

Professional Teaching Standards Board

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Management Audit Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 1: Background and Description

The Legislature created the Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB) in 1993 to assume the function of certifying educators employed in Wyoming public schools. PTSB has the authority to promulgate rules and regulations for the certification of public school professional staff. It can also grant exceptions to the regulations, revoke or suspend certificates, charge fees, and enter into reciprocal agreements with other states.

The creation of the PTSB marked a change in philosophy regarding who should regulate certification. Previously, this function was carried out by the State Board of Education, which is made up of non-educators, with the assistance of an advisory body including educators.

By legislative design, the 13 board members now are primarily classroom teachers and other education professionals. The Superintendent of Public Instruction appoints, and can remove, the members.

PTSB is autonomous from the State Department of Education (SDE) or any other government body. When making PTSB autonomous, the Legislature required it to be self-funding. PTSB fees generated \$618,138 in the 1997-98 biennium.

The purposes for making PTSB autonomous were: to remove teacher certification from the political arena, to elevate the education profession to a point of self regulation, and to give certification specialized attention. The creation of autonomous teacher certification boards was a nationwide movement supported by the education profession. Autonomous boards exist in 12 states other than Wyoming and all are characterized by a majority of classroom teachers.

Educators obtain PTSB permits or certificates, with endorsements for specific subject areas, which must be renewed every five years. In the 1996-97 school year, there were 22,585 individuals with a PTSB credential, although not all were employed. Approximately 36 percent, or 8,172 individuals, were educators employed in Wyoming school districts. Also during the 1996-97 school year, there were 6,854 permit holders, the majority of whom were substitutes.

PTSB has continued the practices for flexibility in the certification process that it inherited from its predecessor, the State Board of Education. These flexibility practices include the granting of exception permits, transitional endorsements, temporary employment permits, and waivers. A rough estimate of PTSB data shows approximately three percent of teachers employed in the 1996-97 school year had utilized one of these flexibility measures. PTSB has enacted two new measures, collaboration and portfolios, for flexibility in certification.

PTSB is the only entity with comprehensive information about individuals holding teacher certification, endorsements, and permits. This evaluation concentrates on three areas where PTSB has great influence: professional development activities as a prerequisite for certification renewal; a new approach to certification, called program approval; and the development of more flexibility in certification.

Chapter 2: PTSB Lets Districts and Individual Educators Shape Professional Development

PTSB places no requirements on the five semester hours (or equivalent) of continuing education that certified educators must take during their five-year renewal periods. Further, PTSB has not set evaluative criteria for the workshops it approves for renewal credit. Participating in PTSB-approved workshops is one of the renewal options available to Wyoming educators, and one which many experienced teachers use.

Professional development is important because educators need to continually enhance their knowledge of subject-matter and learn to use new teaching strategies. Current research suggests that certain approaches to professional development are more effective than others.

By granting approval to individual workshops, PTSB can influence the quality of professional development imparted through them. However, PTSB has no formal criteria with which to evaluate their potential effectiveness. PTSB staff told us that they rarely turn down requests from organizations seeking renewal credit for their workshops.

PTSB allows the sponsoring organizations, which include school districts, to determine the focus of the workshops it approves for renewal credit. PTSB maintains that by not creating requirements, it gives districts flexibility to focus professional development for their certified employees. State school accreditation rules require that schools have staff development plans that focus on district and school student performance goals.

Despite these efforts to encourage teachers to focus their professional development, such focus may not yet be occurring. Our research indicates that educators may still obtain much of their professional development from sources other than district offerings. Further, we saw an indication that teachers may prefer to independently determine the focus of their professional development activities.

Recommendation: PTSB should take a more active role in focusing professional development and ensuring its quality.

PTSB has the authority to determine what experienced teachers must do to maintain their certificates, and what activities will qualify for renewal credit. The expectations of education reform require that PTSB be concerned with the professionalism of all teachers. Therefore,

PTSB should define a greater role for itself with respect to professional development, to ensure that all teachers' skills are both aligned with current standards and honed by effective methods.

Chapter 3: The Perception Is That Certification Has Become More Difficult Under PTSB

Many of the school district administrators consulted or surveyed for this report said that obtaining certification for both beginning and experienced teachers coming from out-of-state has become more difficult. As a result, administrators claim it contributes to the problems they face in hiring teachers to fill vacancies.

When PTSB was established in 1993, it took on rules for a new certification process that its predecessor, the State Board of Education (SBE) had approved in the late 1980s but not implemented. PTSB implemented these rules, changing certification from a system based on completion of prescribed classes, to one based on required knowledge and demonstrated competencies.

The former approach, called transcript analysis, required teachers to have certain numbers of credit hours in specific courses. The new approach, program approval, requires that educators demonstrate their competencies by completing approved teacher preparation programs. Where it used to analyze applicants' individual transcripts, PTSB now reviews the preparatory programs which train applicants. PTSB has responsibility for approving these programs within the state, which are only offered by the College of Education at the University of Wyoming.

A difficulty with program approval is that there is no standard way to certify across state lines: there is really no "clean" reciprocity. This is because no states have exactly the same requirements for teacher certification. Reciprocity is particularly important to Wyoming because its single teacher preparation institution supplies only a third of the state's teachers.

PTSB certifies teachers coming from out-of-state, but attaches "deficiencies" to their certificates. Deficiencies denote the Wyoming standards they do not meet, and which they must meet within five years. It is among these teachers, and the district administrators who are trying to hire them, that PTSB senses the greatest dissatisfaction.

PTSB has taken steps to ease some of the effects of program approval. It has extended the time that initially certified teachers have to clear their deficiencies, and is considering other changes. Nevertheless, negative perceptions about PTSB's approach to certification appear to inhibit administrators from understanding ways to work with PTSB and its certification standards, so they can hire the best candidates.

Recommendation: PTSB should ensure administrators have a complete understanding of current certification procedures.

Since performance-based standards form the basis of certification, and certification is a prerequisite to hiring, administrators need to thoroughly understand the current standards and procedures. There are opportunities for PTSB to address the apparent misunderstanding of program approval among administrators. For example, PTSB could produce a handbook for administrators to reference in making hiring decisions, or design and require professional development in this area.

Chapter 4: PTSB Responds to Perceived Difficulty in Hiring Teachers with New Practices

In order to be responsive to the hiring difficulties expressed by administrators and an expected teacher shortage, PTSB recently enacted two new practices in certification: collaborations and portfolios. The goal of collaboration is to allow teachers some latitude in the classes they can teach, given their endorsements. The goal of portfolios is to increase the hiring pool for teachers and to increase the opportunities for teachers to add an endorsement.

