

INVESTING IN A TEACHER LEADERSHIP
INFRASTRUCTURE FOR
WASHINGTON EDUCATION

A SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT OF
THE WASHINGTON INITIATIVE FOR
NATIONAL BOARD TEACHER CERTIFICATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington Initiative (WI) was created in 2001 as an effort to help strengthen education reform in Washington by addressing teacher quality. The major strategies of the WI were to increase the number of teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and to support the leadership of these teachers in local education reform.

The WI contracted with Inverness Research Associates to conduct evaluation studies during the three year period of the initial grants.¹ This report is a final summative assessment of the Washington Initiative, with findings drawn from the series of studies undertaken over three years. The purpose of this report is twofold: It aims to enable a broad audience of educators and policy-makers to appreciate the specific contributions that the WI has made to education in Washington; simultaneously, it aims to enable this same broad audience to develop what we call an “investment perspective” on improvement initiatives. In this report, we emphasize the ways in which the WI created an *improvement community* and built an *improvement infrastructure*.

A conceptual framework: Infrastructure for improvement

“Infrastructure” can be defined as the foundational structures and technologies that enable necessary work to get done. Douglas Engelbart, technology innovator and creator of the Bootstrap Institute,² posits that organizations should aspire to creating three levels of infrastructure.

- ◆ **Level A** is the **core capability** infrastructure – what is needed to enable people to do the core work of the organization.
- ◆ **Level B** is an infrastructure that enables the **improvement of core work** at Level A
- ◆ **Level C** is an infrastructure that enables the **ongoing improvement of the improvement processes** of Level B.

Improvement infrastructure in education

Engelbart's Levels A, B, C	Educational Infrastructures
Level A—people and technologies concerned with the process of doing core work	Classrooms Teaching of students
Level B—people and technologies concerned with improving the processes of Level A	Education infrastructure School and district leadership, curriculum/materials, qualified teachers, assessments, working and learning conditions
Level C—people and technologies concerned with improving the improvement process	Improvement infrastructure Professional networks, reform organizations, leadership tools, knowledge resources

¹ <http://www.inverness-research.org>. Initial three-year grants for the WI were from the Stuart Foundation, Washington Mutual, and the Gates Foundation.

² See <http://www.bootstrap.org>. In this paper we borrow from Engelbart's ideas to discuss the importance of continual investment in educational improvement.

Contributions of the Washington Initiative to Educational Improvement

The two major strategies of the WI—to increase the number of Board-certified teachers and to create a network to promote their leadership—combined to produce positive outcomes at each level. The following are summary findings.

Core Capability Infrastructure: Effective Classroom Teaching

There is substantial evidence—both statistical and qualitative, and reflecting multiple perspectives—that National Board certified teachers are highly effective in the classroom. They stand out from many of their peers as being able to serve the full range of students and to document their students' learning. By leveraging the professional standards and certification process of the NBPTS, the WI is contributing directly to higher quality teaching in Washington by increasing the number of NBCTs, motivating ever more teachers to seek NBPTS certification, and increasing the visibility and recognition within K-12 and IHE systems of NBCTs as effective teachers.

Infrastructure for the Improvement of Classroom Teaching

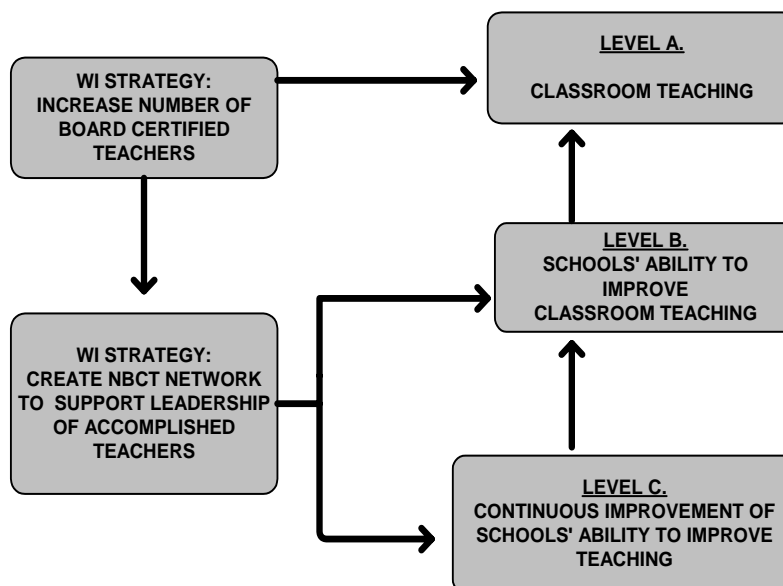
The leadership of NBCTs helps to strengthen professional community in schools and contributes in other important ways to local improvement efforts. Administrators regard effective teachers as the most critical contributors to improvement of teaching and learning. With support from the WI, many NBCTs serve as model members of their professional communities, initiators of reform projects that add to the capacity of their schools to support improvement in teaching, and leaders in school- and district-sponsored reforms. NBCTs' leadership within the core educational infrastructures of schools and districts ultimately helps contribute to higher quality teaching across all classrooms.

Infrastructure for Improving Improvement: A Statewide Teacher Leadership Network

The WI teacher leadership network functions as a statewide infrastructure for improvement. Through its strategies and the activities of its members, the network instills local and state reform efforts with a high standard of professionalism and vision of excellence in teaching and learning, and it strengthens the continuum of teacher development and preparation. The network also enhances the leadership capacity and stature of its members, enabling them to continue working to support improvement in their schools. This infrastructure is helping on multiple fronts to strengthen the teaching profession in Washington and it thus plays a role in contributing to the overall health of the State's education system.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the ways in which the Washington Initiative helps strengthen education systems at multiple levels. It is the investment in the leadership network as an improvement community and infrastructure that has enabled these outcomes to happen.

Contributions of the Washington Initiative



Prospects for the Future

There are two second-generation programs currently funded, although at uncertain levels and for uncertain periods of time. The Washington Initiative will continue to help increase the number of Board-certified teachers, and the newly created Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) will adopt and continue supporting the teacher leadership network as part of its expanded mission to improve development and implementation of policy associated with teaching quality.

