
Feature Interview:

How CMP Helped Me Earn My National Board Certification

Two members of the Wisconsin CMP Project have earned certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). David Bowman, choir director at Lincoln High School of the Manitowoc School District, earned his National Board Certification in Music/Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood in 2006 and Mary Ann Zupan, general music teacher at Wales Elementary School of the Kettle Moraine School District in Dousman, earned her National Board Certification in Music/Early and Middle Childhood in 2007.

National Board Certification is the highest credential in the teaching profession. A teacher-driven, voluntary process established by NBPTS, certification is achieved through a rigorous, performance-based assessment that typically takes one to three years to complete and measures what the most accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. As part of the process, teachers build a portfolio that includes student work samples, assignments, videotapes, a thorough analysis of their classroom teaching, and an assessment of their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

Both David Bowman and Mary Ann Zupan were interviewed to share their experiences and provide some insight connecting CMP and the National Board Certification process:

What motivated you to pursue the National Board Certification?

Bowman:

The first thing that motivated me was a friend who had already completed the process and said that she felt it was a great way to develop the art of teaching. Having completed a master degree already, I was looking for a challenge and felt that the program would help me to focus on key areas of instruction. There are definite monetary rewards as well. The state pays a yearly stipend and my district also pays 13% of base to those who complete the process successfully.

Zupan:

A colleague I really respect encouraged me to take a look at the materials and as I began to read I found myself thinking with each paragraph “That’s what I believe about teaching, too!” I felt drawn in right away. The chance to grow as an educator and reflect on what is truly significant in my practice was compelling. The opportunity to be part of advancing the profession and earn a little extra cash in the process also influenced my decision.

How long did it take to earn the National Board Certification and were you prepared for the many different tasks involved with the certification process?

Bowman:

The process takes approximately one school year. You sign up, begin your video-taping and reflections in the fall and mail in your finished papers by March. You then have until the summer to take the written portion of the exam. I felt prepared for the process except in the area of world music. There are no specific guidelines for study other than that it will be a drop the needle test and you are supposed to give your best guess about the place of origin. Being able to identify elements and then support your guess is more important than getting the exact location correct.

Zupan:

I started creating my portfolios in August of last year and finished in May. It was the most thought provoking and intellectually rigorous ten months of my career! It prompted me to take an objective look at some teaching decisions I had previously taken for granted. One of the portfolio tasks is documenting professional accomplishments. Easy enough, right? However, really scrutinizing those accomplishments is a humbling exercise. How had those accomplishments truly improved student learning? Were they significant? Was there evidence that they had an impact on achievement? It was a great, albeit *exhausting* process, and ultimately very affirming.

How did CMP affect your quest to achieve the National Board Certification and what were some connections that you experienced between CMP and the certification process?

Bowman:

Both CMP and the National Boards process require an understanding of where your students are musically and what goals you want to help them reach. The CMP process also requires a depth of understanding of why you use one piece of music over another and what you will be able to effectively teach from the piece. There were two areas that CMP really helped me win this process. First was covering the three entries criteria. They are Planning, Delivering Instruction, Demonstrating and Developing Musicianship. Writing and implementing a CMP plan covers all three of these areas. Having developed outcomes with CMP (skill, knowledge and affective) you already have experience thinking about teaching in this manner. The second way that CMP helped me was that it has made me more intentionally reflective. As you work through the board papers a large portion is reflection on your teaching. What was or wasn't successful, what changes would you implement and why, and what steps would you take next are all covered.

Zupan:

A hallmark of CMP is being *intentional* in the decisions you make to help students discover deeper and more meaningful musical connections. The National Board process asks you to describe and document that intent in very specific ways. As CMP cultivates a reflective habit of mind when planning instruction and outcomes it was a perfect fit with writing for the National Boards because it also requires that kind of thinking. I looked at CMP as being a springboard.

Zupan (*continued*):

When I write a CMP plan I have to focus on alignment of strategies, outcomes, and assessment, all the while determining if the learning activities flow from my analysis and the heart of the piece. When I compiled the portfolios for the National Board I had to verify if there was clear and consistent evidence that all of that was indeed effective. Each process requires a heightened awareness and the willingness to be metacognitive. I'm a better teacher for my students as a result.

What suggestions do you have for those pursuing the National Board Certification?

Bowman:

Go for it! Be prepared to watch many hours of teaching to find just the right segment. Plan ahead! The more prep time you have spent setting things up, the more likely the things you want to see happen actually do!

Zupan:

It really is a phenomenal process; challenging and completely worthwhile. For those considering taking the plunge I recommend that you start gathering evidence that can be considered artifacts of how your practice improves student learning. Take advantage of the great support that the state offers and network with others who have gone through it as well. I couldn't have done it without peer coaches, my families' understanding, and lots of comfort food, namely chocolate!