"Collaboration" is the term for board approval for certified teachers to teach outside their endorsement areas, provided that each teacher is affiliated with another properly endorsed teacher who acts as a mentor. There have been 41 requests from districts for collaboration and PTSB has approved all requests.

Unlike older flexibility practices, PTSB has put no guidelines, stipulations, or reporting requirements on the practice of collaboration. The board intentionally leaves details of the arrangement to the districts and the individual teachers.

A "portfolio" is a narrative and visual document meant to demonstrate how an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies meet the certification standards. PTSB grants a teaching certificate to anyone who holds a bachelor's degree and can show, with a portfolio, that the

certification standards have been met. PTSB allows portfolios for first-time certification, for a certified teacher to add an endorsement, or to remedy deficiencies.

Portfolios are evaluated by a committee of five educators. For each portfolio, the committee recommends approval or denial to the PTSB. Thus far, 17 portfolios had been evaluated and PTSB denied seven.

Recommendation: PTSB should conduct follow-up study and reporting on portfolios and collaborations.

To ensure that new practices are working as desired and expected, PTSB should conduct an evaluative study on the results of collaborations and portfolios. Careful study could lead to beneficial adjustments.

As part of this effort, PTSB should develop reporting on individual board actions. Currently, board actions to approve certification based on flexibility measures are not reported in aggregate. Without such reporting, it is difficult to know the extent to which these practices influence Wyoming classrooms.

As an autonomous board, PTSB gives educators the authority to establish the standards that govern their profession. No longer is a lay board involved in setting the standards to which professional educators are held. Therefore, PTSB also has the responsibility to strengthen the profession's level of accountability, both among educators and the general public. The recommendations made in this report suggest ways that PTSB can strengthen professional accountability.

PTSB must also be accountable for its role in meeting the state's education reform priorities. It must coordinate its work with other statewide efforts to improve the education system. Doing so may require PTSB to revise its certification standards so that they align with the statewide student performance standards now being developed in response to W.S. 29

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

Legislature Created New Board to Assume Teacher Certification Function

All states require some form of certification for teachers. Certification is meant to provide a measure of safety for children and to influence the quality of education. In W.S. 21-7-303, Wyoming requires all teachers in public schools to be certified. The Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB), created in 1993 through W.S. 21-2-801 and W.S. 21-2-802, has authority to grant certification. Previously, the certification function was carried out by the State Board of Education (SBE) with the assistance of an advisory body known as the Professional Standards Board (PSB).

PTSB has authority to promulgate rules and regulations for the certification of school administrators, teachers, and other personnel providing professional services in public schools. The board can also grant exceptions to the regulations, revoke or suspend certificates, charge fees, and enter into reciprocal agreements with other states.

PTSB is an Autonomous Board with Majority of Teachers

PTSB is autonomous from the State Department of Education (the Department, or SDE) or any other government body. By legislative design, PTSB membership is primarily classroom teachers and other education professionals. All members are appointed, and can be removed, by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The current chair of the board stated that the board views itself as equally accountable to the public and the teaching profession. The self-stated mission of the board is "to ensure that every student is served by competent, ethical educators who meet rigorous performance standards."

PTSB regulates the certification of teachers through rules primarily inherited from its predecessor, the SBE. The rules specify the certification standards educators must meet, and they cover some 48 different academic and professional areas. These standards apply to administrators, teachers, and personnel providing other professional services in the schools, such as librarians, guidance counselors, and educational diagnosticians. In this report, we use the terms "teachers" and "certification standards" to refer to all professional educators and the standards upon which PTSB bases their credentials.

Currently, the board has adopted a five-year review cycle in which it annually revises portions of those rules. The board follows the Administrative Procedures Act, which provides opportunity for public input in the rulemaking process.

PTSB has 13 members, including six certified public school teachers and administrators from various grade levels, a faculty member and a dean from the University of Wyoming, a community college faculty member, three public school administrators, and one lay person who is a current member of a Wyoming school district board of trustees.

PTSB to Professionalize Teachers

The creation of the PTSB marked a change in philosophy regarding who should regulate teacher certification. According to elected officials and several SDE staff, there were several purposes for making the board autonomous: to remove teacher certification from the political arena, to elevate the education profession to a point of self-regulation, and to give certification specialized attention.

The creation of autonomous teacher certification boards was a nationwide movement supported by the education profession, which has sought to professionalize and regulate itself. Autonomous boards exist in 12 states other than Wyoming and all are characterized by a majority of classroom teachers as board members.

Although the authority to self-regulate is common in many professions such as medicine and law, it has not been typical of education. Perhaps because of the public nature of education and its funding, the authority for setting standards for teacher preparation programs and certification has typically resided with non-teachers such as state boards of education, state departments of education, or state legislatures.

PTSB is Self-Funded with Certification Fees

When making PTSB autonomous, the Legislature required it to generate enough fees to be self-funding within one year. Before that, certification had been subsidized by the General Fund, and teachers paid low fees to be certified.

Consequently, PTSB raised certification fees to the following levels: \$125 for the first five-year certificate, \$85 for renewal of a five-year certificate, and \$35 to add an endorsement to a certificate. This fee schedule generated \$618,138 in the 1997-98 biennium. Along with fixed costs and board meeting expenses, this revenue supports a director and one professional staff, two secretaries, and three certification technicians.

In 1996, a statutory change required PTSB to deny certification to convicted felons and to require fingerprinting and criminal background checks on applicants. Since this legislation, fingerprinting is required of all applicants for a new PTSB credential. The cost of fingerprinting is \$45, paid for by the applicant. Fingerprinting fees are separate from certification fees. PTSB reported fingerprinting 1,441 applicants in total. No revocations were sought based on fingerprint reports, but some applicants required additional investigation.

PTSB Issues and Renews Credentials for Staff in Public Schools

Professional staff employed in Wyoming public schools must possess a credential issued by PTSB. Educators obtain permits or certificates, with endorsements for specific subject areas, which must be renewed every five years. PTSB processes an average of 850 new applicants, 300 additional endorsements, 2,000 renewals, and 1,000 permits in a typical year.

PTSB reported that, in the 1996-97 school year, there were 22,585 individuals with a credential from PTSB, although not all were employed. Approximately 36 percent, or 8,172 individuals, were educators employed in Wyoming school districts.

Certificates. A certificate from PTSB verifies that an applicant has completed a teacher preparation program approved by PTSB as meeting certification standards, or has met the standards through portfolio assessment, which is described in Chapter 4. The certificate indicates grade levels the holder is qualified to teach. An endorsement is an official indication on a certificate of the subject areas or specialized program areas in which the holder is authorized to practice in Wyoming schools.

