

Revised January 2014  
Executive Summary

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# Training our future teachers:

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# Classroom Management

# Executive summary

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New teachers deserve better. It is time for teacher prep programs to focus on classroom management so that first-year teachers are prepared on day one to head off potential disruption before it starts.

Every teacher wrestles with the challenge of keeping two or three dozen students in a classroom engaged. While better instruction generally results in better behaved students, the most brilliantly crafted lesson can fall on deaf ears — or, worse, be upended by disruptive behavior. A strong, veteran teacher may only occasionally have difficulty handling disengaged or poorly behaved students, but for new teachers, the strain of trying to deliver sufficiently engaging instruction and at the same time orchestrate appropriate behavior can be intense, overwhelming and ultimately defeating.

In this new report from the National Council on Teacher Quality, we investigate the extent to which America's traditional teacher preparation programs offer research-based strategies to their teacher candidates to help them better manage their classrooms from the start.

The wisdom accumulated from centuries of teaching — as well as findings from strong, recent research studies — recognizes that student learning depends on both engaging instruction and a well-managed classroom.

What is behind a well-managed classroom? First, it is critical that teachers plan and implement daily routines before any misbehavior has a chance to erupt, and second, teachers should establish the right kinds of interactions with students (e.g., praising good behavior rather than drawing attention to bad behavior with criticism) to consistently maintain a focus on instruction.

Considerable research exists on classroom management, much of it consolidated into three authoritative summaries of 150 studies conducted over the last six decades. These studies' agreement that some classroom management strategies are more likely to be effective than others helped us isolate the five most important strategies on which to train teacher candidates:

- 1. Rules:** Establish and teach classroom rules to communicate expectations for behavior.
- 2. Routines:** Build structure and establish routines to help guide students in a wide variety of situations.



3. **Praise:** Reinforce positive behavior using praise and other means.
4. **Misbehavior:** Consistently impose consequences for misbehavior.
5. **Engagement:** Foster and maintain student engagement by teaching interesting lessons that include opportunities for active student participation.

These strategies are so strongly supported by research that we refer to them here as the “Big Five.” They serve as the yardstick for this study, measuring the extent to which teacher preparation programs are training teachers in research-based classroom management strategies. We also examine the integration of a handful of other strategies, although their research bases are not quite as strong.

## Everywhere but nowhere

By examining a sample of 122 teacher preparation programs in which we were able to review the full breadth of the professional sequence — including lecture schedules, teacher candidate assignments, practice opportunities, instruments used to observe and provide feedback on teaching episodes, and textbooks — we can conclude the following:

- Most programs can correctly claim to cover classroom management, with only a tiny fraction (<3 percent) in our sample ignoring instruction altogether. However, instruction and practice on classroom management strategies are often scattered throughout the curriculum, rarely receiving the connected and concentrated focus they deserve.
- Most teacher preparation programs do not draw from research when deciding which classroom management strategies are most likely to be effective and therefore taught and practiced. Especially out of favor seem to be strategies that impose consistent consequences for misbehavior, foster student engagement, and — most markedly — use praise and other means to reinforce positive behavior. Half of all programs ask candidates to develop their own “personal philosophy of classroom management,” as if this were a matter of personal preference.
- Instruction is generally divorced from practice (and vice versa) in most programs, with little evidence that what gets taught gets practiced. Only one-third of programs require the practice of classroom management skills as they are learned. This disconnect extends to the student teaching experience.
- Contrary to the claims of some teacher educators, effective training in classroom management cannot be embedded throughout teacher preparation programs. Our intensive analysis of programs in which classroom management is addressed in multiple courses reveals far too great a degree of incoherence in what teacher candidates learn and what they are expected to do in PK-12 classroom settings. Embedding training everywhere is a recipe for having effective training nowhere.

## The false promise of instructional virtuosity

There is little consensus in the field regarding what aspects of classroom management should be taught or practiced. The closest the field comes to an endorsed approach is the apparent conviction that teachers should be able to rise to a level of instructional virtuosity that eliminates the need for defined strategies to manage a classroom. Defending the lack of focused classroom management training in many teacher preparation programs, the field’s intellectual leader, Linda Darling-Hammond, argues that the teacher candidate should instead learn to “manage many kinds of learning and teaching, through effective means of organizing and presenting information, managing discussions, organizing cooperative learning strategies, and supporting individual and group inquiry.”

Another discouraging development concerns the edTPA, a performance assessment intended as a gateway for licensure, which is now being rolled out in half the states with the strong endorsement of the field's leadership. Although in many ways the edTPA is a commendable effort to insert greater rigor and accountability into teacher preparation, it has yet to specify explicitly what teacher candidates ought to demonstrate as classroom managers. Given how important the edTPA has already become, it is crucial that evaluation of teacher candidates' classroom management skills be incorporated more explicitly into the edTPA's rubrics.

The silver lining is that, according to one survey, half of teacher educators aren't entirely sure that the approach — actually more of a non-approach — of relying solely on instructional virtuosity for classroom management works. It is also clear that some programs are paying more attention to research and to the alignment of instruction and practice: **St. Mary's College of Maryland**, the **University of Virginia** and the **University of Washington – Seattle** are notable for aligning instruction and practice with research-based strategies.

Other than calling out programs that do well on a particular aspect of classroom management training, this report does not provide overall ratings on individual programs. Further, we could not identify a single program in the sample that did well addressing all research-based strategies, identifying classroom management as a priority, strategically determining how it should be taught and practiced, and employing feedback accordingly. Teacher preparation's misdirection in the area of classroom management — insisting that instructional excellence alone can maintain the order necessary for learning — appears almost universally accepted by the field's leadership, and therefore this report necessarily reaches conclusions that require attention by the field as a whole.

## Solutions

### States

Unfortunately, we hold out little hope for a regulatory solution to this issue. While the regulations of every state at least briefly mention training in classroom management, most regulations are poorly informed by the research. Regulators and legislators can and should use their influence to make clear to programs their belief that training new teachers in classroom management strategies is crucial. Unfortunately, policymakers may lack the tools to ensure that preparation programs are actually training their candidates in these strategies.

### Programs

It is up to programs to prepare their candidates in research-based classroom management strategies, beginning with the first foundational courses and continuing to their culminating experience as student teachers. Such integrated preparation runs counter to current practice in higher education, where individual faculty members are too often permitted to decide what to teach, with insufficient regard for programmatic goals. Instruction is needed that connects the dots, with seamless transitions between content delivery and practice.

Because of largely avoidable instances of student misbehavior, the first year of teaching can be a harrowing experience. New teachers and our children deserve better from America's teacher preparation programs, and training that is carefully designed to prepare teacher candidates to be both effective instructors and effective classroom managers will help make the first year a happier and more rewarding experience for both teachers and their students.