

ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE: Getting Started with National Board Certification

Fall 2026



Kentucky Department of
EDUCATION

CONTENTS

Part 1: Program Overview

- What is National Board Certification 2
- Who is Eligible? 3
- Certificate Areas 3
- Timeline for Completion 5
- Component 1 6
- Component 2 7
- Component 3 8
- Component 4 9
- Scoring 10
- Maintenance of Certification 11
- Cost 11
- Dates and Deadlines for 2026-2027 Cycle 12

Part 2: The Candidate Experience

- Kentucky Incentives 13
- Submitting Required Documentation 13
- Why Pursue Certification? 14
- Advice from NBCTs 16

Part 3: Getting Started

- Creating an account 17
- Exploring NBCT resources 17
- KY NBCT Network 18
- Additional Supports 18
- Contact Information 19

Part 1: Program Overview

What is National Board Certification?

Across the country, National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) represent some of the most accomplished and reflective practitioners in the profession. National Board Certification, administered by the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#) (NBPTS), is widely recognized as a rigorous, voluntary process through which teachers demonstrate advanced knowledge, skills, and practices aligned to high and comprehensive standards for effective teaching.

At its core, National Board Certification is grounded in the belief that teaching excellence matters and that accomplished educators are essential to student success. The certification process is built on the [Five Core Propositions](#), which describe what teachers should know and be able to do. These propositions emphasize a deep commitment to students and their learning, strong subject matter expertise, thoughtful management and monitoring of student progress, reflective practice, and participation in learning communities. There are sixteen content areas and four developmental levels in which teachers may certify.

The certification journey requires teachers to engage in an intensive analysis of their instructional practice. Candidates must complete and achieve passing scores on the following four components:

- a. Content Knowledge
- b. Differentiation in Instruction
- c. Teaching Practice and Learning Environment
- d. Reflective Practice

Through this process, teachers critically examine their decisions, evaluate their instructional impact, and articulate how their practice supports equitable access to learning for all students.

While the process is demanding, it is also transformative. Teachers who pursue National Board Certification often report significant growth in their instructional effectiveness, confidence, and leadership capacity. The experience cultivates habits of reflection, inquiry, and collaboration that extend far beyond the certification itself.

Who is Eligible?

To be eligible to pursue National Board Certification, you must meet the following requirements:

1. Hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution (this requirement may be waived if you teach in a Career and Technical Education field that doesn't require a bachelor's degree for your current license).
2. Hold a valid Kentucky teaching or counseling license.
3. Successfully complete three years of teaching or counseling at one or more early childhood, elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

Note: Those pursuing a World Language certificate must also meet the ACTFL language proficiency requirement.

Certificate Areas

NBPTS offers 25 certificate areas that combine a content area with a developmental level. When selecting a certificate, it is important to consider both what you teach and the age range of the students you serve. Current National Board certificate areas as well as tips for selecting your certificate area can be found below.

Content Area	Developmental Level(s)
Art	• Early and Middle Childhood (Ages 3-12) • Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)
Career and Technical Education	• Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)
English as a New Language	• Early and Middle Childhood (Ages 3-12) • Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)
English Language Arts	• Early Adolescence (Ages 11-15) • Adolescence and Young Adulthood (Ages 14-18+)
Exceptional Needs Specialist	• Early Childhood through Young Adulthood (Birth-Age 21+)
Generalist	• Early Childhood (Ages 3-8) • Middle Childhood (Ages 7-12)
Health Education	• Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)
Library Media	• Early Childhood through Young Adulthood (Ages 3-18+)
Literacy: Reading-Language Arts	• Early and Middle Childhood (Ages 3-12)
Mathematics	• Early Adolescence (Ages 11-15) • Adolescence and Young Adulthood (Ages 14-18+)

Music	• Early and Middle Childhood (Ages 3-12) • Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)
Physical Education	• Early and Middle Childhood (Ages 3-12) • Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)
School Counseling	• Early Childhood through Young Adulthood (Ages 3-18+)
Science	• Early Adolescence (Ages 11-15) • Adolescence and Young Adulthood (Ages 14-18+)
Social Studies-History	• Early Adolescence (Ages 11-15) • Adolescence and Young Adulthood (Ages 14-18+)
World Languages	• Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)

Component guides for each specific certificate can be accessed on [this page of the NBPTS website](#).