Permits. A permit issued by PTSB verifies that the holder meets the standards to perform specific functions in Wyoming public schools. Permits are issued for school nurses, coaches, trade and technical education instructors, and substitute teachers. Three types of temporary permits are issued for interns, visiting foreign teachers, and temporary employment. During the 1996-97 school year, there were 6,854 permit holders, the great majority of whom were substitutes.

Flexibility Practices Initiated by SBE Continued by PTSB

Following the practices of SBE, PTSB has continued to allow flexibility in the certification process. "Flexibility practices" include the granting of exception permits, transitional endorsements, waivers, and temporary employment permits. Two new measures for flexibility in certification, collaborations and portfolios, are described in Chapter 4.

Exceptions. An exception permit is a board action that temporarily suspends a certification regulation due to special circumstances. If the board approves an exception, the applicant receives a certificate with an indication of further work required within a specified period. The applicant must provide PTSB a plan to complete work that will meet the requirements.

Exceptions can be, and most frequently are, granted to non-teachers, such as coaches or social workers. In the 1996-97 school year, there were 4 employed teachers with exception permits. There were 17 exceptions requested and none denied in 1995, 21 requested and 2 denied in 1996, and 11 requested and none denied between January and August 1997.

Transitionals. A transitional endorsement allows a Wyoming certified teacher to teach in an endorsement area where that teacher is not yet fully certified. Transitionals require the applicant to have completed two-thirds of the coursework necessary for the endorsement, and to submit a plan for completing remaining work within three years.

Transitionals are a matter of regulation and only borderline cases require board involvement. There were 142 teachers employed in Wyoming school districts in the 1996-1997 school year with transitional endorsements. The board reviewed 15 requests so far in 1997.

Both measures, exceptions and transitionals, temporarily lower the unmet certification standard and give the applicant time to complete the needed work. They are granted for a limited time period and only to people who show intent to complete all requirements for the particular certification or endorsement. An LSO tabulation of PTSB data showed that, in the 1996-97 school year, approximately two percent of the employed teachers in Wyoming had been granted one of these flexibility measures.

Waivers. A waiver is a permanent suspension of a PTSB requirement. For example, the administration endorsement requires applicants to have completed an internship. The board will waive this requirement if the applicant has an equivalent experience. LSO tabulations of PTSB actions show 33 waivers requested of the board in 1995 and 5 denied; 53 requested and 14 denied in 1996; and 22 requested and 8 denied between January and August 1997.

Unlike exceptions or transitionals, no monitoring is necessary for waivers. For this reason, PTSB does not track waivers. Hence, it is unknown how many Wyoming educators have been certified with the use of waivers. The director of PTSB estimates that one percent of all employed teachers have received a waiver.

Temporary Permit. The board can grant temporary employment permits when a district demonstrates that it is unable to hire a properly certified and endorsed teacher. A temporary allows a non-certified individual with a bachelor's degree and experience in the subject to be taught to teach, with supervision from certified personnel. The individual must be fingerprinted. The temporary permit is considered an emergency measure in the field of education because it allows someone with no teacher training to be an educator. Temporary permits must be renewed each year. The board granted eight temporary employment permits in the 1996-97 school year.

In 1997, the Legislature changed W.S. 21-7-303 to enable college teachers to teach in the public schools without PTSB certification. Statute forbids PTSB from making any requirements of

these individuals. There has been some confusion between this statute and the temporary employment permit issued by PTSB. In practice, a person teaching in accordance with W.S. 21-7-303 needs no credential from PTSB and does not have to be fingerprinted.

Information Shared with the Department

PTSB is the only entity with comprehensive information about individuals holding teacher certification, endorsements, and permits. PTSB provides this essential information to SDE's accreditation unit. A school's accreditation depends partially on its having certified and properly endorsed teachers in all classrooms.

Early in the school year, SDE requires school districts to report the teaching assignment of every teacher they employ. PTSB identifies any misassignments; for example, a teacher without an endorsement in music who is teaching music. PTSB provides this information to the accreditation unit so corrective action can be taken.

Because of the benefits of information sharing, as with misassignments, PTSB is physically located in the SDE. Organizationally, PTSB is placed within the Department of Commerce, as were most boards and commissions during state government reorganization.

Three Areas With Great PTSB Influence

PTSB officials noted that the board has focused on two main endeavors since its establishment in 1993. These were implementing the program approval approach to certification that its predecessor (SBE) set in place, and developing more flexibility in certification. Our research indicated that these were indeed the areas in which most activity has taken place. In addition, our research focused on PTSB's authority to require educators to undertake professional development activities as a prerequisite for renewal.

While providing public education is a multi-layered endeavor involving many players, PTSB's authority in these three areas gives it significant ability to influence the quality of education in the state. Generally, we found PTSB has come far in its relatively short tenure in implementing a new certification process and in enhancing flexibility measures in certification. We also found opportunities for PTSB to use its authority to strengthen the effectiveness of the state's education professionals.

CHAPTER 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Finding 1: PTSB Lets Districts and Individual Educators Shape Professional Development

PTSB places no requirements on the five semester hours (or equivalent) of continuing education that certified educators must take during their five-year renewal periods. We found that 85 percent of the educators employed in Wyoming schools during the 1996-97 school year were certified before current certification standards were developed. However, PTSB does not require educators to focus their ongoing professional development in areas that address the current certification standards.

Further, PTSB has not set evaluative criteria for the workshops it approves for renewal credit. Participating in PTSB-approved workshops is one of the renewal options available to educators. Although it appears that workshops provide much of the renewal credit that teachers use to obtain continuing certification, PTSB has no criteria with which to evaluate the potential effectiveness of these workshops. A growing body of research suggests that certain approaches to professional development are more effective than others.

Professional Development Considered Critical to Education Reform. Education experts agree that professional development is important because reform efforts that raise expectations for students also raise expectations for teachers. In order to meet the challenges of teaching, educators need to continually enhance their knowledge of subject-matter and learn to use new teaching strategies. Experts also agree that policymakers must take action to ensure that the form, content, and quality of professional development support teacher professionalism. Further, according to a report from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the traditional professional development methods are not likely to equip teachers to be active and effective participants in today's reform efforts.

PTSB Does Not Have Evaluative Criteria for Professional Development Workshops

PTSB rules state its authority to approve workshops for renewal credit. PTSB receives many requests each year, both from school districts and other organizations, to approve workshops for professional renewal credit. In 1996, it approved 639 such workshops for a maximum of two hours of credit each. It does not limit the number of renewal hours that teachers can obtain through workshops.

