the eldest of three children born to Robert and Nancy “Pidge” Osborn. She lived in several states throughout childhood and adolescence, including Pennsylvania, Ohio, Connecticut, and North Carolina.

She graduated from Myers Park High School in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1979. Jamee graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism in 1982. She spent several years in the field of journalism, including radio and print. She served in the United States Marine Corps from 1984 to 1986 as a military journalist, and is proud of earning the 1986 Combat Correspondents Association Award for Best Picture Story for an article and photographs published on the dedication of the Beirut Memorial in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

Jamee chose to enter the field of education in order to share her love of writing with high school students. She earned a Master of Education from the University of South Alabama in 1991, and began her teaching career at Lejeune High School at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. She taught freshman English, Advanced Placement English, yearbook, and journalism classes from 1991 to 1995. In 1995, she married John Lynch, a career Marine, and upon his retirement in 1995, she relocation to Wake County, North Carolina to teach English at Garner Senior High School. Under the guidance and recommendation of then-principal John Williams, Jamee applied and was accepted into Class 4 of the North Carolina Principal Fellows program at Fayetteville State University, where she graduated in 1999 with a Master of School Administration.
She began her administrative career in Johnston County, North Carolina, at Selma Middle School, where she served as Assistant Principal from 1998 through 2000. In 2000, she returned to Wake County, North Carolina, as an Assistant Principal at Vance Elementary School in Garner, NC. She was promoted to a principal position in 2001, where she assumed the role of principal at Hodge Road Elementary School in Knightdale, North Carolina. Under her leadership, Hodge Road progressed from a school with the lowest student reaching achievement in the district to a school that made Adequate Yearly Progress with every student group, exiting Title I School Improvement status in 2006. Her leadership, along with the efforts of a talented, committed teaching staff, resulted in Jamee being named the Wake County Principal of the Year in 2006, and the North Central Region Principal of the Year in 2007.

In 2007, Jamee opened Sanford Creek Elementary, a new multi-track year-round elementary school in Rolesville, North Carolina. The opportunity to build a school from the ground up was a career highlight. However, she felt compelled to return to her high school teaching roots, and in 2009, she assumed the role of principal at East Wake High School’s School of Integrated Technology. She hopes to continue to use her passion for innovation and making a difference for students at high school level.

Jamee has been influenced and inspired by many educational leaders throughout her career. She hopes to leave a legacy of excellence in every endeavor—now and in the future.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of my doctoral studies has been influenced by many mentors. I would like to thank Dr. Lance Fusarelli, my dissertation chairperson, for keeping me focused and always providing positive and supportive guidance and feedback.

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Chapter I

Background/Context of the Study

Education has entered an era of accountability. Federal and state legislative mandates have resulted in tougher high school graduation standards, benchmarks for promotion from each grade level, the end of social promotion, and stricter standards for teacher licensure. These policy issues are coupled with a pervasive teacher shortage and increasing diversity in North Carolina public schools, thereby increasing the need for high-quality teachers. According to the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research (2004), the state faces increasing numbers of school-aged children, legislative class-size reduction mandates, and a teacher turnover rate of up to 20 percent in some North Carolina school districts. The total population in North Carolina is projected to increase by 14.7 percent between 2010 and 2020 (North Carolina State Data Center, 2005). The Data Center projects that between 2000 and 2030, this increasing population growth will have a significant impact on educational enrollment. The potential kindergarten population (5 years old) is projected to increase by 44.5 percent; the elementary school age population (6-13) will increase by 36.7 percent; the high school age (14-17) population will increase by 47.7 percent. These demographic trends will create a strong need for teachers and may support a climate where the number of accomplished, credentialed educators such as National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) will continue to be in demand.

found that North Carolina’s Hispanic population grew 394 percent between 1990 and 2000, and North Carolina led the nation in its percentage of Hispanic population growth. Further analysis of the demographics of the Hispanic immigrants reflected that 57 percent were foreign-born, 62 percent lacked a high school diploma, and 57 percent were not proficient in spoken English (Pew Research Center, 2005). The impact of this demographic trend is apparent when examining the increasing number of students who do not speak English as their first language, and who have a significantly higher poverty rate. The number of students who require English as a Second Language (ESL) services in one urban N.C. district increased from 4,003 in the 2001-02 school year to 12,850 in 2008-09. Hispanic children are the largest demographic group qualifying for ESL services, comprising 77.1 percent of the total number of students served. Hispanic children also represent the largest group of students in poverty, with 68.3 percent receiving free or reduced lunch (Office of Growth and Planning, 2008). Increasing enrollment coupled with higher percentages of children with special instructional needs create even greater challenges in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers.

The federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* added an additional layer of standards, increasing the pressure to meet the educational needs of every child. The Act redefines the federal role in K-12 education and sets the goal of reducing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. Key components of the legislation include:

- All public school children will be required to perform at grade level in reading and mathematics by the end of the 2013-14 school year.
All public schools in the United States must measure and report Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP measures the yearly progress of different groups of students at the school, district, and state levels against a yearly target in reading and mathematics. There are both proficiency and participation targets. Proficiency target goals are set increasingly higher in three-year increments until 2013-14.

Adequate Yearly Progress measures the yearly progress toward achieving grade level performance for each student group in reading and mathematics. Student groups are: 1) the School as a Whole; 2) White; 3) Black; 4) Hispanic; 5) Native American; 6) Asian; 7) Multiracial; 8) Economically Disadvantaged Students; 9) Limited English Proficient Students; and 10) Students With Disabilities.

By June 30, 2006, all teachers of core academic subjects (English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, social studies, economics, arts, history, geography, and kindergarten through Grade 6) were required to be "Highly Qualified." The federal definition of a "Highly Qualified" teacher is one who is fully certified and/or licensed by the state; holds at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution; and demonstrates competence in each core academic subject area in which the teacher teaches. As of September 2004, 83 percent of North Carolina's public school classes were taught by "Highly Qualified" teachers (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.(a)).

The No Child Left Behind act also places greater restrictions on teacher licensing, eliminating provisional licenses (for teaching out-of-field), temporary licenses (for teachers who have not satisfied North Carolina testing requirements), endorsements (for teaching out-
of-field 50 percent of the time or less), and seriously reducing lateral entry options at the elementary grade levels and for special education, as applicants must pass the required state tests (currently PRAXIS II) before being issued a lateral entry license. Lateral entry candidates have three years, instead of the previous five, to obtain full state licensure status (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Clearly, legislative mandates restricting teacher applicant pools combined with continued public school enrollment increases creates challenges for the education profession.

Research indicates a strong correlation between quality teachers and student achievement (Collias, Pajak, & Rigden, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997), which has driven policymakers to examine ways to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. The ever-increasing mandates for student performance accountability have also pushed educators to rethink traditional school leadership structures, moving instructional leadership to the forefront. In addition, global economic forces such as decreasing communication costs, new political structures and economic alliances, and the emergence of flexible, information-based technologies that have reshaped the future for our public school children (Kerka, 1993). Jukes and McCain (2000) describe skills that 21st century workers will need as the economy continues to move from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, including critical thinking, problem solving, information fluency, and global awareness. This change in worker skills has implications for education, with fundamental assumptions about education being challenged by change forces in technology, economics, and culture. Legislative
mandates and social/economic changes have converged to produce a heightened sense of urgency toward school reform efforts.

North Carolina legislators have attempted to address some of these issues by providing a variety of incentives for teachers to earn National Board Certification, a voluntary certification process created by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). NBPTS, a nonprofit organization committed to education reform via strengthening teaching, was established in 1987 after the release of *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986). The organization’s founding chairperson was former North Carolina governor James Hunt, who led the task force in outlining a plan designed to retain and reward accomplished teachers through a system of advanced certification. The National Board is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan and non-governmental organization governed by a board of directors. According to NBPTS policies, a majority of board members must be active teachers who are regularly engaged in teaching in elementary, middle, or secondary schools. The remaining members of the board of directors come from a variety of fields, but at least half must be public officials with governance or management responsibilities for public schools. NBPTS began offering certification in 1994, and now offers certification in 25 areas. North Carolina provides the following support for teachers to obtain this certification:

- Payment of the $2300 assessment fee
- Providing up to three days of paid release time to candidates
- Granting renewal credit for those teachers completing all components of the assessment within the funded assessment cycle; and
• Paying National Board Certified Teachers a salary differential (separate salary schedule) of 12\% of their state salary for the life of the certificate (10 years). (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d. (b) ¶ 8)

A majority of states now offer some form of incentives for teachers who earn their National Board certification, including payment of the assessment fee and/or additional salary supplement. North Carolina currently leads the nation in the number of teachers earning National Board certification, and currently has one of the most attractive financial incentives for obtaining certification (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2004).

During the 2007-08 school year, North Carolina had 1,453 additional teachers earn certification, bringing the state total to 14,211 during the program's 14-year history. Florida ranks second in the total number of National Board Certified teachers at 12,670, followed by South Carolina with 6,498, California with 4,240, and Illinois with 3,191 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008). Many North Carolina districts have encouraged teachers to pursue National Board certification, with one urban district providing additional incentives such as providing NBPTS coaches an honorarium and providing newly-certified teachers a one-time $500 bonus. As of December 2008, the district in the study had a total of 1,487 National Board certified teachers. The district employs the second largest number of certified teachers in the nation behind Broward County, Florida. Clearly, the belief is that supporting teachers in obtaining this certification will produce positive student achievement outcomes and will keep quality teachers in the profession.

National Board certification can be earned in 25 different areas that cover 15 subject areas and are classified into seven student age categories. Each certification area has a set of
standards related to content knowledge and teaching methodologies specific to the area of certification. In addition, each certification area includes a standard related to teacher leadership, including Professional Partnerships (Early Childhood/Generalist), Contributions to the Profession (Middle Childhood/Generalist), and Professional Community (Early Adolescent/English Language Arts). A fundamental tenet of the certification process is that teachers should be agents of change and leaders in school improvement. According to the NBPTS:

The advent of National Board certified teachers is already resulting in positive changes in their classrooms, in their school districts, and in the larger education community. The recognition, visibility, new roles and growth of the numbers of National Board certified teachers are affecting not only their classrooms, but also the culture of schools where they work. They are affecting how teachers are viewed by everyone from the education policy establishment to parents in the community.

(National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d. (a), ¶ 12)

Research supports the connection between teacher quality and student achievement, with several studies specifically connecting National Board Certification and student outcomes. Goldhaber and Anthony (2003) analyzed the pre- and post-test scores on the North Carolina End of Grade Tests in Reading and Math of approximately 9,000 students in grades 3-5 over the school years 1996-97 through 1998-99. They found that students taught by National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) had on average higher pre- and post-test scores than students taught by non-NBCTs. However, the data showed that growth measured from pre-to post tests averaged 6.18 points in reading and 10.21 points in math, as compared to
students of non-NBCTs (5.69 points in reading and 9.75 points in math) and compared to teachers who had applied for but did not earn National Board certification (average of 5.83 points in reading and 9.14 points in math). In addition, the researchers found during an analysis of college grades and license exam scores of NBCTs that they were on average higher than those of non-NBCTs, which raises the question of the inherent academic ability and skills of NBCTs rather than the impact of the National Board licensure process itself as the primary influence on student achievement. Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, and Berliner (2004) compared academic outcomes of elementary students taught by NBPTS-certified teachers and their non-certified counterparts in 14 Arizona school districts. The researchers found students taught by NBPTS-certified teachers outperformed their peers taught by non-Board certified teachers in nearly 75 percent of the comparisons, with nearly a third of those differences found to be statistically significant.

While evidence exists linking NBPTS-certified teachers with achievement outcomes, little research exists documenting how teachers impact the larger context of education as leaders or agents of change in school reform. Several studies funded by the NBPTS have addressed issues of teacher leadership. Specifically, the 2001 report Leading from the Classroom surveyed 2,186 NBPTS-certified teachers and found that many of them participated in leadership activities such as mentoring and coaching colleagues, conducting professional development activities, and curriculum/instructional strategy development. (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001c). However, this study focused primarily on teacher perceptions and self-reported participation in activities. In addition, Waller and Klotz (2001) investigated self-perceived leadership behaviors among 100
Mississippi NBCTs as compared to their non-NBPTS certified peers, concluding that NBCTs rated themselves more highly on leadership practices such as challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. However, the researchers added that teachers who earn National Board certification could inherently possess these qualities, and/or the National Board certification process itself could have enhanced their self-perceptions. Little independent research supports the impact of National Board certification in developing teacher leadership to address school-level improvement.

Statement of the Problem

The strong support for North Carolina teachers to obtain National Board certification indicates that state legislators and local school officials believe this process will develop high quality teachers who will stay in the profession and use their expertise to improve schools. A troubling research finding indicates that NBCTs are disproportionately working in affluent, high-performing schools with less diverse student populations, and raises the question of how these teachers’ expertise could effectively be harnessed to help improve low-performing schools (Berry & King, 2005). Since a component of the certification process includes documentation of leadership in policy development and contributions to the field at large, research is needed to document the existence and nature of that leadership. In addition to perceptions of NBCTs about their own leadership roles, evidence from colleagues and other building-level staff regarding how those teachers impact school improvement and change would serve to more fully illuminate teachers’ leadership roles. This study also examines how to foster the influence NBCTs can have in the school improvement process.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study is to describe the leadership influence of NBPTS-certified teachers on building-level school improvement. At the study’s inception, the main research question identified as the study’s focus was: How do NBCTs exert leadership influence on building-level school improvement and change, if at all? The general sub-questions examined in this study include the following:

1. What leadership roles do National Board certified teachers have? What conditions support these roles?
2. What is the nature of their work as leaders?
3. Does the NBPTS certification process develop leadership skills in teachers?
4. Do their colleagues view them as teacher leaders? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What school-level factors influence teacher leadership in school improvement?
6. What conditions are necessary to utilize the knowledge and skills of NBPTS-certified teachers in school improvement and school change?

The specific leadership roles NBCTs take in schools were examined using the current North Carolina framework and regulations regarding development of School Improvement Plans. North Carolina statute G.S. 115C-105.27 requires the development and approval of school improvement plans that set annual performance goals aligned to the State Board of Education priorities. Those priorities are:

a. High student performance;
   Healthy students in safe, orderly, and caring schools;

a. Quality teachers, administrators, and staff;
b. Strong family, community, and business support; and

c. Effective and efficient operations.

(North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004, p. 21)

School improvement plans are developed based on comprehensive needs assessments at each school, and also must include a plan for professional development. The State Board of Education established a belief statement that should guide schools’ professional development activities, including the following:

[Professional development] occurs within a learning community founded on a sense of collegiality and collaboration among teachers and school leaders. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004, p. 31)

NBPTS standards are designed with the belief that NBCTs will foster a school learning community by supporting their colleagues by encouraging innovation and collegiality. This study was designed to explore whether that is indeed the case in a diverse, urban North Carolina school district.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant insofar as it will contribute to the knowledge base in teacher leadership by providing a detailed picture of leadership roles among National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) in North Carolina and how they impact school improvement. It will also aid in policy development by analyzing the school factors that serve as either drivers or restrainers in supporting the leadership of these teachers. Study outcomes should illuminate school factors and conditions that nurture and sustain teacher leadership, which may be beneficial to school administrators and central office personnel. The study has implications
for policy makers since the significant financial investment in NBPTS-certified teachers indicates that policy makers believe this investment will have a direct impact not only on student achievement, but also in teacher leadership to improve schools from within. The study outcomes will provide insight into whether that is indeed the case.

*Definition of Terms*

For the purposes of this study, the following operational definitions were used. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, or NBPTS, is the organization that established and oversees the National Board certification process for teachers. National Board Certified teachers, or NBCTs, are the teachers who have been awarded the credential after passing the assessments required for a particular certification area. The term “teacher leadership” is defined as acts that impact organizational change and shape school culture, which can be carried out via formal or informal roles. “Leadership influence” is the results of those acts, or the ability of an individual or group to modify or change the behavior of other individuals or groups. “School reform” can be described as a plan, program, or movement which attempts to bring about change in educational theory or practice. For the purposes of this study, school reform is not be viewed in its broader sense, but instead examined at the building level through the school improvement process. The term “distributed leadership” is defined as the interactions between people within their situation or context of leadership practice. These interactions and relationships, rather than any particular action or individual’s knowledge or skill, are critical to understanding distributed leadership.
Organization of the Study

Chapter Two includes a review of the literature in teacher leadership as well as leadership models in general. Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology, theoretical framework, and limitations of the study. Chapter Four opens with the anonymous survey data in order to frame the issues in a collective sense and then presents the three schools used as cases individually, including demographic information, achievement data, and results of interviews conducted with school leaders and National Board certified teachers. Chapter Four concludes by discussing overarching themes from the survey data and case studies. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the literature. It also addresses the implications of the findings to policy and practice and explores avenues for future research.

Chapter Summary

Student demographic changes coupled with increasing mandates requiring increased student achievement for individuals and disaggregated groups produce an environment that requires highly skilled teachers. Schools are required to respond to these challenges by developing plans for continuous improvement and meeting benchmark performance standards for all students. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards includes in its stated mission that it will “advocate for education reforms that integrate National Board certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified teachers” as a platform for school improvement. These include initiatives to:

- Improve teacher preparation
- Create mentoring programs
- Redesign teacher evaluation
- Provide new paths for teacher-leaders (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d. (b), ¶ 1-3). This study examines whether NBCTs are accomplishing these goals within their schools.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

The phenomenon of teacher leadership has been a concept discussed in various ways in research studies over the past thirty years. In examining the concept of teacher leadership, it is assumed that teachers are central to the successful operation of schools and that their leadership is fundamental to educational innovation and improvement. This literature review traces the background of National Board certification, and then examines the concept of teacher leadership using the following framework:

- How is teacher leadership defined?
- Who are teacher leaders?
- What do teacher leaders do?
- What conditions influence teacher leadership and how is teacher leadership fostered?
- What are the effects of teacher leadership?

Background—National Board Certification

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was created in 1987 in response to the publishing of the report A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report, and subsequent research by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, recommended enhancing teacher quality as the most effective way to improve America’s public schools. The Carnegie task force report, A Nation Prepared, recommended:
the development of a plan to restructure schools and redefining the teaching profession by raising teacher standards through the creation of NBPTS;

- strengthening teachers’ academic preparation at the undergraduate and graduate level;
- examining ways to increase teacher salaries to become more competitive with other professions;
- creating a professional environment for teaching that combines flexibility with accountability; and
- developing teacher leaders who demonstrate proven ability to provide active leadership in the redesign of schools and influencing the profession at large by helping colleagues develop and maintain high standards of teaching and learning.

(Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986)

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was created with the stated mission of enhancing 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 for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d. (d), ¶ 4)

The core beliefs that underlie National Board certification are:
- Teachers are committed to students and their learning;
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students;
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning; teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

(National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d. (d), ¶ 13)

National Board certification can be earned in 27 different areas, ranging from early childhood through adolescence and including specialized subject areas such as art and music. Each certification area has a set of standards related to content knowledge and teaching methodologies specific to the certification area. Of interest to this study is the area that defines a standard related to teacher leadership. Among the elementary teacher certification areas, these leadership components include Professional Partnerships (Early Childhood/Generalist) and Contributions to the Profession (Middle Childhood/Generalist). A fundamental tenet of the certification is the expectation that teachers should be agents of change and leaders in school improvement. According to the NBPTS:

National Board Certification and the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards can be a catalyst for lasting change. It is already redefining teaching as a career by stimulating new incentive structures, staffing patterns, and organizational arrangements. It is bolstering reform in teacher education by casting the knowledge base in richer light. Many teacher preparation programs are using the National Board’s standards as models of accomplished teaching for future teachers.
And it can both help increase the flow of first-rate people into the teaching profession and stem the tide of those departing. (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, n.d. (d), ¶ 13)

The NBPTS’s *Middle Childhood Generalist Standards* (2001 b) describes the standard of Contributions to the Profession to include the following practices:

Accomplished teachers define their responsibilities as professionals to include a commitment to the continuing growth and development of their colleagues, their school, and their profession. They see themselves as members of a larger learning community with responsibilities that extend beyond their classrooms. They collaborate with peers and other school professionals to shape the professional culture of the school and to strengthen their schools’ programs and education in general.….They seek input from their colleagues and others to improve programs and to establish and sustain a community of learners. (pp. 55-56)

Similarly, the *Early Childhood Generalist Standards* (2001 a) echo the theme of NBPTS-certified teachers as leaders and change agents:

[Teachers] work to overcome structures or traditions that separate teachers from one another, and they seek to make the school a collaborative enterprise that draws out the best from its faculty. (p. 55)

Clearly, the assumption is that NBPTS certification is a credential or identifier of high-quality teachers, and that those teachers directly influence their schools through leadership roles. However, recent research indicates that many NBPTS-certified teachers are working in high-performing, affluent schools, not struggling schools with high-poverty student
populations (Humphrey, Koppich, & Hough, 2005; Rotherham, 2004). This circumstance raises several questions: Are NBPTS-certified teachers already employed in successful schools with collaborative school cultures that embrace principles of professional learning communities? If so, were the NBPTS-certified teachers instrumental in creating such an environment, or did the environment influence the teachers to obtain National Board certification? If research reflects that few NBPTS-certified teachers work in high-poverty, low-achieving schools, would NBPTS-certified teachers have influence as change agents through leadership roles to improve academic performance at struggling schools? According to Rotherham (2004):

There is some evidence that NBCTs are taking on additional leadership responsibilities within schools, including important activities such as mentoring new teachers. Yet, while valuable, these activities do not alter the inequitable distribution of these teachers in the first place. (p. 3)

Policymakers in the state of Washington have developed the Washington Initiative for National Board Certification of Teachers, with the stated intent of “[increasing] the number of Board certified teachers (NBCTs) in the state and to promote the leadership of NBCTs as change agents in schools and districts” (Stokes, St. John, Helms, & Maxon, 2004, p. i). In their program assessment, the researchers examined administrative perspectives about the leadership roles of NBCTs at the school level. They found that administrators value NBCTs as effective teachers, but the leadership roles of NBCTs were less clear:

Administrators say that Board certification does not automatically confer leadership status on teachers. Even NBCTs are influential as change agents only when their
contributions support school priorities and when their style of leadership is congruent with the social practices and norms of their professional communities….In most schools and districts, NBCTs are considered as individual assets to a school staff rather than an enhancement of system capacity. (p. ii)

Humphrey, Koppich, and Hough (2005) found in North Carolina that only 5.8 percent of NBCTs taught in schools with student populations of 75 percent or more eligible for free and reduced lunch compared to 10.6 percent of the total teaching population. Researchers found that 39.6 percent of NBCTs taught in high-performing schools, compared to 29.7 percent of the total teaching population. This pattern of inequitable distribution was reflected in five of the six states with the highest percentage of NBCTs (California, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Ohio), with the Los Angeles (CA) Unified School District being the only exception. California represented one of the few states that linked financial incentives with working in low-performing schools, which resulted in more NBCTs teaching in high-poverty, high-minority schools. However, researchers also found,

The California example suggests that money by itself may not be an adequate inducement to encourage large numbers of high-quality teachers to move from higher-performing to low-performing schools. Support is clearly important…[as] are working conditions. And working conditions are generally less favorable in low-performing than in higher-performing schools. (p. 18)

Goldhaber, Choi, and Cramer (2004) examined the distribution of North Carolina NBCTs over a four-year period (1996-97 through 1999-2000) to determine the degree to which they were clustered in particular districts or schools. They found that NBCTs were
more likely to teach in districts where students achieve high academic performance in math and reading tests, and schools that employed NBCTs had fewer students receiving free or reduced price lunch and fewer minority students. They also found “white students are approximately 30 percent more likely than minority students to have an NBCT as a teacher” (p. 15). The researchers concluded:

The distribution of NBCTs is important because of teacher equity issues, but also because, at least based on North Carolina’s current NBPTS incentive program, substantial state-level funds are invested in those districts and schools in which NBCTs are employed. …[These findings] illustrate how state policies may interfere with at least one of the stated objectives of NBPTS: to contribute toward a more equitable distribution of teacher resources. The state-level incentive paid to NBCTs is the same regardless of where these teachers opt to teach, which means there are no explicit incentives to encourage the employment of NBCTs in especially needy schools and districts. (pp. 19-20)

A notable exception to this pattern of inequitable distribution of NBCTs was highlighted in a North Carolina school—Adams Elementary School (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005). Adams Elementary (a pseudonym) is a rural elementary school with more than 60 percent of its students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Of the school’s 25 teachers, nine were NBCTs and four were pursuing National Board certification. Adams was profiled as a struggling school, with 56 percent of its students at or above grade level during the 1999-2000 school year. Analysis of the key components of the change process for Adams Elementary included:
First, the district administration began to apply its collective gleanings from the National Board experience to its ongoing development of a sharply focused, job-embedded approach to professional growth. Second, Adams got a new principal—herself a National Board-certified teacher with a strong commitment to teaching quality and a determination to spread the power of teacher reflection and collaboration throughout the school. (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005, p. 58)

Adams Elementary improved its student achievement over time, with 83 percent of its students at or above grade level by 2004. Clearly, this model exemplifies the intent underlying the National Board model and how it is expected to transform school culture and improve teaching and learning. However, several questions remain unanswered. For example: Why does Adams remain an anonymous school, as research is needed to determine how to implement this change process? What key factors led to its transformation? The concept of teacher leadership, including definitions, roles, effects, and barriers, will be discussed with a focus on determining key components needed for teacher leaders to experience success.

How is Teacher Leadership Defined?

According to Darling-Hammond (1994), “teacher leadership is essential to restructure schools for the twenty-first century.” (p. 4) However, Barth (2001) discusses powerful forces that shape teacher leadership within schools, noting that “something deep and powerful within school cultures seems to work against teacher leadership.” (p. 444) Nonetheless, he describes teacher leadership as a critical untapped resource in school improvement. Smylie (1995) described the aims of developing teacher leadership as:
enhancing the quality of the work force by expanding and diversifying teacher work; establishing new incentives, controls and opportunities for professional learning aimed at improving teacher performance; and seeking to enhance institutional capacity and performance of schools by placing teachers in positions of leadership and decision making, thereby increasing resources and expertise available for improvement. (pp. 3-4)

Numerous studies and government reports point to the potential of teachers as catalysts for school reform and improvement; however, as accountability mandates increase, it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to take on responsibilities outside their classroom walls. A great deal of research describes the organizational structure of schools as a major barrier for teacher leaders, making them unable to act as change agents due to constraints of the workplace context, role definitions, and ambiguity in conceptions of leadership (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Brooks, Scribner, & Eferakorho, 2004). In addition, teachers who receive National Board certification in North Carolina are required to continue working directly with students for a minimum of 75 percent of their day in order to receive the additional salary supplement. At the same time, teacher leaders are viewed as key catalysts for change and school reform. Wasley (1991) defines teacher leadership as “the ability of the teacher leader to engage colleagues in experimentation and then examination of more powerful instructional practices in the service of more engaged student learning” (p. 170).

Generally, the literature on teacher leadership defines this concept in three categories: 1) functional/organizational roles that are designed with an “efficiency function…not
designed to change practice but to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system” (Wasley, 1991, p. 4); 2) instructional support or mentoring roles; and 3) agents of organizational change in reshaping school culture. The research is embedded within what is described as the “three waves” of school reform: first, maintaining efficient and effective systems; second, focusing on teachers as instructional leaders; and third, using teacher leaders to “slide the doors open” to collaborate with other teachers, discuss common problems, share approaches to various learning situations, and explore ways to overcome the structural constraints of limited time, space, resources, and policies (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). The shifting nature of these definitions reflects a change in school reform approaches that began in the early 1980s after the publication of A Nation at Risk. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) add:

Although calls for teacher leadership abound in the reform literature, virtually no research has been conducted using this third wave definition of teacher leadership that makes leadership a part of the work a classroom teacher does on behalf of children…. [Little] is known about the roles and responsibilities of third wave teachers or the knowledge, skills, and abilities they possess. (p. 780)

The movement toward more collaborative school structures, or professional learning communities, in recent years shows promise for illustrating evidence of the third wave definition of teacher leadership. According to Eaker and Keating (2008),

There is no credible evidence that the best way to improve student learning is to have teachers work in isolation. On the other hand, there is ample evidence to support organizing teachers into high performing, collaborative teams. A
teacher’s world can change when the school shifts from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration. (p. 15)

The National Board certification model embraces the concept of teacher leaders as agents of change in not only reforming schools by changing existing elements within school structures, but also in restructuring schools by not only focusing on the way schools are organized, but also on how schools operate as rules, roles, and relationships within the organization are changed (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995). According to the Institute for Educational Leadership (2001), “Teacher leadership is not about ‘teacher power.’ Rather, it is about mobilizing the still largely untapped attributes of teachers to strengthen student performance at a ground level and working toward real collaboration, a locally tailored kind of shared leadership, in the daily life of the school” (p. 4). First, definitions of teacher leaders will be examined.

**Who Are Teacher Leaders?**

Teacher leaders are defined by their instructional skills as well as their formal leadership roles within the school. Gonzales and Lambert (2001) define teacher leaders as individuals who possess certain qualities and behaviors, including professional, effective teachers who act as role models for peers and students, and know subject matter, pedagogy and classroom management, as well as lifelong learners who are “people of action,” bringing about change in their colleagues and schools and “expand their circle of influence” (p. 11). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) discuss a number of traits that effective teacher leaders possess, including demonstrating strong instructional skills, having a clear belief system and philosophy of education, being reflective about the profession and one’s practice, having an interest in adult development, and being in a stage in their personal and professional lives
that allows them to give to others. Their Leadership Development Model for Teachers begins with personal assessment, as examining one’s own values, attitudes, and beliefs is critical before attempting to influence the larger context of the organization and one’s colleagues. Lambert, et. al. (1996) broaden this concept:

Teaching is an act of leadership, requiring an understanding of one’s role, a commitment to empower all learners, the skills of facilitation, and the willingness to inquire about and reflect on one’s own learning. Teaching and learning are highly relational, interactive, and grounded in the lives of the participants. (p. 119)

Teacher leaders are traditionally viewed as being experienced teachers with excellent teaching skills (Fullan, 1994). Elementary school teacher leaders have been described as experienced teachers viewed by colleagues as professionals who accept responsibility and work to assist and support other teachers. They are also described as sharing in decision making, mentoring, and collaborating with others for school improvement (Stone, Horejs, & Lomas, 1997). Crowther, et. al. (2002) constructed the Teachers as Leaders framework to define teacher leadership:

**Teacher Leaders:**

Convey convictions about a better world;

Strive for authenticity in their teaching, learning, and assessment practices;

Facilitate communities of learning through organization-wide processes;

Confront barriers in the school’s culture and structures;

Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action;

Nurture a culture of success. (pp. 4-5)
Wasley (1991) describes dominant themes that emerged in her case studies of teacher leaders. They included valuing students, participatory decision making, “practicing the preaching,” teacher leadership focused on teaching, and winning support. This model illustrates that teacher leadership can and does occur within the classroom walls, not just in formal leadership positions.

**What Do Teacher Leaders Do?**

Traditionally, schools have been organized hierarchically with the principal seen as the organizational leader. In elementary schools, most teachers work in self-contained classrooms, where they spend the majority of their time with children. Elementary teachers do not always have daily planning periods, and when they do, they tend to be short periods of time when the children are attending special-area classes such as art or music. Teachers in middle and high school settings tend to have more planning time built into their daily schedules; however, the allocation of planning time does not necessarily lead to greater staff collaboration or decision-making (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Little (1995) found leadership roles in high schools were strongly affiliated with subject-area expertise and school organization of departments, while Stone, Horejs, and Lomas (1997) studied differences in teacher leaders across elementary, middle, and high schools and found a unique feature of elementary teachers is their perceptions of the structures that support or constrain teacher leadership. They found that elementary teachers were the only ones who cited opportunities for experience as a support for teacher leadership activities and were unique in not citing compensation or school climate as a constraint upon teacher leadership. While this case study was small and therefore limited in generalizability, the structure and organization of
elementary schools tends to be similar throughout the United States. The organization of teachers’ daily instructional routines is not automatically conducive to sustained adult interactions and provides little opportunity for leadership roles supporting the school’s total instructional program.

According to a survey conducted by NBPTS, National Board-certified teachers at all levels—elementary through high school—reported being involved in leadership activities, with the most frequent leadership roles being mentor-coaches for other teachers pursuing National Board certification, mentoring other teachers, serving on program or curricular material selection committees, and serving in school-based leadership positions such as grade/department chair or school-based leadership team representatives (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001). While these activities are important and have the potential to impact the larger instructional program of the school, they are layered onto existing classroom responsibilities. Teachers who serve in these leadership positions frequently earn extra-duty stipends of a nominal amount, but are not provided release time or reduced classroom responsibilities in exchange for the time and work necessary to fulfill these leadership responsibilities. In addition, the 12 percent salary supplement paid to NBPTS-certified teachers requires them to work directly with students at least 75 percent of their day. Clearly, the intent of this legislation is designed to keep high-quality teachers in the classroom in direct service to children. However, this presents a barrier to NBPTS-certified teachers who wish to expand their sphere of influence within the school by working to directly support colleagues or by assuming leadership positions in administration.
O'Connor (2003) conducted a comparative study of 370 North Carolina National Board-certified teachers (NBCTs) and non-NBCTs who taught grades 3 through 5 to determine their self-reported wants and needs as it pertained to professional respect, school working environments, and teacher retention. Areas studied included needs for administrative support, community support, and professional development. A significant difference between NBCTs and non-NBCTs was found in the administrative support need of autonomy. NBCTs indicated they wanted a greater voice in school-based decision-making. There were other significant differences in expressed professional development needs between the NBCTs and non-NBCTs, with NBCTs expressing a greater need for time to pursue study and research independently and reading professional journals. Of particular note was the finding that the professional activity need of serving in leadership roles proved to be statistically significant between the two groups of teachers with NBCTs expressing a greater need to be leaders. This study seems to support the belief that NBCTs possess leadership skills and the desire to use them, but also raises the question of how well these teachers have been utilized in leadership roles, if many still express the need for greater autonomy and voice in decision-making through leadership roles.

Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (1988) also pointed to the necessity of creating a collaborative setting in order for teacher leadership to flourish and emphasized the need to build collegiality as a prerequisite step. They studied teacher leaders to determine the skills, abilities, and strategies used to build collegiality in schools. They found:

Although their contexts and styles were different, the similarity of the ways these leaders worked has added to our understanding of the complexities involved in
changing a school culture when the leadership team is expanded beyond the principal. [The leadership skills included] building trust and rapport, organizational diagnosis, dealing with the process, using resources, managing the work, and building skill and confidence in others. (p. 153)

Other studies reveal a disconnect between teacher and administrative definitions and perceptions of teacher leadership roles (Shen, 2001; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Wasley, 1991). In their study of teacher leadership, Smylie and Denny (1990) interviewed teachers who were part of a district-wide implementation of new teacher leadership roles. Teachers described their roles primarily as support for their colleagues, specifically labeling their roles as “facilitator,” “emotional support,” and “catalyst for improvement.” However, teachers also expressed reservations about how they were perceived by their colleagues and whether they were meeting administrators’ expectations. Shen (2001) compiled survey data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education during the 1987-88, 1990-91, and 1993-94 school years to analyze change over time. The NCES survey data, collected every three school years, includes a component asking teachers and principals to rate their leadership on the following school-wide and classroom-based policy areas:

**School-wide issues**

- Determining discipline policies
- Determining the content of professional development activities
- Establishing the curriculum
- Hiring new teachers
- Deciding school budget expenditures
- Evaluating teachers

**Classroom-based issues**
- Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials
- Selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught
- Selecting teaching techniques/instructional strategies
- Disciplining students
- Determining amount of homework assigned. (Shen, 2001)

Teachers and principals rated their level of influence on each area using a six-point scale, ranging from “no influence at all” to “a great deal of influence.” After comparing the percentage of teachers who perceived they had influence on these issues, researchers concluded that teachers’ leadership on school-wide issues such as determining discipline policy, determining professional development activities, and establishing curriculum was virtually unchanged over the seven-year period. The percentage of teachers who perceived they had much influence on these three areas averaged 33.67 percent in 1987-88 and 35 percent in 1993-94. The findings also revealed that teachers perceived they had greater influence over classroom-based issues, particularly in the areas of determining amounts of homework and selecting instructional techniques. The percentage of teachers who perceived they had much influence over those two areas averaged 86 percent. Interestingly, when teachers’ and principals’ perceptions of teacher leadership were compared, principals perceived teachers had a greater influence on school-wide issues than teachers perceived they had. Three percent of teachers believed they had much influence over teacher evaluation, compared to 24 percent of principals, and 31 percent of teachers perceived they had much
influence over professional development activities, compared to 76 percent of principals. Clearly, teachers perceived they had greater influence over classroom-based issues and relatively little influence over school-wide issues, while principals perceived teacher leadership influence to be greater than teachers themselves did.

Lashway (1998) writes, “Teacher leadership has emerged as a prominent theme in the educational restructuring literature” (p. 2). However, this literature continues to reflect that significant shifts in beliefs about educational structures and systems and traditional teacher and administrator roles must occur to realize the potential of teacher leadership. According to Gonzales and Lambert (2001), “[Teacher leaders] reframe traditional notions of leadership from role and authority dependent to reciprocal, purposeful learning among adults in the community” (p. 6).

Ash and Persall (2000) use the framework of Formative Leadership Theory to differentiate traditional leadership roles from the potential roles teachers could fulfill in order to have greater influence. They reframe the principal’s role to be “chief learning officer,” with the principal’s primary responsibility to focus on students’ learning opportunities and student work. Formative Leadership Theory is built on the belief that leadership is not role-specific, and that learning opportunities should be enhanced for students as well as adults. Ash and Persall describe Formative Leadership Principles as follows:

- Team learning, productive thinking, and collaborative problem solving should replace control mechanisms, top-down decision making, and enforcement of conformity.
• Teachers should be viewed as leaders and school principals as leaders of leaders.
• Trust should drive our working relationships.
• Leaders should move from demanding conformity and compliance to encouraging and supporting innovation and creativity.
• Leaders should focus on people and processes rather than on paperwork and administrative minutiae.
• Leaders should be customer-focused and servant-based.
• Leaders should create networks that foster two-way communication rather than channels that direct the flow of information in only one direction.
• Formative leadership requires proximity, visibility, and being close to the customer.
• Formative leadership should empower the people within the school to do the work and protect them from unwarranted outside interference.
• Formative leadership requires the ability to operate in an environment of uncertainty, constantly learning how to exploit systemwide change, rather than maintaining the status quo. (pp. 17-18)

Using the Formative Leadership Theory framework, teacher leadership roles are redefined from the traditional roles of grade chair, mentor, or trainer of other teachers to roles that include collaborative efforts at improving instructional practice, designing learning activities, or conducting school-wide action research.
Buckner and McDowelle (2000) analyze the current organization of schools and barriers to teacher leadership outside of traditional formal roles. The organization of schools has changed little over time, with teachers experiencing professional isolation as they conduct their day-to-day work. This isolation fosters fear and ambivalence among teachers who are reluctant to be perceived as “impinging on other teachers’ professional sovereignty” (p. 39). Teachers also fear being perceived by their colleagues as being in a role of special favor with administrators, as this may create an atmosphere where teachers question the legitimacy of teacher evaluations. In addition, teachers who fulfill certain leadership roles are sometimes privy to information not shared with their colleagues. Teacher leadership roles require personal and professional skills such as discretion, the ability to listen while suspending judgment, being responsive to others’ needs, and the ability to manage conflict among colleagues. These skills are not traditionally part of preservice teacher preparation, and must be explicitly taught and cultivated for teachers to be comfortable assuming leadership roles. Conley and Muncey (1999) point to the need to further examine how teachers are prepared to assume new roles as school leaders.

In addition, teacher definitions and perceptions of their leadership roles can vary widely. Suranna and Moss (2000) categorized perceptions of teacher leadership in a case study of elementary teachers under the concepts of “professional development, taking a stand, great teaching, and facilitators and hindrances” (p. 7). Many participants discussed the hierarchical organization that persists in most school districts, but described teacher-leaders as the ones who refuse to accept the traditional response of closing the classroom door with
the attitude of “this too shall pass.” One teacher described her role in challenging assumptions and long-standing practice:

I don’t go out of my way to make people upset and I actually try to be very diplomatic. But if it comes down to it and it’s got to be said, it’s got to be said. It does make me uncomfortable to have someone mad at me. I’ll be the first to admit it. But that’s my job. (pp. 11-12)

Schlecty (2005) further elaborates on the need to reframe how teacher leaders are defined:

For schools to ensure success for children, teachers must, first, think of themselves as leaders of children rather than as performers for children or diagnosticians and clinicians who treat children. The most important thing a teacher does is to lead—meaning to inform, inspire, direct, encourage, and nurture (as opposed to controlling, managing, and coercing). (p. 106)

Lieberman and Miller (2004) add that new roles for teacher leaders hold promise for the restructuring of schools in the 21st century, including teacher as researcher, teacher as scholar, and teacher as mentor.

What Conditions Influence Teacher Leadership, and How is Teacher Leadership Fostered?

As accountability requirements increase, today’s students face the uncertain future of an ever-changing global economy. Educators are challenged to prepare children for a world very different from the one they experienced. These change forces point even more to the need to transform school structure and culture. However, the American system of education has changed little over the past century.
According to the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), teachers are leaders when they function in learning communities to impact student learning, contribute to school improvement, inspire excellence in professional practice, and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement (SERVE, 2001). The concept of professional learning communities has been advanced in school reform literature as a model with promise to empower teacher leaders and improve academic achievement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 1999). Specific building-level practices can also serve to support teacher leadership, including teachers perceiving they are empowered to initiate change, having a sense of autonomy in initiating change and new programs, believing that their ideas are heard and respected, and a strong sense of self-efficacy and high regard for the school’s mission (Beachum & Dentith, 2004). Principals must also develop strategies to foster teacher leadership, including creating opportunities for teachers to lead, building professional leadership communities, providing quality, results-driven professional development, and celebrating innovation and teacher expertise (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) synthesize the research on the conditions that influence teacher leadership and categorize the conditions as school culture and context, roles and relationships, and structures. In general, school structures have supported isolation and a hierarchical decision-making framework. School environments that foster and promote collegiality and collaboration create the conditions that support authentic teacher leadership. School cultures most strongly supportive of teacher leadership have a school-wide focus on student learning and achievement, an expectation of staff ownership and engagement, and a view of teacher leaders as positive contributors to the total school culture (Katzenmeyer &
Moller, 2001). In addition, the role of the principal is critical as either a facilitator for or barrier to effective teacher leadership (Blase & Blase, 2000). The principal is still viewed as the “official” leader by formal position authority and is a key player in shaping school culture. Barth (1988) states that principals have to clearly communicate that they want to develop a community of leaders, relinquish some of their own power, involve teachers and support them in decision making, and share responsibility for successes and failures. He describes the results of this authority shift: “The best principals are not heroes; they are hero-makers” (p. 146). Suranna and Moss (2000) concur, finding in a case study of elementary teachers that a “collegial relationship between teacher leaders and their principals has the potential to act as either facilitator for or hindrance to teacher leadership” (p. 15). The Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) concurred: “As long as school leadership remains mostly top-down and hierarchical, there is little chance that teachers will ever be more than fringe players—available as a resource when called upon, but seldom directly and continuously involved in decisions of substance” (p. 9).