As these efforts evolve, we believe they should continue addressing three important challenges:

- ◆ Defining leadership as a legitimate professional role for teachers
- ◆ Enhancing the capacity of school and district administrators to tap teachers' leadership
- ◆ Continuing to build a more seamless K-University continuum and profession

Improving teacher quality on a scale that can make a difference for Washington's students requires ongoing investment in strengthening the teaching profession. On the scale of Washington education, the initial investment of \$4.1 million is about \$4 per student. This is small when compared to the annual expenditure of ~\$7,000 per student. However, *this level of investment can pay off when it is sustained over time because it is designed to generate continual and cumulative improvement activity at multiple levels of the system, all of which play a role in creating conditions affecting the quality of teaching and learning.*

I. THE WASHINGTON INITIATIVE FOR NATIONAL BOARD TEACHER CERTIFICATION

History and context

The Washington Initiative (WI) was created in 2001 as an effort to help strengthen education reform underway in Washington State since the early 1990's. The original grant proposal for the WI notes that whereas the State had developed standards, assessments, and accountability goals for schools, the reform strategy was missing "a deliberate effort to simultaneously improve teacher quality." The WI was designed on the idea that the teacher certification process designed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) would be a good vehicle for improving teacher quality in Washington toward the ultimate goal of leading "more students to a higher standard." The logic was that the NBPTS standards, and the rigor of the certification process, reflected a commitment to a high standard for excellence in the classroom as the foundation for improving teacher quality.³

Three funders — Stuart Foundation, Washington Mutual, and Gates Foundation — joined together to commit a total of \$4.1 million to the WI for three years. The WI was jointly designed by leaders of three major organizations in Washington, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the University of Washington (to represent the many universities that prepare teachers), and the Washington Education Association (WEA).

Goals and strategies

The Washington Initiative espoused the goal of enhancing teacher quality in Washington and making a contribution to education reform through the leadership of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). There were two broad strategies for accomplishing these aims:

1. Increase the number of Board certified teachers in the State. Funds from the WI were dedicated to recruiting teachers interested in NBPTS certification, providing scholarships to promising NBPTS candidates to defray a portion of the \$2,300 application fee, and providing systematic support in the form of regular meetings facilitated by NBCTs and university faculty. This strategy was designed to support incrementally larger cohorts of teacher candidates over the three years, as well as to add incrementally to the number of IHEs participating. Universities were invited to apply through a competitive process for funds to coordinate the support process.
2. Promote NBCTs as change agents for school reform. The WI established a network of all NBCTs in the state for the purpose of developing collective capacity to promote and

³ For information about the NBPTS and its certification process, see <http://www.nbpts.org>. Candidates must submit a portfolio that includes video documentation of classroom instruction as evidence of effectiveness, plus extensive written analyses of classroom teaching and professional activity. They must also take a subject matter examination. These submissions are scored against the rigorous standards that are specified for the given certificate that a teacher selects. There are 24 certificates, each focusing on a subject matter and an age range of students.

foster teachers' leadership in local school reform initiatives. This network was coordinated by the WI director, and included an electronic communication system and information clearinghouse, an annual two-day retreat for leadership development, and training and support for a WEA-hosted speakers bureau for promoting National Board certification. Additionally, the WI created a leadership grant program for NBCTs. These were mini-grants of \$5,000-\$8,000 that NBCTs could use to fund their own local reform projects.

Scope of core activity

In 2001 when the WI was created, there were 69 NBCTs in Washington. (They were involved in the initial design and ongoing activities of the WI.) As of December 2003, there were 346 NBCTs. An additional 438 candidates submitted portfolios in spring 2004, with a projected 250-275 of them receiving certification in fall 2004. The projected total number of NBCTs in Washington at the end of calendar year 2004 is 600-625. This comprises roughly 1% of the teaching force.

In 2001-02, the University of Washington and Washington State University provided support to candidates. In 2002-03, Pacific Lutheran University and Eastern Washington University also began supporting candidates. In 2003-04, these four, along with Western Washington University, supported candidates. Each year, the Washington Education Association has also offered support to non-scholarship candidates, using WI-trained NBCTs as facilitators. A total of 142 NBCTs have been trained to serve as facilitators for candidates.

Participation in the annual leadership retreat and in the grants program has grown along with the total number of NBCTs. In spring 2002 at the first retreat, 51 NBCTs participated. In spring 2003 there were 111 NBCTs participating, and in spring 2004, there were 151. In the pilot round of six-month grants in 2002, eight grants were given to eight NBCTs. In 2003, 11 full-year grants were given to 12 NBCTs. In 2004, 18 full-year grants were given to 19 NBCTs.

Transition beyond the sunset of the three-year grants

The intent of the grantors was that after three years, OSPI would assume responsibility for housing the WI and for providing a base of financial support as well as seeking additional external funds. In reality, OSPI has agreed to house and provide oversight to the WI on an in-kind basis, with program coordination supported at a minimal level through carry-forward grant funds. Teacher interest remains high. For 2004-05, a total of 433 teachers applied for funding. Of these, 160 will receive partial scholarships available from multiple sources (including the NBPTS itself as well as Washington-based funders). A total of 270 teachers are on record as having requested application materials from NBPTS; thus there is potential to add 150 NBCTs in 2005. Future funding for continuation of the WI, however, is in question.

Six universities will offer support to candidates in 2004-05, the current five as well as Central Washington University. The universities are not receiving WI funds, however. Rather, they are working to create more self-supporting designs that rely on partnerships with schools and

districts, as well as candidate payment. The current coordinators express optimism that IHE commitment to supporting NBPTS certification is sustainable.⁴

In late 2003, the Stuart Foundation provided funding to create a new Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP). CSTP's aim, which is broader than that of the WI, is to improve development and implementation of policy associated with teaching quality through better data, more informed engagement with issues, and increased influence of effective teachers.⁵ CSTP is serving as a second generation "home" for the WI-created leadership network of NBCTs. This network—which is expanding to include leading teachers in Washington with qualifications other than NBPTS certification—aims to bring the perspectives, knowledge, and high standards of accomplished teachers to discussions of policy.

In the concluding section of this report, we comment on prospects for sustaining the work begun by the WI.