By granting approval, PTSB can influence the quality of professional development imparted through individual workshops. However, PTSB has no formal criteria with which to evaluate their potential effectiveness. PTSB staff told us that they rarely turn down requests from

organizations and institutions seeking renewal credit for their activities. The board believes that preparing teachers to teach interdisciplinary topics justifies the wide array of topics approved.

The quality of these workshops is important because they provide a considerable portion of the professional development acquired by the state's experienced educators. According to the report prepared by MAP Associates to inform legislative deliberations on school finance reform, 60 percent of the state's teachers have more than ten years of experience, one third have been teaching 20 years or more, and the largest cohort has fourteen years of experience. PTSB officials told us that these experienced teachers are more likely to take PTSB-approved workshops, sponsored either by districts or other organizations. According to PTSB, this is because they have reached the point on the pay scale where college credit hours, another renewal credit option, provide no additional salary increases.

National Consensus on Improving Professional Development

Literature in the education field indicates that critically assessing professional development efforts is necessary to determine whether or not such efforts have the potential to be effective. There is growing opinion that conventional forms of professional development such as workshops and lectures may be too isolated from classroom realities to have an impact on teachers' practice. Furthermore, there appears to be a consensus among researchers, professional development specialists, and policymakers on the characteristics of good professional development.

The National Staff Development Council has established national standards to provide direction in determining what constitutes quality staff development for educators. Its standards are consistent with those developed by other experts in the field. The basic criterion is that staff development must shift from counting how many staff participate and for how long, to determining whether student achievement is improved. Emerging standards call for:

- Staff development that is grounded in research-proven methods to convey best teaching methods and curriculum content.
- Activities that lead teachers to understand the process of change and how to work collaboratively to solve problems.
- Staff development that is continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning.

PTSB has incorporated some of these emerging standards in its criteria for less-used professional development options. However, it does not apply them to the full array of individual workshops it approves.

Staff Development Standards Not Evident in All District Offerings. Districts sponsor some of the PTSB-approved workshops as inservice offerings. These district offerings are typically in the form of formal education activities, such as courses or workshops. We reviewed Department of Education accreditation reports for 19 districts over the 1995-96 and 1996-97

school years. These reports showed that the quality of district offerings was not meeting standards like those set by the National Staff Development Council. Most of the districts evaluated were basing their staff development plans on school improvement goals, but nearly all were having difficulty selecting research-proven practices for training. None had systems to provide follow-up or to support the implementation of new practices.

Although the Department evaluates district staff development as part of the accreditation process, it does not have an office to oversee it. Through its approval authority, PTSB can apply evaluative standards before districts or independent organizations hold workshops that teachers use for professional renewal. The quality of these activities is important to the state's education reform effort. Therefore, the state would benefit from having current professional development standards applied, to ensure that proposed professional development workshops, or other formal education activities, have the potential to be effective.

PTSB Standards Are Not the Focus of Activities It Approves for Renewal Credit

PTSB allows the sponsoring organizations or institutions to determine the focus of the workshops it approves for renewal credit. Of the 489 PTSB-approved workshops held between August 1, 1996 and the present, PTSB indicated that only 37, or approximately eight percent, addressed the standards that PTSB uses to certify teachers. The rest presumably focused upon topics determined by the sponsoring entities requesting renewal credit for their offerings, i.e. school districts or other organizations.

Statute and Consensus Focus Professional Development at the District Level.

PTSB maintains that by not creating requirements, it gives districts the flexibility to focus professional development for their certified employees. State and district officials we interviewed agreed that it has not been PTSB's responsibility to focus professional development. Traditionally, local school district administrators have been responsible for identifying specific teacher needs and seeing that they are met through professional development.

Teacher Evaluations. District administrators are likely to identify these needs through evaluations. W.S. 21-3-110(a)(xviii) requires each district to establish teacher performance evaluation systems and to evaluate the performance of each continuing contract teacher at least annually. Department rules supporting this statute require individual teachers to have both goals and plans for stimulating ongoing professional growth and curriculum implementation.

Although the Department checks to ensure that each teacher has a goal, an accreditation official noted that fully developed plans would likely be in place only for teachers evaluated as having problems. A few of the larger districts SDE reviewed require teachers to demonstrate a

connection between their staff development requests and assessed student needs and/or individual professional growth goals.

As part of the state education reform effort, the Legislature assigned SDE to evaluate tools used to assess the capability of teachers and administrators. The Department is currently researching this topic and will report its findings to the Select Committee on School Finance by January 1, 1998.

District Staff Development Plans. State school accreditation rules require that schools have staff development plans focused on district and school student performance goals. Legislation from 1990 required local districts and their communities to establish performance standards for student learning. Consequently, SDE evaluates districts on how well they demonstrate that planned staff development activities relate to student performance and improve student learning.

An accreditation official indicated that districts have made significant progress in focusing their staff development in the last two years, since SDE issued guidance in meeting accreditation rules. Moreover, state education officials believe that implementing student performance standards is the most effective way to change teacher behavior. For students to meet the standards, their teachers will need to select professional development in areas in which students will be assessed.

PTSB Augments Local and State Efforts

PTSB augments these local efforts to direct professional development by providing renewal credit for district inservice activities. Most districts prefer to make these offerings voluntary. As one district official stated, PTSB credit "makes the carrot a little more orange."

PTSB further assists local districts by approving their staff development plans for renewal credit. In this way, districts can submit an entire package of courses and workshops at once, rather than getting individual approvals. PTSB requires that these plans be aligned with district missions and outcomes. However, less than one-fourth of the districts have submitted plans for approval. PTSB officials attribute this to the fact that many districts do not have personnel assigned to staff development who can prepare the plans.

PTSB also provides renewal credit for SDE statewide training in the new accreditation requirements, and to educators who participate in developing required school improvement plans. Finally, PTSB provides credit to teachers who are involved in developing statewide

student performance standards. These types of activities, which involve teachers in reflection and dialogue about their practice, are recognized nationally as valuable professional development.

Districts May Not Yet Be Focusing Staff Development. A SDE official noted that although random staff development was "rampant" two years ago, the new rules and regulations requiring staff development to be driven by student assessments will now focus it. Nonetheless, that may not yet be occurring. Teacher respondents to our survey at the Wyoming Interdisciplinary Conference indicated that individually-assessed professional needs and personal interest were the predominant deciding factors when they chose professional development activities. The 56 teachers we surveyed indicated that, on average, they obtained about three-quarters of their renewal credits from college courses or workshops that they took at their own initiative, and the remainder from district offerings.

PTSB Focuses Professional Development In Some Cases

Although it does not require teachers who were certified before the existing certification standards were in place to focus their professional development, PTSB does focus beginning and experienced teachers coming from out-of-state. If PTSB finds that these educators do not meet current Wyoming certification standards, it requires them to address those standards during their first five-year renewal periods.