Start with Your Current Teaching Assignment

National Board Certification is designed to recognize accomplished teaching practice within specific developmental levels and content areas. Candidates should select a certificate that closely matches the students they teach and the content they are responsible for delivering.

As you explore certificate options, consider:

- The age or developmental level of the students you serve
- The subject area(s) you teach
- The instructional responsibilities you have on a daily basis
- The setting in which you work

While there is no requirement that your teaching assignment perfectly matches the certificate area, you should have regular access to students, instructional materials, and evidence that align with the certificate's standards and portfolio requirements.

Review the Certificate Standards Carefully

Each National Board certificate has its own set of standards describing accomplished teaching within that field. Before making a final decision, read the standards for any certificate areas you are considering. You can access standards for each certificate on the [NBPTS website](#).

Consider Your Experience and Expertise

Candidates are often most successful when they select a certificate area in which they have established instructional expertise. Think about where you have developed strong content knowledge, refined instructional strategies, and meaningful experience with student learning.

Remember that National Board Certification is not an assessment of potential. It is an opportunity to demonstrate accomplished practice that you have already developed.

***Per KRS 157.395, it is important to note that, "If a nationally certified teacher becomes no longer employed as a classroom teacher or a teacher mentor in the field of his or her national certification, the (\$2,000) supplement shall cease." Therefore, it is important to choose your certificate carefully to align with current and future career goals.**

Timeline for Completion

One of the benefits of National Board Certification is the flexibility candidates have in completing the process. Rather than completing all requirements at once, candidates may choose to complete the four certification components over one, two, or three years, allowing them to select a pace that best fits their professional and personal commitments.

Some candidates elect to complete all four components in a single year, while others spread the work over multiple years to allow for more time to gather evidence, reflect on their practice, and balance other responsibilities. Many candidates choose to complete one or two components per year, creating a manageable workload while making steady progress toward certification.

Because each component is scored independently, candidates receive scores as components are completed. This allows candidates to track their progress throughout the certification journey and focus their efforts on remaining components in subsequent years.

When developing a certification plan, candidates should carefully consider their schedule, workload, and available support. Choosing a realistic timeline can help reduce stress and increase the likelihood of a successful certification experience. Ultimately, there is no "right" pace. Candidates should select the timeline that best supports their learning, growth, and success.

Component 1: Content Knowledge

Component 1 is a computer-based assessment that measures a candidate's knowledge of content and pedagogy within their selected certificate area. Through this assessment, candidates demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter they teach, as well as their ability to apply that knowledge to support student learning across the full age range and ability levels represented by their certificate.

Unlike the portfolio components, Component 1 is completed at an authorized testing center during a scheduled assessment session. The assessment is designed to evaluate both content expertise and instructional decision-making, reflecting the National Board's expectations for accomplished teaching.

The assessment consists of two types of questions:

- Selected Response Items (SRIs): Multiple-choice questions that assess content knowledge and pedagogical understanding.
- Constructed Response Exercises (CREs): Written responses that require candidates to analyze scenarios, evaluate student understanding, and explain instructional decisions using evidence and professional knowledge.

Candidates are expected to demonstrate:

- Deep understanding of content standards and concepts.
- Knowledge of how students learn within the certificate area.
- Ability to analyze student thinking and performance.
- Use of developmentally appropriate instructional practices.
- Understanding of equitable and effective teaching strategies.

Weight in the Certification Process

Component 1 carries the greatest weight in the National Board Certification scoring process, accounting for 40% of the total certification score. Because of its significant impact on overall results, candidates should devote substantial time to studying both content knowledge and certificate-specific standards.

Preparing for Success

Successful candidates begin by thoroughly reviewing:

- The Five Core Propositions
- National Board Standards for their certificate area
- Component 1 instructions and assessment policies
- Certificate-specific content expectations and study materials

Many candidates find it helpful to create study guides, review content across the entire certificate age range, practice responding to written prompts, and engage with support networks or candidate cohorts. Since the assessment evaluates knowledge across the full developmental range of the certificate, candidates should prepare beyond the grade level they currently teach.

