



DISTRICT 97 NEWS

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District 97 Teachers Earn National Board Certification

When kindergarten teacher Erica Childress decided to pursue National Board Certification in 2016, she had been seeking professional learning opportunities that would not only advance her teaching, but also directly impact her students.

“Of the various options and opportunities that I explored, National Board was the one that I felt had the resources and support system I needed to achieve my goal,” she said.

Developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Board certification is earned through a rigorous, performance-based, peer-reviewed process in which teachers demonstrate their advanced knowledge, skills and practice. It is widely considered to be the highest level of recognition available in education.

Although she found the program to be intimidating at first, Childress ultimately viewed it as a chance to examine her instructional practices and develop strategies to improve student learning.

“I realized that an accomplished teacher is not a perfect teacher, but rather a teacher who is reflective and willing to honestly examine their effectiveness both in and out of the classroom,” she said.

In 2018, Childress was one of 20 teachers from District 97 to earn Board certification. According to National Board data, this group was the biggest class of newly-certified teachers from any district in the state of Illinois.

During the past two years, District 97 has seen its number of Board-certified teachers increase from nine to 39. There are 27 additional teachers who are expected to earn the recognition by 2020.

Jim O'Connor, who serves as the vice president of the school board, believes the growing interest in the program is due in large part to the district's commitment to improving the quality of instruction for students and providing the highest level of professional development for its staff.

“Research shows that teacher quality is the most impactful, school-based factor in improving student achievement,” O'Connor said. “That is why it is so inspiring to see such a large number of our teachers actively engaged in a process that is aimed at enhancing their practices and helping every student be successful.”

In order to support teachers going through the certification process, District 97 formed its first National Board cohort in 2016. The school board also built an annual recognition for certified teachers into its last two contracts with the Oak Park Teachers' Association.

A similar recognition was developed for support staff (e.g., nurses, social workers, physical therapists, psychologists, and speech and language therapists) who complete equivalent certifications. There are currently 34 people across the district who hold this certification.

Dr. Carrie Kamm, who is the senior



Erica Childress, who teaches kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary School, earned her National Board Certification in December 2018.

director of equity for District 97, said that one of the core benefits of the National Board program is its differentiated approach to learning.

“It's important for districts to provide professional learning opportunities that meet individual teachers where they are in their growth and development, and National Board is one of the few experiences out there that does that,” Kamm said.

Seth Baker, a fifth-grade teacher at Irving Elementary School, said the program also influences the way teachers think about their students and classrooms.

“One of the basic tenets of National Board is the importance of adjusting instruction based on the unique qualities of each student,” Baker said. “During my certification process and now as a cohort facilitator, I am reminded how important this is to student learning.”

To learn more about National Board, please visit <https://www.nbpts.org>.

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