Professional Development Was Focused in the Past. PSB, which used to advise the State Board of Education on certification matters, created professional development requirements for Wyoming teachers in the early to mid-1980's. PSB required all certified teachers to obtain training in areas such as special education, computer-assisted instruction, and teaching gifted and talented students. Generally, these subjects had not been offered in preparatory programs when most teachers took their training. PTSB still enforces these requirements, and has integrated them into the standards it requires all newly-certified educators to meet. PTSB officials told us that at this point, nearly all experienced teachers have fulfilled the requirements.

States Handle Professional Development Differently

According to PTSB staff, "There are 50 states and 50 ways, but most require a master's degree." States with the master's requirement typically have staged certification levels, under which the only way to qualify for a continuing certificate is to obtain the graduate degree. Kentucky uses

this approach, requiring teachers to have master's degrees by the end of their second renewal period (ten years). Thus, teachers' professional development efforts in the first ten years must focus in programs that prepare teachers to meet the state's experienced teacher standards. Oregon also requires a master's degree for continuing certification, and only allows teachers to teach for six years before obtaining it.

In addition, Oregon's certification commission, also an autonomous board, recently introduced a comprehensive plan to ensure that teachers with continuing certificates undertake professional development. Legislation passed in 1997 obliging teachers to meet continuing professional development requirements was the impetus for the plan.

Oregon's Plan Sets Standards and Directions. The Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, developed basic objectives for professional development plans. Plans must relate to district and state goals for learning, and assist educators in keeping current with best practices in teaching and learning strategies.

The Oregon plan also focuses educators' professional development activities in six domains identified for professional competency. These domains are: subject matter or specialty, assessment strategies, methods and curriculum, understanding diversity, state and national education policy, and use of technology in education.

Although focused in content, the Oregon plan offers flexibility. Educators can participate in formal district plans that meet state objectives, or they can work with an advisor to develop individual plans that address at least one of the specified domains. Monitoring for both types of plans is done at the local level. Districts verify that educators have participated in approved plans, and educators who use individual plans maintain lists of activities, the domains addressed, and the number of credit hours. To complete the plans, educators must write about what they did and how it enhanced student learning.

Recommendation: PTSB should take a more active role in focusing professional development and ensuring its quality.

PTSB plays an integral role in Wyoming's education system. It has the authority to determine what beginning teachers must know and be able to do, what experienced teachers must do to maintain their certificates, and what activities will qualify for renewal credit.

To this point in its brief existence, PTSB has concentrated its efforts on defining what beginning teachers should know. The expectations of education reform, however, require that PTSB be concerned with the professionalism of all teachers. As it moves forward, PTSB should define a greater role for itself with respect to professional development, to ensure that all teachers' skills are both aligned with current standards and honed by effective methods.

The new Oregon plan summarized above is an example of an approach that gives districts flexibility to meet their specific needs, while also introducing direction for those educators pursuing professional development on their own. It also includes components that PTSB has already developed, such as the approval of district and individual staff development plans.

Similarly, PTSB has recognized emerging professional development standards in some of the activities it approves. However, it has not applied them to the workshops that many teachers independently choose for renewal credit. By introducing standards for all workshops it approves, and focus for workshops outside of district plans, PTSB could enhance the effect of educators'

CHAPTER 3: CERTIFICATION UNDER PTSB

Finding 2: The Perception Is That Certification Has Become More Difficult Under PTSB

Many of the school district administrators consulted or surveyed for this report said that obtaining certification for both beginning and experienced teachers coming from out-of-state has become more difficult. As a result, administrators claim it contributes to the problems they face in hiring teachers to fill vacancies. Administrators in small districts noted particular problems in certifying teachers with the multiple endorsements necessary to meet district needs.

Our research indicates that this perception may result from administrators (the hiring officials in districts) not understanding the certification approach that PTSB uses. The program approval approach, although new to the state, is part of a national effort to improve teaching. Without an understanding of it, some administrators may see PTSB as impeding rather than supporting efforts to place qualified teachers in classrooms.

PTSB Implemented a Major Change in Certification

Administrators hiring teachers must do so under a new certification system. Under PTSB, certification has changed from a system based on completion of prescribed classes, to one based on required knowledge and demonstrated competencies. The former approach, called transcript analysis, required teachers to have certain numbers of credit hours in specific courses. The new approach, program approval, requires that educators demonstrate their competencies by

completing approved teacher preparation programs. Where it used to analyze applicants' individual transcripts, PTSB now reviews the preparatory programs which train applicants.

PTSB has implemented program approval under the rules adopted by its predecessor, the State Board of Education, in the late 1980's. When legislation established PTSB in 1993, the Superintendent of Public Instruction appointed members and staff with the implicit understanding that the program approval rules would be carried forward.

Program Approval Part of Teacher Education Reform Effort

Although certifying through program approval is new to Wyoming, it is an accepted part of the national reform effort aimed at raising the standards for teacher preparation. States have been implementing reforms in teaching and teacher preparation for over a decade. Setting standards for what beginning teachers should know and be able to do, and ensuring that teacher preparation programs adequately prepare them, is central to that reform effort. The focus has changed from reviewing lists of classes teachers took in college, to setting standards for the preparatory institutions.

Program approval is midway on the reform continuum for teacher preparation. National groups involved in the reform movement also envision requiring one-year or two-year internships before teachers are eligible for continued certification. Individual performance assessment rather than approval of preparation programs would eventually be the basis of certification. No states are yet licensing all teachers through performance assessments.

New Approach Based on Performance-based Standards

Program approval is a performance-based standards approach whereby the certifying authorities (i.e. PTSB) apply standards to the academic programs at teacher preparation institutions, not directly to individual teachers. Under program approval, each state determines what teachers must know to teach in that state, and sets corresponding standards for those institutions within its borders that prepare teachers. Institutions meeting those standards assess their graduates to ensure they are qualified to practice independently as teachers, and those graduates obtain certification or licensure from the state.

PTSB has responsibility for approving these programs within the state, which are only offered by the College of Education at the University of Wyoming (UW). PTSB conducted site visits at UW to verify that its preparation programs in the various academic endorsement areas meet the corresponding standards. PTSB must review these programs once every five years. It elects to

conduct these reviews in partnership with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE accreditation is a statement of recognition by the education profession that UW's programs meet rigorous national standards.

Program Approval Based on Assumptions

There are basic assumptions at the core of program approval. One is that all states will rigorously evaluate their teacher preparation programs. All teacher education programs must gain approval from the state certification authorities in order for their graduates to be certified. States approve virtually all of the programs because if they did not, according to a PTSB official, such programs would "go away" since they would no longer be viable.