**What are the Effects of Teacher Leadership?**

The literature on teacher leadership supports the notion that developing teacher leaders will have a number of desirable effects on teacher retention, student achievement, and school reform. Barth (2001) states that teacher leadership impacts students both directly, through receiving instruction by more engaged staff with a stake in the school’s success, and peripherally, as students observe the democratic process in the school’s leadership. He adds:

All teachers have leadership potential and can benefit from exercising that potential.

Teachers become more active learners in an environment where they are leaders.
When teachers lead, principals extend their own capacity, students enjoy a democratic community of learners, and schools benefit from better decisions. (p. 445)

Teachers report desired outcomes of their leadership in terms of shared decision making, collaboration, school improvement, and professional growth and learning (Stone, Horejs, & Lomas, 1997). Teacher leaders are viewed as having the potential to create cultures of school renewal and transformation; specifically to “push the school culture toward a more inclusive and collaborative one…. [where] the culture of the school shifts from authoritative, linear, and mechanical to open, responsive, and thoughtful” (Beachum & Dentith, 2004, p. 284).

Patterson and Patterson (2004) studied the influence of teacher leaders in schools in twelve states with high-poverty, high-student-mobility schools that had academic achievement levels at state norms on standardized tests. They found that teacher leaders impacted school culture through credibility, expertise, and relationships. Specifically, these elements supported schools in developing resilience, defined as “using the school’s collective energy to achieve school goals in the face of adversity” (p. 76). Lambert (2002) cites the need to develop the internal capacity of schools by nurturing and supporting teacher leadership in order to improve schools. A strong collaborative culture of teacher leadership develops effective practices such as action research teams, study groups, and vertical learning communities. Teacher leaders’ influence on shaping school culture is critical, as their colleagues must be open and ready to respond. Hatch, White, and Faigenbaum (2005) studied how expertise, credibility, and influence are created in teacher leaders’ activities regardless of formal position authority. In their case study of four teachers, they concluded:
[Exercising] leadership or having an impact on others was not their primary motivation, nor have they systematically endeavored to build and increase their influence. Rather, their influence has its roots in their efforts to think deeply about questions and problems in their practice, to articulate what they were learning for themselves and for others, and to build and maintain their credibility with and relationships with their colleagues. (p. 1015)

Managing the change process alone is a significant task for school leaders—both administrators and teacher leaders. Change within organizations can only be sustained if the renewal process is internally motivated rather than externally imposed, and teacher leaders are more likely to facilitate “passionate change, meaningful change, and sustained change” (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995, p. 206). Indeed, researchers claim that significant systemic changes in our schools are needed to face the challenges presented by the 21st century. Schlecty (2005) states,

Innovations that are sufficiently congruent with the existing social systems that they have little impact on either the structure or the culture of those systems are sustaining innovations….Disruptive innovations, if they are to be employed effectively, require dramatic alterations to both the structure and the culture of the organization. Such alterations require changes in beliefs, values, and commitments as well as changes in rules, roles, and relationships. (p. xiii)

The leadership roles of National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) are also constrained by school or district-level infrastructure. While NBCTs often emerge within schools as
accomplished teachers, this view is largely related to the abilities of NBCTs as highly skilled classroom teachers. Stokes, St. John, Helms, and Maxon (2004) concluded:

[There] remains a general system reality that circumscribes the leadership of teachers, i.e., that limits the extent to which teachers, even model professionals, can instigate change. The paradox still exists, even in schools where teachers are unusually empowered and influential. The lesson from this study—drawn from administrators who are biased in favor of NBCTs—is that teacher leadership is most welcome and most potent when it demonstrably contributes to the aims of the organization, as those aims are understood by the people who are formally charged with authority. (p. 9)

**Leadership Models—Transformational Leadership and Distributed Leadership**

The theoretical framework—or the “lens” through which leadership is examined—is the concept of distributed leadership using the model of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns (1978), and its emphasis was leaders who tap into the motives of followers in order to meet organizational goals. Burns described the concept of transforming leadership:

Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality…. [Transforming leadership] ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspirations of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both. (p. 20)

Bass (1990) built upon Burns’ work by defining and studying key behaviors demonstrating transformational leadership as identified by business and military leaders.
Bass categorized these behaviors as idealized influence (gains respect and trust; attracts followers; articulates a vision), inspirational motivation (promotes optimism; believes in the possibilities of the vision), intellectual stimulation (challenges past assumptions; encourages new ideas), and individualized consideration (gives personal attention to followers; develops leadership among followers). These principles have been frequently cited in school improvement research as critical factors that will enable schools to address the challenges of the 21st century.

Leithwood (1992) further expanded on the role of transformational leadership in educational settings, stating that transformational school leaders continually work toward three fundamental goals: 1) helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; 2) fostering teacher development; and 3) helping teachers solve problems together more effectively. However, Leithwood (1993) further elaborated that “advocating a transformational approach to school leadership does not entail the specification of a uniform or rigid set of leadership behaviors,” noting that “expert thinking” and “high levels of problem solving expertise” were evident in school environments with successful transformational leadership practices (pp. 38-39). In follow-up studies, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) examined the effects of transformational leadership on organizational culture and student engagement, finding significant effects of transformational leadership practices on organizational conditions along with moderate, yet still significant, total effects on student engagement.

Lucas and Valentine (2002) studied the concept of transformational leadership and how it intersected among the principal, school leadership team, and school culture by
conducting a statistical analysis of survey data using the School Culture Survey, the Principal Leadership Questionnaire, and the Team Leadership Questionnaire. Their study revealed the strongest relationship was between leadership team transformational leadership and school culture. The researchers concluded:

Principals should increasingly acknowledge, facilitate, and employ the potentially transformational leadership abilities of teacher leaders. While principal leadership seems more important in “identifying and articulating a vision” and “providing an appropriate model,” it seems important to recognize that the application of that vision and model—in terms of faculty commitment, support, challenge, and expectations—seems to be heavily dependent upon the presence of a successful and transformational body of teacher leaders. (p. 26)

The transformational leadership model aligns with the core beliefs of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which includes in its stated mission the goal of transforming American education with NBCTs acting as catalysts to school improvement. As Taylor and Angelle (2000) found, transformational leadership practices and school improvement are strongly related.

In addition, the concept of distributed leadership frames the study. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) state that school leadership is best understood as a “distributed practice” over the school’s social and situational contexts. The concept of distributed leadership focuses on four functions: 1) leadership tasks and functions, 2) task enactment, 3) social distributions of task enactment, and 4) situational distribution of task
enactment. Examination of these functions allows leadership to be viewed in a multifaceted manner:

[It] frames inquiry into leadership activity so that we can move beyond leaders’ and teachers’ accounts to develop more integrative understandings of leadership as a practice. A distributed perspective also suggests that leadership activity at the level of the school, rather than at the level of an individual leader, is the appropriate unit for studying leadership practice. (p. 27)

Spillane (2005) further defines distributed leadership as “first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures” (p. 144). Other researchers have used the distributed leadership perspective to develop understandings of effective school improvement practices needed for 21st century educational realities (Copland, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Lambert, 2002). Distributed leadership practices include teachers and administrators working collaboratively as leaders and learners; developing shared vision through the use of inquiry-based strategies for decision-making; using reflective practice to assess the impact of decisions and the need for change; and a focus on improving student achievement through collective responsibility.

Chapter Summary

Several themes emerge from the literature review. First, the concept of restructuring is a dominant element, pointing to the need for changing traditional roles and responsibilities of leaders—both principals and teachers. Another theme is the need to professionalize the role of the teacher—hence, the development of the National Board certification. The need for professionalization of the teaching profession is reflected in both external (compensation,
teacher preparation) and internal (work environment, formal leadership roles) areas. Another key component driving the need for teacher leadership is the ever-increasing accountability mandates—both federal and state. As schools are required to individualize student instruction in order to meet academic standards, the role of the teacher is more critical and challenging. The pervasive teacher shortage adds to the difficulty of creating and sustaining successful schools in the 21st century.

Chapter III discusses the methodology and research design employed in the study. Research questions are introduced, and issues of validity and reliability addressed.
Chapter III

Methodology

Chapter Three discusses the rationale for the qualitative method. The study’s research questions and research design are explored. Issues related to reliability and validity are addressed, and the researcher’s subjectivity and theoretical framework are explored. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed in detail.

Rationale: Qualitative Approach

The broad focus of qualitative research is to provide insights, discoveries, and interpretations that are inductive in nature, which can lead to “interpretive or analytical constructs” (Merriam, 1998, p. 48). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the meanings people construct about their experiences and the world around them. The purpose of this descriptive comparative case study was to describe the nature and type of teacher leadership among National Board certified teachers (NBCTs) and how that leadership supported school improvement. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe five features of qualitative research:

- It is naturalistic, in that the research uses actual settings as the direct source of data with the researcher as the key instrument. Researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context—and that the action can best be understood when it is observed in its naturally-occurring setting.

- It includes descriptive data. Data collected takes the form of words or pictures, and researchers try to analyze the data with all its richness. The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the
assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a
cue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being
studied.

The research is concerned with process, i.e., How do people negotiate
meaning? How do certain terms and labels come to be applied?...What is the
natural history of the activity or events under study?

It uses an inductive approach. Qualitative researchers analyze their
data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove
hypotheses….rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been
gathered are grouped together.

Its emphasis is on meaning. Meaning is of essential
concern…researchers are interested in how different people make sense of
their lives. (pp. 5, 7)

The qualitative approach is most appropriate, as the study attempted to develop a
holistic perspective on the complex interaction of teacher leadership and the contexts in
which it operates. As Freebody (2003) states, “Educational activities are inherently complex
and dynamic, both in the local settings in which they occur…and as part of a society’s
publicly coordinated activities” (p. 1). This complexity requires a holistic perspective that,
according to Patton (2002), allows a phenomenon to be understood as a complex system that
is more than the sum of its parts, and focuses on complex interdependencies that cannot be
reduced to discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships. The collective case study
approach allows the impact of teacher leadership to be viewed from multiple perspectives, as
each school site is a bounded case with its own internal and external context (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). A multiple case study design was used in order to compare and contrast between school sites, allowing for an analysis of the influence of context on teacher leadership. Cross-case analysis is important to enhance generalizability and to deepen understanding and explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The cross-case analysis leads to the development of categories and themes using the constant comparative method. According to Merriam (1998), this process allows the data to “gradually evolve into a core of emerging theory. This core is a theoretical framework that guides the further collection of the data” (p. 191). In addition, the multiple case study design allows for replication logic to provide more robust findings. The rationale for the case study design is due to the nature of the investigation, which includes both a particular phenomenon (teacher leadership) as well as the context in which the phenomenon occurs (the school environment) (Yin, 1993). The multiple case study approach allows for greater breadth and depth in describing teacher leadership and its impact on the school improvement process. “By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29).

*Site Selection and Data Collection*

The study was designed with no preconceived ideas of eventual findings, as the schools and staff members were not known to the researcher. Elementary schools in a large North Carolina district were selected for the study because of the large number of NBCTs in the system. Site selection took into consideration feasibility and access for the researcher. All
three of the schools selected were in the same district. Protocols were observed as aligned with North Carolina State University’s Institutional Review Board to ensure participants would not experience harm as a result of participation in the study. Data were collected to determine which elementary schools within the district had the largest number of NBCTs. From those schools, a multiple-case, purposeful sampling method was employed to select three sites for further analysis of the leadership roles of the NBCTs. School sites were initially considering by listing those with highest number of NBCTs on their staffs. Once the schools with minimum of 10 or more NBCTs were identified, the choices were narrowed by selecting sites that had a variety of demographic profiles, including choosing sites that were in different communities within the district as well as selecting sites that had differing student demographics. The district in the study is one with a history of rapid growth in student enrollment and influenced by policies aimed at balancing student populations at its schools by assigning students in part based on socioeconomic status. By selecting schools with a large number of NBCTs, as well as considering a variety of school contexts based on community and student demographics, one is able to examine NBCT influence collectively, rather than focusing on the contributions of one or two individual teachers. The number of teachers considered appropriate for the sample can generally follow the “Pareto principle,” which states for many phenomena, 80 percent of consequences stem from 20 percent of the causes. If this general principle were applied to a school staff of 60 teachers, a “critical mass” would be roughly equivalent to 12 teachers. This general concept is based on a fundamental belief that little changes can have large effects, and that when small numbers of people start behaving differently, that behavior can ripple outward until a critical mass or “tipping point”
is reached. By choosing school sites with varying demographic profiles, one can examine the influence of the school context on teacher leadership roles. This study focused only on elementary schools, as research indicates that the nature and type of leadership roles differ in elementary and secondary schools as a result of greater content-area specialization of secondary teachers and the more content-based NBPTS secondary certification areas (Little, 1995; Stone, Horejs, & Lomas, 1997).

Research Questions

The main research question that initially framed the study was: How do NBCTs exert leadership influence on building-level school improvement and the change process, if at all? The general sub-questions examined include the following:

1. What leadership roles do National Board certified teachers have? What conditions support these roles?
2. What is the nature of their work as leaders?
3. Does the NBPTS certification process develop leadership skills in teachers?
4. Do their colleagues view them as teacher leaders? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What school-level factors influence teacher leadership in school improvement?
6. What conditions are necessary to utilize the knowledge and skills of NBPTS-certified teachers in school improvement and school change?

As the study unfolded and evolved, it became apparent that the secondary questions became of greater significance than the primary question that was identified prior to the study’s inception. According to Merriam (1998),
At the outset of a qualitative study, the investigator…has selected a sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. (p. 162)

During the interviews of the NBCTs and other key school leaders, the ideas of the nature of school culture emerged as a key theme. Therefore, the emphasis in the research questions shifted to the sub-questions regarding school factors that influence teacher leadership, as well as an exploration of the leadership roles held by teachers and how NBCTs are perceived by their NBCT colleagues and administrators.

**Research Design**

The qualitative study used a combination of questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews. Data collection began with the use of a questionnaire designed to determine the specific leadership roles filled by NBCTs as well as contextual data related to building-level challenges and instructional priorities (See Appendix A). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher using a framework including school improvement components required by the state of North Carolina and based on information obtained during the literature review related to teacher leadership roles. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts to ensure face validity and clarity. Because it was important to gather the views of those responsible for the broad-based vision of school improvement, staff members selected for the survey included not only the NBPTS-certified teachers, but also the principal, assistant principals, Instructional Resource Teacher, and the leadership team chairperson. The views of other staff
in formal leadership positions were critical in examining the influence NBPTS-certified
teachers have in school improvement, as these staff members had key roles in the assessment
of the total school environment and instructional program. In addition, the change process
must be led by what Kotter (1996) describes as a “guiding coalition”—the size of which is
related to the size of the total organization:

Change often starts with just two or three people. The group in successful
transformations then grows to half a dozen in relatively small [organizations]
or small units of larger [organizations]. (p. 59)

After survey data collection in the three schools, semi-structured interviews were
conducted with NBCTs at each school. The number of teachers interviewed was determined
by the number of NBCTs at the school site and their willingness to participate in the study,
but the target number was a minimum of five to seven teachers per site. A total of 24
interview sessions were completed, including 15 staff members at the first site, nine staff at
the second site, and 10 at the third site. The interviews allowed for follow-up to provide
clarifying data.

Data collection was time-limited, with survey data collected first. Permission to
conduct a survey was obtained from the sites selected for the study. Directions for
completing the survey were delivered to staff members via e-mail, with a link to the survey.
The survey was conducted using online web-based survey tools, and the survey data
collected was anonymous. A total of 32 respondents completed the online survey, resulting in
a return rate of 74.4 percent. Questionnaires were developed using the general framework
required for all North Carolina schools when developing their school improvement plans,
including: 1) academic achievement in reading, math, and writing, 2) safe, orderly, and caring schools, and 3) staff development. The same questionnaire was used for both the NBPTS-certified teachers as well as the other school leaders. Survey data was compiled to determine how key school personnel viewed the leadership roles of NBPTS-certified teachers. The survey data gathered from NBPTS-certified teachers was compared with the data collected from other school leaders to determine commonalities and areas of divergence.

After collecting survey data, semi-structured interview questions were used during focus group interviews with the NBCTs and the school principal. The interviews allowed the researcher to further examine the nature and impact of NBPTS-certified teachers in the key areas identified from the survey (See Appendix B). This allowed for greater exploration, including rich description, of how NBPTS-certified teachers impacted improvement of the total school program. The interviews provided the true picture of teacher leadership and its context, as “the telling of tales is a means of making abstract something about a concrete but complex situation—the lived tales of teachers and students in classrooms, cradled within the lived tales of administrators and governments and the whole community” (Geelan, 2003, p. 8). Triangulation was addressed, both within each case and across cases, by use of multiple data sources, including survey data, interviews, and review of the each school’s School Improvement Plan. The use of multiple sources of evidence helped ensure construct validity.

Interviews were conducted individually or using focus groups of NBCTs at their school sites. Focus groups consisted of two to three teachers per group, while some teachers were interviewed individually. Interview times were arranged at the interviewees’ convenience. A total of 24 interview sessions were completed, including 15 staff members at
the first school site, nine staff at the second site, and 10 at the third site. Interviews lasted approximately one hour, and were audiotaped and transcribed. The audiotapes will be destroyed one year after completion of the study. In addition, the school’s principal and assistant principals were interviewed separately using similar questions used for teacher interviews (See Appendix C). Names of interviewees and specific school sites have been kept confidential.

According to Merriam (1998), reliability in qualitative studies can be examined not by whether findings are replicable, but instead whether the results are consistent with the data collected. Reliability can be enhanced through explanation of the researcher’s assumptions and theoretical framework as well as through an “audit trail…[describing] in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 207).

Survey data were combined with information obtained from interviews to provide a picture of the types of leadership roles played by NBPTS-certified teachers. Data were compiled and coded, first within each case and then in a cross-case analysis. Themes and patterns were developed from the analysis of the data, which then allowed the researcher to form an organizational framework. A cross-case analysis provided deeper understanding and explanation of the leadership role of NBCTs. (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Research Reliability and Validity

According to Glesne (1999), “In qualitative inquiry, the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of your interactions to support your research—or rapport—and the quality of your self-awareness of the potential effects of self on your
research—or subjectivity” (p. 95). Rapport can be built through forthrightness and trust by assuring the subjects that their views as NBCTs are of value to the development of ongoing processes for supporting and nurturing teacher leadership. Issues of subjectivity are addressed in the next section.

Creswell (1998) states, “[Writers] search for and find qualitative equivalents that parallel traditional quantitative approaches to validity” (p. 197). Hence, the task of the qualitative researcher rests in sufficiently “painting a picture” to allow readers to draw a trustworthy conclusion. Or, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “It is not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability, but it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). Verification, rather than pure validity, can be attained through extensive time on site during data collection and by providing detailed and thick description in order to build authenticity. According to Merriam (1998), basic strategies to enhance validity include triangulation, long-term observation at research sites, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation. To ensure reliability, a case study protocol and case study database were used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The use of a case study protocol ensured the same procedures were followed at each school site. The researcher’s biases, as identified through assumptions and worldview, are discussed in the following section.

Subjectivity Statement/Theoretical Orientation

As the researcher, I brought to this study practical knowledge drawn from experience, as well as more abstract ideas drawn from reading and analyzing the works of others. As a
white woman, I brought some values and beliefs derived from being a member of the culture of privilege. I grew up in an affluent family where education and achievement were valued and supported. I come from a long line of well-educated ancestors, with a notable inclusion of women. I have two great-grandfathers who served as school superintendents. Although no one in my immediate family went into the field of education, it was a field that was highly respected within my family.

I earned a master’s degree in education and taught English for four years at a Marine Corps base high school. I moved to administration after five years in the classroom, including one year teaching at a large urban high school, where I had a total student load of 125 students, including two Advanced Placement Language and Composition classes, one Academically Gifted English class, and two sophomore English classes. The never-ending reading papers, grading, and preparing lessons burned me out, and I sought an opportunity to make a difference in another way. During several years of my teaching, I did not feel I worked for strong principals who were instructional leaders that were supportive of teacher innovation. My goal in becoming an administrator was to help create what I considered to be an “ideal” school environment: one where teachers were reflective, innovative, collaborative, and lifelong learners. I have always chosen to work in schools with challenging populations of children, as I believe that making an impact is the most important driving force in my professional and personal life. I believe that my upbringing in the culture of power and privilege can be used as a tool to navigate on behalf of those who are disenfranchised.