Component 2: Differentiation in Instruction

Component 2 focuses on a candidate's ability to understand individual students and use that knowledge to design and deliver instruction that advances learning for all students. This portfolio component asks candidates to demonstrate how they identify students' strengths, needs, backgrounds, interests, and readiness levels and then differentiate instruction accordingly.

Through written commentary and samples of student work, candidates illustrate how they:

- Gather information about individual learners.
- Design instruction that responds to diverse learning needs.
- Use assessments to monitor progress.
- Provide feedback that supports student growth.
- Reflect on instructional decisions and student outcomes.

Unlike Component 1, which emphasizes content knowledge, Component 2 emphasizes the candidate's ability to translate that knowledge into meaningful learning experiences for individual students. Successful submissions clearly demonstrate the candidate's understanding of students as learners and provide evidence of how instructional decisions positively impact student achievement.

Weight in the Certification Process

Component 2 accounts for 15% of a candidate's total certification score. While it carries less weight than Component 1 and Component 3, it provides an important opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of students and the ability to adapt instruction to support diverse learners.

Preparing for Success

Strong candidates begin preparing early by identifying students who represent diverse learning profiles and collecting evidence of instruction and assessment throughout the school year.

Component 3: Teaching Practice and Learning Environment

Component 3 focuses on instructional practice through video evidence of teaching and learning. Candidates submit classroom video recordings and written analyses that demonstrate their ability to engage students in meaningful learning experiences and create a positive learning environment.

Candidates analyze:

- Student engagement and participation.
- Instructional strategies and teacher decision-making.
- Classroom culture and learning environment.
- Student interactions and discourse.
- Evidence of student thinking and learning.

The goal is not to present a perfect lesson but to demonstrate accomplished teaching and thoughtfully analyze instructional practice.

Weight in the Certification Process

Component 3 accounts for 30% of the total certification score, making it the second most heavily weighted component. Because of its significant impact on overall certification results, candidates should devote substantial time to selecting, reviewing, and analyzing their video evidence.

Preparing for Success

Successful candidates often begin recording lessons well before submission deadlines. Doing so provides multiple opportunities to capture strong evidence of student learning and engagement.

Component 4: Effective and Reflective Practitioner

Component 4 highlights a candidate's professional responsibilities beyond direct classroom instruction. Accomplished teachers influence student success through collaboration, reflection, leadership, advocacy, and partnerships with families and colleagues.

Candidates provide evidence demonstrating how they:

- Use data to inform instructional and professional decisions.
- Collaborate with colleagues to improve student outcomes.
- Engage families and caregivers in student learning.
- Reflect on and improve their professional practice.
- Contribute to their school, district, profession, or community.

Component 4 emphasizes that accomplished teaching extends beyond daily classroom instruction and includes leadership and service that positively affect students and schools.

Weight in the Certification Process

Component 4 accounts for 15% of the total certification score. Although it is one of the lower-weighted components, it provides candidates with an important opportunity to demonstrate leadership, collaboration, and professional impact.

Preparing for Success

Because much of the evidence for Component 4 develops naturally over time, candidates should begin gathering documentation as early as possible.

Helpful preparation strategies include:

- Maintain records of collaborative work and professional learning activities.
- Save examples of family communication and engagement efforts.
- Collect evidence of leadership roles and contributions.
- Keep notes about professional reflections and resulting changes in practice.

Scoring

For many first-time candidates, National Board scoring can feel overwhelming. Understanding how scores are calculated, what constitutes accomplished teaching, and how certification decisions are made can help candidates approach the process with greater confidence and develop a strategic plan for success.

How Components Are Scored

Each component is scored independently and contributes a specific percentage toward a candidate's total certification score. The weighted scores from all four components are combined to determine a candidate's overall certification score. Weights for each component are listed in this guide under each component's explanation.

Understanding the Rubric Scale

Components that are scored by assessors are evaluated using a rubric score scale ranging from 0.75 to 4.25. The scale is divided into four performance levels, with plus (+) and minus (–) designations within each level.

A score of 2.75 represents the entry point for accomplished teaching and is considered the lowest score that demonstrates clear evidence of accomplished practice.. While earning individual scores above 2.75 is a positive indication, certification is based on the combined weighted score across all four components, not solely on performance in any single component.

