

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

**A** new study from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) takes a 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.

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too man

### Some Assembly Required

Piecing Together the Preparation  
Preschool Teachers Need

Hannah Putman, Amber Moorer & Kate Walsh

National Council on Teacher Quality

They rarely  
evaluate a  
candidate's  
ability to  
redirect  
children's  
off-task behavior  
misbehavior

They spend  
too little  
time on how  
young children  
develop

While many allow  
candidates to  
student teach  
in preschools,  
they don't pay  
enough attention  
to the quality of  
the experience

Bottom line problem?  
Most programs focus too  
much training on how to  
teach older kids.

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 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 a 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 socio-economic 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. Visit [nctq.org/dmsView/Preschool](http://nctq.org/dmsView/Preschool) to check out the full study along with policy recommendations and preschool teacher resources! ■

# How to Overcome Writer's Block: Advice from Published Authors

Sometimes the hardest part of writing for students is just getting started. When words don't come, what is there to do? Some call it writer's block: the challenge to start (or keep) writing.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) interviewed several of their authors and novelists to get their tips for how to overcome writer's block.

### John Joseph Adams, series editor of *Best American Science Fiction & Fantasy*

When you finish a story, don't submit it right away. Set it aside and don't look at it for a week or so. Meanwhile, work on your next story. After you've let it sit for a week and you've distracted your brain with other creative projects, then look at the story again one last time—with hopefully fresher eyes—and see if you can find some ways to improve it before sending it to an editor. Giving yourself this distance can be essential in finding a story's flaws before sending it out into the world.

### Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*, *Number the Stars*, and *Anastasia Krupnik*

Did you ever go to have your braces adjusted and hear your orthodontist say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I can't do it. I have dentist's block today." Of course not. There is no such thing. There is also no such thing as writer's block. It is just a made-up phrase that means: I don't feel like writing right now.

Everyone feels that way now and then but for some reason writers, maybe because they have better imaginations than dentists, are the only ones who have given the feeling a silly name. The way to get over it? Yawn and stretch and go back to work.

### Jacqueline Davies, author of *The Lemonade War* series

If you're stuck in the middle of your story, staring at a screen and the words won't come, get up and do something physical and repetitive: take a walk, go for a run, go for a swim, jump on an elliptical. Do something where your body has to work, but your brain has nothing to do. So if you usually listen to music while you run, don't. If you usually watch TV when you're on the treadmill, don't. If you usually talk on the phone when you walk, don't. Just figure out a way to move your body and leave your brain completely blank. I guarantee you will think of the next (possible) idea for your story. Something to try. You won't be stuck. You'll be moving forward. ■

*A version of this article was originally posted on HMH's Blog, The Spark; published with permission from HMH. HMH is currently seeking the nation's best short stories written by high school authors for the Spark a Story contest, open until October 7.*

Visit [aeteachers.org/blog](http://aeteachers.org/blog) to read the full list of quotes on writers block on our blog!

## AAE's Legal Corner: Bullying in the Workplace

**Y**our coworker is snide and rude. He or she keeps undermining you in meetings, sending nasty emails, and is generally condescending. You could swear in the hallway yesterday the coworker deliberately bumped into you (but was quick to apologize).

Is it bullying? Work is miserable and you want to quit. What are your other options?

These days a number of schools have anti-bullying/harassment policies for employees. If your school has such a policy, take advantage of it and file a complaint.

If you have no policy in place on which to rely, analyze the behavior aimed at you. Is it inappropriate? Bullying does not have to be intentional and can include the following:

**Verbal:** This includes someone who is lying about you (slander), ridiculing you or your family, name calling, making you the butt of jokes, or generally engaging in abusive or offensive remarks. This can be in your presence, through emails, on the internet, or during conversations with others.

**Gestures:** People can also bully through gestures, which can include threatening gestures, eye contact, or glances that convey threatening messages.

**Physical:** The most commonly understood type of bullying includes pushing, shoving, tripping, assaulting, or damaging to work areas or property.

**Exclusion:** Unfortunately this occurs more often in the workplace than anywhere else and it includes excluding or disregarding someone in a workplace setting by physically excluding (e.g. locking a door so you cannot come in to a meeting), failing to advise you of an activity, or excluding you from social events involving others in the workplace. Generally it is not bullying for people to socialize outside of work and not include you. However, if there is a function that involves all of your colleagues and you are the one excluded, that could rise to the level of bullying.