My collective experiences have made me combine idealism with an understanding of how to make the system work. These beliefs may bias my view toward teacher-leaders, as I
saw myself as a teacher-leader and chafed against administrators who did not support innovation and risk-taking among their staffs. I am not a National Board certified teacher, as the certification process was in its infancy when I was in the classroom. If I had continued as a classroom teacher, I would have likely pursued the certification, as I have always been driven to be an “achiever.”

My role as a school principal may impact the lens through which I view the subjects and findings. However, I sought to successfully “Bracket” this experience by selecting sites where I did not know the staff, and I introduced myself as the researcher, not as a principal. In summary, I viewed my inquiry through a personal lens (my practical experience), a risk-taking lens (embracing change and seeking ways to overcome institutional and organizational barriers), and a service lens (believing in the concept of education as a vehicle for social change and upward mobility).

The research was conducted using a constructivist paradigm, with the objects of inquiry being individual perspectives or constructions of reality (Hatch, 2002). The constructivist model, based on the work of Immanuel Kant, states that knowledge is not solely dependent on environment or innate qualities, but on an interaction between the two. Our innate mental structures, or “mental models,” are developed through the interpretation and organization of our experiences. By conducting a qualitative study using a constructivist paradigm, the researcher and participants work collaboratively in a process of co-construction. “Accounts include enough contextual detail and sufficient representation of the voices of the participants that readers can place themselves in the shoes of participants…and judge the quality of the findings” (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). The theoretical framework—or the
“lens” through which leadership was examined—is the concept of distributed leadership using the model of transformational leadership (as discussed in Chapter II).

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study was limited to NBCTs in three North Carolina elementary schools. According to Stake (1995), “The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization….There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself” (p. 8). The findings are not necessarily generalizable to other settings or contexts. Schofield (1990) adds that the use of multiple sites for the case studies is an effective approach to increasing the generalizability of qualitative work to what is, i.e., what is typical, common, or ordinary. The findings may be useful to teachers, administrators, and policy makers, as well as serve as a basis for further research. It is hoped that the study will generate findings of what Maruyama and Deno (1992) describe as “practical importance”—i.e., how the findings address practical and applied questions, such as:

Are there strong implications of your research for the ways education is practiced?
Based upon your findings, are there ways in which educational approaches can be modified to be made more effective? Are there particular recommendations to be drawn from your work that could help schools when they have to confront problems?

(p. 112)

At the very least, the findings contribute to what Bassey (1999) describes as the role of educational research—to inform professional discourse and be informed by it. “Research should contribute to the maelstrom of ideas, theories, facts, and judgments about education. It
should be something that teachers and policy makers look for, read about, argue over, reflect on and then either reject and forget, or file away in their memory to adapt and adopt later” (p. 51). It is hoped that this study will contribute to the field of leadership studies by addressing what Harris (2004) describes:

We undoubtedly need to understand much more about distributed leadership in action, and how it can be nurtured, supported, and developed. We need more empirical studies of distributed leadership that interrogate the relationship between distributed leadership and school improvement. But most importantly, we need to know whether distributed forms of leadership contribute to improved student outcomes, and if so, in what form. (p. 22)

Chapter Summary

This qualitative, multiple case study is designed to capture differing perspectives about teacher leadership among NBCTs, and through open-ended interviews, to examine the implications of those multiple perspectives. The case study includes descriptive and comparative methods in order to describe the nature and type of teacher leadership among NBCTs and how that leadership supports school improvement within the context of three elementary schools. Chapter IV presents the three schools selected for the study, including the collective results of the online survey, as well as a profile of each school individually. Chapter IV also presents findings from the site visits and interviews with each school’s staff.
Chapter IV
The Three Schools

Survey Results

Data collection began by distributing an online survey to all National Board certified teachers, as well as the principal, assistant principal, and Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT) of each of the three schools selected for the study. The survey questions used are listed in Appendix A. An invitation to complete the online survey was sent to 43 potential respondents, including 34 National Board Certified teachers, along with the administrators and IRT from the three schools. A total of 32 staff members, representing all three of the school sites, completed the online survey, resulting in a return rate of 74.4 percent. Survey responses were not separated or identified by individual school and were instead compiled into a comprehensive summary, allowing for a collective picture of the views of those surveyed. School-specific responses will be presented and discussed in the individual case studies.

Survey data revealed that the most common leadership roles National Board certified teachers have in schools are formal positions, including mentor teacher, grade chair, and leadership team representative. Figure 1 shows the percentage of staff surveyed who reported that they held that specific formal leadership role within their schools, and indicates the specific leadership roles held by NBCTs within their schools. A number of teachers held multiple leadership roles within their schools. Figure 1 shows the greatest percentage of NBCTs held formal leadership roles within their schools, including mentor teacher, grade chair, and school-based leadership team member.
The leadership roles of NBCTs were primarily confined to the individual school level, with a much smaller number of NBCTs reporting that they were involved in district-wide committee representation or leading district-wide staff development. However, when asked which leadership roles most significantly impact school improvement efforts, the role identified as having the greatest impact was not one of the top three formalized roles. Instead, NBCTs reported that the leadership role that had the greatest impact on school improvement was the role of planning and leading school-wide staff development. Figure 2 shows how the NBCTs ranked the impact of leadership roles:
Figure 2: NBCT Leadership Roles Impacting School Improvement

Survey respondents showed strong positive response to the statement that the National Board certification process develops teacher knowledge and skills that is valuable in school-wide improvement, with 90 percent of respondents stating they agreed or strongly agreed.

However, when asked more specifically about individual leadership roles and how those roles influence school improvement, the results were less definitive. Survey responses are shown in Figures 3, 4, and 5.
The survey results indicated that 26 percent of those surveyed agreed that NBCTs demonstrated greater skill than their non-NBCT colleagues in using data analysis to improve student achievement, while 32 percent of respondents were neutral. In addition, 26 percent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, as reflected in Figure 3. It should be noted that the majority of the perceptions and conclusions were derived from self-reports, as the online survey data was elicited from the National Board certified teachers within the schools. The survey data also includes perspectives of the school principals, assistant principals, and instructional resource teachers. However, it is important to note that the data collected represents self-perception of NBCTs, as well as NBCT perceptions of their Board-certified colleagues, and not the views of the entire school staff. In a data-driven school improvement climate, it is interesting to note how many of the survey responders did not view their NBCT colleagues as more skilled in analyzing student achievement data to identify areas for improvement.

**Figure 3: NBCT Skill in Data Analysis**
Figure 4 also illustrates the disparity of opinion regarding how NBCTs affect a school’s ability to recruit and retain teachers. The majority of respondents reported they were neutral on this statement (34 percent), while 28 percent agreed. However, 25 percent of the NBCTs and their administrators either disagreed or stated they did not know if NBCTs impacted their school’s hiring and teacher retention.

Figure 5 also revealed the divided opinions on how the NBCTs and the school administrators perceived abilities of the school-based NBCTs to manage student behavior and analyze classroom environment.
Again, the highest percentage of respondents were neutral in response to this statement (31 percent). Interestingly, 25 percent of respondents agreed, while 25 percent disagreed. This was an odd finding given the large percentage of NBCTs who reported that they served as mentor teachers in their schools. Since a key role of a mentor teacher is to support beginning teachers with classroom management, one would expect that NBCTs would be viewed as more effective than their non-certified colleagues at managing student behavior and analyzing the classroom environment.

In the survey’s open-ended comments section, several statements indicated that NBCTs were not necessarily viewed by their NBCT colleagues and administrators as leaders in any of the school-wide initiatives related to school improvement. Two comments were:

“NBCTs at this school have not branched out beyond the classroom for contributing to school improvement efforts.”
“Having the certification does not change much in regard to the manner or activities in which the teachers choose to participate…Those who do, help, and lead were inclined to do so before [achieving their] National Boards.”

The areas where survey respondents rated NBCTs more favorably were those related to roles as mentor teachers, planning and leading school-wide staff development, and identifying specific school improvement goals and strategies, as shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8:

![Bar chart showing NBCTs have a positive impact on overall school improvement by serving as mentors and coaches for their colleagues.]

**Figure 6: NBCTs as Mentors and Coaches**

Here, 72 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that fellow NBCTs have a positive impact on overall school improvement by serving as mentors and coaches; however, this finding is surprising when juxtaposed against the findings in Figure 5. One explanation for this discrepancy could be that survey respondents viewed the impact of NBCTs on school improvement in a global sense; however, one would still expect perceptions of fellow NBCTs’ skills as mentor teachers to have a higher rating than reflected in Figure 5.

Figure 7 showed strong agreement with the statement that “NBCTs share their expertise in formalized settings, such as planning or leading school-wide staff development.”
Seventy-two percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, thereby indicating that the knowledge and skills of NBCTs are recognized in this particular area.

Figure 7: NBCT Roles in Planning or Leading School-wide Staff Development

Figure 8 also shows an area of strong consensus among survey respondents. Here, 75 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “NBCTs are leaders at our school in identifying specific school improvement goals and strategies.”
It would seem from the survey data that respondents viewed the leadership influence of NBCTs as most marked in areas where teachers work in defined relationships with their colleagues, such as mentoring, or in leading ongoing staff learning by facilitating professional development at the school level. The results were less favorable in areas that assessed the influence of NBCTs in impacting teacher recruitment and in areas where teachers would draw upon skills in classroom management, learner environment, and identifying strategies to support struggling learners. This result was somewhat surprising, as two key areas in the National Board certification process speak to how effectively teachers employ multiple teaching strategies for meaningful learning and to how they regularly analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work. One could conclude that while individual NBCTs may be effective in these areas within their classrooms, their skills and teaching practices do not extend to the broader context of whole-school improvement. Certainly the survey data supports the conclusion.
NBCTs and other key school leaders perceive that NBCT leadership influence is still limited as it relates to district-wide improvement within the district studied.

The NBCTs and school leaders also identified areas that would better support the leadership influence of National Board certification and allow NBCTs to exert greater impact on total school improvement. The factor identified as having the greatest potential to develop NBCTs influence on school improvement was leadership training for NBCTs (with 74 percent of respondents rating it the highest). The other two factors rated among the top three having the greatest potential impact were additional release time during the school day (55 percent) and increased extra duty pay (48 percent). The factors that were identified as having the potential to enhance the leadership influence of NBCTs are shown in Figure 9.
Figure 9: Factors Allowing NBCTs to Have Greater Impact on School Improvement

Respondents were asked to rate which of these factors would have the greatest impact in fostering NBCT leadership for school improvement by identifying the three factors that would have the greatest influence. Here, 33 percent of respondents rated “differentiated professional development for NBCTs” as the factor with the greatest potential, followed closely by “ongoing support for NBCT cohorts to provide school-level leadership” at 29 percent, and “additional release time during the school day” at 27 percent. Responses are shown in Figure 10.
Interestingly, three of the top five factors identified could be accomplished with minimal cost. NBCTs and other school leaders indicated that they would like to capitalize on the skills and talents of NBCTs by providing them opportunities for professional development tailored for their needs, including leadership training and ongoing support for NBCTs to provide school-based leadership. However, some of the open-ended comments in this survey section pointed to a perception that some NBCTs do not seek to extend their knowledge and skills beyond their individual classroom. Sample comments included:

“I find some NBCTs do not carry through with leadership roles and only have the title.”

“Board certification alone has no impact on whether a not a teacher accepts and carries out leadership at my school.”
“Unfortunately, many who pursue their National Boards do it for the money.”

“Money is a big incentive to most people.”

“I feel as an NBCT that you should use your knowledge to help implement best practices throughout the school. We are here to ensure all students learn.”

The role of NBCT leadership was also discussed in the last open-ended section of the survey, which asked respondents to add any other thoughts they had about NBCTs and the leadership roles they had in the school. Several comments also echoed the previous ideas that NBCTs were not necessarily leaders in the work of whole-school improvement and change. Typical comments included the following:

“[National Board certification] over the past five years has come down to just being able to write good responses and implement intended practices while in the process of becoming National Board certified. After becoming certified, less effort is implemented in doing what is needed in order to help all children. Unfortunately, many leaders and non-classroom [teachers] see it also. I wish a system would be in place to more frequently monitor the implemented practices after a teacher is certified.”

Another comment was:

“I believe that the kind of person that acquires their National Boards is also the same kind that tends to be in leadership roles at school.”

Another added:
“Leadership roles at my school are carried out by both NBPTS and non-NBPTS teachers. I see NO evidence that NBPTS teachers possess a greater degree of skill or motivation to provide school or system-wide leadership.”

Another comment was:

“My answers do not show NBCTs having any special influence on school planning because these positions are mostly filled by others. This is my second year at this school, and although I am a certified, experienced mentor and have asked to [be assigned to mentor a beginning teacher], this has not happened. Our IRT is an NBCT and therefore does much of our staff development and has a big hand in policy-making, but she is the exception.”

A final comment reflected the perspective that NBCTs may not be leaders in school-wide improvement:

“Not all of our NBCTs have leadership roles. Some of our NBCTs have taken the achievement and truly used what they learned through the process to improve the school. Others, however, only have the title and did not conceptually understand what the process meant.”

In conclusion, while the survey data did reveal NBCTs held several leadership roles within the schools, the comments illustrated a clear perception that their role might be individualized or context-specific. The comments also showed a perception that some NBCTs were natural leaders who assumed leadership positions, while others may have obtained National Board certification primarily for the financial benefits. The survey data
provided some avenues for follow-up questioning that would be used during the focus group interviews at each school.

The next section presents each of the three schools selected for the research study. Each school is presented and described individually, followed by discussion of the broad ideas and themes that emerged during the cross-case analysis. Each of the three schools selected for the study had significant differences in student demographics, unique features and challenges, and leadership cultures. Providing a picture of each school individually allows for the rich description of each school and its context, as well as highlights key themes that emerged when comparing the schools. Again, the main research questions to be addressed include:

1. What leadership roles do NBCTs have? What conditions support these roles?
2. What is the nature of their work as leaders?
3. Does the NBPTS certification process develop leadership skills in teachers?
4. Do their colleagues view them as teacher leaders? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What school-level factors influence teacher leadership in school improvement?
6. What conditions are necessary to utilize the knowledge and skills of NBPTS-certified teachers in school improvement?

I begin with a profile of each of the three elementary schools in the case study, including information about the community each school serves as well as a brief overview of school achievement and demographic data. This information is provided to describe the broader context of the school as it relates to the research questions. The chapter presents information and overarching themes compiled from interviews of each school’s National
Board certified teachers as well as school administrators. This cross-case analysis is then synthesized to address the research questions.
Sandy Hill Elementary School*

Sandy Hill Elementary School is located in a rapidly growing suburban community with a population of approximately 34,000 people. The town’s population has increased 68 percent since the 2000 census. The town’s website posts the following data:

- **December 31, 2007 Population Estimate:** 33,780
- **Median Family Income:** $78,689
- **Per Capita Income:** $28,727
- **Median Age:** 31.2 years
- **Education:** (minimum high school diploma) 96%
- **College Graduate:** 58.8%

Sandy Hill Elementary was built in 2000, and it is described as a “state of the art facility that is landscaped, has age-appropriate playgrounds, baseball fields, soccer fields, a butterfly garden, an outdoor classroom, and a pond.” The school website states that it emphasizes the Core Knowledge curriculum, which is based on the philosophy and writings of E.D. Hirsch, who states that “knowledge builds on prior knowledge,” and that “all children must have access to a body of critical content which provides a firm foundation for later learning.” In the 2007-08 school year, Sandy Hill had an enrollment of approximately 926 students in grades K-5. The student demographic profiles for a five-year period are shown in Table 4.1:
Table 4.1: Demographic profile of Sandy Hill Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Limited English Proficient</th>
<th>% At/Above Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sandy Hill was recognized as an Honor School of Excellence in 2006-07 according to North Carolina’s student accountability model, the ABCs of Public Education. The accountability program measures student achievement by creating a weighted formula. At the elementary level, the formula takes into account scores on reading, writing, and mathematics tests administered to students in grades 3 through 5. An ‘Honor School of Excellence’ is one in which at least 90 percent of students performed at or above grade level and the school met expected growth and federal No Child Left Behind requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Sandy Hill has a track record of high student performance, achieving at or above 90 percent of students at grade level the last six out of seven school years. The school has achieved “High Growth” status in the ABCs accountability model for the past three years. “High Growth” indicates that the school exceeded its growth standard as determined by the North Carolina ABCs of Public Education and End of Grade Test scores.

When visiting Sandy Hill Elementary, the first thing visitors see upon entering the building is a rock garden that includes the school mascot—the salamander. The foyer is
brightly decorated with displays of student work, including drawings of Chinese characters on a “Great Wall of China” display board. A collection box advertises Spring Harvest Week, which includes a project to collect pet food, treats, toys, collars, leashes, and bowls to benefit Carolina Animal Rescue and Adoption and Best Friend Pet Adoption. Representations of the school mascot permeate the foyer and the front office, including stuffed animals and paintings. Sandy Hill’s school mission is posted prominently on the wall: “We pledge to foster an educational environment that respects and honors all members of the Sandy Hill Elementary School community.” Many staff members walking in and out of the office area wear shirts embroidered with “Sandy Hill Elementary Staff” on them. A display rack includes colored flyers with general information about the school, as well as a 14-page newsletter produced by the school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The newsletter features profiles of students chosen by their classmates as demonstrating the month’s character trait of integrity; features on the school’s ten Odyssey of the Mind teams; a promotional flyer for the school’s annual fundraiser, which included a catered dinner, indoor carnival games, outdoor inflatable games, and information about the prizes to be awarded at a silent auction (MP3 players, a week at a YMCA summer camp, and gift certificates to local businesses).

During the 2006-07 school year, Sandy Hill had 14 National Board certified teachers out of its 51 certified staff (27%). All 14 NBCTs participated in a small-group interview for the study using the questions in Appendix B. Interviews were also conducted with the principal, assistant principal, and Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT), using the questions in Appendix C. The interviews were taped and transcribed, then analyzed for overarching
themes and conclusions. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the following ideas that formed the framework in which the interviews are presented: 1) the experience of the National Board certification process and motivations for pursuing National Boards; 2) identification of the specific challenges facing the school that frame the work of each school’s School Improvement Plan and process; 3) how NBCTs view their colleagues as it relates to teacher recruitment and retention; 4) the relationship between National Board certification and teacher leadership; 5) barriers to teacher leadership; and 6) school culture. Specific supporting quotations from interviewees are below.

**National Board Certification Process**

Nearly all the teachers interviewed at Sandy Hill Elementary obtained their National Board certification while working at the school. Many of them discussed the culture of support and encouragement at the school as being a key factor in their decision to pursue National Board certification. Typical comments from NBCTs included:

“I did mine because of the support in the school—there were already so many teachers that were certified who could support me, and it gave me the initiative to tackle the task.”

Another added:

“[The principal] was very supportive and encouraging.”

Another said:

“The administrators make a big to-do about it…they really think it’s a special thing to do and it’s good for the school, so it’s highly encouraged.”

A final comment was:
“A lot of us started this school together, and I think that people who choose to open a school are certain types of teachers anyway. They are…enthusiastic and very into being a teacher. We had a really wonderful teaching staff that started here and people started getting their National Boards. I think it [was] catching…when you work with people that are excited to be doing what they’re doing. Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that a primary motivator for obtaining National Board certification was the challenge and growth experience. Nearly all agreed that while the financial incentives were nice, those were not the main reason they chose to pursue National Boards. For example, several NBCTs stated:

“I am a very reflective type of person. I like to reflect on what I’m doing and I learn best that way.”

“I’d think, ‘where is my next step to do some more learning?’…It looked like it was a good opportunity to explore teaching a little more.”

“I had talked to several friends who had been through the process, and they said it was a really good growing experience.”

“I did it because of the growth experience. I didn’t know what kind of leadership roles it would lend itself to. And the extra money was nice, too.”

“It was something to make me look at the profession in a new way.”

A common theme from their comments was the teachers’ belief in ongoing professional growth and the desire to take on challenges to ‘stretch’ themselves as educators.
Specific Challenges Facing the School

Responses to the question about the biggest challenges facing the school were generally consistent across all the interviewees. The staff discussed the difficulty of finding enough time for collaboration and curriculum planning across grade levels, challenges presented by an increasingly diverse student population, and the prospect of converting the school calendar from a traditional calendar to a multi-track year-round calendar the following school year. Sandy Hill was one of 22 schools in the district selected in 2007 to be converted to a multi-track year-round calendar as a result of rapid growth in student enrollment. The district’s student enrollment has doubled since 1985, and an additional 130,000 students are projected by the year 2025. This rate of growth led to the decision to convert 22 schools to a multi-track year-round calendar as a way to maximize building capacity. Schools operating on a multi-track year-round calendar can accommodate 20 to 33 percent more students in a building, because at any given time, three tracks of students and their teachers are in school and one track is on vacation. Sandy Hill Elementary staff were preparing for the conversion to the year-round calendar in the spring of 2007. A sampling of NBCT comments on this issue included:

“I believe one of our biggest challenges is the change to year-round. We have a very cohesive staff...a real family feel....[It will be] fractured by the schedule, and personally I’m afraid we’re going to lose that. We’ve been working so hard for consistency in instruction...and I hate to see that fall apart.”

Another added:
“The continuous growth has been a challenge….We’ve lost some of that unity…that closeness.”

Another comment was:

“Because of the growth, there’s very little opportunity to communicate with others across grade levels. It used to be when the school first started out, it was much smaller and everybody knew everybody’s story.”

The assistant principal said:

“That’s probably been the biggest challenge because it’s tough running a school and trying to convert. You can’t stop….But our staff adjusts and rallies….No matter what challenges we give them, they rally!”