Important Information for First-Time Candidates

Many successful NBCTs did not certify on their first attempt. National Board allows candidates to retake components to improve their overall score if necessary. Retakes provide an opportunity to strengthen evidence, refine writing, and demonstrate growth as an accomplished educator. Candidates should not view retakes as failure but rather as part of a reflective professional learning process.

Throughout the certification process, candidates should remember a simple principle: Assessors can only score the evidence that is submitted. Strong candidates make their evidence explicit by clearly explaining what they did, why they made those decisions, how those decisions impacted student learning, and what they learned through reflection.

Score Release

Components are generally submitted online in late spring. Scores are not released until early December of the submission year. This is because scoring is done by educators over the summer. Candidates receive a notification when scores become available and can access their reports online. Reports include individual component scores, certification status, and information about next steps.

Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

National Board Certification is a milestone, but it also reflects a commitment to continuous professional growth. Initial certification lasts five years. To maintain their status as an NBCT, educators must complete the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) process before their certification expires. Through MOC, teachers demonstrate that they continue to grow professionally and positively impact student learning.

Successfully meeting MOC requirements extends an NBCT's certification five years beyond the current certificate expiration date. The MOC process is also significantly less intensive than initial certification. In fact, more than 99% of NBCTs successfully demonstrate that they are maintaining certification.

For candidates just beginning the certification process, MOC may seem far away. However, the habits developed throughout National Board Certification, including reflection, evidence collection, and continuous improvement, will help prepare educators for maintaining certification throughout their careers

Cost

Currently (October 2026), the Kentucky Legislature no longer funds the Teachers' National Certification Incentive Trust Fund. This means that it is up to candidates to pay for their own registration and components. However, incentives for certification (explained in section two of this guide) quickly help candidates make up for their initial investment. NBCT remains one of the cheapest options for teachers to achieve rank change in Kentucky. NBPTS also offers payment plan options to help candidates spread out the cost of certification over six months.

For each assessment year in which candidates submit components, they must pay a \$75 registration fee. Each of the four certification components costs \$475. As a result, candidates who complete all four components in a single year can expect to pay \$1,975 (\$1,900 in component fees plus the \$75 registration fee).

Candidates may choose to spread the certification process over three years, allowing them to distribute both the workload and costs. If a component must be retaken, candidates are responsible for paying the applicable registration fee and component fee again.

Maintenance of Certification (MOC), which is completed every five years, costs \$495, plus a \$75 registration fee.

Dates and Deadlines for the 2026-2027 Cycle

The following graphic outlines the important dates and deadlines for the 2026-2027 cycle:

2026-2027

DATES AND DEADLINES

NATIONAL BOARD

for Professional Teaching Standards®

Registration Window	June 1, 2026- February 28, 2027
Registration and Component Purchase Deadline <i>(includes payment of registration and component fees)</i>	February 28, 2027
Third-Party Payer Funding*	February 8, 2027
Third-Party Payer Designation**	February 22, 2027
Change of Component Selection	February 28, 2027
Change of Certificate and/or Specialty Area	March 19, 2027
Withdrawal Deadline	February 28, 2027
Component 1: Content Knowledge Testing Window	March 1-June 15, 2027
ePortfolio Submission Window	April 1- June 15, 2027
Score Release	On or By December 4, 2027

*This is the final date we will accept funding from Third-Party Payers.

**This is the final date for Third-Party Payers to designate funding to individual candidate accounts. Candidates will be allowed to purchase components through February 28.

Some specific dates you should note:

February 28, 2027- Last date to register for the 2026-2027 cycle

June 15, 2027- The last date to submit components

December 4, 2027- Scores are released

Part 2: The Candidate Experience

Kentucky Incentives

Although National Board Certification requires a significant upfront investment, many educators find that the professional growth, state incentives, and long-term career benefits make the process well worth the cost. In Kentucky, teachers who achieve certification are eligible for both **a rank change** and a **\$2,000 annual stipend** as long as they maintain an active National Board certificate and meet state requirements. With these incentives, many educators recover the cost of certification within just a few years.

When an educator's initial certification period ends, those who choose not to pursue MOC will retain their rank change; however, they will no longer be eligible to receive the annual stipend. Additionally, under KRS 157.395, educators must be employed as a classroom teacher or mentor in the field of their National Board certification to receive the supplement. If an NBCT is no longer serving in one of those roles, the annual stipend will cease.