II. EVALUATION OF THE WASHINGTON INITIATIVE

Inverness Research Associates is an education evaluation and research firm headquartered in Inverness, Marin County, California. Our mission is to provide insight into the design, quality, and effectiveness of investments in educational improvement initiatives.⁶

Evolving purposes and focuses of the WI evaluation

We were contracted to carry out evaluation studies of the Washington Initiative over its three-year initial grant period. The focuses and purposes of our study evolved as the program evolved. During the first year (2001-02), our purpose was wholly formative, that is, intended to provide feedback that would help project leaders strengthen their project designs and activities. We focused on the quality and value of the support provided to candidates. In 2002-03, we began shifting to the more summative purpose of documenting the ways in which the WI was helping to build a leadership capacity that could serve Washington education. We focused on the leadership work of NBCTs and the supports for teacher leadership provided by the WI. In 2003-04, we carried out two focused studies. One documents outcomes of the participation of IHEs in the WI, particularly the ways in which faculty participation contributed to program development within Education Schools and Colleges. The second captures the perspectives of K-12 administrators—principals and superintendents—on National Board certification of teachers and the contributions of NBCTs to improvement in education.⁷

⁴ For additional information about the universities' roles in supporting candidates, the benefits to School of Education programs of this role, and prospects for ongoing participation, see our report, *Bringing National Board Standards to the Preparation and Certification of Teachers: Portraits of Four Universities Participating in the Washington Initiative* (June 2004), available from <http://www.inverness-research.org> and <http://www.cstp-wa.org>.

⁵ For further information, see <http://www.cstp-wa.org>.

⁶ See <http://www.inverness-research.org> for further information about our mission, projects, and sample work products.

⁷ Full reports of the 2003 leadership study, as well as the 2004 IHE and K-12 administrator studies, are available from <http://www.inverness-research.org> and <http://www.cstp-wa.org>. The 2003 leadership

This report: A final summative study

As the initial grant period ends and the work continues along different avenues, we are stepping back to assess in a broader way the nature and value of the contributions the WI has made to the education reform movement in Washington. We have in mind a broad audience for this report—not only the funders, but also reform activists and policy makers at all levels of the education system from classrooms to the state. In addressing this audience, our purpose is twofold. One aim, of course, is to enable a broad state audience to appreciate the contribution of the WI to Washington education. The second—at least as important, we believe—is to enable this same broad audience to develop what we call an “investment perspective” on improvement initiatives. In this report, we emphasize the ways in which the WI created an *improvement community* and built an *improvement infrastructure*. Seeing the outcomes of the WI through this lens, we hope, will provide insight into the benefits accrued thus far, and the benefits the state stands to gain (or lose) depending on the status of future investment.

For this summative study, we are drawing from data we have collected throughout the life of the initial grants, including:

- ◆ WI Project documents 2001-2004
- ◆ Survey of candidates 2002 and 2003
- ◆ Survey of NBCTs 2003
- ◆ Focus groups of NBCTs 2002 and 2003
- ◆ Observation of leadership retreats 2002 and 2003
- ◆ Case studies of NBCT-led school and district leadership projects 2003
- ◆ Case studies of university participation in candidate support 2004
- ◆ Interviews with principals and superintendents 2004

In this report we do not offer exhaustive evidence from these studies; rather, we summarize key outcomes and include references to full reports for further detail.

study includes a report of a survey of all NBCTs, three case studies of teacher-initiated and led reform projects in schools and districts, and a report of NBCTs’ perspectives on the quality and role of the WI as a leadership network.

III. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING INVESTMENTS IN IMPROVEMENT

In our nearly 20 years of studying short- and long-term projects, we have developed a perspective about the nature of education systems and efforts to improve them. In this section we offer a conceptual framework about improvement in education. We then use this framework to examine the outcomes and contributions of the Washington Initiative.

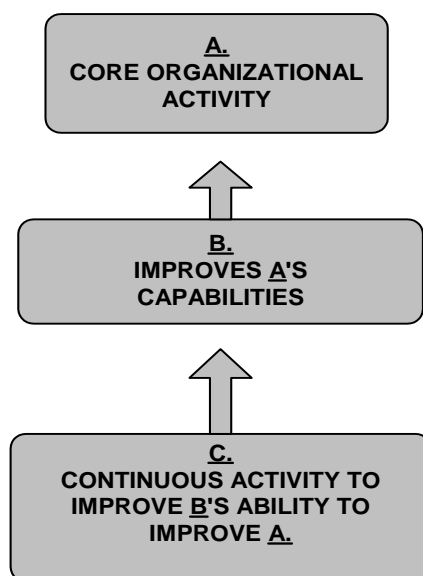
The importance of an infrastructure for improvement

“Infrastructure” can be defined as the foundational structures and technologies that enable necessary work to get done. Highways allow trucks to carry supplies and people to get to work; phone lines and other communication infrastructures support transfer of information. Applied to organizations, infrastructure refers to the technologies and processes that enable an organization to do its work.

Douglas Engelbart, technology innovator and creator of the Bootstrap Institute,⁸ posits that organizations should aspire to creating three basic levels of infrastructure.

- ◆ **Level A** is the **core capability** infrastructure – what is needed to enable people to do the core work of the organization.
- ◆ **Level B** is an infrastructure that enables the **improvement of core work** at Level A
- ◆ **Level C** is an infrastructure that enables the **ongoing improvement of the improvement processes** of Level B.

Figure 1. Levels of infrastructure in effective organizations



⁸ See <http://www.bootstrap.org>. In this paper we borrow from his ideas to discuss the importance of continual investment in educational improvement.

Improvement infrastructure in education

Applying Engelbart's framework to education, the Level A core activity of the organization is the teaching of students, and the core capability infrastructure enables that to happen: the presence of a teacher, books and other learning materials, technologies for learning, and structures of time and space. The Level B educational infrastructure that surrounds that classroom—e.g., schools and districts—should be what enables improvement in the teaching of students: presence of shared standards, provision of high-quality materials, qualified teachers, good assessments of learning, and leadership that creates good conditions for learning. The Level C infrastructures are what enable these educational infrastructures to *improve their ability to improve teaching*. These are professional development networks and other institutions that enhance teacher quality, the curriculum developers who produce new and better materials, the creators of analytic tools that enhance the quality of school leadership, and so on. Engelbart asserts, and we agree, that it is the Level C investment that is both most important to organizational effectiveness and most neglected.

Figure 2. Improvement infrastructure in education

Engelbart's Levels A, B, C	Educational Infrastructures
Level A—people and technologies concerned with the process of doing core work	Classrooms Teaching of students
Level B—people and technologies concerned with improving the processes of Level A	Education infrastructure School and district leadership, curriculum/materials, qualified teachers, assessments, working and learning conditions
Level C—people and technologies concerned with improving the improvement process	Improvement infrastructure Professional networks, reform organizations, leadership tools, knowledge resources

In education systems, there can be weaknesses at multiple levels. There may be a shortage of qualified teachers or a lack of basic educational materials in the classroom. Or there may be educational infrastructures that are ineffective at supporting the improvement of teaching, for example, schools and districts without high-quality curriculum or that do not provide teachers with adequate planning or learning opportunities. And very commonly, activity at Level 3—often deemed as reform activity because it aims to strengthen districts and schools' ability to support better teaching and learning—is conceived as series of unrelated, short-term "projects" rather than as investments in ongoing improvement.

