

District teacher takes her skills to a higher level

Christie Olsen teaches 4th grade at Oro Grande Elementary and is in her 11th year with Lake Havasu Unified School District. She recently became one of only 146 teachers in Arizona to be awarded National Board Certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The certification process costs the candidate significant time and money, but Mrs. Olsen says, “I would highly recommend it to any educator who wants to improve their practice.” She says her husband (Larry Olsen, a teacher at our high school) deserves a medal for all his help and support. This included getting up at 4 a.m. to go with her to Phoenix to meet with her mentors, and keeping their two children occupied while she devoted time to her studies.



Mrs. Olsen

Superintendent, Dr. Joe Meli, says, “We are very proud of Christie Olsen in achieving National Board Certification. This represents hard work, commitment and a great deal of professional growth and development.”

What is this all about? What is National Board Certification? According to The National Education Association:

National Board Certification, a growing part of the national effort to strengthen standards for the teaching profession, is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential that goes beyond state licensure by creating national standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. The National Board certifies teachers who successfully complete its rigorous certification process.

[The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards](#), the organization that awards National Board Certification, says its mission is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by

- maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do,
- providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards, and
- advocating related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in American education and to capitalize on the expertise of

National Board Certified Teachers.

National Board Certification is not a replacement for state certification. In fact, an applicant must have already taught for at least 3 years to enter the national certification process, and that process is a daunting one. [The National Board Certification Handbook](#) (2002 by Stenhouse Publishing, edited by Diane Barone) lists fifteen criteria to help decide if you are ready to try for National Board Certification. They include

- I have 200 to 400 hours to work on this process.
- I can teach to high standards.
- I routinely analyze students' work and then use this information to guide my teaching.
- I have no problem meeting with a cohort group on Saturdays.
- I have no major life events happening this year (e.g., a new baby, marriage, divorce)
- My family and colleagues are ready to support me.
- I can afford \$2,300 for this process.

Mrs. Olsen says that she invested 600 hours of time to acquire the certification. 500 hours went into preparing the required portfolio, which included video tapes of her classroom work, samples of student work, evidence of contact with students' families, evidence that she continues to learn and is a leader in her peer group, and critical descriptions and analysis of all the above. 100 additional hours went into preparing for a written test designed to demonstrate her knowledge of science, math, reading, social studies, health, and art. Mrs. Olsen says, "The process focuses on **what goes on in the classroom, with the students**. National Certification demands that a teacher critically analyze what goes on in their classroom and why." Scholarships from Arizona State University/Arizona Education Association and State Farm Insurance helped with Mrs. Olsen's expenses.

Mrs. Olsen is now a National Board Certified Middle Childhood Generalist. She feels her efforts have made her a better teacher, and she looks forward to once again having some spare time (at least until she sets her sights on a new goal).

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