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***New Study: Teacher Prep Programs Fail to Prepare Future Preschool Teachers  
in Essential Classroom Skills***

*Even many "Gold Standard" programs lack essential content  
that many assume is being taught*

Washington, D.C. – A new study from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) takes a first look at the inner workings of teacher preparation programs aimed at aspiring preschool teachers, discovering major omissions in essential content and best practices.

The study, *Some Assembly Required: Piecing Together the Preparation Preschool Teachers Need*, examines a large sample 100 teacher prep programs located in 29 states. All but 5 of the 100 programs lead to a bachelor's or master's degree—considered by many states and preschool advocates to be the "gold standard" for ensuring a well prepared preschool teacher. The study scanned these programs for their coverage of a range of topics accepted by preschool experts as essential: building language, vocabulary and literacy skills; introducing math and science concepts; understanding the development of young children; and being able to create a warm and productive classroom environment.

Kate Walsh, President of NCTQ, remarked, "While states continue to invest heavily in preschool, they too often overlook the quality of those preschools, and particularly their most important ingredient: the classroom teacher. It's no wonder that increasing funding for preschool has yielded such mixed results."

Walsh continued, "If preschool is as crucial as so many experts believe it to be, then training for preschool teachers must be just as important. Today, that is not the case."

"Examining how teachers are trained to teach our children is vitally important," said Todd Klunk, program officer of Education and Learning at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "When educators receive the development and training they need to deliver high-quality early learning in the classroom, they're helping to ensure that those children are ready to succeed in life."

**Big takeaways for states:**

- In many states and programs, preschool teachers receive training alongside of teachers heading to older grades, with the result that their coursework often marginalizes the content specific to preschool years. In a typical two-year training program, preschool content is typically either completely overlooked or may be addressed in a tiny fraction

of a single course. For example, the average program devotes 2 percent of a program's total coursework to language development.

- States and programs should not assume that a BA or MA degree ensures that a preschool teacher is fully prepared. States may need to be far more explicit about essential content or no longer allow individual programs to prepare teachers for so many grades.

## **Highlights**

### On language and literacy:

- On the plus side, more programs addressed this essential content than other areas reviewed in this study, yet the coverage was by no means universal:
  - Four in ten programs fail to address how to build young children's language, essential for closing the achievement gap between children of different socioeconomic backgrounds.
  - Almost no programs (20 percent) spend time learning about and practicing a central preschool strategy: reading books out loud.

### On mathematics and science

- Emergent math concepts such as comparing shapes, exploring patterns, and measuring objects should be introduced in preschool, yet fewer than half of the programs (40 percent) require a course that includes teaching math to preschool children.
- Only a third of programs dedicate time to how to teach science to young children.

### On classroom environment and child development:

- Despite the alarming and escalating rate of suspensions among preschool children, teacher prep programs routinely fail to evaluate student teachers on their ability to manage a classroom of young children.
  - Only 19 percent of programs hold candidates responsible for knowing how to redirect a young child who is engaging in disruptive behavior.

Strong executive function is considered essential to help children develop reasoning and focus their attention, and is associated with improving reading and math skills. Yet only half of programs (48 percent) evaluate student teachers on whether they help children build executive functioning skills.

For the study, NCTQ reviewed multiple data sources, with particular emphasis on outcome measures used to evaluate what preschool candidates know and can do upon completion of their student teaching. Sources included program's course requirements, class lecture topics, required textbooks, assignments, and student teaching evaluation instruments. The full study, as well as policy recommendations and preschool teacher resources can be accessed [here](#).

***NCTQ is grateful to the W.K Kellogg Foundation for the funding for this work.***

## **About the National Council on Teacher Quality**

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group committed to modernizing the teaching profession based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. To that end we work to achieve

fundamental changes in the policy and practices of teacher preparation programs, school districts, state governments, and teachers unions. Our [Board of Directors](#) and [Advisory Board](#) come from a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives, and they all believe that policy changes are overdue in the recruitment and retention of teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)

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