Experts in the field say that since states usually approve all of their programs, professional accreditation such as that provided by NCATE is critical to guarantee the quality of the institutions. NCATE accredits approximately 46 percent of the nation's teacher education institutions.

Another assumption is that all educators in a state can meet that state's current certification standards, even if they completed teacher preparation under the transcript analysis approach. PTSB officials make this assumption about the 85 percent of Wyoming teachers certified before the current standards came into effect in 1995. PTSB believes that teachers actively involved in the profession who have participated on committees, attended workshops, enrolled in college classes, and implemented current research in their classrooms, would meet current standards. However, only teachers who attempt to add endorsements or let their certificates lapse would need to demonstrate their competencies with respect to the current certification standards.

PTSB also assumes that teachers coming from other states meet those states' current certification standards, even if they were certified through transcript analysis. Hence, when PTSB evaluates experienced teachers applying for Wyoming certification, they look to the current standards in the teachers' home states to determine their competencies. If the standards do not mesh in some areas, PTSB lists those on the backs of the certificates it issues.

According to PTSB officials, most states administer tests or use transcript analysis to determine whether incoming teachers meet standards. PTSB officials said Wyoming does not use a test because developing one would be too expensive to recover the costs, given the relatively small base of teachers seeking certification in the state.

Program Approval and Reciprocity

Administrators face particular problems hiring teachers trained in other states because under program approval, there is really no "clean" reciprocity. This is because no states have exactly the same requirements for teacher certification. An education expert with whom we consulted said that a known difficulty with program approval is that there is no standard way to certify across state lines.

Wyoming is one of 33 states that certify teachers through the program approval method. Each state sets its own standards and approves the teacher preparation programs within its borders. Consequently, when teachers attempt to certify in other states, they may not meet all of the new states' certification standards.

Reciprocity is particularly important to Wyoming because it has only one teacher preparation institution, UW. Further, UW currently has programs in only 37 of the 48 PTSB endorsement areas. PTSB data shows that between July 1996 and June 1997, UW supplied one third of the teachers certified; another third came from the neighboring states of Colorado, Nebraska, Utah, Montana, and South Dakota; and the final third came from the remaining states. PTSB officials estimate that this is a consistent pattern.

PTSB Has Reciprocity With 19 States. PTSB has signed an interstate agreement to provide certification to graduates of approved programs, but only when those individuals also meet Wyoming-specific requirements. For example, Wyoming requires all teachers to have training in teaching gifted and talented students; many states do not have this requirement. Because the state has some one-room schools, Wyoming requires all elementary teachers to be able to teach physical education; not all states have that requirement. Further, PTSB has established reciprocity only with states that certify through program approval. Hence, PTSB grants additional endorsements only to teachers who have completed approved sequential programs; it does not grant endorsements on the basis of accumulated credit hours alone.

PTSB officials told us that when the switch to program approval was made, the intent was to provide complete reciprocity to teachers who completed approved programs in another states. However, because UW graduates had to meet all Wyoming certification standards, PTSB decided to require all applicants for certification, including those from out-of-state, to meet its standards. PTSB will certify teachers trained somewhere other than UW, but those teachers must meet Wyoming-specific standards in the first five-year renewal period.

Many Teachers Coming From Out-of-State Are Certified With Deficiencies. Many teachers have "deficiencies" when they are initially certified in Wyoming. Deficiencies denote the Wyoming standards they do not meet, and which they must meet within five years. Of teachers employed by schools in the state, who were initially certified between 1995 and 1997, from 40 to 78 percent had deficiencies each year. During the 1996-97 school year, six percent of

all teachers employed in Wyoming schools were teaching with deficiencies, with the proportion somewhat higher in smaller districts.

It is among experienced teachers from out-of-state, and the administrators who are trying to hire them, that PTSB officials sense the greatest problem. PTSB acknowledges that the very term "deficiency" insults these teachers. Further, they are frustrated to find they must clear deficiencies to continue teaching in Wyoming after having successfully taught for a number of years in other states. One education official outside of PTSB commented, however, that these individuals would probably face the same difficulties if they attempted initial certification under their home states' current standards.

Because of the problems created when experienced teachers seek Wyoming certification, PTSB may initiate a rule change. This change would certify such teachers on the basis of experience, rather than on a comparison of standards or completion of an approved program. If such a rule is adopted, PTSB would certify teachers in endorsement areas in which they have successfully taught for three of the last six years. According to PTSB officials, this change would assume teachers have maintained currency in their fields. It would also place more responsibility on local administrators hiring them to verify their competencies through interviews.

Unfamiliarity With Program Approval Detracts From Recognition of its Benefits

Administrators struggling to fill vacancies may misinterpret the PTSB approach to certification. Some suggest that program approval depletes the pool of available candidates from which they can choose, and ultimately is a barrier to hiring the candidates they want. One superintendent commented that while high standards were good in theory, practically, they made it difficult to find qualified applicants. In addition, teachers coming from other states may view PTSB's attachment of deficiencies to their certificates as insults to their professionalism, and as a deterrent to seeking Wyoming certification.

Having a certification process focused on ensuring the competency of beginning teachers will become increasingly important for Wyoming. MAP Associates indicated that most teaching vacancies are filled by beginning teachers. Furthermore, there will be more new teachers to hire in the near future. State statisticians recently reported the state is facing the retirement of a significant portion of its teachers in the next five to twenty years. One superintendent estimated that 60 percent of his district's teachers will be retiring in the next decade.

PTSB has taken steps to ease some of the effects of program approval. It has extended the time that initially certified teachers have to clear their deficiencies, and is considering other changes.

Nevertheless, negative perceptions about PTSB's approach to certification appear to inhibit administrators from understanding ways to work with PTSB and its certification standards, so they can hire the best candidates.

Recommendation: PTSB should ensure administrators have a complete understanding of current certification procedures.

Since performance-based standards form the basis of certification, and certification is a prerequisite to hiring, administrators need to thoroughly understand the current standards and procedures. Most administrators are likely included in the 85 percent of certified educators who were not certified under program approval, and thus may have no direct connection to the current standards. However, their hiring, evaluation, and assignment responsibilities will increasingly require that they fully understand them.

Generally, the administrators we interviewed and surveyed indicated that they freely and often contact PTSB when they need information. Nevertheless, our poll of district officials involved in hiring showed that the majority were either not familiar or only somewhat familiar with the program approval approach to certification. PTSB admits that its communications with the educational community have been lacking.