If you believe you are being bullied, seek help. You're a professional and you deserve the same professionalism in the workplace. You are not required to work in an abusive situation. Contact AAE's Legal Services Department today. We are here to help. ■



**Sharon Nelson** is the director of legal services for the Association of American Educators. In this capacity, Ms. Nelson oversees AAE's extensive legal teams across the country and works daily with members and panel counsel to address member legal concerns. A passionate advocate for educators, Ms. Nelson has been a lawyer focusing on employee rights issues for nearly 20 years.

# Member Perspective: Bigger & Better

**A**s I gear up to start a new job and a new school year, my mom came to help me. Mid-August is not only my busiest time of year, but also my husband's. I am so thankful that my mom is often able to come and help out. As I was discussing my new job with my mom last week, I explained how I've finally accepted my calling.

"Last year I was looking for something bigger, better. I wanted to leave education or move up in some way. However, as I interviewed and then accepted my new job, I realized that I am a teacher. This is what God has called me to do."

My mom looked at me and said, "What could be bigger or better than being a teacher? I am so proud of you."

This simple comment changed my entire perspective. I had previously considered becoming a special education director. My husband and I struggled through this decision as he told me he did not think that I would enjoy that. I was frustrated in the classroom and thought that the answer was to leave. At the end of a very difficult school year last year, I received many affirmations that I was a good teacher. I had many comments from students and parents. All of the frustrations and challenges were worth it when I learned that I made a difference for students.

This new perspective provided by my mom has helped me to realize that there is nothing bigger or better than what I am called to do. I use my talents, affect lives, and let my

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light shine. We all need to accept our calling with grace and gratitude. Society tells us that being an executive is better than being a stay-at-home mom or dad. It tells us that being a doctor is better than being a nurse. It tells us that being a principal or superintendent is better than being a teacher. Society lies.

You must let your light shine in whatever you are called to do. This is the only way that you will find joy in your career. It is the only way that our society can flourish. When people want to have jobs that they think are valuable or where they can make the most money, they will be miserable. These people will develop anxiety or depression, and may commit suicide. The pressure to have an "important" job destroys people. We wonder why workers in the United States are so stressed; the answer is that they are not letting their light shine. They are punching in, they are running on the gerbil wheel, but they are not doing what they are passionate about.

Find your passion, then find a way to make money doing it. This may not sound possible, but it's not as difficult as it seems. When I talk to students about future careers, I do not ask them what they want to be, I ask them what they want to do. I know that my children's careers may not even exist yet. I have had multiple jobs that I did not know existed when I went to college.

The other very important part of finding your passion is to experiment. Job shadows are crucial for young people, even beginning in middle school. Starting job shadows in the senior year is too late. Job shadowing is a special education initiative, but it should be part of everyone's education.

Job shadows are important not only in school but also for adults. If you are considering a job change, take a day to shadow someone in the job that you are considering. When I looked closer at my director's job, I realized that he spent most of his time in meetings and doing paper work. My desire to be a special education director was to support teachers and help them be the best that they could be. I realized that I could do that better by simply supporting my fellow teachers.

Accept what you are called to do, embrace it, and excel at it. Then, you can truly *let your light shine!* ■



An active AAE member, **Michelle Uetz** has been a teacher her entire life. From making her siblings play school to a bachelor's degree in biology and health education and then a master's degree in special education. The more she teaches, the more she learns. She speaks at conferences, provides presentations to parents, writes articles, research, and blogs, and consults with parents on various issues. She's currently a special education teacher in Minnesota.



# My Day: Virtual School Teacher Amy Rosno

**A**fter teaching in a traditional brick and mortar school for ten years, I was offered the opportunity to teach for a virtual high school my school district was starting. I was thrilled at the opportunity as I always had a love for technology. Twelve years after accepting the position, I am still a virtual teacher and would struggle to go back to a traditional classroom. For twelve years, my day has not been determined by the ringing of a bell. I am not limited to a 45-minute class period, and I can work one-on-one with a student for as long as needed. Because I work from home, my face-to-face colleagues think I lounge in my pajamas all day. To be honest, some days I do. However, that's only because the minute I fired up my computer in the morning, I didn't have a moment's free time. To describe a typical day is difficult because every day is different. However, if I did have a typical day, here's what one might look like.

## 6:00 a.m. The commute

I begin my morning commute from my bedroom to the back door and usher the dogs out for the morning. In passing through the living room, I fire up my laptop. Dogs are fed, I have a cup of coffee in hand, and I am ready to begin my day.