Engelbart argues that we... are still focused around projects and task forces with short-term expectations and short-term lifecycles...The most important activity we can do is to develop the improvement infrastructure... and to encourage and fund cross-functional "improvement communities" whose members work on common challenges to explicitly improve improvement...and then that community itself thus becomes a knowledge accelerator. In essence, the human network, supported with a stable, sound technology network, is the way to get better at getting better. (Jennifer Stone Gonzalez, The 21st Century Intranet [1998:Prentice Hall Computer Books])

Using this conceptual framework, we can define the sequence of Washington reforms begun in 1992 with the passage of HB 1209 as a state-supported effort to create a stronger set of infrastructures to support improvement of teaching. And we can define the Washington Initiative as an investment in an improvement infrastructure intended to create an “improvement community” that in many ways could contribute to this effort.

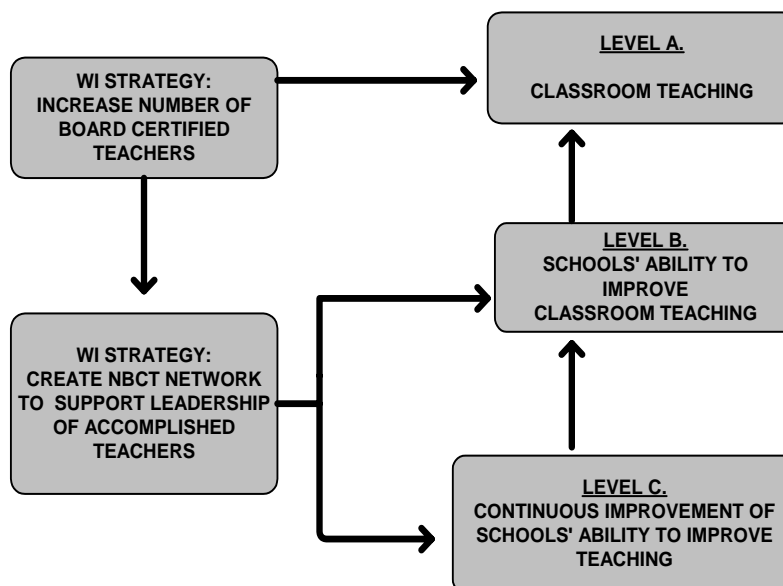
IV. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE WASHINGTON INITIATIVE TO EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

In this section, we summarize the major outcomes of the WI during its initial three years, and show how those outcomes are associated with each of the three levels of organizational infrastructure:

- A. Core Capability Infrastructure: Effective Classroom Teaching
- B. Infrastructure for the Improvement of Classroom Teaching
- C. Infrastructure for Improving Improvement: A Statewide Teacher Leadership Network

We will show how the two major strategies of the WI—to increase the number of NBCTs and to create a network to promote their leadership—combine to produce positive outcomes at each level. The following diagram shows that increasing the number of NBCTs contributes directly to strengthening the core activity of classroom teaching as well as helping to build the capacity of the leadership network. The diagram shows that the leadership network contributes directly to the improvement of teaching in local schools and districts, and also functions as a statewide infrastructure that strengthens the teaching profession and enhances improvement efforts at multiple levels. Our discussion will suggest that it is the investment in the leadership network as an improvement community and infrastructure that enables outcomes at multiple levels to happen.

Figure 3. Contributions of the WI



Contributions to Core Capability Infrastructure: Effective Classroom Teaching

Summary Finding

There is substantial evidence—both statistical and qualitative, and reflecting multiple perspectives—that National Board certified teachers are highly effective in the classroom. They stand out from many of their peers as being able to serve the full range of students and to document their students' learning.

By leveraging the professional standards and certification process of the NBPTS, the WI is contributing directly to higher quality teaching in Washington by increasing the number of NBCTs, motivating ever more teachers to seek NBPTS certification, and increasing the visibility and recognition within K-12 and IHE systems of NBCTs as effective teachers.

The effectiveness of Board certified teachers

For three-quarters of all NBCTs, “personal growth as a teacher” was the most important motivation for becoming Board certified.⁹ The NBCTs we spoke with over the three years offered many perspectives on the links between Board certification and the quality of their own teaching. Many of them referred to the certification process’s very strong focus on evidence of student learning:

⁹ Candidate surveys in 2002 and 2003.

Through the NB process, you are really looking at what is it that you are doing that is really working for kids, and what is best for kids. (NBCT)

NBCTs also commented on certification as independent validation of their effectiveness, both for themselves and for others:

As a National Board Certified Teacher, I can say I proved myself as a teacher. I have that in my pocket. (NBCT)

We heard from school principals and superintendents that NBCTs are highly effective teachers. Their comments show why administrators believe the NBCTs on their staff stand out as excellent teachers. Again, the standard for effectiveness is demonstrable skill in supporting student learning.

These teachers tend to take all of their students more seriously. They see their whole class and they don't marginalize any kids. They work systematically to meet all their kids' needs. Not all of my teachers do that. (Superintendent)

There is a tendency in education to judge the teachers' effectiveness by judging the teacher's performance rather than assessing the learning of the students. Certified teachers have an ability to measure the effectiveness of their teaching by analyzing the performance of their students. (Superintendent)

Our NBCTs have become more confident in their knowledge and practice. (Principal)

The university education faculty who worked alongside NBCTs and facilitated the candidates' portfolio preparation also developed a profound respect for the knowledge and skill of Board certified teachers as well as the rigor of the NBPTS standards. As one put it:

Those who get certified are good. I don't think you can hide from this [NBPTS certification] process at all. (University professor)

There is additional independent evidence that Board certified teachers are highly effective, and that the process of becoming certified enhances their effectiveness further. The WI commissioned a study of the extent to which the certification process helped Washington State teachers improve teaching and learning. The results were positive across the board on multiple indicators of teaching effectiveness.¹⁰ Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned a study to determine whether teachers who become certified are more effective than teachers who pursue certification but do not attain it.¹¹ A recently completed three-year study using comprehensive data from North Carolina (which has a greater proportion of its teaching force Board certified than other states) shows that Board certification does identify teachers who are more effective at raising student achievement, including the achievement of younger students and low-income students.¹²

¹⁰ See the report *National Board Certification Impact on Student Learning: Final Summary Report* (January 2004), by Allan Morasch. Available from the Washington Initiative office in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

¹¹ Certification rates vary along a number of variables, but are typically between 50 and 70%.