Along with the rapid growth in enrollment, staff members identified the challenge of meeting a diverse range of student needs. However, they consistently framed that challenge as an important element of their school identity and culture, calling the outreach effort “Raleigh Night,” and several NBCTs described this effort:

“[A challenge for us has been working with] the ever-changing diversity of our population…and where they’re coming from. It’s the neediness…and when you look at the area of Raleigh that they come from…they’re dealing with gangs and tough situations they’re living in. We are working on meeting their needs.”

Another added:

“It’s a challenge [blending] the affluent areas around our school and the kids from downtown Raleigh.”
Another comment was:

“One of the key processes in our school improvement plan is that every semester we pack up the bus and go to the community center [in downtown Raleigh]. We need to get as much information to those parents who aren’t banging on the doors demanding it. It’s caused us to be mindful of what all parents deserve to know. We think it also makes us think more deliberately about the things we put in place academically.”

An additional comment was:

“Many of our parents have never even seen our school. Public transportation in Raleigh doesn’t come [here], so our whole staff gets into their cars and we go there to conference with parents. We bring school supplies and toys for the kids…the only requirement to get the things is that they have to come with an adult to conference with their teacher…. These are a group of kids that may not be as fortunate as others because of where they live, but they are our family. Our community here has really embraced the whole idea…Our PTA president usually comes with us on Raleigh Night. We also reach out to our community for translators…It’s almost invigorating! I’m on such a high whenever I leave there.”

Interviewees frequently referred to their outreach efforts as a critical component of their ongoing work of school improvement.

*National Board Certification as a Tool for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers*
Another consistent theme drawn from the interviews was that while school staff valued and nurtured the process of obtaining National Board certification, it was not in and of itself viewed as a tool for recruitment and retention of teachers. The majority of the teachers earned National Board certification while at the school, and colleague support was frequently mentioned as a factor in teachers’ decisions to pursue certification. Staff stated that there were benefits of having a contingent of National Board certified teachers, as it created a school climate that would be attractive to prospective teachers, as well as viewed positively by the parents and community. Typical NBCT comments include:

“When I think of our national board certified teachers, number one they’re hard working. They were leaders in our school before they got their honor. They got it through hard work again and they’re very humble people… They’re going to take a step out and they’re not going to let anyone around them not be successful whether it’s a colleague or a child….Who better to help as an advocate for our profession?”

Another added:

“As far as retaining [teachers], I [think how National Board certified teachers] model their leadership and their collaboration processes…builds a culture that makes people more likely to want to stay.”

“I think it makes the parents happy! They’re happy when the papers come out, and it says all the names [of the National Board certified teachers].”
Another NBCT added:

“I think it says something about the climate of the school. I think it says that there are a lot of people who are willing to go the extra yard and make a difference, and that they’re progressive. But it wouldn’t [keep] me here…I wouldn’t stay because my neighbors are national board certified.”

*Relationship Between National Board Certification and Teacher Leadership*

One theme that emerged from the interviews was the linkage between perceptions about teacher leaders and whether this affected decisions to pursue National Board certification. The majority of the staff interviewed believed that there was no connection between the National Board certification process itself in developing teacher leaders; most stated that teachers who chose to pursue certification were already natural leaders, and that the National Board certification process did not inherently develop leadership skills. However, they stated that the certification process could enhance traits that could connect with leadership skills, such as reflecting on their own teaching and becoming more deliberate and purposeful about instructional decisions. Typical NBCT comments included:

“I don’t think the process [necessarily] makes you a better leader. I think that has a lot to do with personality, not so much the National Board process.”

“If you are a natural leader anyway, this does not affect you. But if you are not, this might help you in being more of [a leader].”
“I agree. Teachers who pursue National Board certification are those who are inclined to want to assume leadership roles and to want to make a difference in a wider arena.”

“I that that there are some processes in the National Board certification processes and procedures that build skills for teachers that help in leadership. Some of those are the reflective practices that are required in national boards….With that said, I don’t think that just because a teacher went through that process and received National Board certification that it ensures that those skills will be applied in that way. I think the use of those skills and how they carry after the board process is directly related to some characteristics of the individual teacher and some characteristics of personal motivation and some leadership features that some teachers seem to embody that other teachers don’t necessarily. And some of those other teachers that don’t embody those natural leadership qualities--for lack of a better word--don’t seem to carry those national board skills beyond their individual day to day work.”

Another NBCT added:

“I just think it’s more about becoming a better teacher. Although I realize that a lot of people who have done the boards, they have gone out [of the classroom]. But those teachers might have done that anyway without national boards. I don’t think it is necessarily related to leadership.”
The school principal agreed:

“I think it makes a huge difference in classroom instruction. I don’t know that it does a lot for them as far as leadership. You still have to do your own development with conflict resolution and dealing with adults. I don’t see that National Boards gives them any of that. But I do see huge differences in the way they teach in their classroom and the way they look at kids. And that sort of permeates into the whole grade level or the whole team because it’s like the light bulb goes on and they get it…..It’s not National Boards, it’s a byproduct of National Boards.”

Interviewees tended to describe National Board certified teachers as highly motivated, self-directed achievers, and while some of their natural skills and leadership traits were evident, these traits were not necessarily developed by the National Board certification process itself. The instructional resource teacher said:

“I think it’s probably a big chunk experience, and I think it’s probably a big chunk of who they are as people. But I also think the purposeful thinking through the national board process—you have to kind of defend what your decisions are… about the lesson that you’ve highlighted and whether it matches the curriculum requirements… I think some of those processes do give them some tools that they need to have those conversations with parents. But I think the willingness to do it and move forward it probably more coming from who they are as people and their own temperament…. I think there are some assumptions—as with anything—that if you carry teachers through a
similar process that you get a similar result in the end. I think with National Board certification there is this interaction between the process and what the person’s own temperament and leadership style and those kinds of things are. If you have someone who’s extremely tentative in their work and in their dealings with other people, and they’re successful in the board process, you may get a stronger teacher who is more reflective in their practice, and the direct results and the direct impact on improvement is on kids that teacher connects with, but it may or may not move to a broader point of leadership. I don’t know if the board process in and of itself necessarily builds a stronger leader; that there are a lot of other contributing factors.”

**Barriers to Teacher Leadership**

A common response to the question about barriers to teacher leadership was the issue of time. In addition, many of the staff pointed to the requirement that National Board certified teachers remain in positions of direct service to children as a barrier to taking on greater leadership roles and responsibilities. The school principal stated:

“I would break down that barrier that says that they have to teach a certain percentage of the time. Some of them are so much more useful than that in that they can lead lesson studies. That should probably be a national board certified teacher who knows what to look for when they go into a classroom—who knows what good instruction looks like. There need to be positive exemplars. They do need to stay grounded in teaching also. But I think when we said that 75 percent of their time needs to be spent in the classroom, that’s
hard. It would be great if I could have a [half time] teacher and a [half time] teacher leader, and it would be great if that was a national board certified teacher.”

The teachers interviewed agreed, talking at length about the balancing act required to teach children while simultaneously taking on leadership roles. Some of the NBCT comments included:

“I really think that just time is a big barrier for a lot of people just wanting to take on leadership roles with all the things that you’re responsible for just within your classroom. You want to do the best job you can with your children. A lot of people don’t want additional pressures from outside with other types of leadership roles.”

Another NBCT shared:

“I think time is a huge barrier. Because in order to pursue anything or to do the work that is associated with becoming a leader, you’ve got to let down somewhere. And then who fills in that gap? I for one don’t want to leave my kids in order to do something like that.”

One NBCT added:

“It’s just always the time. You have to be a teacher OR a leader…. I mean, you’re looking at what starts to suffer, too…You’re being pulled out from the classroom—what’s missing from the classroom?”
In addition, several teachers commented on their belief that leadership can take many forms, and is not necessarily tied to a formal leadership role outside the classroom.

Two NBCTs shared the following observations:

“Not everyone aspires to go on to become leaders, but I’ve noticed that with the knowledge that I’ve gained by going through the National Board experience, that my vocabulary is different…my outlook is different…the way I perceive school is totally different…I didn’t want to become a leader and I am not a leader!.... But when you walk into my classroom, you can tell that it is right on track with the objectives…that I know what needs to be taught, I know the curriculum…I know what to do to help children become successful. I know what to do to help parents with children…There are lots of problems for every child…each one’s different in that room…each one…and being able to know how to deal with problems and know how to help children now makes you a leader. And whether or not you even think you are, people are watching and they know what’s going on…you don’t have to become an IRT or an assistant principal to be a leader.”

“You’re a leader in your classroom! I see it trickling down to my students and helping them become leaders…of themselves…not so much of the classroom but just of themselves, and being responsible for their learning and like she said, every child’s different.”
School Culture

One remarkably consistent theme that emerged across all the interviews was the importance of the school culture at Sandy Hill Elementary. In every interview, teachers spoke to the positive, collaborative culture in the school, and attributed the establishment of that culture to the school’s principal. They described the school as having a professional, supportive environment that fostered and nurtured teacher leadership. They also consistently identified the principal’s ability to ‘hire the right staff’ to build and support the school’s culture. Typical comments from NBCTs included:

“I think that [our principal] is one of the best administrators I have ever worked with, and I’ve worked with probably 15 administrators. She’s probably one of the best administrators I’ve ever worked with as far as encouraging you to do things.”

“I think she recognizes when people need to make changes and do things differently.”

“She’s very flexible. And I think change is encouraged instead of squelched.”

“I think [our assistant principal] really inspires us, and [our principal] just has a really strong talent at finding people to hire. She picks people that for the most part really just seem to fit in. They’re just a great team!”

“I think the administration does a good job of making everyone feel like a leader. We’re all goal-oriented and we’re looking at what’s best for the
children, and we’re all in that mindset. We kind of lead…not only ourselves, but we help each other become leaders. I think with the administration, they give you that respect as being a leader…not necessarily grade-level wise or on a committee, but in your own classroom. You’re in there doing what you feel is necessary and they trust us enough to do that, and allow us to be leaders.”

“I think that everyone feels the safety and the freedom to join in and to show…their capacity to become a leader.”

In addition, the teachers described their school improvement process as one where teachers and committee members were empowered to make decisions and recommendations in support of school goals. The staff was clearly unified in the focus of their school’s improvement plan and the priorities of the school as a whole. Typical NBCT comments included the following:

“I would say that the culture at [Sandy Hill] supports teacher leadership. In fact, in some cases, it demands it!”

“They're just very supportive. Whatever help you need. I think the other thing is one thing [our principal] does here is she… makes sure everyone’s on the same page. She wants everyone included. She wants everyone informed. She wants everyone to take a piece of the school improvement plan so it belongs to you.”
“All of the teachers feel like they do have a say in how it goes, and those are really important to keep and they’re unique. Too many schools don’t have that…all of a sudden decisions are made, and they’re like, “OK!” you know, and so that’s why the school improvement team leaders [play such an important role here].”

“Our principal…knows how to pick them, and everybody…that started the school is very ‘go get ‘em’…step up to the plate and do whatever it takes.’ Leadership is encouraged by the teachers. The administrators want teachers to take on leadership roles. They send us out to be the experts on something and come back and share. You know like our school improvement team…I mean, there’s a leader on each area and most of them are national board teachers, but I don’t know if it’s all of them. But they’re the experts and they lead the other teachers in figuring out what it is we want, and what goals we have, how we’re going to achieve those goals, so leadership through the teachers is very much encouraged here. It’s definitely not just ‘this is how it’s done; we’re going to tell you what to do.’”

“I think this year especially that we really focused on [our school improvement plan] being a working model. It really is something that we all know and all understand and we’re all invested in, and like I said, with it being a working model, it’s always changing. And when the changes come,
we know that change is necessary. It’s not just changing the text on the
document, but that all the staff knows how, I guess, to use the document
because it’s really curriculum-oriented and it’s focusing on areas of weakness
in our school. And so I think that we are more invested in making it work
because it is something that we have to use to guide us through and get us all
on the same page.”

The school administrators’ observations reinforced the teachers’ perspectives. The
assistant principal commented:

“We don’t make decisions—[the principal] and I—it’s our school
improvement process. If it’s not in our plan, it’s not going to happen…. [She]
has an uncanny ability to get good people in. She fostered the atmosphere
when this building first opened.”

In a separate interview, the principal added:

“The experts are right here in the building. The teachers are the ones who
know the answers to those questions. They’re the ones who write the school
improvement plan and [the assistant principal] chairs that and does a really
good job. One of the reasons is that is I’m not there is because if I am there,
they look to me for the answers. I don’t want to be the answer. I want to be
the resource person that helps find what they need once they determine they
know what the answer is, not what they think I think the answer is. Because
I’m only one person. If you’re not smarter than me, I don’t need you! There a
lot of people here that are smarter than I am. Especially when we get all of our
When asked if the school improvement team ever made decisions that the principal did not believe was in the best interest of the school, she shared:

“I might not have agreed, but honestly who died and made me right? I mean really! Until they decide that that’s something we need here at this school, we’re not going to do it. Will we decide that is of value? Probably. But it’s not me saying that. Everything has to be grass roots, or what’s the point?

Because if they don’t see the value, then why are we doing it?... If the professionals in this building believe that it’s true and we can find research that says it’s true, then it is. I’m not always right. And it is OK with me that I’m not always right. That’s OK. I’m a grown up!...I don’t always know the answer, they do. They’re the ones who do it every day, not me. I’ll tell you what I am right about. I am right about my ability to deal with parents who are difficult. I am right about my ability to select staff to be in this building.”

It was evident from the interviews of Sandy Hill staff that their teachers were committed to their school and regarded one another in a positive, respectful manner. The next school in the study is Holloway Elementary School.

**Holloway Elementary School***

Holloway Elementary School is located in another rapidly growing suburban area in the northern part of the district. The town’s population has increased from 12,588 in 2000 to 22,324 in 2007. The town’s Chamber of Commerce website posted the following data:
**Median Family Income:** $74,660  
**Per Capita Income:** $34,043  
**Median Age:** 33.9 years  
**Race/Ethnicity:** 81.3% White; 12.9% Black  
**Education:** (minimum high school diploma) 89.2%  
**College Graduate:** 43%

Holloway Elementary opened in 2001, and it operates on a multi-track year-round schedule. The principal who opened the school left to take a central office position in 2002. The school’s principal at the time of the study had announced that she would be retiring, and the school was in a state of transition. When Holloway Elementary school opened, its student population was comprised of families who had applied to attend the school and wanted to be assigned to a year-round schedule. Holloway Elementary operated for several years with a student population that was primarily white and had a low percentage of students who received free and reduced lunch. During the 2007-08 school year, Holloway Elementary had an enrollment of approximately 765 students in grades K through 5. Table 4.2 illustrates the comparison and changes between 2003 and 2008:
Table 4.2: Demographic profile of Holloway Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Limited English Proficient</th>
<th>% At/Above Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
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<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>25.35%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holloway Elementary School had a record of high student performance in its first few years after opening, but as the student population changed over time, student performance on End of Grade tests declined. The school met the “High Growth” standard in 2003-04 and 2004-05, but met the “Expected Growth” standard in 2005-06 and 2006-07. In addition, the school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07. Since Holloway Elementary was not designated as a Title I school (Title I schools in this district have a Free or Reduced Lunch student population of 35 percent or greater), it did not receive sanctions for failure to meet AYP for three consecutive years. However, it was required to amend its School Improvement Plan to address sub-groups that did not make AYP (which included Black students, Economically Disadvantaged students, and Students with Disabilities).

When entering Holloway Elementary, one walks into a large, vaulted entry way. It is noticeable that there is no artwork, posters, or any type of information in the entry hall. The main office is located directly off the entry to the left. Upon entering, one sees rows of chairs
lined up along the walls, and a reception desk is piled with papers, folders, binders, as well as the traditional student check-in and check-out rosters and visitor sign-in. Unlike Sandy Hill Elementary, there is no discernable evidence of a school mascot, the presence of its Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), or a school mission statement. Several adults sit in the chairs in the office, and within a few minutes, teachers arrive to escort the parents to what appear to be conferences. I was directed into a conference room to conduct the interviews. The conference room had bare, white walls with a few old binders on a bookshelf. Along the main hallway, the walls were bare with no displays or student work posted. Across from the conference room adjacent to the staff lounge, there was a bulletin board that had minutes from leadership team meetings posted. The minutes were dated from one to three months prior to the scheduled interviews. The bulletin board had a heading, asking the question, “Where are you now?” The subheadings posted under the question were:

1--Confusion/Overload

2--Feeling Inadequate/Distrustful

3--Challenging the Test

4--Examining the Results Objectively and Looking for Causes

5--Accepting the Data as Information, Seeking Solutions, and Modifying Instruction

There were tallies marked next to each subheading, which seemed to indicate that staff were posting and charting responses to the question. There were seven tallies next to the first responses (Confusion/Overload); four next to Feeling Inadequate/Distrustful; six next to Examining the Results, and two next to Accepting the Data as Information.
During the 2006-07 school year, Holloway Elementary had 10 National Board certified teachers out of its certified staff of 43 (23%). Six of the 10 NBCTs participated in small-group interviews for the study using the questions in Appendix B. Interviews were also conducted with the two assistant principals and the Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT), using the questions in Appendix C. The principal was out of the building on the day of the interviews, and stated that she preferred not to participate in the interview.

National Board Certification Process

Two of the six National Board certified teachers interviewed at Holloway had obtained their National Boards at another school, while the other four obtained it during their tenure at Holloway. All the teachers interviewed indicated they obtained their National Board certification for personal reasons related to professional challenge or financial advancement. Sample NBCT comments included the following:

“I wanted to prove myself…prove to myself that I could do it. I wanted to see if I had what it took. And the twelve percent raise is nice, too!”

“I got my national board certification when I was teaching at another school. I was encouraged to do so by my mentor. She had gone through the national board certification process during my third year of teaching. We had several conversations about it and she talked about what a good experience it had been for her to reflect on her own teaching. She had been teaching for more than 30 years. That influenced me. And of course the extra money is also
nice, too. But I would definitely say the encouragement from my mentor.”

“I was at another school….I had just recently gotten divorced, and I needed the money.”

When discussing National Board certification with other key school leaders, including the assistant principals and the Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT), these leaders tended to view the motivation behind teachers who obtained their National Boards as primarily financial. Typical NBCT comments included:

“If I look at names, I would say of the ones that we have…(that) four of the ten are leaders…I would say that) money was the primary contributing factor in their getting National Boards.”

“When I think about our young staff and the teachers who’ve gotten national board certification in the last three years, I don’t think that I would say it’s made a big difference.”

“[Several of our National Board certified teachers] haven’t been at a school where a lot of the kids are on free or reduced lunch. I think a lot of them do it because of the extra income.”

After hearing the responses regarding teacher motivation (as well as others’ perceptions) for obtaining National Boards, it became apparent that there were some problems within
Holloway Elementary. These problems were revealed when the staff discussed the greatest challenges at the school.

Specific Challenges Facing the School

The most noticeable theme that emerged from hearing responses to the biggest challenges facing the school was lack of consistency in identifying those challenges. Some of the staff were initially guarded and indirect in their responses to this question, while others openly shared their views. Responses from NBCTs included the following:

“The biggest challenge that we are facing is a staff is actually collaborating with one another so as to impact positively student performance.”

“Focusing on student needs as opposed to teacher needs.”

“Looking at how to make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) and what we need to do to make that.”

“Morale.”

“Being on the same page. It’s hard developing our vision of what we need to do to help our struggling students. Some of that vision needs to start at the top and filter down. But there has to be a common goal in sight as well as the path we’re going to take to get there. I think…we are all on different paths.”
“Having a strong leader that’s consistent.”

“I think the perceptions of the teachers. The turnover rate. I have been here since 2001, and it’s been very hard to gel because so many new teachers quit after three or four years.”

“Some of the greatest ones that are facing my school are communication…. Academically, [the teachers] think they’re meeting everyone’s needs but then you get your test scores back…we’re trying to make sure the we’re doing what we need to, but it doesn’t really seem like we’re all on the same page.”

One of the assistant principals and the Instructional Resource Teacher offered strikingly similar comments when asked to elaborate on the school’s challenges.

“I think that work that is expected needs to be inspected. And we kind of struggle with that.”

The IRT added:

“[If] you expect it, you’re going to have to inspect it…. I used to] hear that administrators are the key to success, but [I didn’t believe it.] But I’ve changed my tune! And even as the IRT, I can only do so much. Because what the teachers will say is, do we have to do this? …[That] question cannot be answered by me. It has to be answered by administrators. And don’t get me wrong, when the administrator has a heart for children and wanting what is best, it is a difficult job to do that. But when you have more than one
administrator and only one—*one*—of them [asks the hard questions] like,

Why are you doing that? What do you want the outcome to be for students?
What’s your rationale for selecting this? One [of our administrators] will do it.
Don’t get me wrong—it’s difficult as a leader. But another principal said it like this—it really takes courage to be a principal. It’s about being courageous!
But I also like this [idea] from Rick DuFour—structure your thoroughbreds and monitor your jackasses. I’m sorry—but it’s true. It’s true, and you know it is!”

Holloway Elementary clearly had some internal issues related to school climate and perceptions of leadership within the school. These elements will be discussed further in the section related to school culture.