There are opportunities for PTSB to address the apparent misunderstanding of program approval among administrators. Like teachers, administrators must take five semester hours of professional development during each renewal period. If it sees a need, PTSB can focus the content of this professional development. Hence, PTSB could design and present training for administrators, either electronically or in person, on the current certification standards and procedures.

PTSB could also produce a handbook or guide that busy administrators could reference in making hiring decisions. Either, training or a handbook, could also include information on the flexibility measures discussed in the following chapter. An understanding of both can help administrators address perceived difficulties in hiring.

CHAPTER 4: COLLABORATION AND PORTFOLIOS

Finding 3: PTSB Responds to Perceived Difficulty in Hiring Teachers with New Practices

The transition to program approval set the stage for PTSB to be responsive to demands for new practices allowing more flexibility in and alternative routes to certification. On the one hand, getting a clear Wyoming certificate now, under program approval, can necessitate additional work for teachers already certified in other states. Program approval can also be a more challenging process for teachers adding endorsements. On the other hand, performance-based certification standards allow for more flexibility in certification. They enable educators to meet the standards in ways other than transcript hours.

Superintendents, personnel directors, and several PTSB board members we surveyed and interviewed repeatedly pointed out the difficulty of finding teachers for every classroom who can meet certification requirements. Anecdotal experiences indicated agreement within the education community about the perceived difficulty in hiring teachers. PTSB, a member of the education community, wants to be responsive to this constituency.

One-Third of Teachers to Retire in Next Ten Years. An additional factor which will influence the ability of administrators to hire is the anticipated retirement of a large number of teachers. The aging and retiring of teachers is a national trend felt in Wyoming, since the state's teachers are concentrated in the baby boom age range.

Nearly 42 percent of the 8,172 educators employed in Wyoming schools in the 1996-97 school year were between 44 and 53 years old. Rough estimates, based on the age of employed educators, show approximately 30 percent of teachers in Wyoming can be expected to retire within ten years. The aging of educators has and will continue to feed a growing shortage of teachers who completed traditional teacher training programs at colleges and universities. The shortage is exaggerated in some specialty areas, such as math or special education.

It is not known whether there will be an adequate supply of teachers to replace those retiring. However, it appears unlikely that the University of Wyoming's College of Education will be able to supply all the needed teachers from among their graduates. The number of bachelor degree graduates from the College of Education has decreased from 450 in 1993 to 219 in 1997. Furthermore, enrollment in the College of Education is concentrated in elementary education, which is not an area of particular need. The University has developed a program called "Fast Track" that allows people who already have bachelor's degrees to become a certified teacher in one calendar year, although it has not yet been program approved by PTSB.

PTSB Establishes New Practices

When PTSB was created in 1993, the appointing Superintendent of Public Instruction charged PTSB with balancing rigorous certification standards with flexibility in, and alternative routes to, the certification requirements. The Superintendent's prompting, together with the hiring

difficulties expressed by administrators and concern over teacher retirements, motivated PTSB to implement two new practices in certification.

Collaborations and portfolios are new practices that offer flexibility and alternative routes. The goal of collaborations is to allow teachers some latitude in the classes they can teach, given their endorsements. The goal of portfolios is to increase the hiring pool for teachers and make it more possible for teachers to add an endorsement.

Alternative routes to certification can increase the hiring pool for teachers because they appeal to people who have an undergraduate degree in a field other than education. They minimize the need for additional schooling, give credit for past experiences, and emphasize skills learned by on-the-job training.

Collaboration is a New Flexibility Measure

Flexibility in certification requirements allows districts to use their existing staff in more diverse ways. PTSB grants 48 different endorsement areas, each with its own certification standards. There are complex nuances among some of the closely related endorsements, such as K-12 reading, remedial reading K-12, and reading specialist. It is the endorsements on teaching certificates that dictate which classes can be taught. While there is good reason for this system, there has also been demand for flexibility in it. The key is to develop flexibility practices that do not lower the quality of teaching.

The board has begun granting approval for certified teachers to teach in areas for which they are not endorsed, provided that each teacher is affiliated with another properly endorsed teacher who acts as a mentor. This arrangement, termed "collaboration," was not offered when certification was under the SBE. In 1996, there were nine requests from districts for collaborations. Between January and August 1997, there were 32 requests from districts for collaboration.

Districts can use collaboration to deal with slight increases in a particular class enrollment from year to year, i.e., one extra math class when enrollment demands it. Without collaboration for that one extra math class, the district would have to hire another teacher or have a teacher obtain a transitional endorsement. A transitional is often not practical because it necessitates the completion of substantial coursework and a willingness to complete the endorsement.

PTSB Leaves Collaboration Arrangements and Monitoring to the Districts

Typically, a collaboration request is a letter from the principal or superintendent naming the individuals involved and detailing any qualifications that the collaborating teacher may have. PTSB has set no requirements or guidelines for what type of teacher can collaborate in a

particular subject area. PTSB also does not require monitoring, reporting, or evaluation of the arrangement. All collaboration requests presented to the board, thus far, have been approved.

Members of the PTSB state that they intentionally have chosen to leave all details of the collaboration arrangement to the districts. This is considered a matter of professional trust between educators. In the words of one board member, "We are licensers and not cops." PTSB makes no efforts to verify that the mentoring is occurring. The collaborating teacher is not required by PTSB to have any background in the subject to be taught or a closely related endorsement. Neither must the collaborating teacher be pursuing the needed endorsement, as is the case with transitionals and exceptions.

Portfolios Provide An Alternative Route to Certification

PTSB has made the policy decision to grant a teaching certificate to anyone who holds a bachelor's degree and who can show, with a portfolio, that the certification standards have been met. A portfolio is a narrative and visual document meant to demonstrate how an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies meet the certification standards. PTSB allows portfolios for first-time certification, for a certified teacher to add an endorsement, and for certified teachers to remedy deficiencies.

A total of five portfolios were assessed in 1996; one was denied. Twelve portfolios were assessed between January and August 1997, and six were denied. Some in the education community have been discouraged by the small number of portfolios submitted, although the practice is still quite new. Five of the portfolios evaluated so far have been for educational diagnostician, an endorsement for which UW no longer has a program. Because the practice is new and many traditionally trained teachers are uncomfortable with it, PTSB offers a mentor to each portfolio applicant.

Portfolios Held to Certification Standards. Portfolio is synonymous with the term "alternative route to certification." Educators are quick to point out that portfolios offer an alternative route to certification, but the standards are not lowered or suspended.

The development of a portfolio is a rigorous undertaking, and it is not intended for emergency certification situations. PTSB staff and others in the education community agreed that a successful portfolio cannot be created by someone unless they have a depth of experiences related to teaching. A portfolio not qualifying for complete approval can be used as the basis for granting an internship permit, which will allow the individual to work in a school, under supervision of certified personnel. Experiences gained through an internship, collaboration, or substitute teaching can be used to develop or enhance a portfolio.

