

FORWARD TOGETHER

Actions for Impact: School Leaders



In the United States, 1 in 5 students have learning and attention issues. This includes those with identified specific learning disabilities, diagnosed ADHD, or related disorders that impact learning. Despite often having average or above average intelligence, the majority of these students are achieving below grade level. When their [disabilities](#) are not identified or appropriately supported in our schools, their potential goes untapped—with lifelong consequences. Schools struggle to help students reach the levels of achievement they are capable of and that school leaders are often accountable for.

Because the 1 in 5 spend most of their time in general education classrooms, NCLD and Understood sought to better understand how school leaders can help general educators meet the 1 in 5's learning needs and unlock their talents. We partnered with teachers to understand their experiences and insights. And we identified evidenced-based actions that leaders can take.

Understood



Because we're not yet effectively reaching and teaching the 1 in 5:

Outcomes for students with learning disabilities are poor. These consequences are compounded for students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students who have additional needs.



1 in 3 are held back at least once



2x more suspended than their peers



3x more drop out than their peers



They enroll in college at **half** the rate as peers



4 in 10 who attend college complete it



50% are unemployed



1 in 2 have been involved in the justice system

There are many paths to becoming a teacher, and some preparation programs are more comprehensive and rigorous than others. However, since most states do not articulate the specific skills, knowledge, or training general educators should have for working with students with learning disabilities and ADHD, many general educators report that they did not take courses applicable to teaching the 1 in 5. If they did, most did not find these courses beneficial or relevant once in the classroom. The majority of teachers cited “on-the-job training and trial-and-error learning” as the ways they learned how to teach the 1 in 5. Of teachers surveyed:



Only **17%**

feel very well prepared to teach students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.



Only **30%**

feel strongly that, **when they try their best, they can be successful with the 1 in 5.**



Only **50%**

feel confident in their **ability to implement an IEP or a 504 plan.**



Only **50%**

feel strongly that the **1 in 5 can reach grade-level standards.**

Yet, teachers emphasized that they want to learn more to help their students and improve their practice. More than 80% prefer to get information about teaching the 1 in 5 through school and district trainings.

We can all do better together—and there is proof we can.

School leaders play a critical role in setting the expectations and creating the conditions for teachers to be successful with the 1 in 5. To move forward together, NCLD and Understood conducted a literature review of empirically driven studies, and engaged Understood's Educator Advisory Council, NCLD's Professional Advisory Board, and other experts to identify and capture evidence-based [critical mindsets and key practices](#) educators can take to improve learning and achievement for the 1 in 5—and for *all* students!

Just flip the page to access resources and find out more. ▶

Actions you can take today to help *all* students:

Build a deep understanding of the science of learning and what learning and attention issues are. Understood.org and NCLD provide [resources](#) and [tools](#) that build [empathy](#) for all learning differences and make accessible the complex findings from learning science on how the 1 in 5 and *all* students learn. [Stay up-to-date](#) on the most recent information.

Learn and promote critical mindsets and evidence-based strategies. There are [three critical mindsets and eight key practices](#) that will give you, your instructional leaders, and teachers a strong start for better reaching and teaching the 1 in 5. These are foundational for shaping and supporting effective, engaging classrooms.

Establish a schoolwide mission and vision for inclusion that students with learning and attention issues are first and foremost general education students, and foster a collective commitment among all school staff to implementing this mission and vision with high expectations for all students and with appropriate services and supports.

Prioritize professional development and schoolwide implementation of key practices within general education classrooms and into learning management system resources.

- Build foundational understanding and break down misconceptions about the 1 in 5 by leveraging the [Through Your Child's Eyes](#) simulation and [Understanding Learning and Attention Issues](#) in professional development.
- Use the [Universal Design for Learning](#) framework to have all teachers remove barriers to learning in lessons.
- Incorporate [key practices](#) via reading and math instruction, then expand across all content areas.
- Agree to a set of schoolwide strategies for building cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies so that these are reinforced and consistent across student experience.
- Embed expectations and provide time for professional learning for inclusion into your schoolwide systems (e.g., faculty meetings, department/grade-level meetings, classroom walk-throughs, teacher feedback, and evaluations).

When hiring, look for teacher candidates who can demonstrate the critical mindsets and key practices.

Implement multi-tier systems of supports, with faculty training, for early screening and timely intervention for students with learning and attention issues. This includes implementing a schoolwide system of positive behavioral supports and interventions and establishing supportive school discipline policies and procedures.

Identify and train in-school champions/teacher leaders to lead collaboration, coach, model, and provide resources. In-school champions could be current teacher coaches or special educators in leadership roles.

Rethink your school schedule to prioritize time for collaboration among general educators, special educators, related service providers, and families, as well as creating flexible time so teachers can group and regroup students based on ongoing identification of strengths and needs. Use a student-centered scheduling approach that prioritizes inclusion and schedules around students with learning and attention issues first. Where and when your school reviews student data, ensure that special educators and related specialists are at the table with general educators.

Engage families as partners. Find [tools](#) for building partnerships with families and connect your families to [resources](#) on how to help and support their children.

Impact policy. Become more involved with [NCLD](#) to learn and inform policy for improving how we serve students with learning and attention issues.

School Leaders



Our approach

NCLD and Understood set out to unpack and address the challenges facing the 1 in 5 in the general education setting, in partnership with Lake Research Partners, SRI Education, and EducationCounsel.

 **1,350** teachers surveyed

 **13** teacher focus groups conducted in California, Ohio, and North Carolina

 **150** academic, empirically driven articles reviewed

 **50** states researched for teacher certification requirements

With input and pressure testing by Understood's Educator Advisory Council, NCLD's Professional Advisory Board, and other experts

For more information and to access the full report, visit nclid.org/forwardtogether

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