¹² See the report, *Can Teacher Quality be Effectively Assessed?* By Dan Goldhaber (University of Washington and the Urban Institute) and Emily Anthony (Urban Institute). Available in .pdf format from Center on

Momentum toward increasing the numbers of Board certified teachers

The Washington Initiative has in multiple ways increased the visibility of National Board certification and increased interest in it. Fully 75% of all NBCTs have been involved in advocacy for NBPTS certification, both formally through the WI and WEA-sponsored speakers bureau and informally through conversations with colleagues, administrators, board members, and parents in their schools and districts. The WI as a network has distributed thousands of National Board scholarship application forms around the state and made presentations at conferences.

There are multiple signs that sustained momentum toward, and appetite for, continuing to increase the number of Board certified teachers is an outcome of this work. For example, 433 teachers applied for the very reduced amount of scholarship funding in 2004-05. Of these, 391 had requested materials from the NBPTS by August 10, 2004, and an estimated 60-70 more are likely to do so, for a total of some 450 candidates in 2004-05. Thus there will likely be roughly 225-250 additional NBCTs in Washington by December 2005. These numbers suggest that interest among teachers is high – and also that many teachers are dependent on scholarships to make pursuit of candidacy possible.

There is also momentum within districts to support more teachers in becoming certified. In one, for example, a year after the first teacher was certified, 10 teachers applied and were certified. The following year, an additional 10 certified. In 2003-04, there are 36 NBPTS applicants and 70 teachers considering application for the 2004-2005 school year. In another district there is an explicit priority to get 30% of the 180 teachers in the district Board certified within five years. Administrators who have NBCTs in their schools and districts see firsthand the extent to which they enhance the quality of teaching.

Contributions to Infrastructure for the Improvement of Classroom Teaching

Summary Finding	<p>The leadership of NBCTs helps to strengthen professional community in schools and contributes in other important ways to local improvement efforts. Administrators regard effective teachers as the most critical contributors to improvement of teaching and learning. Many NBCTs serve as model members of their professional communities, initiators of reform projects that add to the capacity of their schools to support improvement in teaching, and leaders in school- and district-sponsored reforms.</p> <p>NBCTs' leadership within the core educational infrastructures of schools and districts ultimately helps contribute to higher quality teaching across all classrooms.</p>
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Reinventing Public Education, <http://www.crpe.org>. CRPE is within the Daniel C. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington.

Board-certified teachers' perspectives on their roles as contributors to local improvement

Among the concerns that original supporters of the NBPTS had were that teachers would leave the classroom when they became certified. This concern stems from the widely shared view that the leadership—from within the classroom—of highly effective teachers is vital to ongoing educational improvement. It turns out this fear is largely unfounded: our survey of all NBCTs in Washington showed that fully 91% choose to remain in the classroom. One administrator expressed the hope that we heard from many:

The way we have tended to value our teachers in the past is to make those people administrators. Board certification helps us value our teachers in such a way that they stay in the profession as lifetime contributors. (Superintendent)

Board certified teachers feel that the combined process of becoming certified and of membership in the statewide WI network has enabled them to expand their professional perspectives and roles so they can be helpful beyond the walls of their classrooms:

It has broadened my thinking about many issues, it has made me look at our school district differently, and it has given me a bigger picture of our district and how it operates. I can use that information in a positive way. (NBCT)

The Washington Initiative has opened my eyes to the fact that people like me create reform projects. I learned that I had the skills. (NBCT)

Some NBCTs have stepped up to define, initiate, and implement a local improvement project, using mini-grant funds offered by the WI. These projects often involve the engagement of colleagues in professional development activities such as reading/study groups, lesson study, or critical friends groups; or involve leading a team to review and revise a strand of curriculum; or involve mentoring teachers working toward their Professional Certification; or involve designing and coordinating assessments or analyses of evidence of student learning.¹³ In each of these ways, NBCTs are helping to strengthen the local system infrastructures for improving teaching.

In these projects and also in more subtle every-day ways, many NBCTs are also working to build stronger professional communities in their schools so that all teachers can, in the words of one NBCT, “find a little piece of the pizza” that comes with being an empowered member of an energized teacher community:

As leaders...we are more enabling support. We are involved at times as the point person, but we don't think of ourselves as always the apex. You are working to be a part of this great community of energized and interested people, and sometimes it just takes somebody else to listen and help others to see their strengths. Suddenly, they are advocates and they are involved. They have found a little piece of the pizza and they are going for it. That is the way that I think we support and become advocates. I think that is where the magic is. (NBCT)

¹³ For additional information about NBCT-led local reform projects, see the case studies that are part of our 2003 leadership study, available from <http://www.inverness-research.org> and <http://www.cstp-wa.org>.

Administrators' perspectives on the value and contributions of NBCT leadership

More than a third of NBCTs have held formally designated leadership positions in their school districts. Those administrators who have NBCTs in their schools and districts readily see the ways in which Board certification strengthens teachers both as practitioners and as leaders. They also appreciate the link between effective teaching and powerful leadership for school improvement:

The reflection process causes them to increase their own level of skills and there is a component in National Boards about being willing to share with others and I think that piece helps them see themselves in a different light and pushes them farther out. (Principal)

She emerged [in our school] as a professional expert in how to raise student achievement with highly struggling students. All of her first graders were reading, and that wasn't true of other classrooms. (Principal)

All of their work is aligned with our reform efforts, especially the classroom-based assessments. (Principal)

Our National Board certified teachers are powerful leaders in our building, and have had such a strong influence on the staff. It is a neat cultural thing. (Principal)

They are always asking how they can make things better and what they can do, and what they would like to see. They are very forward thinking. (Principal)

A number of administrators we spoke with noted that having NBCTs on staff also helped raise teaching quality indirectly, helping the district attract more accomplished teachers. When a districts sets a priority of increasing the number of NBCTs, it sends a signal that it has a commitment to effective teaching:

These teachers will be out there representing our district, helping to show our district in a positive light, helping us to recruit and retain top-notch teachers. (Principal)

These administrators—especially those at the school level—understand that leading teachers are crucial as an *ever-present* and *expanding* component of the core infrastructure for improvement of teaching and learning:

My vision is for continuing to raise up teacher leaders throughout the district so they take an equal role in establishing curriculum, staff development, peer coaching and greater collegiality across the staff. Principal mandates are limited in scope. If you have a group of teachers who are very excited about their profession, and they feel that the ideas that they offer really have an impact, the sky is the limit on how effective we can be. (Principal)

I think it is important that we recognize the contributions that those teacher leaders make. How can we [administrators] support them in the roles that they have taken on? I think they are really the future of education. As principals, we are resources and encouragers. I believe it is the people actually in the trenches, so to speak, that are going to make the greatest difference with students and other staff. (Principal)

Contributions to Infrastructure for Improving Improvement: Creating a Statewide Teacher Leadership Network

Summary Finding

The WI teacher leadership network functions as a statewide infrastructure for *improving the improvement* of teaching and learning. Through its strategies and the activities of its members, the network instills local and state reform efforts with a high standard of professionalism and vision of excellence, and it strengthens the continuum of teacher development and preparation. The network also enhances the leadership capacity and stature of its members, enabling them to continue working to support improvement in their schools.

This infrastructure is helping on multiple fronts to strengthen the teaching profession in Washington and thus plays a role in contributing to the health of the State's education system.

Developing the leadership capacity of NBCTs

Some NBCTs regarded themselves as leaders before becoming certified, and many administrators who have NBCTs in their schools say that is frequently the case.¹⁴ Nonetheless, there is strong agreement among NBCTs that the WI greatly expands their opportunities and perspectives about leadership. One teacher put it this way:

If it wasn't for the Washington Initiative, I don't know that I ever would have really known about all of these opportunities. I didn't see beyond certification as the goal. But having reached certification, I feel like there have been a number of opportunities both in the district as well as through this Initiative. I have personally led a book study in my district, and then I was a presenter [at the WI leadership retreat]. I also teach at a community college and I think, 'Oh I wonder if they have an ed program and maybe I could get involved in that?' That is what this network is all about. (NBCT)

The WI helps NBCTs gain leadership roles in multiple spheres of the education system, including their local schools and districts, professional associations, universities, the state education system, and the NBPTS itself.¹⁵ The WI does this by distributing information and resources, and providing professional development for leadership. The WI leaders also advocate both within the network itself and beyond it the idea that teacher leadership is so important that it should be the "sixth proposition" of the NBPTS.¹⁶

NBCTs reported on the leadership survey that the WI has added value to several aspects of their leadership, including their motivation to seek opportunities, their confidence in pursuing

¹⁴ See our 2003 leadership study and 2004 study of administrators' perspectives.

¹⁵ See the report of the NBCT survey in our 2003 leadership study for details of the leadership roles that NBCTs play at all levels of the system, and the extent to which the WI enhanced their ability to gain those roles and succeed in them.

¹⁶ For the five propositions of the NBPTS, see <http://www.nbpts.org>. These are five broad statements defining excellence as a teacher, beginning with a deep commitment to all students. The fifth proposition says teachers should be members of a professional community. The WI espouses a sixth—that accomplished teachers should become leaders in education.

leadership roles, their effectiveness as leaders, and their ability to learn from their leadership experiences. NBCTs report that the WI offers them better professional development support for leadership than other sources.

The WI network serves as an important source of collegiality to NBCTs, far beyond its role as a conduit to leadership. On the candidate surveys, nearly 80% reported that the opportunity to meet and work with “like-minded colleagues” is an important component of the WI’s support system. More than three-quarters of NBCTs report that they stay involved in the leadership network because they enjoy being “part of an energizing and motivating professional community” (80%), receive “validation for my seriousness about and commitment to good teaching” (78%), and enjoy “being with teachers who share similar values about students and teaching” (75%). For most NBCTs, membership in the active network and the ability to serve as a leader are intertwined: two-thirds of NBCTs agreed with the statement: “I find it difficult, if not impossible, to be a teacher leader for any length of time without the support of a professional community of colleagues.” The network infrastructure is vital to these teachers’ work as leaders.

Strengthening the profession

Through Board certification and leadership opportunity, teachers gain greater professional status, become more effective in the classroom, gain enhanced career satisfaction, and develop new professional relationships.¹⁷ In other words, they become stronger professionals with a stronger professional identity. As the number of NBCTs grows over time, these outcomes can raise the standard of professionalism.

Board certified teachers also develop a clearer and more warranted vision of teaching excellence as part of the certification process; this vision becomes more robust through validation by the National Board and through interaction with teachers holding similar values. NBCTs thus bring a strongly held vision of teaching excellence to their work as change agents in the context of school reform:

The WI is a grassroots reform effort that gives us a clear vision of what teaching excellence looks like. Frankly, I don’t know that I ever had that. I have been teaching 12 years, and everybody has a different idea. It seems like there are so many different visions, and they change all the time. With the National Board process, someone has agreed on what accomplished, excellent teaching looks like, so you know what the vision is and you can help others reach it. That is what I like – clear, convincing evidence of what teaching excellence is. (NBCT)

Administrators who have NBCTs in their districts appreciate them as being able to establish a standard of excellence that extends beyond their classrooms and schools:

The reflective process required by the certification helps teachers look deeply at themselves and their teaching, which, in turn, helps them become advocates for better classroom practices in their schools and the larger district. (Superintendent)

The process attempts very intentionally to hold up the traits that are characteristics of effective teachers. (Assistant Superintendent)

¹⁷ Reported in the 2003 leadership survey.

NBCTs' enhanced professional stature is vital to their ability to participate with greater strength and legitimacy in a stronger profession, as suggested by this university faculty member:

The National Board process, from all I have seen so far, is our best hope in terms of helping teachers be acknowledged and recognized as professionals, as people who should make decisions about curriculum and about their children...the National Board process helps teachers become more articulate about their practice so they become better advocates for their children and better spokespeople in the political arena. (University professor)

NBCTs as a group can be seen as a collective embodiment of teaching excellence. This certainly does not mean that NBCTs are the only effective teachers—NBCTs themselves are the first to say that this is not the case; nonetheless, the NBCT network as an entity stands out in Washington as being bound together by, and grounded in, a common vision of teaching excellence across all grades and subjects. The WI has thus built a network that is a unique contributor to a stronger teaching profession in Washington.

