

FORWARD TOGETHER

Key Findings: Mindsets and Practices to Better Reach Students With Learning and Attention Issues

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. The majority of the 1 in 5 spend at least 80% of their time in general education classrooms, where many struggle to achieve at grade level despite often having average or above average intelligence.

NCLD and Understood sought to better understand how to help educators unlock the potential of the 1 in 5. Through an extensive literature review of empirical studies, we found evidence of specific critical mindsets and key practices that can improve outcomes for students with learning and attention issues—and all students!

What We Found: Mindsets

Three critical mindsets for general educators emerged as appearing to have a positive influence on the learning and development of the 1 in 5:

 **Strong sense of self-efficacy**, or the belief in their own ability to teach all students successfully. When teachers have a strong sense of efficacy, they are more likely to have a positive orientation toward [inclusion](#) and take responsibility for providing the conditions and instruction that allow all of their students to achieve.¹

 **Positive orientation toward inclusion and personal responsibility for all students.** Teachers with a positive orientation toward inclusion are more likely to believe the 1 in 5 can succeed and are more likely to differentiate instruction.²

 **Growth mindset**, in which teachers believe they can improve as teaching professionals and that all students can learn through practice and hard work. Educators with growth mindsets recognize that learning disabilities and ADHD are brain-based and do not go away over time, but that the vast majority of students with learning and attention issues can achieve at grade level when provided the right supports.

What We Found: Practices

There are eight key practices that educators can implement to improve achievement of the 1 in 5 and all students. These practices are most effective when educators implement them *within*, rather than in place of, system-wide structures and processes that support identification, intervention, and differentiation, such as a [multi-tier system of supports](#) (MTSS).

 **Explicit, targeted instruction** makes learning processes systematic, overt, and clear.

Why it works: Reduces the cognitive demand of guessing what the expectations are, so students can focus on mastering those expectations.

Important to know: Explicit instruction includes methods such as step-by-step modeling, guided and independent practice, and think-alouds during problem solving.³

 **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is a framework to design differentiated learning experiences to meet the needs of individual learners.

Why it works: Fosters a flexible learning environment that removes barriers to learning and creates equal opportunities to succeed.

Important to know: Lesson plans and assessments are grounded in three principles: **Representation**—offers information in more than one format (text, audio, video, and hands-

Understood



We wanted to learn from research: What do teachers need to know and believe about teaching the 1 in 5?

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

1: Soodak, L. C., Podell, D. M., & Lehman, L. R. (1998). Teacher, student, and school attributes as predictors of teachers' responses to inclusion. *The Journal of Special Education*, 31(4), 480–497. doi: 10.1177/002246699803100405

2: Cullen, J., Gregory, J., & Noto, L. (2010). The teacher attitudes toward inclusion scale (TATIS) technical report. Online submission.

3: Cohen, J. (2018). Practices that cross disciplines? Revisiting explicit instruction in elementary mathematics and English language arts. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 69, 324–335. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2017.10.021

on); **Action and expression**—gives students more than one way to interact with material and show what they've learned; **Engagement**—motivates students in multiple ways (e.g., student choice).



Strategy instruction teaches students cognitive (e.g., question generating) and metacognitive (e.g., self-regulation, executive function) strategies for learning content.

Why it works: Gives students their own learning strategies that become routine for future independent learning.

Important to know: Strategy instruction prioritizes presenting information in ways that students can identify, organize, comprehend, and recall (e.g., content anchoring, in which students are taught a new concept by anchoring it to a familiar one). Students learn how they learn and are then able to self-advocate.



Positive behavior strategies help teachers understand and set expectations for student behavior. These strategies also help students build skills to communicate and manage their emotions or needs.

Why it works: Makes expectations for behavior clear and consistent while differentiating supports.

Important to know: Positive behavior strategies is a data-driven approach—with initial screening and continuous progress monitoring—for developing all students' positive behavior. It often is a part of a whole child system (e.g., [MTSS](#)) that includes a larger school-based strategy for social-emotional learning (SEL) and academic support systems (e.g., [RTI](#)).



Flexible grouping uses data to frequently rearrange students according to needs/strengths for small group instruction.

Why it works: Holds high expectations for all while recognizing that students' needs/strengths vary by topic and skill and that students require multiple opportunities for practice and feedback.

Important to know: Flexible grouping is temporary, based on student data and the length of time necessary for students to develop a specific skill, master a concept, and/or accomplish a task. It is distinctly different from fixed groups, which are organized around general achievement rates and don't shift as students' needs change.



Collaboration involves all staff working as a team to review student data, co-plan targeted instruction, and [collaboratively team teach](#). Collaboration also occurs between educators and caregivers to coordinate support for students' learning and development.

Why it works: Leverages adults' knowledge/skills to align around a student's needs/strengths and ensures shared expectations and ownership for student learning.

Important to know: Should be supported by data systems, time in the schedule, and setting of shared professional norms.



Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy understands, responds to, incorporates, and celebrates students' cultural references, [engaging families/caregivers as equal partners](#).

Why it works: Creates learning environments that are respectful and inclusive, and that build upon what students know—so that caregivers and schools can better support learning together.

Important to know: It requires both rigor (e.g., critical thinking) and relevance (students regularly see themselves and their cultures reflected in the curriculum).⁴



Evidence-based content instruction includes practices based on multisensory, explicit, structured, and sequential content instruction for literacy and concrete-representational-abstract strategies for math.

Why it works: These strategies combine the effectiveness of explicit instruction with research on the science of learning.

Important to know: Structured literacy explicitly teaches systematic word-identification and decoding strategies, which benefit most students and are vital for those with dyslexia. For math, teaching students in an explicit, sequential manner allows one skill to build to the next: modeling and practice for students first with concrete materials (such as base ten blocks), then transition to representational (such as dots on a page), and end in abstract (only numbers and mathematical representations on a page).

Learn more

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

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4: Ford, D. (2018, February). *Creating culturally responsive education to address disproportionality: Seeking equity*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Council for Exceptional Children, Tampa, FL.