*National Board Certification as a Tool for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers*

Although Holloway Elementary had a large number of National Board certified teachers on its staff, the interviewees did not necessarily see that as a tool for recruiting or retaining teachers. In addition, several teachers interviewed expressed reservations about their National Board certified colleagues. Typical NBCT comments included the following:

“[Our National Board certified staff does not impact recruitment or retention] the way it is here. Some of the people were doing the writing, but they weren’t practicing what they were writing. I think some people realized that. They were just doing it to get the money. And I kind of feel like you’ve got to walk the walk so you can talk the talk. When you have experiences like I do, and
you walk down the halls, you know what’s really going on.”

“Part of that may be because it is the administration who does the hiring. We don’t really have an interview team or committee or anything. I think we could have more of an impact if we could, but the way things are currently I don’t think it really makes a difference.”

“I don’t think so because the hiring is all up to the principal.”

One of the assistant principals added:

“I don’t know that that has a real effect on it. In interviews no one has ever asked about the number of national board certified teachers on our staff.”

In general, the views expressed regarding the impact of National Board certified teachers on the staff seemed to parallel the perceptions about why many of the teachers pursued National Boards. In contrast to the comments at Sandy Hill Elementary, the Holloway staff tended to view the process as an individual achievement, and that the motivations for obtaining certification were largely personal. None expressed the view that these teachers played an integral role in shaping the vision or direction of the school, although several of the National Board certified teachers did have formal leadership roles at the school.
Relationship Between National Board Certification and Teacher Leadership

The staff members at Holloway identified a number of formal roles that National Board certified teachers held at the school, including grade chairs, leadership team representatives, and mentor teachers. The majority of them stated that they did not think the National Board certification process necessarily developed leadership skills, while several staff members also said that many of the National Board certified teachers were not involved in any formal leadership roles at Holloway Elementary. The assistant principals and IRT shared the following observations:

“I don’t see that it’s made that much of a difference. We have some that are not national board certified who are great leaders and then we have others who are not great leaders. Some who are national board certified don’t take on leadership roles in some of the more important areas.”

“I honestly don’t think it has any influence on [leadership], because….we have teachers who are not National Board certified, but they still have the mindset that [success depends] on the child and where they came from. [Many of our National Board certified teachers] haven’t been at a school where a lot of the kids are on free or reduced lunch. I think a lot of them [pursue National Boards] because of the extra income. [Of the ones who are leaders], I think they came in with that. They had it before. I think that has something to do with experience, too. I think the ones who came in had that experience and
didn’t need to make excuses.”

“If I look at names, I would say of the ones that we have….four of the ten are leaders…. These people without national board certification would be the same leaders that they are. Because of those that I mentioned who are leaders, it’s them. Always willing to go above and beyond. They actually went through it as a professional growth experience. And they are even better, though, for the experience. I have to say that.”

Two of NBCTs interviewed, Betsy and Mary, served in leadership roles on the School Improvement Team. They were identified as teacher-leaders by their peers, although others viewed them as natural leaders. Sample comments from their NBCT colleagues included:

“Betsy does a really outstanding job. I think she [would be a leader] even if she wasn’t certified. And Mary—they’re both just really strong leaders anyway.”

“If you took the ones who have national board certification, and look at who are grade chairs or on the data team or who were involved in the original PLC training group, every one of them was. They were on one of those three. I think it is part of their personality, but there is something in the process that really does help develop leadership. The process drives them and they want to keep up on it. They want to be involved.”
Betsy and Mary were interviewed together, and their comments were:

“I think having to reflect on your own teaching and really, having to toot your own horn—which we sometimes as teachers hesitate to do. But by the time you finish that certification process, there is a sense of accomplishment and confidence when you look back at the things you really do. I think that’s a big part of being a leader. You have to have confidence in what you’re doing if you’re going to lead other people.”

“I do think it does depend on the person. I can say for us that we have been reflective and have moved into our leadership roles. In the building, we have others who have just gotten the certification and have taken a step back. In some cases they only did things just to get the certification.”

Although a few National Board certified teachers held formal leadership roles at Holloway, several comments reiterated the contextual challenges to teacher leadership at the school. One NBCT comment was:

“I think [National Board certification] does potentially give teachers the ability to lead in a new way. They might not be able to do it at that school, but they might be given another situation where they could do it.”

When asked which leadership roles were most influential and had the greatest impact on school improvement at Holloway, three National Board certified teachers responded:
“I would pretty much say the administration.” (Laughter)

“I think [administrators are] willing to listen to us, but they have the final say.”

“I think there are some teachers here who are really scared to speak out because they’re scared if they speak out and say it to the wrong person, even though they’re just voicing their opinion, that it is taken the wrong way. Our three administrators have completely different personalities, so it’s very hard within the grade levels depending on who their evaluator is that year—that’s who they work with the most. You have to get used to who your evaluator is for that year, and that’s how you set your tone for the year. They know who they can speak out to, they know who to expect can keep information confidential and not relay it back to someone else.”

The perceptions of top-down leadership and lack of unified vision and mutual trust in the school were elaborated upon during discussions of school culture and barriers to teacher leadership at Holloway.

*School Culture*

The comments from interviewees pointed to some troubling aspects of the school culture at Holloway. In addition to the perception of a lack of shared vision and atmosphere of inconsistency, many of the teachers regarded their colleagues with distrust. When asked to describe the culture at Holloway Elementary, typical comments from NBCTs included:
“You can be a leader, but there’s really no authority that you would need in that leadership role. Nor is there always the support if you make a decision in that leadership role in order for that leadership to really be effective. Sometimes when [you ask the same question to different people], you can [get] a totally different response.”

“I think as a whole, people tend to think that they can dictate what they want, and it’s not always said that no, you can’t have that. Or if they’re given a yes, and others ask a different question, and they’re given a yes—but it can’t be that both can have what they want. So it causes some ill feelings. Or it feeds the rumor mill. People speak very freely and in an unprofessional manner. Or some are chosen by the leadership of the school. So while some teachers are encouraged to take on leadership roles, it does seem to be the same handful that are depended on.”

“[I would describe our culture as] average. I think there a lot of teachers that think that some of these children can’t learn, and they don’t stretch them. They don’t challenge them. I think all of your faculty has to buy into [the school] in order to get growth.”

“As far as the leadership, if I could change it I would want there to be open communication and for our administrators—for all three of them to be on the same page and working with openness.”
Responses from one of the assistant principals and IRT included:

“I’ve been here since four or five months after [the school first opened] and our population has changed. [Most] of the teachers who started at that time were a very young group—they had less than five years of teaching experience. For so many of them, this had been the only setting they’d been in….We had a really low population of free and reduced lunch students [when we first opened]. So when our free and reduced lunch student population swelled…I think the mindset [was] they that they felt like a lot of kids [could not be successful] because of where they came from….That was kind of the excuse—we would hear, “Now that we have those kids, we won’t get this and be able to do that.” Our teachers work hard. But I still hear—and they’re politically correct—I don’t hear in their language that they truly believe what they say. When I look at our national board certified teachers, most of them are pretty much on board [with the idea of reaching all students]. But we have that culture still here.”

The IRT added:

“I would say the culture of this school is somewhat inflexible. Rigid. The idea that, “We’ve always done it like this” [exists]….We have a fairly new administrator. And so whatever is introduced is not what the other one did. And—reluctantly—though I’m going to go ahead and say it…whatever he did was “right,” and whatever she does is met with suspicion and doubt. ‘She can’t really change us, we’ve been here since the beginning, and blah, blah,
blah,’….Of course, this isn’t everybody. But there’s a really strong group who don’t want the school to look successful because of that allegiance to the former principal….Change is good – it’s inevitable. But if you close the door, and you continue to do what you’re doing, and this talk and discussion between colleagues—we don’t have a meeting to say what you want to hear. And the other thing is, if you expect it, you’re going to have to inspect it. You’re going to have to go in there and see if this is being implemented. I’m passionate about this!”

Most of the interviewees highlighted teachers’ perceptions regarding the change in the student demographics at Holloway as an important factor in the overall school climate and culture. It was often noted that many of the National Board certified teachers at Holloway had never taught in another environment, and that many of the teachers struggled with maintaining high expectations for at-risk students. Typical NBCT comments included:

“One of the things that bothers me is when our population changed a couple years ago …we got some children [who lived in a housing project], and [the reaction] was like, ‘Oh gosh, there go our test scores!’ And at my previous school, [the principal there was clear in her expectation that] all children are going to learn. And [it was not acceptable to] say that they can’t. I think to me that’s been the most frustrating thing.”

“I think there’s just a lot of stress in our school…. I think some of it’s just related to what wanting to know what’s going to happen at the end of this year
and what will happen next year regarding change [in our student enrollment]—who’s going to be here, is not going to be here… Also the stress of [end of grade tests] coming up… and parents not cooperating like they should. I think that that has a huge impact right now.”

“When I think about our young staff and the teachers who’ve gotten national board certification in the last three years, I don’t think that I would say it’s made a big difference. The ones who came in having it, they would be great even if they didn’t have it!...But I don’t hear the conversations about what we could be doing to help all children.”

One of the assistant principals added:

“I think that we have to go in and monitor. I think if we do a lot more of going into classrooms—everybody and not just me this year…. I want to know what their philosophy is about children. I want them to know what I feel and to be able to talk about that. I think sometimes they get offended by that. It’s like ‘how dare I ask them what’s going on in their classroom?’ but I do believe if we went in consistently, like weekly, and have discussions with the teachers, it will not only make them more accountable, but it will also help them understand that we are here to help them. Not just coming into observe them…. Teachers need to see us in their classrooms, and then when we’re
talking about something, I know what I’m talking about. I’m just a strong believer in inspecting because then it gets done.”

While the school culture was seen as a major barrier to the school’s success, the staff identified some wider institutional practices that also prevented National Board certified teachers from taking on opportunities to have greater leadership influence.

Barriers to Teacher Leadership

Several Holloway teachers identified larger institutional or policy-related barriers to teacher leadership. One NBCT suggested building leadership roles into the NBCT renewal process:

“I think it should be that we have to look at the whole ten year cycle when you’re renewing national boards. It shouldn’t be what have you just done this year, it should be what have you done over the past ten years? What kind of leadership roles have you taken on for the duration? When you look at the research, it takes three to five years to really make an impact. Some of the national board certified teachers just do something for one year. Some of them may just take on a leadership role just to get the certification. I think we should also look at, how long have you been in that role? And what impact have you seen within that time?”

Another NBCT agreed, suggesting forming a leadership group of NBCTs:

“Maybe if it was actually encouraged in our school for the national board certified teachers to almost be a task force. Just getting together to brainstorm amongst ourselves, what kinds of things do we think we could do to help our
school? What kind of roles do we see? And maybe just creating new roles. I think that might help. That might help those national board certified teachers who do take the back seat. They don’t really step forward—if other people who have the same certification as you are stepping it up, and you’re not, and people are paying attention to that maybe that would encourage them to continue reflecting on themselves. It’s really not ever mentioned that we have these national board certified teachers here. It’s printed in the paper when the new people get theirs, but that’s it. You don’t really hear anything else about it. So maybe if that was a focus, that might help.”

Other Holloway NBCTs mentioned lack of time and the multi-track year round calendar as significant barriers:

“I think there are some barriers. Time is always an issue as well as tracking in and out—not having all the staff here. That is a challenge definitely. I think teachers just trying to do their jobs on top of having leadership roles can be difficult.”

Another NBCT added:

“When you give somebody time, then you take away from instructional time. It’s very hard to find a balance. You can’t really control teachers not being here. That can’t really be changed. To me communication has always been a barrier here. I don’t really have an answer to that either.”

Another NBCT discussed the balance of instructional responsibilities with trying to effectively mentor beginning teachers:
“I just don’t think that a classroom teacher can really effectively mentor…or maybe if they just taught in the morning, and could be a mentor the rest of the day. They really need time to sit down and help new teachers. I don’t think [beginning teachers are] getting the quality support that they need. I think so many of them just aren’t getting quality guidance. I feel like they get frustrated and that’s why the turnover rate is what it is…. And I’ve seen more of it here than I did at [my previous school]. They will teach two or three years then get married and quit.”

The issues at Holloway Elementary painted a much different picture than those discussed at Sandy Hill Elementary. The Holloway staff depicted a school that was fundamentally distrustful, with a fragmented culture and a lack of unified vision or direction. We turn now to the final school in the case study, Gardner Elementary School.

**Gardner Elementary School***

In contrast to Sandy Hill and Holloway Elementary, Gardner Elementary School is located in an older neighborhood near the city’s downtown. Gardner was a neighborhood school that opened in 1959 serving a previously affluent area of the city until the population near the school began to age and the demographic profile of the school changed. Gardner was converted to a multi-track year round school in the 1995-96 school year, and was the district’s first traditional calendar school converted to a multi-track year round calendar. Unlike Sandy Hill and Holloway Elementary, Gardner is a Title I school, meaning that more than 35 percent of its students receive free or reduced lunch. In the 2007-08 school year, Gardner had a total enrollment of 576 students. Table 4.3 illustrates the a demographic
profile of Gardner Elementary over a five-year period:

Table 4.3: Demographic profile of Gardner Elementary School

<table>
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<th>School Year</th>
<th>Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Limited English Proficient</th>
<th>% At/Above Grade Level</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2007-08</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that the school’s population has become increasingly diverse over time, with increasing numbers of students living in poverty as well as increasing numbers of students whose first language is not English. However, the school’s achievement profile has remained fairly high over the years, despite changes in student demographics. Gardner did experience a drop in End of Grade test scores in both 2005-06 and 2007-08, which the staff attributed to the renorming of the passing test scores for the math tests in 2006, and the reading tests in 2008. Gardner’s high number of Limited English Proficient students particularly impacted the passing rate on the reading test. The surrounding community is in the northern area of the city and is currently undergoing renovation and re-imaging as a mixed-use development with pedestrian-friendly shopping and townhomes taking the place of an aging shopping mall that closed. The area has had a slow rate of population growth, and according to the city planning website, the community demographics are as follows:
December 31, 2007 Population within ZIP Code: 32,830
Median Family Income: $50,880
Median Age: 35 years
Percent (age 25+) with College Degree: 55%
Average Household Size: 2.2. Persons
Average Number of Rooms in Household: 5.4
Median Age of Housing Structure: 32 years

The student and community demographics at Gardner were clearly less affluent than those at Holloway and Sandy Hill. However, upon entering Gardner Elementary, one is struck by the many representations of community identity and student-centered displays.

The school building has undergone several renovations and additions over the years, resulting in two distinct “wings” of the building connected with a ramp/corridor. Throughout the old and new sections, several murals and paintings of the school mascot—the frog—are present. In the main entry hallway, there are several framed photographs of staff members, including the current principal, assistant principal, and Teacher of the Year. In addition, there are several award plaques posted in the lobby, displaying all the teachers who had achieved National Board certification, as well as each year’s nominee for Teacher and Teacher Assistant of the Year. Above the plaque with the names of NBCTs on Gardner’s staff is another sign that reads, “[Our district] has the second highest number of NBCTs in the nation, and 11 of them are at our school! Do you know who they are?” Another plaque notes the school’s significance as “The First Traditional School Converted to Year Round—Celebrating our 10th Year of Year Round Excellence.”
Immediately adjacent to the office doorway is a large display of student yearbook covers—all with a student drawing of the frog mascot—highlighting the last 10 years of artwork selected for the yearbook cover art. Several frog banners are hung, along with a banner proclaiming, “We LEAP at Gardner Year Round: Learning is key; Earn respect; Act responsibly; and Practice safety.” Several bulletin boards are dedicated to highlighting student work, including one with a graph representing the country of origin of all the school’s Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, a Physical Education display highlighting the school’s First in Fitness Team and recipients of the Presidential Physical Fitness Award. A roster for the school’s safety patrol duties for the current and next week was posted, along with a board titled, “Watch Us LEAP at Gardner Year Round!” which included a display of the “Emerald Frogs,” which were earned by classes receiving class compliments for positive behavior.

On one of the school’s back hallways, a sign announced that students could exchange their “Bullfrog Bucks” at the Gardner Book Store each morning before school, and a graph adjacent to the bookstore showed ‘income’ earned from students exchanging their “Bullfrog Bucks.” Another wall held a display of student photographs, announcing the “Great Leaps Hall of Fame.” Charts throughout the building displayed school procedures for student behavior in the hallway, in the restroom, on the playground, and during arrival and dismissal. In the corridor joining the older and newer sections of the building, a hand-painted mural posted directions, with the title “Getting Around Gardner.” A poem was painted on the hallway leading to the library, which read, “Look in a book and you will find…sense and
nonsense of every kind. Look in a book and you will know...all the things that can help you
grow.”

At the time of the study, Gardner had 11 National Board certified teachers on its
certified staff of 44 (25%). Ten of the 11 teachers agreed to be interviewed and participated
in one-on-one interviews using the questions in Appendix B. One event that was noteworthy
was that the principal had just announced that he would be leaving the school within the
month, as he was moving to California. The assistant principal had been named as his
successor and would be taking over the role at the end of the school year. Interestingly,
Gardner was the only school in the study whose administrator and IRT were both National
Board certified. Another noteworthy fact was that the majority of Gardner’s NBCTs were not
assigned classroom teacher responsibilities—instead, they included the art and music
teachers, the counselor, two special education teachers, two literacy teachers, and only two
classroom teachers—one who taught kindergarten and one who taught fifth grade.

*National Board Certification Process*

Several of the teachers at Gardner mentioned the financial benefit as an important
factor in their decision to pursue National Boards. Unlike the teachers at Sandy Hill and
Holloway, a number of the Gardner staff were nearing retirement, and expressed that the pay
raise would be significant in their future retirement planning. One NBCT commented:

“`I’m closing out my career, and it seemed like a good option for me to go
ahead and get that certification because of the financial reward.”`

Another NBCT added:
“I was obviously attracted by the financial implications, and for me it was also a long-term decision, because I’m going to be retiring….It’s the most difficult thing I’ve ever done in my life!”

While the financial reward was certainly a motivator, nearly all the teachers interviewed also pointed to the achievement of a goal and sense of accomplishment as major reasons for pursuing National Boards. Typical NBCT comments included:

“‘I’ve been teaching for a lot of years, and I enjoy challenges and I enjoy stretching myself. [Obtaining my] national boards was another means to see if I could be the best of the best.’”

Another added:

“I think it helped me see what a master teacher is….to find out things that I needed to grow in and to find out things that I was doing already that I didn’t know were key elements of a master teacher. This is my twentieth or 21st year of teaching, you know you learn new things every year, but I think it just helped me to affirm things I was doing and it helped me understand that reflection is a key part. That was something I did, but I didn’t understand that was a big part of being a master teacher.”

A number of the Gardner teachers also mentioned being part of a climate of support and encouragement that helped them make the decision to work on National Boards. Typical NBCT comments included:

“The reason that I did it the year that I did, there was a group of about seven people going through it at the same time, so we had our own little support
system. They were teachers that I respected and I felt that we could work together like a little ‘army force,’ and so I chose to go through it that year as opposed to putting it off for another year. So I think that was an asset here at this school.”

Another comment was:

“My principal supported national boards and I had several friends working on my grade level that were also considering getting national boards. There were three of us, and we chose to go through it together.”

Another commented:

“I had a lot of support to get the national boards, and had a strong [grade level] team that was supporting me.”

All of the Gardner staff agreed that while difficult and time-consuming, that the process of earning National Board certification made them a better, more reflective teacher. One NBCT described the experience:

“Going into the national board certification process, I thought that what would differentiate certified and non-certified teachers would be the use of best practices and their ability to teach differently or work with their students differently. But what I really found, though, it was the ability to reflect and being able to communicate exactly what you did, really being able to name it. Quite honestly, when I finished my certification, I felt like I was the same teacher that I was the year before—but the difference was that I was able to tell you why I was a good teacher. I think that plays into the leadership role
because you’re able to communicate and break [your teaching] down and break down data in a way that you can really talk about it.”

Specific Challenges Facing the School

The staff at Gardner consistently identified the changing student demographics as one of their greatest challenges. Many of the Gardner NBCTs had been at the school five years or longer and had seen first-hand how the student population had become increasingly diverse with higher numbers of students coming from poverty. Several of the teachers also identified the challenge of staff turnover—in particular, the fact that the school had three principals over the past seven years and was facing the prospect of another leadership change at the end of the school year. Typical NBCT comments included:

“Our population has changed over the course of time. I think that probably has created the greatest challenge. We have also had three administrative changes in seven years. Not that we’ve had poor administrators – we’ve had great administrators. But when you have change over that short a period of time, that’s a challenge for any teacher who is still on board.” Another NBCT added:

“Well, for me personally, it’s the change from [our current principal]…the change of administration. This may not have any implications, but I cannot imagine a better administrator. So that’s a huge challenge for us. And then when I first started working here, there was around 10% free or reduced lunch [student population]. And now we are at close to 40%. So the population has changed. I don’t think the commitment to students has changed at all, and it’s not that people are frustrated with the level of needs the children have. I have
not heard that at all, but [the challenge is] having the resources to support the kids. We’ve had to ask, what can we do and how can we be flexible? In connecting with the parents, do we need to go to their homes? Do we need to go to their work? It’s been hard not having enough interpreters available to make sure parents understand what we’re doing.”

