

# FORWARD TOGETHER

## Actions for Impact: District and Network 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 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.

*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:



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



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



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



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.*

District/school network leaders play a critical role by setting system-wide priorities, expectations, and supports for teaching 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!

[Understood](#)



### Ongoing classroom struggles create a devastating ripple effect

The 1 in 5 are more likely to repeat a grade, be suspended, and drop out of school as compared to their peers—and the consequences are compounded for individuals of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students who have additional needs.

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

## 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.

**Partner with area educator preparation colleges** to set expectations for leader and teacher hiring in your district. Advocate for required practicum in inclusion classrooms and for degrees that require dual certifications for general education and special education.

**Set district/network-wide expectations for inclusion.** Build school board, district, school leadership, and community understanding of the facts and myths about 1 in 5 learners and how strategies for the 1 in 5 benefit *all* students. Ensure that network- and district-wide definitions of equity include learning differences. Include expectations for critical mindsets and key practices in leader and faculty job descriptions, feedback and performance evaluations, and coaching tools.

**Implement district/network-wide supports for inclusion with a goal of building staff expertise.**

- **Review data** (e.g., academic achievement, disciplinary removals, and more) and **provide targeted support** to schools most in need.
- **Provide the necessary technologies, with training,** for shared data collection and analysis on student learning needs to support collaboration and continuous improvement.
- **Dedicate professional development days to strategies that support the 1 in 5 and *all* students, and provide ongoing coaching support for teachers.** These might include training in the areas of multi-tier systems of supports (MTSS) and Universal Design for Learning or other elements of the key practices. Learning progressions can be used to support teacher decision making about instruction.
- **Provide principals with professional development, guidance, tools, and resources necessary to foster inclusive practices.** This includes providing support for principals to effectively supervise, evaluate, and coach teachers in the building. Additionally, districts can provide principals with tools and resources for designing school schedules that are student-centered and create time for collaboration, teacher/parent partnerships and other essential practices.
- **Provide resources to establish school-based teacher leader roles** for in-school champions who are successful with the 1 in 5 to coach others.

### Impact policy.

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

## District & Network 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 Education Counsel.

 **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](https://ncld.org/forwardtogether)

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