The cost for certification via portfolio assessment is \$590; it costs \$340 to resubmit a portfolio, and \$100 to add an endorsement. According to PTSB staff, portfolio certification is more costly

because of the involvement of a assessment committee. However, for the applicant, portfolios may ultimately be less expensive than college tuition.

Currently, most district salary schedules grant increases based on a teacher's years of experience and cumulative graduate hours, not on the number of endorsements. Thus, acquiring an additional endorsement by portfolio may not add to a teacher's salary. Lack of compensation for an additional endorsement may be a disincentive for teachers who are not at the top of the payscale.

Portfolio Evaluation Methods Developed by University of Wyoming

The desire for performance-based assessment of teachers has put portfolios at the forefront of the field of education. The issue of how to evaluate or assess a portfolio is currently a topic being actively explored by experts. Many states have put substantial resources into pilot projects to develop portfolio assessment methods. PTSB used the work of professors at the University of Wyoming to establish a procedure and evaluation process for portfolios.

Under PTSB's procedures, portfolios are evaluated by a committee of at least five members, including three teachers, one administrator, and one PTSB board member. PTSB professional staff provides the committee with approximately four hours of training, developed in conjunction with professors at UW, in how to assess portfolios. PTSB staff estimated that 25 to 30 evaluators have been trained and feel the portfolio evaluation system is in place. Final authority to approve or deny each portfolio rests with the board.

Results of New Practices Promising, but Unknown

PTSB has made substantial progress in establishing the use of portfolios for an alternative route to certification. One superintendent in a Wyoming school district said PTSB's efforts toward portfolios were "laudable." Portfolios are "a good direction to go and clearly the trend of the future in education," according to one education expert. Similarly, collaborations represent progress in giving flexibility to the districts that have used them. PTSB has implemented these practices with the best of intentions and in the interest of getting quality educators in the classroom.

However, there has been no follow-up evaluation accompanying the implementation of portfolios or collaboration. As a result, the effect these measures have on the quality of teaching is unknown. For example, there has been no research to see if the assessment method developed

and used for portfolios actually produces a quality teacher in the classroom. Wyoming is different from many states in that it does not require teacher testing for certification. Teacher testing would be an additional check on those teachers entering the profession through portfolios. Neither has there been a follow-up on the practice of collaboration, involving the collaborators, mentors, and students, to see if the practice has been successful in the classroom.

A review of the collaboration requests approved for the 1997-98 school year shows that many of the collaborating teachers had experience in the subject to be taught. Also, some letters requesting collaboration approval showed that administrators expected PTSB oversight on the collaboration arrangement, as they included a request for instructions about necessary reporting or documentation. Nevertheless, PTSB does not make such requirements.

Collaboration Similar to Emergency Measures. A national expert in the field of education stated that, conceptually, Wyoming's collaboration is more akin to "true emergency measures," which allow anyone to teach, than to flexibility measures. This is because of the lack of regulations regarding the collaboration arrangement. By contrast, exceptions and transitionals do have some guidelines and requirements and were deemed "reasonable and necessary to accommodate special circumstances" by the same expert.

Collaboration, as it now stands, is contrary to the current national approach to teacher preparation programs. The education community no longer approves of teachers who teach everything simply because they have training in classroom methods. Rather, teachers are now prepared in content areas which also have content-specific methods of teaching.

Without following up on the collaboration arrangements, PTSB does not know the impact of its practice of leaving all the details and enforcement of the collaboration arrangement to the districts. Wyoming may be able to develop and promote the use of distance learning, team teaching, district sharing of teachers, and block scheduling to lend assistance in the situations where collaborations are currently used.

Recommendation: PTSB should conduct follow-up study and reporting on portfolios and collaborations.

The expanded use of new practices in teacher certification has potentially far-reaching consequences. These practices require ongoing evaluation, but one superintendent said of PTSB, "I don't know if they have an effective way to review something after it has become a practice." New policies need evaluation in order to create information which plugs into a cyclical policy-making process.

The use of portfolios and collaboration is still very small, but has more than doubled in the two years since they became functional practices. Once educators become familiar with these measures, there is potential for routine use.

At this point of early development, the practices of portfolios and collaborations are still malleable and not widespread. With the imminent retirement of a large portion of Wyoming's teachers, school districts will be doing all they can to hire new teachers who are likely to remain for 20 to 30 years. To ensure that new practices are working as desired and expected, it would be wise to conduct an evaluative study. Careful study could lead to beneficial adjustments to these practices.

As part of this effort, the board should develop reporting which tabulates individual PTSB actions according to the type of action and content area. Currently, individual board actions to approve certification based on flexibility measures are not reported in aggregate; without aggregate reporting, it is difficult to know the extent of the influence of these practices in Wyoming classrooms. Reporting would formalize important information and would give the public a meaningful representation of some of the results of this board. Also, it could help improve communications with districts and individual teachers, who need to be aware of the latest practices in certification.

CONCLUSION

Having a professional standards board with the ability to focus solely on the preparation and certification of the state's educators will continue to be important to the state's education reforms efforts. As an autonomous board, PTSB gives educators the authority to establish the standards that govern their profession. No longer is a lay board involved in setting the standards to which professional educators are held. Hence, PTSB also has the responsibility to strengthen the profession's level of accountability, both among educators and the general public.

The recommendations made in this report suggest ways that PTSB can strengthen professional accountability. By setting standards and direction for professional development workshops, PTSB can lead all educators to augment their skills and knowledge in ways that improve student learning. By ensuring that administrators fully understand the current certification standards, PTSB can assist them in hiring the most qualified candidates available to fill their vacancies. By following-up to see the effects of its recently adopted flexibility measures, PTSB can ensure that these practices result in competent teaching.

Finally, PTSB must be accountable for its role in meeting the state's education reform priorities. The professional literature and education professionals we consulted for this report repeatedly stated that education reform is systemic, and that system components must integrate to accomplish specified goals with respect to student learning. As a critical component of the system, PTSB must coordinate its work with other statewide efforts to improve the education system.

Specifically, PTSB may need to revise its certification standards so that they align with the statewide student performance standards now being developed in response to W.S. 29-9-101(b). The Legislature has appropriated funds to implement a statewide assessment system to measure student progress. Aligning with that effort may require PTSB to revise its teaching standards on a more accelerated schedule than the five-year cycle it currently follows.

AGENCY RESPONSE

The response from the Professional Teaching Standards Board is available with the printed version of this report.