

## Loma Linda Elementary School: National Board Certification Results in a Dramatic Turnaround

Recently, the state of New Mexico began assigning letter grades to schools based on student performance. In the latest round of grading, several schools in the community of Anthony, N. M., received a “D.” Loma Linda Elementary – a K-7 school – would have been one of them had it not been reconstituted with a district requirement that every teacher become National Board Certified.

### A school in decline

Loma Linda Elementary is a Title I school in a district in which every student receives free breakfast and lunch based on Student Nutrition Provision Title II. Over half of the school’s 500 students are English Language Learners or use English as their second language, and all but two students are Hispanic.

The school was infamous in the region for having the district’s lowest test scores, and parents were so unhappy that many literally took to the streets and picketed the school in protest. Not surprisingly, Loma Linda was under Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) corrective action status from the state.

### Certification required

Desperate for a solution, the district decided to reconstitute the school, reassigning 24 of its 29 teachers to other schools. The assistant principal became principal at the site, but left soon after, and a new principal was hired. Leslie Jackson was hired as the new assistant principal at the reconstituted site.

Jackson spent 15 years in a neighboring district, helped lead a district-wide literacy program and taught at the college level before coming to Loma Linda. She became a National Board Certified teacher in 1997 and renewed in 2007 – an important milestone, because National Board Certification is more than just a professional development option at Loma Linda – it’s a requirement for teachers.

“I am committed to making a change in this district,” Jackson said, and she believes National Board Certification is making a significant contribution to that change.

As part of the reconstitution process, the district issued the requirement that every teacher employed at the school go through the National Board process. The plan to use NBPTS programs to improve the school was the brainchild of then-superintendent Cynthia Nava, now a New Mexico State Senator.

Every teacher agreed to pursue certification or *Take One!*

Throughout the process, candidates were supported by representatives from Eastern New Mexico University who frequently made the four-plus hour drive to Loma Linda to advise and assist the teachers attempting certification and *Take One!* The teachers received additional support from the regional NBPTS Network in the area. Advanced candidates were

supported by NBCT Pat Graff, a candidate support provider from Albuquerque. In addition, Eastern New Mexico University offers graduate credits for participation in NBPTS programs.

### Motivated to succeed

In the fall of 2011, 15 of Loma Linda’s teachers attempted the full certification process and nine participated in *Take One!* Two of the 15 achieved National Board Certification, and eight obtained bankable *Take One!* scores.

“When they found out the results, some were upset,” Jackson said of the teachers who had not achieved certification. “But after finding out how close they were to certifying, they became motivated to try again.”

Understanding the rigorous requirements for National Board Certification, the district supports Loma Linda teachers who don’t achieve on their first attempt to continue in the National Board process as a retake candidate. Those who choose not to retry are assigned to other schools in the district. To ease the financial impact of the certification process, the district pays for teachers’ first attempt at certification, and offers loans for subsequent efforts.

Jackson says the Loma Linda teachers who didn’t achieve last year are now meeting weekly to “clean things up,” studying together as they prepare to try again.

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“They are a community of learners – the whole group,” she said. “They’re a large professional learning community, talking about what is going on in each other’s classrooms and how they can help each other.”

She also believes the certification process has inspired a renewed commitment among the teachers toward their students.

“We tell the kids, ‘We’re going to come to your high school graduation. We’re going to follow you and make sure you graduate,’” she said.

### **Back on track**

Following the reconstitution of Loma Linda Elementary, the school made its AYP benchmark with a significant improvement in scores – an achievement that earned the school an acknowledgement from the state legislature.

As a result, the protests are over, the parents are happy and are meeting monthly with the principal to facilitate communication.

“The parents are wonderful,” Jackson said. “They say there is a different feeling when they walk the halls now.”

Loma Linda’s turnaround is reflected in the most-recent grade the school received from the state. On its way to an “F” just two years ago, Loma Linda has now earned a “B.”

“Of course, we’re striving for an ‘A,’” Jackson declared.

Today, the school’s faculty credits the National Board Certification process for their professional growth. Four new teachers will start the certification process in the coming school year.