Through the WI, about a third of all NBCTs report that they have developed new and different working relationships with IHE faculty members. More than a third of all NBCTs have taught university courses,¹⁸ and the universities that have been participating in the WI have begun to involve greater numbers of NBCTs as instructors and supervising teachers, as well as consultants and advisors in the development of new certification programs.¹⁹ One university faculty member described the advantages of having “a close connection” among NBCTs and faculty who prepare teachers for K-12 certification:

It is a really neat network that has started to develop. We send out emails probably a couple of times a week to the NBCTs and we email questions back and forth. A lot of them email each other, so a NBCT in Port Angeles and I talked to one of our National Board facilitators in Tacoma, and then they see each other at a partners meeting and they share ideas...We always have that kind of constant connection to NBCTs. I am out in their schools a lot, and I go to both the National Board and group meetings as well as the Pro Cert seminars. I bring a lot of that back and share it with the faculty to use as examples or use as the starting point for tasks or assignments in the Prep program. So it is this back and forth, where we bring a certain set of eyes from the university out into the schools, and then we bring the best teacher examples from practice and bring it back into the academy. So there is this close connection and not a disconnect between what our faculty are asking of students and expecting as best practices and actually how it is playing out in schools. (University professor)

Through its strategic network activities, the Washington Initiative is beginning to engender the kind of genuine collegiality that can eventually create a more “seamless profession” comprising K-12 and university educators.

Contributing to educational improvement efforts in K-12 system and universities

The WI has given NBCTs information, opportunity, and encouragement that helps them add value to the state's overall reform effort. Three of four NBCTs see their leadership work as being directly supportive of Washington's content standards. Eighty-seven percent see their

¹⁸ Leadership survey 2003.

¹⁹ IHE study 2004.

leadership as consistent with local reform efforts in their schools and districts. As many as two-thirds of NBCTs are mentoring Pro Cert candidates, and some are serving on OSPI committees or other state-level commissions and boards, or assisting with range-finding for WASL assessments.²⁰

Leaders at the state level see NBCTs as having the professional standards and practical know-how to help schools and districts make good on the promise of policy associated with teacher quality. In the comment below, a member of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's office notes that NBCTs are playing a vital role in shaping Pro Cert programs that provide valuable support to new teachers:

Districts are feeling overburdened like never before, with local pressures...Then the state adds to it with the Pro Cert, other requirements for students, WASL, EALRS, accountability, and now the Feds with NCLB adds another new layer. Central office administrators are overwhelmed. Good teachers, NBCTs, can take these burdens off their backs: tap the people good with instruction, put them in leadership roles... The NBCTs in district ____ have taken the ball and run with it. They have taken what people were envisioning and made it blossom in ways that could not have been anticipated...Their choice of NBCTs taking responsibility for the Pro Cert program is fabulous. NBCTs are currently teaching, so they know what the challenges are. No one can accuse them of being insensitive to the daily requirements of teaching, and they have proven they're good at what they do. These NBCTs clearly understand the support needs of teachers in their first few years. (OSPI project director)

In our study of universities participating in the WI, we learned that in every campus's Education program there are faculty who are beginning to infuse NBPTS standards and certification processes into their courses and degree programs. Changes being seriously discussed or underway include new courses that focus on analysis of student work as evidence of teaching and learning, new Master's degree options, new Pro Cert opportunities, and new strategies for identifying promising teachers in undergraduate preparation programs.²¹ And as we noted earlier, there are new professional roles and relationships for NBCTs embedded in these changes. Together, these changes signal important first steps toward building a continuum of university-supported teacher development that better matches teachers' needs and capabilities.

NBCTs see themselves as leaders in educational improvement, and they see the WI as a necessary galvanizing entity – an infrastructure – that makes their leadership role possible. And while many NBCTs see their contributions as being consistent with state policies, they do not see themselves as “foot soldiers;” rather, they see themselves as expert practitioners and strong professionals who have knowledge and skill that are vital to educational improvement.²² One NBCT put it this way:

If [being part of an NB network] is going to make politicians take me seriously, then I am going to use that to make Washington State a better place for kids. We don't want to be always patting ourselves on the back as National Board certified teachers. I think that we have to have this network, we have to be focused, and we have to use that influence in the best way that we know

²⁰ Leadership survey 2003.

²¹ IHE study 2004.

²² See leadership study 2003, especially the report of focus groups of NBCTs.

how. I think that we all would agree that if we are going to reform education in the state, where is it going to start? In the classroom with the teachers. (NBCT)

Through its creation of an active teacher leadership network, the WI is enabling accomplished teachers to develop a collective voice that can address educational policy from the perspective of classroom excellence, that is, from a perspective of professional accountability to students and their learning.

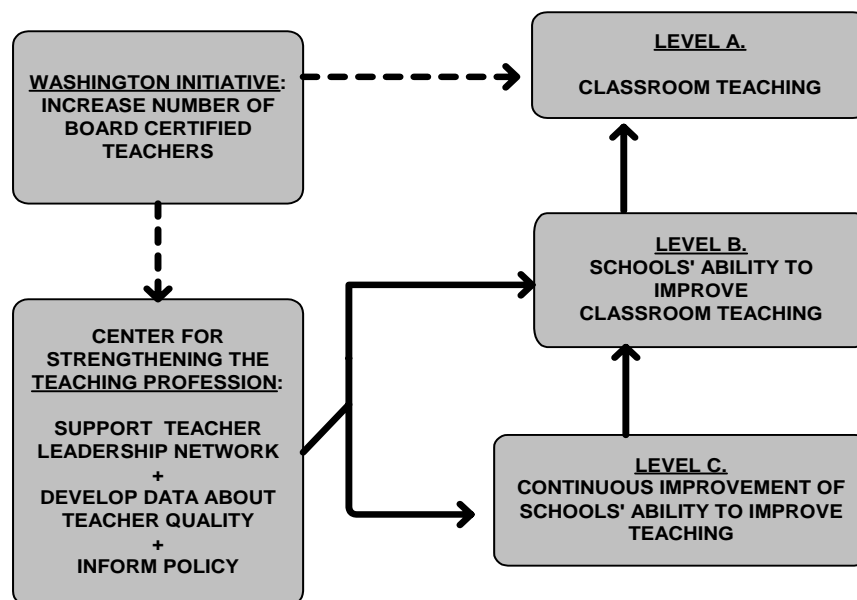
V. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE: THE NEED TO SUSTAIN INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR IMPROVEMENT

The need for ongoing investment in a stronger profession

Improving teacher quality on a scale that can make a difference for Washington's students requires ongoing investment in strengthening the teaching profession. A stronger profession means many things. It means that there are stronger individuals within the profession; that the profession is more inclusive, encompassing teachers, researchers, and leaders from K-University levels; that the profession has greater collective capacity to contribute to improvement in teaching; and that the profession plays a stronger and more constructive role in shaping policies associated with teaching quality. The Washington Initiative has taken important steps toward the creation of a state-level infrastructure that can help strengthen the profession on all fronts. Only if the investment is sustained, however, will the benefits of the investment continue to accrue. It is the leadership infrastructure that ultimately enables these accomplished teachers—as individuals and as a collective entity—to enrich their profession and help strengthen their schools.

