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For me becoming a National Board Certified Teacher was more than just a certificate or a stipend. It was about learning to be a reflective practitioner and taking risks to analyze my teaching on a day today basis. I was encouraged to pursue National Board Certification by my sister-in-law who was in one of the first groups to certify in the state of Illinois. She told me I would learn more about myself as a teacher than through any professional development in which I would participate. At the time, I did not believe her, but I trusted her and I trusted the process. In the end, she was right. At no point during my 20 years of teaching have I learned more about myself as an educator than I have while working to achieve certification and later, renewal. The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards has always been ahead of its time in terms of best practices in education. As an Early Middle Childhood Literacy Reading Language Arts NBCT, I was exploring standards in visual literacy and speaking and listening long before that was to become a household name in the common core/state standards. Being an NBCT has impacted my teaching career as it has always kept me reflecting on my practice and striving to be better. I look at each school year as an opportunity to learn and grow and to apply that growth to my everyday practice with my elementary students. I'm not afraid to put myself out there, to try something new, to take a risk, because I have been doing those things since the moment I began certification in 2005. I know that the growth that my students have made in my years as an educator comes from my experiences as a National Board Certified Teacher because I am using my knowledge of the Architecture of Accomplished Teaching (the NBPTS foundational document) to continuously analyze, reflect, plan, and grow.

This program has provided me opportunities to be a leader for other educators, a mentor to colleagues, and a learner for myself. Teachers who choose this path do so for themselves which means when we invest in National Board Certification we are investing in the hearts and passions of Illinois educators. Educators with passion will pass that feeling onto students -- who better to lead the next generation of this country than passionate learners?