Submitting Required Documentation

Once receiving a notification in your NBCT account that you have attained certification, educators in Kentucky should login to their [KECS account](#). Once logged in, educators should click "Profile" in the top left corner. From here, click "Applications" from the menu on the left. Once on the applications page, click the blue "+ new" button.

From here, select "Rank Change (CA-1)." On the next page, select National Board from the dropdown menu. You will need to submit both your certificate letter and verification letter in this application. Both can be downloaded from your NBCT account.

Once your application is complete, educators will pay the \$85 processing fee. In addition to adding your rank change in the KECS system, educators should submit paperwork to their district financial office as each district is responsible for paying the \$2,000 stipend.

After a rank change application has been approved, the Kentucky Department of Education no longer plays a role in tracking maintenance of certification. When educators complete MOC, the updated paperwork should be submitted to their district's financial office. Educators are responsible for ensuring their certification does not lapse.

One benefit of the Maintenance of Certification process is its flexibility. NBCTs have two opportunities, or assessment cycles, to successfully complete MOC before their certificate expires. This allows educators who do not meet the requirements during their first attempt to revise and resubmit during the next available cycle while maintaining their certification status.

Why Pursue Certification?

National Board Certification is widely recognized as the highest professional credential available to teachers. More importantly, research consistently shows that NBCTs make a measurable difference in student learning and demonstrate accomplished teaching practices that positively impact students, schools, and the profession.

National Board Certified Teachers Improve Student Learning

Across numerous studies, students taught by NBCTs consistently demonstrate higher academic growth than students taught by non-certified peers. Researchers have found that students of NBCTs often achieve the equivalent of one to two additional months of learning during an academic year. These findings have been observed across multiple states, grade levels, and assessment measures, providing strong evidence that National Board Certification is linked to improved student outcomes.

For teachers considering certification, this means the process is more than earning a credential. It is an opportunity to strengthen instructional practice in ways that can have a lasting impact on student achievement.

Certification Identifies Accomplished Teaching

Research has consistently shown that National Board Certification serves as a reliable indicator of teaching effectiveness. Unlike certifications based solely on coursework or years of experience, National Board Certification requires candidates to provide evidence of their practice, analyze student learning, and demonstrate their impact through a rigorous performance-based assessment process.

Teachers who achieve certification have demonstrated advanced knowledge of their content area, effective instructional decision-making, and a commitment to continuous reflection and improvement.

Make a Difference for All Students

Research suggests that the positive impact of NBCTs may be especially significant for students in high-need schools and traditionally underserved populations. The accomplished teaching practices emphasized throughout the certification process, including differentiation, reflection, and responsiveness to student needs, help educators create equitable learning opportunities and support growth for all learners.

Strengthen Your Professional Practice

Many NBCTs report that the greatest benefit of certification is professional growth. The process encourages educators to:

- Reflect deeply on their instructional decisions.
- Analyze student learning and assessment data.
- Refine teaching practices.
- Strengthen communication with families and colleagues.
- Develop habits of continuous improvement.

Open Doors to Leadership Opportunities

National Board Certification is frequently recognized as a mark of instructional expertise. As a result, NBCTs are often sought out for leadership roles such as:

- Mentor teacher
- Instructional coach
- Department chair
- Professional learning facilitator
- Curriculum leader
- District and state advisory positions

Advice from NBCTs

The following quotes are from Kentucky teachers and offer advice to educators interested in pursuing National Board Certification.