Current progress toward sustaining the work begun in the WI

Below we show how the new generation of WI-related initiatives has potential to sustain the work that has begun. The Washington Initiative retains the aim of increasing the number of NBCTs in Washington. However, it is operating with a much-reduced funding level and uncertain institutional support in the future. We thus show its potential contributions as dotted lines. The new Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) has adopted the NBCT leadership network and will broaden it to include teachers with qualifications other than National Board certification. CSTP also has additional aims: to strengthen the available data associated with teaching quality, to amplify the voice of leading teachers in the formation and implementation of policy, and to enhance the quality of dialogue in Washington about teaching quality and conditions. CSTP has potential, in other words, not only to sustain the leadership community created by the WI but also to build a stronger infrastructure for improvement—one that involves leading teachers at all levels of education from the classroom to the state. While CSTP is being built on a solid foundation of grant funds, we believe it is too soon to estimate its ability to expand its funding base and sustain its work beyond the initial grant.

Figure 4. Potential Contributions of WI and CSTP

Challenges that continued investment should address

On the scale of Washington education, the initial investment of \$4.1 million is about \$4 per student. This is small when compared to the annual expenditure of ~\$7,000 per student. However, *this level of investment can pay off when it is sustained over time because it is designed to generate continual and cumulative improvement activity at multiple levels of the system, all of which play a role in creating conditions affecting the quality of teaching and learning.*

Conceptualizing the initiative as an investment in improvement

What are the needs to be addressed in these second-generation initiatives? First, there is the over-arching need for policy makers and reform activists alike to conceptualize the Washington Initiative as an initial investment that will continue producing returns only with sustained investment. This requires an ongoing effort of documentation and communication associated with the role of the second generation of programs in contributing to a stronger teaching profession in Washington.

Continuing to address key critical issues

Second, these second-generation projects need to address strategically key areas of activity and policy development that are vital to the support of leading teachers and to enabling their work to have a positive effect on improved teaching and learning. In our research over the past three years, we have uncovered three challenges to the ultimate effectiveness of this investment. Strategies for addressing them are crucial if the work that has begun is to increase in its efficacy.

◆ Defining leadership as a legitimate professional role for teachers

Although the WI has created new leadership roles and opportunities for teachers, these have not yet begun to serve in a significant way the broader purpose of creating a new conception of the teaching profession as including visible and legitimate leadership roles for accomplished teachers. Teaching remains an undifferentiated profession in which teachers who remain in the classroom add leadership roles to full classroom schedules. This is not a viable long-term structure for teacher leadership,²³ and solutions are likely to require policy activity. Moreover, it is troubling that many NBCTs feel that their own colleagues are among the most resistant to teacher leadership; the WI has played a relatively minor role in increasing teachers' acceptance of their colleagues as leaders.²⁴ We believe the teaching profession itself must take on the dialogue about the occupational norms that inhibit teachers' visibility and legitimacy as educational leaders. This combination of normative and structural limitation to teachers' defined roles limits the ability of the profession to strengthen itself.

◆ Enhancing the capacity of school and district administrators to tap teachers' leadership

The Washington Initiative's strategy for engaging school and district administrators in the cultivation of teacher leadership was, from our perspective, under-developed. Administrators have legitimate authority within the core educational infrastructure (the "level B" work that Engelbart describes), and thus have a powerful effect on the educational contexts in which teachers work and lead. Those administrators who have NBCTs in their schools and districts have a quite strong and shared perspective that NBCTs are highly effective teachers; however, many of them are not yet skilled at tapping teachers' leadership capacities in ways that can amplify NBCTs' contributions to their schools and districts.²⁵ Together, NBCTs and experienced administrators can perhaps develop strategies for enhancing NBCTs' ability to contribute to the improvement of schools and districts.

◆ Continuing to build a more seamless K-University continuum

The WI was carefully designed to link NBCTs and university faculty. These working relationships launched important dialogues within Schools and Colleges of Teacher Education that are beginning to result in the strengthening of courses and programs for teachers. We believe it is critical that the second generation of teacher leadership initiatives include strategies for sustaining the commitment and interest of higher education institutions. The WI's external funding served as a powerful incentive to faculty, motivating them to work alongside NBCTs as colleagues and ultimately to want to infuse NBPTS standards and practices into their courses and programs. Participating universities are currently experimenting with ways to sustain

²³ 80% of NBCTs say that leadership removes them from their classroom so often that it detracts from their teaching; 63% say that even with extra compensation, adding leadership to teaching will cause burnout. Teacher leadership survey 2003.

²⁴ Roughly 70% of NBCTs report that school and district administrators have high regard for National Board certification. Only 35% of NBCTs report that their school colleagues have favorable regard for Board status; 31%, report that the WI has influenced teachers' level of regard. Teacher leadership survey 2003.

²⁵ See our study of administrators' perspectives 2004.

candidate support in partnership with districts. While faculty express some optimism that they can sustain the work this way – and this optimism is certainly a critical factor – we wonder whether sufficient momentum was gained in the short time frame of the original Initiative grants.²⁶

We see these three areas of challenge not as discrete foci but rather as inter-related and inter-dependent elements within a complex educational infrastructure. The WI has created an improvement community within which NBCTs are working individually and collectively to help strengthen education, but this work is just begun.

A last word

The Washington Initiative has galvanized the energy, knowledge, and commitment of many of the state's leading teachers – teachers that the Washington education system relies upon for establishing a high standard of excellence in teaching. No group is more acutely aware of the need to sustain this network than the teachers who have been a part of it – those who want to continue their efforts to support improvement in teaching, and who know they need to belong to an active and well organized network in order to sustain their own growth and capacity as leading teachers. Their perspective is reflected in this comment by a Board certified teacher:

There has to be a next thing. I can't say that strongly enough...How do I know who to go to about something? It's because of this network. If we lose that, that scares me. ...Imagine if it was us teachers down in Olympia talking about *one common goal*. We don't have that, other than the WEA talking about compensation, which is not what we [the NBCT network] are really focusing on. We need someone to help us. (NBCT)

²⁶ See our IHE study 2004