Another NBCT echoed those concerns:

“[Our student population has] changed significantly since the first year we became a year round school. In 1996, it was almost like a private public school in that we just had incredible PTA involvement and we had money flowing out our ears. We had parents volunteering right and left, you almost had to limit the numbers! And I think a lot of it’s been reflected in the changes throughout the county. They’ve redistricted so many times, and the whole idea of year round… and it’s been a real transition since I’ve been here. There have been three principals since I’ve been here. And our staff has changed significantly. I think there’s probably one other person on the staff who’s been here since we started, and maybe two more since the second year. Part of it is just trying to find a focus and keeping the same people here to carry that through. That has been tough for everybody. And then the demographics have changed significantly. I guess that’s reflective of [the entire district], particularly with the number of children who don’t speak English. I would say that has certainly complicated the process, and it’s given us some challenges that perhaps we didn’t have before.”
Interestingly, although the Gardner staff was consistent in identifying their common challenges related to changing student demographics and increasing levels of student need, they frequently spoke to the staff’s willingness to embrace those challenges and address them directly. One NBCT who had been at Gardner for ten years commented:

“One thing I do know is that our school is really working. I’ve been in a lot of schools, and even with the turnover we have, when a child comes into our school, whether it’s October or later, every child that comes into our school has made tremendous growth. And part of that is because I think we have such high expectations here. So when a student comes in and is struggling, our staff is like, OK, let’s take care of that problem. The expectation is that students are going to be successful. Most students that I see really grow during their time here – they become different people.”

The IRT, who was not Board certified, also commented on the staff’s commitment, which became evident to her soon after she took the position at Gardner:

“I’ve been here about a year, but after being here just two weeks, it was very clear. There was an environment here that had been grown. I think in some ways it happened just because of the number of people we have here who are very talented, but I think that that culture is also grown. Some of it comes from the administration, and it’s also helped by being very picky and choosy about who we bring onto the staff – that ‘tight and loose’ concept. Like, here’s a ‘loose,’ but I trust you to do your job. I also think there is some intrinsic thing that happened by having the caliber of people that we have on
the staff. I think it happens when there are people who just naturally want to talk about what’s happening in their classrooms. They have a deep desire to do right by kids. That culture kind of grows itself.”

National Board Certification as a Tool for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

The staff at Gardner consistently viewed the number of NBCTs on their staff as an asset to the school, but did not particularly see it as a tool for recruitment. Some stated that the number of NBCTs at Gardner helped create a culture and climate that fostered a positive work environment, although most said that connection was indirect. Typical NBCT comments included:

“I see [the] parents liking it. It’s more of a sell for the school when parents come in and they see that list of all the national board certified teachers. I think it speaks well for our school that national board certified teachers want to come here and be here. It’s hard to get highly qualified teachers to come to a school that is a place where you’re really going to earn your bucks. To be honest, there are some schools that are country clubs!”

Another NBCT added:

“I don’t know what outsiders perceive. I see it as a very positive thing. I’m the person that asked that we put up that plaque [that hangs in the front lobby]. I thought it was important that there should be a way that people realize as they come in the door that we actually acknowledge our employees and that’s important. And we’re showing that’s important.”
The assistant principal commented:

“I don’t think [it impacts recruitment or retention]. I think it’s just that we have a really good group of teachers. Compared to some other schools I’ve been in, we’re a small staff, so when you look at the number of teachers we have that are just really great phenomenal teachers, we’ve got a higher percentage. And when you come to school and you’ve got that strong group of teachers around you, and you’ve got people that you can turn to in a crunch, I think that contributes to it.”

The IRT discussed her perspective on the staff’s identity as it relates to National Board certification:

“As a national board certified teacher myself, I was excited to find out that there were a large number of national board certified teachers here. But I think it also lends itself in the interview process—that [comes out] when they ask you about yourself. They said to me, ‘If you treat us low, we’ll let you know.’ I didn’t know what that meant at the time, but I’ve come to understand that they really want to ride the top of the wave. They don’t like to be crashed upon; they don’t like to be below the curve. They like to be right on the cusp of what’s happening. There is that communication piece and that reflectivity – people just want to know. They want to know whatever they can to make sure that our kids can do the best that they can. It’s encouraging and people want to be a part of that. …And the other big part is people would say – and they did say the beginning of the year – that we’re all in it for the kids. I don’t
close my door and forward all my information. …It’s the expectation that you really are getting together and sharing the data. Now it’s not so much just my kids and my grade level, it’s that we all know all the children.”

**Relationship Between National Board Certification and Teacher Leadership**

Gardner Elementary’s staff had similar perspectives to the other two schools in the study, sharing that they didn’t view the National Board certification process as one that necessarily develops leadership skills in teachers. Nearly all of the staff interviewed shared the belief that the National Board certification experience made them better teachers, and that the experience made them more reflective practitioners who better understood best practice in teaching. One NBCT shared:

“Really, I’m not exactly sure how it affects leadership, but it is definitely an amazing reflective experience on your teaching as far as what you teach and why you teach it. I think so many teachers just walk in the door and do what they need to do to survive. They do what they have to do to get through the day or get through the test or get through the month! The national board [process] really makes you ask, why are you doing that? … The connection with leadership I’m not really sure about, except the entry where you have to talk about your collaboration and your role in the larger school. I think the national board [process] does highlight that. I know I’ve worked with some teachers who never had that experience outside of their classrooms before they did national boards—they didn’t teach workshops, they didn’t have
leadership roles, and going through the certification process really highlighted to them that they didn’t have a part in the larger picture.”

Another NBCT added:

“I don’t know how you would want to define leadership. Does it make someone more mindful of what a master teacher should be? Then if so, I would say yes. Someone who is going to spearhead [an initiative] – not necessarily.”

Another NBCT comment was:

“I think people who go for national boards are already leaders. I think that’s already their personality. I’ve met very few national board certified teachers who weren’t already leaders in their school. When taking on more responsibilities, I think it’s more about the person and their personality.”

Another NBCT echoed that viewpoint:

“Not necessarily….I see national boards as being more of a focus inward, in looking at my own teaching practice and what’s important…. So no, I don’t necessarily think it’s a leadership thing. I think the kind of people that gravitate toward national boards are probably leadership material in the first place.”

Overwhelmingly, the interviewees expressed the belief that National Board certification could indirectly enhance leadership skills by making teachers more mindful of their instructional decisions and by allowing them to see their place within the larger context of the school as a whole. The Gardner staff also consistently shared that they believed the
administrators set a tone in the school that nurtured and supported teacher leadership. The counselor said:

“I think [teacher leadership] is supported. Instead of leadership, I think sometimes we think of it in terms of professionalism. We look at it as really supporting professionalism.”

School Culture

The responses from the staff members interviewed at Gardner also overwhelmingly highlighted the importance of school culture and how the climate of the school supported teacher leadership. Every staff member consistently described their school culture as positive, supportive, and child-centered, and each expressed that Gardner was a place where teacher leadership was valued and promoted. Typical NBCT responses included:

“I think [our school culture is defined by] whatever this child needs. I really do. What do we have to do for this child? If there’s ever any question about what we’re doing, we always go back to, what does this child need? It clarifies everything and helps give us direction.”

Another NBCT described the school culture:

“The people are respectful—it’s a very professional staff. We definitely look out for each other and try to help one another. We’re not lone soldiers.”

Another NBCT added:

“I think it’s a very welcoming place. I think it’s a very accepting place…. I think the children are very much valued here. And I think that individuals are very much valued here.”
Another NBCT comment was:

“I think that the commitment is high. I think that people really feel like they can go across the hall to the teacher and say, I’m having trouble with a student, what should I do? And they’ll really get a response. It’s really team oriented, and everybody is really working together to do what’s best for the kids. It’s almost double-edged, because since people do that, there’s a lot of pressure on you if you don’t do that. There’s a high expectation for teachers to do well. I think there is also an open door. I think people feel responsible for other people’s students in the school... like if a student is running down the hall, they won’t just ignore it. I guess that’s what I mean by commitment or ownership. People feel responsible for all the students.”

The assistant principal (who soon took over as principal) described the school this way:

“I think it is truly a place that nurtures and encourages teacher leaders. We are really a facilitative place—[the principal] really uses facilitative leadership and I do, too. We really try to get teacher input on everything we do. Knowing of course that there are times when you just have to make a decision, but we really do try to find opportunities to make sure we hear teachers’ voices -- give them their say and tell us their opinions. We want them to know that it will be heard and we will take it in and really make those decisions on what they feel is right as well. I think the teachers would say we really do listen to them and really take what they say into account.”
Interestingly, the Gardner staff cited their administrators as a key factor in preserving and nurturing the culture of the school despite the fact that they had experienced fairly rapid turnover in principal leadership. It was also noteworthy that the principal at the time of the study had served as an assistant principal at Gardner prior to his promotion, as did the assistant principal who was then promoted upon his departure. Promoting an internal candidate from assistant principal to principal within the same school was not a common practice in the district in the study. However, in Gardner’s case, it may have been a factor in maintaining a positive school climate.

**Barriers to Teacher Leadership**

The staff at Gardner shared similar perspectives on the greatest barrier to teacher leadership—time. This factor was consistently discussed by staff members at all three of the schools in the study. One NBCT shared:

“I think it’s really difficult – I was a grade chair for a long time, the time constraints [are so difficult]. A teacher leader is a teacher first, and leadership is kind of tacked on at the end. It’s about time – you have to make the time. But it’s certainly not release time from the classroom. So I think it places a huge demand on a person who is willing to step up to that role.”

Another NBCT said:

“Flexibility and time. I’m sure that’s not anything out of the ordinary. I think that’s the thing that people struggle with. I don’t think it’s a matter of, do I want to get involved… do I want to do all these wonderful things…and do I
want to influence the way the school is going? It’s a matter of how much time
do I really have to teach *and* to do that?”

Gardner’s IRT shared:

“The biggest thing is just the issue of time. You’ve got diamonds in the
rough—they’re doing fantastic things in the classroom—but unless they have
the time to interact with other people about what they’re doing, and unless
other people have the time to collaborate with them as well, then it still ends
up perpetuating that culture of individuality and independent kingdoms. It’s
still that same old model. I think they try to reach out, but even with the grade
level meetings, there’s just so much time in the day!”

Another challenge that was mentioned several times was the inherent structural
barrier created by the multi-track year-round calendar. Both Holloway and Gardner operate
on the multi-track year-round schedule, and Sandy Hill was in the process of converting to
that calendar at the time of the study. Several Sandy Hill staff members expressed
reservations about how the calendar change would impact the collaborative nature of their
school, and a number of the Holloway and Gardner teachers echoed those concerns. As all
three schools were working to implement collaborative planning structures and professional
learning community teams, they pointed out the difficulty in forming those relationships and
developing common plans when one track was always out on break and when the teachers
were in different places in the instructional calendar. Typical NBCT comments included:

“I’ve taught in a traditional calendar for 24 years, and that’s a whole different
ball game than in year round. It’s very difficult to collaborate in a year round
school. [It is important to] find ways to bridge those tracks, because every
time someone tracks in or out, the dynamics change somewhat, because of the
personalities of the teachers on that track.”

Another NBCT added:

“There’s only one thing that jumps out, and I don’t know that there is a real
way to have it changed, but it’s the nature of the beast of a year-round school.
Don’t get me wrong—I’m very pro-year round, because I chose to come to a
year-round school. But because there are always people coming and going,
you could go for several months and truly not have an opportunity to
collaborate with someone on your grade level. The way our building is laid
out structurally, you could go months without seeing someone. And so to me
that makes it very hard. If you’re a newcomer to feel part of the school, to
feel connected, and then if you’re an old-timer, just to keep up the
relationship, it’s a big hurdle.”

The assistant principal added:

“The only thing really the comes to mind is the time. Teachers are incredibly
busy people with all the things that they’re expected to do and all of the things
that we’re continuing to pile on. Just having the time for meetings after
school. They’re already on so many different committees. That is really the
only thing I can think of. If they could have, for example, another planning
period to work on some of those things, I think a lot of teachers would be
willing to take on those leadership roles. It’s just the time, having the time to do everything!”
Cross-Case Analysis

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the schools’ achievement data and the data collected during the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and observations:

A unified school vision and school improvement plan leads to positive outcomes in student achievement. Sandy Hill’s staff identified common challenges and efforts they were making to address them. The school has had a solid track record of academic achievement for its students. Staff members had a clear picture of the needs of their school and felt empowered to develop strategies to address areas of need. It was evident that the staff felt ownership of the total school instructional program and embraced all of their students—including those who were assigned to the school from outside the school’s affluent community setting. In contrast, Holloway Elementary staff discussed division within the school and a lack of a clear, shared vision. The staff at Holloway were not in agreement about the biggest challenges facing their school, and their comments revealed that the school did not have a defined way to improve student achievement that was shared and understood. At Gardner, the staff expressed a clear, consistent commitment to meeting the needs of all students and having a ‘can-do’ spirit related to the challenges of their students. Although their student population was quite different from those at Sandy Hill, the teachers at Gardner described a similar unified, coherent vision for their school.

National Board certified teachers tend to be leaders independent of the certification process itself. The certification process develops important skills and traits that can be useful in a leadership role, but most teachers pursue the certification as a
means for professional growth. The consensus among all the staff interviewed was that teachers who choose to work on National Boards tend to already be natural leaders who are goal-oriented and self-driven. These qualities can be enhanced by the certification process. In addition, many teachers seek National Board certification as a vehicle to becoming better teachers, not necessarily to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.

Teacher leadership influence can be found in many arenas and is not necessarily tied to formal leadership roles. Many of the National Board certified teachers at all three schools had formal leadership roles at the school, including those of mentor teacher, leadership team member, and grade chair. However, they consistently shared their belief that many non-National Board certified teachers also held leadership roles, and that the National Board certification process did not in and of itself make a more effective leader. Several stated that they did not intend to seek out formal leadership roles—that their motivation for becoming National Board certified was tied to individual professional growth.

The existing school structure and policy create barriers to deeper, richer teacher leadership roles. Teachers all identified the barriers of time as well as competing responsibilities of classroom instruction for children with leadership roles that remove them from their classrooms. In addition, the provision that National Board certified teachers work directly with students for 75 percent of their day precludes them from considering other leadership roles. While some teachers did not seek to take on roles outside of their classrooms, others shared their disappointment with the limited roles available to them if they wanted to have a broader influence within the school system. Many expressed the difficulty of serving in leadership roles, as these responsibilities tended to be added onto their existing
classroom duties. With the increasing demands of accountability in academic achievement, they expressed that it could be an overwhelming job to teach children and fulfill other leadership roles within the school. According to Danielson (2006), “it is increasingly recognized that if schools are to achieve better results with their students, it must be a collective endeavor rather than a collection of individual efforts” (p. 15). The current organization and structure of elementary school continues to reflect the individual effort of one teacher with his or her assigned classroom of students, and fostering opportunities for the best teachers to impact change outside their classrooms remains a daunting task when those leadership responsibilities are layered on top of the demanding tasks of teaching multiple content areas to every child.

Administrators make a difference in creating a school culture that fosters and supports teacher leaders. This was one of the clearest themes that emerged at both Sandy Hill and Gardner Elementary. Their staff consistently spoke to the effectiveness of their administrators and stated that they felt valued, encouraged, and supported in taking on new challenges and leadership responsibilities. This was an interesting finding at Gardner, given the amount of leadership turnover that the school experienced. However, the Gardner staff described a history of strong leadership at the school dating back prior to any of their tenures, which pointed to a strong school climate that had been nurtured over the years. Unfortunately, this was also a clear theme at Holloway, albeit for the opposite reasons. Teachers at Holloway frequently cited the lack of unified leadership, clear expectations, and support when discussing the school leadership. Among the staff at Holloway, there was also
a strong sense that leadership was inconsistent in holding staff accountable, which contributed to a lack of trust and a sense that everyone acted in isolation.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four has presented the collective findings from the online survey, presented findings from each school chosen for the study, and presented a cross-case analysis of key findings. Chapter Five connects the findings from Chapter Four in relation to the research literature and summarizes the answers to the original research questions. Chapter Five concludes by proposing avenues for further study and implications for practice.
Chapter V

Discussion of Findings, Implications, and Areas for Further Study

As noted in Chapter Three, the school visits and interviews of NBCTs and administrators guided the study toward a focus on the study’s sub-questions. While school culture was not explicitly identified as a key research question prior to the study’s inception, it became apparent during the research process that school culture was a significant element framing the perceptions of NBCTs about the nature of their leadership and its impact within their respective schools. The original research questions were:

1. What leadership roles do National Board certified teachers have? What conditions support these roles?
2. What is the nature of their work as leaders?
3. Does the NBPTS certification process develop leadership skills in teachers?
4. Do their colleagues view them as teacher leaders? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What school-level factors influence teacher leadership in school improvement?
6. What conditions are necessary to utilize the knowledge and skills of NBPTS-certified teachers in school improvement and change?

An analysis of the case studies of the three schools in the study supports the conclusion that NBCTs tend to occupy the traditional formal leadership roles such as mentor teacher, grade chair, leadership or school improvement team member, or other school-based committee chairperson. These formal roles reflect those identified by Wasley (1991) in the research as functional or organizational roles that are designed with an “efficiency function…not designed to change practice but to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of
the existing system” (p. 4) or roles of instructional support and mentoring. While two of the three schools in the case study had school cultures that were supportive of teacher leadership, there was no conclusive evidence that the teacher leaders at any of the schools could be considered change agents in shaping or redefining school culture. All three of the schools could be viewed as places where the principal set the overarching tone for the school and defined its climate—both positively and negatively. Both Sandy Hill and Gardner were described by their staffs as having school cultures that were defined and shaped by their principals—and that their perceptions of the schools as being supportive and nurturing toward teacher leaders were heavily connected with how they felt about their principals. At Holloway, the same conclusion could be drawn, although the staff there clearly did not feel empowered and did not see their school as a place where teacher leaders were influential in shaping the school culture. Research supports this finding. In a study that profiled effective and ineffective organizational cultures, Cheng (1993) found stronger school cultures had better motivated teachers. The study revealed that in school environments with a strong organizational ideology, shared participation, charismatic leadership, and intimacy, teachers experienced higher job satisfaction and increased productivity.

While the majority of the NBCTs in the study held formal, traditional leadership roles, one could still conclude that some of their leadership influence is more indirect. Several teachers believed that leadership influence could be measured in multiple ways, and that they saw themselves practicing leadership with students, colleagues, and with parents. As one Sandy Hill teacher put it:
“I think it’s about goal setting…personal goal setting….I had a personal goal that I wanted to advance myself. Not that I wanted to go to central office or whatever…I had a personal…I wanted to advance myself. I did the master’s program, and I said, ‘ok…I still want to know more.’ So leaders…I don’t think you have to be an assistant principal or principal…I think you can be the leader of yourself, if that makes sense.”

The IRT at Gardner Elementary also shared:

“I would say that most of the national board certified teachers [have influence] even if they’re not the grade chair [or in a formal role, because] administrators can put a voice on what is happening, but these people can give voice to what is actually being done—what is going on with kids on a day to day basis….Ultimately, I think it’s all about the ability to communicate about what’s happening in your classroom and I see that growing as a more and more important part of education. Being able to communicate – whether it’s to the public at large, or to parents or even your staff, what is it you want to do and why?”

These comments reflect the research of O’Connor (2003), who described National Board certified teachers as those whose leadership can be assessed by their perceived autonomy and voice in school-based decision-making. In addition, a report titled Measuring What Matters (Center for Teaching Quality, 2008) presented findings from a study led by a group of NBCTs to assess the influence of National Board certification on teachers, examining the process as a policy initiative as well as a professional growth experience. Its chief finding was, “Teachers are not yet considered full partners in the work of educational reform” (p.
While the report focused primarily on instructional effectiveness of NBCTs, it also highlighted the need for NBCTs to “inspire and guide the work of re-imagining the teaching profession” (p. 12). Specifically, the report recommended that researchers “should further examine how NBCTs serve as an organizational resource for the entire public education system…[researchers] might identify and document school-based models where NBCTs have been effective and examine how to bring these models to scale, reproducing them in diverse contexts” (p. 17). With that in mind, one could examine the findings from the three schools in this case study. However, the nature and influence of teacher leadership still seems to be highly context-specific, which makes it difficult to generalize ideas for bringing particular models to scale and reproducing them.

Returning to the research questions, one consistent conclusion was that the National Board certification process did not inherently develop leadership skills in teachers, but the process did contribute to teachers’ leadership capabilities by requiring teachers to analyze the effectiveness of their teaching and reflect on student learning in broader ways. At all three schools, the teachers shared that the process made them better teachers—and that they became more aware of the “big picture” through the required National Board entries. One Gardner NBCT explained:

“I think if you really take the [certification process] seriously, you advance teaching. Because for all the standards and measurements we have for the children, we don’t have that many for teachers….So I think whether it’s misguided or not, people perceive that those teachers have advanced by doing extra work. I think it does raise the profession by saying that these teachers
have done something to be recognized as professionals. What else do you
have that’s like that? I think it helps the perception of our profession.”

The findings were also mixed in whether colleagues viewed NBCTs as leaders.
Several staff members at each of the three sites shared the belief that many teachers pursued
National Board certification primarily for financial motivations. Also, a consistent finding
was that staff members viewed leadership skills and capacity as wholly separate from the
National Board process, and frequently stated that leadership seemed more often connected
to personality. Many also concluded that the types of teachers who pursue National Board
certification tended to be highly committed and achievement-oriented, and that many NBCTs
were teacher leaders prior to earning their certification. This finding is supported by Barth
(2001), who noted that a “source of passive resistance to the teacher leader, found in many
schools, is the primitive quality of the relationships among teachers. Few teachers would
characterize themselves as collegial. Many seem to lack the personal, interpersonal, and
group skills essential to the successful exercise of leadership” (p. 445).

