

FORWARD TOGETHER

Actions for Impact: Leaders of Teacher Preparation



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. State and national assessments show that we are systemically failing these students: The majority perform at below basic levels. Yet, many have average or above average intelligence—and *all* have potential and strengths.

Although the majority of the 1 in 5 spend most of their time in general education classrooms, most general educators report that they were not trained to successfully teach these students. This impacts how teachers perceive their classroom, how they perceive their own ability to teach, and, most importantly, how they perceive their students. [NCLD](#) and [Understood](#) sought to understand how to better train and support general educators. We partnered with teachers to understand their experiences and insights. And we identified evidence-based actions to ensure that aspiring teachers step into full-time positions with the skills and knowledge for successfully teaching the 1 in 5—and *all* students.

[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

Teachers are clear: They need to be better prepared before they are in the classroom full-time. And once they're there, they need to be better supported so they can better reach and teach the 1 in 5.

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 and attention issues, 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.

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

As a leader of a teacher preparation program, you can be at the forefront in building the expertise of general educators in teaching students with learning and attention issues. To move forward together, NCLD and Understood conducted a literature review of empirical 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](#) from the field. These mindsets and practices have been shown 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 the aspiring teachers you work with a strong start for better reaching and teaching the 1 in 5.

Explore teacher certification programs that have bolstered their preparation for all teachers in teaching students with learning and attention issues. For example, [Urban Teachers](#) at Johns Hopkins University provides a scaffolded experience for aspiring teachers that results in a master's degree with dual certification in either Elementary, Secondary English, or Secondary Math *and* Special Education. Among their surveyed graduates, 95% said the program gave them the knowledge and skills to be effective in the classroom.

Examine your program's coursework and practicum requirements. Seek feedback from your alumni about how well the program prepared them for the classroom experience. Identify ways to strengthen the courses and clinical practice offered through your program and exceed the minimum standards set by the state.

Partner with local districts. Develop opportunities for your teacher candidates to obtain diverse teaching experiences and serve various student populations before completing the program.

Assess the effectiveness of your overall program through the lens of teaching the 1 in 5.

- Your current philosophy for teaching the 1 in 5 and holding high expectations for students with disabilities should be clearly stated and part of the overall mission for developing teacher readiness for the classroom full-time.
- Course offerings should provide teachers an opportunity to become experts in both special education *and* content areas—in a way that is affordable and accessible.
- Your current degree requirements should intentionally break down the silos between content areas and special education—recognizing that strategies for the 1 in 5 that are based on learning science and learner variability research benefit all students, and incorporating expectations for successful candidates to exhibit evidence of critical mindsets and key practices.

Evaluate your coursework and clinical experience requirements.

- The learning frameworks and resources for your courses and practica should integrate brain-based science and learner variability research into how teachers are learning to teach.
- Courses and practica should integrate the evidence-based findings on critical practices and mindsets so that *all* aspiring teachers develop proficiency in those areas.
- Practicum requirements should intentionally include teaching students with learning and attention issues in general education settings. Theory is not enough—teacher candidates should have specific, carefully crafted, and repeated experiences of putting what they learn into practice with students who learn differently, with multiple opportunities to apply knowledge and skills with feedback.

Don't wait for your state; be a policy leader instead.

NCLD's research on teacher certification requirements reveals that states set a low bar for preparing general educators to educate students with learning and attention issues. Almost every state has failed to bring their licensure or certification standards in line with the reality that every teacher will surely have students with disabilities in their classroom. As you enrich your own program requirements and experiences, become involved with [NCLD](#) to learn and inform policy for improving teacher preparation.

Leaders of Teacher Preparation



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:

ncld.org/forwardtogether

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