## 6:15 – 8:00 a.m. My quiet time

I call this my quiet time because during this time, I receive few emails before 8:00 a.m. Most of my students are still sleeping. I teach five separate classes and have started this school year with 277 8th-12th grade students. I open my browser and log in to my work email account and the school website. I first tackle all emails that came in since I last logged off. All emails must be responded to within 24 hrs. If it's the first week of school, I usually have 50-plus emails waiting for me; on an average day, a handful. Emails are answered, and I move on to grading. All assignments must be graded within a week from the day they were submitted. Depending on the time of year, I could be grading work that was due week 1 or week 10. Our school has no deadlines except the last day of the semester. The entire semester is available for students to work through at their own pace.

## 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. Mental health break

If my morning is going well, I take a break. If the weather is good here in Wisconsin, I walk my dogs or head to the gym, but I at least try to squeeze in breakfast and a shower during this window. If these daily tasks aren't taken care of by 10, then there's a good chance I won't have a free minute again until after 4:00.



## WHAT IS YOUR DAY LIKE? AAE WANTS TO KNOW!

Walk us through your day: the highlights, the challenges, the typical moments, and the extraordinary ones. Keep a log of your day and what happened, before, during, and after school. AAE wants to educate the public and policymakers about what it is really like to be a teacher. Will you participate? Email [editor@aaeteacher.org](mailto:editor@aaeteacher.org) today!

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#### 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. eSession time

Once a week, I meet each of my classes online during a live lesson called an eSession. These sessions typically last an hour, and during this time I answer questions, review the week’s material, have peer editing sessions, or do anything an English teacher would do during a typical class period. These sessions are very interactive. We can hear each other, text each other, and see each other. I also can take students on a web tour, show a video clip, and share a whiteboard. I can also send students to “breakout rooms” where they are assigned a task and collaborate for the session. Attendance at the session is not mandatory. Our school prides itself on flexibility, and by requiring students to be online at a set time each class, we would lose that feature. These sessions are recorded, and students can listen at their leisure.

#### 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Back to square one

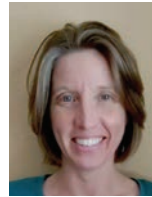
While I was busy holding eSessions, my email box and gradebook filled up, so it’s back to square one. Within that pile of emails, a student requested a one-on-one help session. We meet online and work through the assignment for however long it takes. Another student and I collaborate in real time on Google doc discussing how to write an effective introduction for the essay due the following week. Some afternoons are spent calling home to parents of students who have not logged in to class in weeks. I usually leave a voicemail message and seldom hear back from the parent.

#### 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. Family time

Time to walk away from the computer for a couple hours and focus on my family. My family cooks dinner, we eat dinner, and we catch up on everyone’s day.

As long as I leave on my computer, my workday is not over. Each email notification that comes through draws me to my computer. I can’t help myself but check. And if it’s a question I can answer quickly, then I know that student doesn’t have

to put his evening on hold waiting for my response. I usually grade in the evening, too. I figure if I work a little each evening, then the next day might free some mid-afternoon time to run to the grocery store, head to the doctor, or even meet a friend for lunch. Imagine if all teachers had that kind of flexibility in their days? ■



Amy Rosno is an AAE member and virtual school teacher from Wisconsin.

**Do you know a teacher who would make a great member?**



Invite them to visit [aaeteachers.org/membership](http://aaeteachers.org/membership) today to learn more about the nonunion choice for educators!



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Have you read the latest AAE blog? Stay abreast of trending topics in education by navigating to [aaeteachers.org/blog](http://aaeteachers.org/blog) and select "CTRL + D" on your keyboard. When you're done, dive in and check out what's in store!



## Check Out AAE's Teacher Resources

From lesson plans, books, and other teaching materials to teacher quality and certification, AAE brings you the tools you need to live up to your full teaching potential no matter what your needs are. Visit [aaeteachers.org/resources](http://aaeteachers.org/resources) to see the full list of our member resources!

## AAE Teacher Survey of the Month

What should the dress code be in the education profession?

- Business Professional
- Business Casual
- Casual
- Don't have an opinion
- Other

▶ Take this one-question survey at [tinyurl.com/aaeOct16Survey](http://tinyurl.com/aaeOct16Survey) today and be entered to win an AAE prize pack—just for letting us know! You can also scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone.