A conclusion that could be drawn is that the original intent of National Board
certification—to define what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do—was
focused more on aspects of teaching within the walls of the classroom and not specifically on
the role of teacher leaders. However, the fifth of the Five Core Propositions of National
Board certification is, “Teachers are members of learning communities.” This concept is
further elaborated in the following:

Professional teachers share responsibility with colleagues and administrators
for decisions about what constitutes valuable learning for students. This
includes their participation in critically analyzing the school curriculum, identifying new priorities and communicating necessary changes to the school community. Accomplished teachers attend to issues of continuity and equity of learning experiences for students that require school-wide collaboration across the boundaries of academic tracks, grade levels, special and regular instruction and disciplines. (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (n.d.)(d), p. 18)

These goals and expectations for NBCTs as teacher leaders are lofty, yet are abstract and difficult to measure. Again, it would appear that the nature and impact of NBCTs as teacher leaders is context and site-specific. This finding can be linked back to the research of Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), who point to the importance of the unique and particular school culture in fostering and promoting teacher leadership, and how those leadership roles, both informal and formal, are as varied in nature as the differing school contexts. The importance of site-specific and contextual factors are reinforced by Danielson (2006), who states, “It is not accidental that some schools and school districts promote teacher leaders and others do not—there are important conditions that must in be in place if teacher leaders are to flourish. Some of these are cultural; others are structural” (p. 125). These cultural and structural conditions were identified and explored through the three case studies.

The findings continue to reinforce the critical nature of the principal as the key leader in establishing and shaping school culture. As Barth (1976) states, “It is not the teachers, or the central office, or the university people who are really causing schools to be the way they are or changing the way they might be. It is whoever lives in the principal’s office” (p. 10).
The findings from the case studies reinforce the critical role of the principal in creating and supporting an environment that capitalizes on the strengths of NBCTs and allows them to assume meaningful leadership roles. Research from nearly 20 years ago still reinforces this key finding, as shown in a study conducted by Anderman, Belzer, and Smith (1991). Their study included three analyses examining the relationships between teachers’ perceptions of school leadership, school culture, and teacher satisfaction and commitment. They concluded:

The model for teacher satisfaction suggests that teachers feel quite satisfied with their jobs when they are working in an environment that encourages support among co-workers (affiliation), recognition for a job well done, and a stress on performance and accomplishment. Our model further demonstrates that such an environment is likely to exist when principals engage in particular behaviors, such as promoting an instructional climate that recognizes the unique contributions of teachers, effectively managing the curriculum, defining the school’s goals, and spending time working with and supervising teachers. (p. 19)

Key leadership behaviors by the principal in establishing a healthy school culture are important school-level factors that influence teacher leadership. The case study findings also highlight some of the conditions that are necessary in order to utilize the knowledge and skills of NBPTS-certified teachers in school improvement and change.
Implications for Policy Makers and Practice

When examining the final two research questions, there were some clear findings that provide direction for education leaders and policy makers to create environments that would better nurture and support NBCTs in meaningful leadership roles. Some of the conclusions are context-specific—primarily the finding that the principal in the school has a major impact on the climate and culture of the school as it relates to teacher leadership. According to Danielson (2006), “Teacher leaders do not work alone; their activities and projects are facilitated by strong and sensitive administrative engagement” (p. 41). A wealth of research supports the critical role of school culture in successful schools (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005); however, it is difficult to have a clear sense of how a particular principal may function in a specific context, as demonstrated by the problems faced by the principal at Holloway Elementary. The leadership lesson that could be derived from analyzing that case may be that education leaders need to ensure they are providing learning opportunities for principals related to identifying and changing school culture. Danielson (2006) describes critical factors in school culture:

Possibly the most important aspect of a school’s culture from the point of view of encouraging teacher leadership is the culture of professional inquiry...The culture of inquiry is established first by the administration. In a school with a well-developed culture of inquiry, administrators ensure that every teacher is aware of an expectation for ongoing professional engagement. This is not a choice; it is integral to the work of teaching. But the parallel expectation must also be in place: When teachers take a risk and asks advice
of a colleague or seeks to improve their practice, the environment must be not only safe but encouraging. (pp. 55-56)

Identifying, shaping, and changing school culture is critical, yet this task is complex and involves the interrelationship of many human and organizational factors. Saphier and King (1985) describe strong cultures as the engines of school improvement, and identify 12 norms that affect school improvement: 1) collegiality; 2) experimentation; 3) high expectations; 4) trust and confidence; 5) tangible support; 6) reaching out to the knowledge bases; 7) appreciation and recognition; 8) caring, celebration, and humor; 9) involvement in decision making; 10) protection of what’s important; 11) traditions; and 12) honest, open communication. (p. 67) District leaders and university personnel tasked with principal preparation could identify a clear leadership framework for influencing organizational culture, and provide intensive, ongoing, job-embedded support for principals in order to ensure that all school-based leaders are examining their school’s culture and identifying necessary steps for change. Saphier and King (1985) state, “The culture builders in any school bring an ever-present awareness of the 12 norms to everything they do in the conduct of daily business. It is this awareness and commitment to culture building that is more important than any single activity or structure in the school organization.” (p. 74) A framework for examining and changing school culture is also discussed by Reeves (2006), who says, “Cultural change, although challenging and time-consuming, is not only possible but necessary—especially in organizations in which stakeholders use the word ‘culture’ as a rhetorical talisman to block leadership initiatives, stifle innovation, and maintain the status quo. In the last decade, the education standards movement has taught us that policy change
without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration.” (p. 92) He articulates recommended steps for changing school culture, including 1) defining what the leader will not change; 2) recognizing the importance of actions; 3) using the right change tools for the needs of the school, 4) and being willing to do what he terms the “scut work.” Reeves emphasizes that the work of cultural change rests primarily with the principal, stating, “The greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say they value and what they actually do.” (p. 93)

Other study findings that could lead to actionable steps include the recommendations from NBCTs regarding factors that would allow them to have greater impact on total school improvement. The two factors identified in the study as having the greatest potential impact in fostering NBCT teacher leadership were providing differentiated professional development opportunities for them and providing ongoing support for NBCT cohorts to provide school-level leadership. These professional development opportunities could consist of action research projects, professional networking, collaborative examination of student work using a lesson study framework, teacher academies, or systematic coaching initiatives to provide NBCTs an opportunity to coach colleagues. School district leaders would have to examine traditional professional development offerings that often emphasize content knowledge and instructional strategies in a ‘workshop’ setting. NBCTs could take leadership roles in improving their content knowledge and instructional skills through curriculum writing, forming study groups, or leading colleagues in collaborative scoring of common assessments tied to their teaching assignments. Implementing these recommendations would have minimal cost implications, but could better tap into the expertise of NBCTs. In addition,
Measuring What Matters (Center for Teaching Quality, 2008) included a similar recommendation for policy makers:

Policymakers should craft policy around specific goals, such as offering incentives and time for NBCTs to spread their instructional expertise to a wide range of colleagues, rather than focusing on simply producing more National Board certified teachers. (p. 18)

Reeves (2008) recommends the adoption of an action research framework to capitalize on teacher expertise. He states, “The most important finding of the study—and the foundation of my New Framework for Teacher Leadership—is that direct observation of the professional practices of teachers by teachers must become the new foundation of professional development” (p. 3). The staff at all three schools in the case study overwhelmingly cited the barrier of time in preventing teachers from taking on more leadership roles, especially since any leadership responsibilities teachers assume are added on to a full day of teaching children. This problem is especially acute at the elementary level, where teachers are responsible for teaching all content areas to their students, and often do not have as much planning time as their colleagues who teach middle or high school. These finding also align with recommendations in Measuring What Matters (Center for Teaching Quality, 2008), which state:

Policies that promote high quality professional development directly aligned with National Board standards can produce rapid improvements in the teaching quality of a school. These policies would create incentives for teachers and administrators to jointly restructure the school day to provide
time for collaboration, roles for leadership, and opportunities for teachers to pursue National Board certification. Policymakers should support “hybrid” teaching roles for NBCTs so they may teach students part of the day and also assist with professional development, curriculum revision, mentoring, and teacher education. Such policy approaches will maximize the value of teachers who have been identified as effective by allowing them to serve as agents for quality teaching for all students. (p. 18)

Danielson (2006) summarizes the critical need to redefine time for teacher leaders:

Most schools are not organized to promote the development of teacher leadership; the school day, the school week, and the school year are all organized around a view of teaching that regards contact time with students as the entirety of the job. Any time teachers spend on professional learning or problem solving with their colleagues is regarded…as extra and dispensable. Therefore, time for teachers to work on the craft of teaching and on improving the curriculum and how it is implemented with students must be carved out of time left over in the day. But it is much more than simply an issue of time: it is a matter of commitment. If professional work is regarded as important and teachers are regarded as professionals with important expertise, then the time will be built into the day and the calendar. (p. 131)

The need to redefine the role of teacher leaders is also discussed by Schlecty (2005) as a “disruptive innovation”—which “[will] require changes in the way vital functions are carried out in the organization…For example, if teachers are expected to
work in teams or make decisions collectively, then the way the role of teachers is defined in the school will likely need to be changed and the authority ascribed to that role will need to be modified” (pp. 3-4). He goes on to add, “It is clear that schools of the future must be organized in ways that are at substantial variance from the way schools are presently organized, and teachers will need to learn to do things few teachers have ever done as opposed to simply to learning to do what good teachers have always done” (p. 6). However, the importance of teacher engagement in any redesign or restructuring of their roles cannot be underestimated. According to Giroux (1988, as cited in Fine, 1991), educators who are denied serious involvement in policy settings and decision making cannot be fully effective with students. Giroux’s data suggests that educators who believe that they can influence institutional policy and practice also believe their students can be helped. Educators who feel that they cannot influence either policy or practice consider their students to be “beyond help.” (Fine, 1991) However, it must also be stressed that one leader—whether it be a principal or other experienced school leader—can develop the capacity of NBCTs to impact and advance the profession. As Wade and Ferriter (2007) state, “Our experiences as teachers who have achieved National Board certification show that certification alone does not a leader make. For a teacher to translate the knowledge and self-awareness received through certification into successful leadership, a more established leader needs to reach out with encouragement and guidance…. In very different contexts, we each emerged gradually into leadership roles after becoming board-certified. Neither of us might have taken the risk if established leaders had not
actively reached out.” (p. 65-66) While systematic and structural barriers can be formidable, the influence and contributions of NBCTs can be tapped through building principals’ awareness of their power to shape school cultures in order to foster teacher leadership—one teacher at a time, if necessary.

**Implications for Research**

The findings of this case study raise a number of significant areas for further research. Specifically, the following issues need to be examined in depth:

- How effective principals establish and nurture school cultures and climates that support teacher leadership and capitalize on the expertise of teachers. This research could also include recommendations for administrator preparation and certification programs at the university level.
- Model elementary schools that have restructured the school day and teacher responsibilities in order to provide meaningful leadership opportunities for teacher leaders. It would be instructive to examine effective models of practice, particularly in a climate of budget constraints where schools are faced with reducing instructional personnel and struggling to provide elementary-level teachers with instructional planning time.
- Models of effective professional development and leadership training for NBCTs to enable them to support their colleagues in school and district-based leadership roles. What sorts of training and ongoing support are needed to develop leadership skills in teachers? How can NBCTs most effectively serve as coaches for their colleagues?
How to clearly define and measure the leadership influence of National Board certified teachers. The schools in the case study revealed significant differences in the nature and impact of teacher leaders in each school. Could there be a clear measure of the leadership expectation that follows National Board certification?

Answers to these questions would help address some of the major issues and limitations of the NBCT process and help make it a more effective reform.

**Conclusion**

The conclusions drawn from this case study are as follows:

National Board certified teachers tend to be driven, achievement-oriented professionals and natural leaders independent of the certification process itself. The certification process hones and develops important skills and traits that may enhance a teacher’s leadership abilities, but most teachers pursue the certification as a means for professional growth or for the financial incentives. In addition, teacher leadership influence can be found in many arenas and is not necessarily tied to formal leadership roles. While many of the NBCTs in the study had formal leadership roles in their schools, there was very little consensus about their specific impact and influence on the total school environment. Findings of the role of teacher leadership was also site-specific, with some schools having a strong, supportive climate for teacher leadership and others having an almost toxic climate that squelched any possible influence of NBCTs.

Principals play a key role in creating a school culture that fosters and supports teacher leaders. This finding was one of the clearest to emerge from the study. It was particularly
noteworthy that leadership transitions at Gardner Elementary did not negatively affect the school culture, while a single change in principal leadership at Holloway Elementary preceded a major climate shift at that school. Sandy Hill Elementary was and continues to be led by its founding principal, and Sandy Hill’s staff was clearly unified in their respect and commitment to her. It was also evident that a strong school culture was linked to the development of a unified school vision and school improvement plan, and principal leadership also directly impacts how effectively a school implements its improvement process.

The study also revealed that existing school structure and policy creates barriers to deeper, richer teacher leadership roles. The expectations for student achievement and accountability for outcomes for every child have never been greater; therefore, the demands on teachers are formidable—particularly at the elementary level. The work of a teacher can be grueling, particularly when they are held accountable for a wide diversity of learner needs. In order for teachers to take on greater leadership responsibilities, they must have alternatives for professional development and career pathways and more opportunities for leadership roles built into the instructional day. Tapping into their skills as master teachers will require creativity and innovation—and will necessitate a redefining of the traditional elementary classroom teacher’s role.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Questionnaire
Assessing the Leadership Roles of National Board Certified Teachers

This study is designed to assess the impact National Board certified teachers have in the total school improvement process. These questions are designed to examine the nature and type of leadership played by these teachers in your school.

**DIRECTIONS**: Please complete each section as indicated.

**Part One: The Teachers**

1. How many National Board certified teachers are on your school staff? _______

2. What types of leadership roles do National Board certified teachers have at your school? Check all that apply.

   ___ Grade Chair
   ___ Leadership Team Representative
   ___ Mentor
   ___ Leadership Team Chair
   ___ Committee Chair
   ___ County-wide Committee Representative
   ___ County-wide Committee Chair
   ___ Planning school-wide staff development
   ___ Conducting school-wide staff development
   ___ Coach to other teachers seeking National Board certification
   ___ None
   ___ Other not mentioned: Please describe: _________________________________

3. Rate the **three** (3) teacher leadership roles that most significantly impact school improvement efforts at your school. Place a 1 for the role with the greatest impact.

   ___ Grade Chair
   ___ Leadership Team Representative
   ___ Mentor
   ___ Leadership Team Chair
   ___ Committee Chair
   ___ County-wide Committee Representative
   ___ County-wide Committee Chair
   ___ Planning school-wide staff development
   ___ Conducting school-wide staff development
4. What are the greatest challenges of your particular school? Please list the top three (3), with 1 being your school’s greatest challenge.

1) ________________________________________________________________
2) ________________________________________________________________
3) ________________________________________________________________

For each of the following areas, evaluate each statement about the roles National Board certified teachers have in your school improvement planning process. Check the box that most closely matches your opinion.

1. The National Board certification process develops knowledge and skills in teachers that is valuable in the development of school-wide improvement.

   ___ Strongly Agree   ___ Agree   ___ Neutral   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly Disagree   ___ Don’t Know

2. National Board certified teachers are more skilled than their colleagues in analyzing student data to identify areas for improvement.

   ___ Strongly Agree   ___ Agree   ___ Neutral   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly Disagree   ___ Don’t Know

3. National Board certified teachers have a positive impact on overall school improvement by serving as mentors and coaches for their colleagues.

   ___ Strongly Agree   ___ Agree   ___ Neutral   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly Disagree   ___ Don’t Know

4. National Board certified teachers share their expertise in formalized settings, such as planning or leading school-wide staff development.

   ___ Strongly Agree   ___ Agree   ___ Neutral   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly Disagree   ___ Don’t Know

5. National Board certified teachers are leaders at our school in identifying specific school improvement goals and strategies.

   ___ Strongly Agree   ___ Agree   ___ Neutral   ___ Disagree   ___ Strongly Disagree   ___ Don’t Know
6. National Board certified teachers contribute to our school’s ability to recruit and retain high quality teachers.

___ Strongly Agree  ___ Agree  ___ Neutral  ___ Disagree  ___ Strongly Disagree  ____ Don’t Know

7. National Board certified teachers are more effective than their colleagues at managing student behavior and analyzing the social dynamics of the classroom environment.

___ Strongly Agree  ___ Agree  ___ Neutral  ___ Disagree  ___ Strongly Disagree  ____ Don’t Know

8. National Board certified teachers are leaders at our school in developing and implementing strategies to address the social/emotional needs of at-risk students (referred to Student Support Team).

___ Strongly Agree  ___ Agree  ___ Neutral  ___ Disagree  ___ Strongly Disagree  ____ Don’t Know

9. National Board certified teachers are leaders at our school in developing and implementing strategies for students with diverse learning needs, including Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and students with disabilities.

___ Strongly Agree  ___ Agree  ___ Neutral  ___ Disagree  ___ Strongly Disagree  ____ Don’t Know

10. National Board certified teachers are leaders at our school in the development of effective parent involvement programs.

___ Strongly Agree  ___ Agree  ___ Neutral  ___ Disagree  ___ Strongly Disagree  ____ Don’t Know

11. National Board certified teachers are leaders at our school in forming community and/or business partnerships to support school improvement goals.

___ Strongly Agree  ___ Agree  ___ Neutral  ___ Disagree  ___ Strongly Disagree  ____ Don’t Know

Part Two: The School Context
1. What incentives are provided to your National Board certified teachers to support their leadership roles? Check all that apply.

_____ Extra duty pay
_____ Additional release time during the school day
_____ Reduced number of non-instructional duties
2. Which of the following do you think would allow your National Board-certified staff to have a greater impact in total school improvement? Check all that you think would apply.

___ Increased extra duty pay
___ Additional release time during the school day
___ Reduced number of non-instructional duties
___ Reduced instructional responsibilities
___ Leadership training for NBPTS-certified teachers
___ Differentiated professional development for NBPTS-certified teachers
___ Ongoing support group for NBPTS cohorts to provide school-level leadership
___ Other—Please describe:

3. Of the factors listed in question #2, which do you believe would have the greatest impact in fostering National Board-certified teacher leadership for school improvement? Rate from 1 to 3, with 1 indicating the area you believe would have the greatest impact.

___ Increased extra duty pay
___ Additional release time during the school day
___ Reduced number of non-instructional duties
___ Reduced instructional responsibilities
___ Leadership training for NBPTS-certified teachers
___ Differentiated professional development for NBPTS-certified teachers
___ Ongoing support group for NBPTS cohorts to provide school-level leadership
___ Other—Please describe:
Appendix B
Teacher Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to earn National Board certification? Did you earn it before or after you began working at this school?
2. Describe the greatest challenges facing your school.
3. Describe how these challenges relate to the goals in your school improvement plan.
4. Describe which teacher leadership roles have the greatest impact on total school improvement. Why do you believe those roles are most significant? How do they directly tie to school improvement planning?
5. Describe the culture of this school in relation to teacher leadership.
6. Describe how National Board certification helps develop teacher knowledge and skills, and how that is valuable in school-wide improvement.
7. If NBCTs serve as mentors to other teachers, how does their role as a mentor influence total school improvement?
8. Do NBCTs plan or lead school-wide staff development? If so, how has this impacted your school improvement efforts?
9. Do NBCTs participate in the development of the school improvement plan? How? How are their contributions unique?
10. Do NBCTs influence your school’s ability to recruit and retain high-quality teachers? How?
11. Do NBCTs serve in leadership roles related to analyzing and/or managing student behavior? If so, how? What perspectives do they offer to their colleagues in this role?
12. Do you see NBCTs as leaders in designing instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners? If so, how?
13. How have NBCTs served as leaders in parent involvement or community engagement?
14. Describe the school factors that you believe would greater support the leadership of NBCTs in your school improvement efforts. What would you change about these factors at your school if you could?
15. What else do you want to tell me about the National Board certification process and teacher leadership at your school?
Appendix C
Administrator Interview Questions

1. Describe the greatest challenges facing your school.
2. Describe how these challenges relate to the goals in your school improvement plan.
3. Describe which teacher leadership roles have the greatest impact on total school improvement. Why do you believe those roles are most significant? How do they directly tie to school improvement planning?
4. Describe the culture of this school in relation to teacher leadership.
5. Describe how National Board certification helps develop teacher knowledge and skills, and how that is valuable in school-wide improvement.
6. If NBCTs serve as mentors to other teachers, how does their role as a mentor influence total school improvement?
7. Do NBCTs plan or lead school-wide staff development? If so, how has this impacted your school improvement efforts?
8. Do NBCTs participate in the development of the school improvement plan? How? How are their contributions unique?
9. Do NBCTs influence your school’s ability to recruit and retain high-quality teachers?
10. Do NBCTs serve in leadership roles related to analyzing and/or managing student behavior? If so, how? What perspectives do they offer to their colleagues in this role?
11. Do you see NBCTs as leaders in designing instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners? If so, how?
12. How have NBCTs served as leaders in parent involvement or community engagement?
13. Describe the school factors that you believe would greater support the leadership of NBCTs in your school improvement efforts. What would you change about these factors at your school if you could?
14. What else do you want to tell me about the National Board certification process and teacher leadership at your school?