"GO FOR IT! IT'S INTENSE! IT'S RIGOROUS,
BUT IT'S SO WORTH
IT. YOU FIND OUT SO MUCH ABOUT
YOURSELF THROUGH THE PROCESS.
YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT
EDUCATION, CURRENT PRACTICES,
AND METHODS THAN YOU EVER
THOUGHT POSSIBLE."
-OLIVIA COMBS, PERRY COUNTY

"By fiercely guarding dedicated time
for writing and reflection, and
surrounding yourself with a trusted
group to share feedback, you will
transform your teaching—so don't
hesitate, just jump in, because you **CAN**
do this!" -Sarah Reed, Jefferson County

"Treat it like a marathon, not a sprint. Set aside
dedicated time each week to work on the process,
even if it's just a few hours. Consistency is much
more effective than trying to complete everything
at once. I encourage candidates to celebrate the
small accomplishments along the way!"
-Delisa Brooks, Shelby County

*"I wholeheartedly encourage you to
pursue it! Through this journey, I
grew not only as a teacher, but also
as an educator, collaborator,
colleague, and individual."
-Erin Peach, Frankfort Independent*

"Don't try to be perfect, just be
honest about your practice. Some
parts feel overwhelming, but if you
keep moving forward, you'll surprise
yourself with how much you grow!"
-Zach Parsons, Russell Independent

Part 3: Getting Started

Creating an Account

To create an account, navigate to the NBCT [Pearson Educator Portal](#).

Important note: When you create an account, please be sure you enter your EPSB ID number under the field "license number." This ensures your results are factored into your school's targeted quality measure score as part of the state's accountability system. Your ID number can be found on the [KECS website](#) under your profile.

Exploring NBCT Resources

Pursuing National Board Certification is a significant professional undertaking, but candidates do not have to navigate the process alone. A wide variety of resources are available to help educators understand certification requirements, develop strong submissions, and stay organized throughout the journey.

The first and most important resource is the [NBPTS website](#), which serves as the official source for all certification information. Candidates should become familiar with these resources linked within the NBPTS website:

1. [General Portfolio Instructions](#): Provides overall requirements, policies, and submission expectations for all certification components.
2. [Certificate Area Standards](#): Defines the characteristics of accomplished teaching within a specific certificate area.
3. [Certificate Area Component Guides](#): Outlines the requirements, prompts, and evidence needed for each certification component.
4. [The Scoring Guide](#): Explains how submissions are evaluated and what performance looks like at each score level.
5. [Homeroom](#): A collection of resources designed to help educators navigate the Board certification process from start to submission.
6. [ATLAS](#): Offers videos of accomplished teaching practices to support candidates' professional learning.
7. [Webinars](#): Provide live and recorded guidance on certification requirements, strategies, and candidate support.

Finally, candidates may use the [NBCT directory](#) to search for and connect with NBCTs in Kentucky and across the country. This directory may be helpful identifying NBCTs in your area, providing opportunities to seek mentorship, guidance, and support throughout the certification process.

The Kentucky NBCT Network

The KY NBCT Network is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that believes the National Board process and resources are valuable for supporting all teachers' growth and deepening reflection. In partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education, they also host the Kentucky National Board ceremony for newly certified and maintaining educators each winter.

Benefits of membership to this group include:

- Opportunities to network with like-minded NBCTs in Kentucky and across the country
- Leadership opportunities and ways to grow and stretch beyond certification
- Access to high quality resources
- Cool #NBCTStrong Swag
- A chance to make a real difference in improving education for ALL Kentucky students

You can become a lifetime member of the KY NBCT network for just \$25. [Visit their website](#) to become a member today.

Additional Supports

Many districts and educational cooperatives in Kentucky offer National Board candidate cohorts that provide guidance, resources, and encouragement throughout the certification process. Candidates should reach out to district leaders or professional learning staff to determine whether a cohort already exists in their district. If one is not available, consider working with district leadership or local NBCTs to explore creating a cohort. Participating in a cohort can help candidates stay motivated, connected, and on track toward certification.

You can also access a list of [Kentucky NBCT mentors here](#). Mentors have all completed the Professional Learning Facilitator course through the Kentucky Education Association and can provide 1:1 assistance to candidates. Mentoring fees are determined by individual mentors and may vary based on the services provided.

You can also browse available resources on the [GoTeachKY website](#) which include FAQs, candidate resources, information on creating a cohort, and recorded webinars.

Contact

Candidates are encouraged to seek support throughout their National Board Certification journey. Questions about certification requirements, registration, policies, and technical processes should be directed to National Board. Questions about Kentucky-specific supports, incentives, and resources may be directed to the Kentucky Department of Education.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

Website: www.nbpts.org

Customer Support: 1-800-228-3224

Homeroom: <https://nbpts.org/candidate-center/>

Kentucky Department of Education

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