

FORWARD TOGETHER

Strengthening Teacher Certification



In Today's Classroom...

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 having average or above average intelligence, the majority of these students are achieving below grade level.

Around 70% of students with learning disabilities (LD) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) spend 80% or more of their day in general education classrooms. But more than 90% of students with LD are below proficient on reading and math tests in grades 4 and 8 (based on the 2013 NAEP results).

Students with learning and attention issues—like learning disabilities (in reading, writing, or math) or ADHD—can and should achieve at high levels when provided the right supports and accommodations. And yet, misconceptions about these students and their potential continue to limit the opportunities they are provided and negatively impact their success in school and in life.

What We Heard: The Experience of General Educators

In 2018, NCLD and Understood conducted research that included a survey of 1,350 educators and 13 focus groups with educators in California, Ohio, and North Carolina. Here is what we heard from them:

Most teachers feel unprepared to support the 1 in 5.

Only 17% of teachers feel very well prepared to teach students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

Teachers cite “on-the-job training and trial-and-error learning” as how they learned to teach the 1 in 5.

Teachers feel comfortable teaching up to three or four students with learning or attention issues in their class, but not more.

Not all teachers are convinced that they should be supporting the 1 in 5.

Only 50% of teachers feel strongly that students with learning or attention issues can reach grade-level standards.

One-third do not believe that inclusion benefits the 1 in 5.

Only 56% of teachers surveyed believe IEPs provide value to students, and just 38% believe IEPs help them be better teachers.

Teachers do not have many formal opportunities to learn to teach the 1 in 5.

1 in 3 teachers have not participated in professional development on teaching students with learning and attention issues. And, for teachers who have, most believe it wasn't effective.

Some teachers hold on to long-debunked misconceptions about students with disabilities.

1 in 3 teachers view a student's learning or attention issues as laziness.

1 in 4 teachers believe learning and attention issues can be outgrown.

1 in 4 teachers believe ADD/ADHD is a result of bad parenting.

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

Only two states—New York and New Jersey—require teacher candidates to have specific clinical experience with students with disabilities.

Five other states require teacher candidates to have field experiences with diverse students or diverse settings, but don't specifically mention students with disabilities. Seven states require field experience settings to include students with disabilities, but have no requirements that the teachers specifically serve those students.

Examples from Leading States: Coursework Requirements

CONNECTICUT

“To be eligible to obtain an initial educator certificate, each person shall be required to complete (A) a course of study in special education comprised of not fewer than thirty-six hours, which shall include an understanding of the growth and development of exceptional children, including handicapped and gifted and talented children and children who may require special education, and methods for identifying, planning for, and working effectively with special needs children in a regular classroom, and (B) a course or courses of study in special education relating to instruction on classroom techniques in reading, differentiated instruction, social-emotional learning, cultural competencies, and assistive technology.”

ILLINOIS

“Must take coursework addressing: (A) the psychology of, the identification of, and the methods of instruction for the exceptional child, including without limitation the learning disabled, which shall focus on the characteristics and methods of instruction for cross-categorical special education students so that all teachers: (i) understand the impact that disabilities have on the cognitive, physical, emotional, social and communication development of an individual and provide opportunities that support the intellectual, social and personal development of all students; (ii) understand how students differ in their approaches to learning and create instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners; and (iii) understand instructional planning and design instruction based on knowledge of the discipline, students, community, and curriculum goal....”

PENNSYLVANIA (elementary):

“At least 9 credits or 270 hours regarding accommodations and adaptations for students with disabilities in an inclusive setting (instruction in literacy skills development and cognitive skill development for students with disabilities must be included)”

Examples from Leading States: Teaching Standards

UTAH

“The Board may approve the educator preparation program of an institution if it ... (4) requires the study of... (b) Knowledge and skills to assist in the identification of students with disabilities and to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Knowledge and skills shall include the following domains ... (iii) skills in providing tier one instruction on the Utah Core Standards and positive behavior supports to students with disabilities within a multi-tiered system of supports including: (A) assessing and monitoring the education needs and progress of students with disabilities; (B) implementing and assessing the results of interventions; and (C) skills in the implementation of an educational program with accommodations and modifications established by an IEP or 504 plan for students with disabilities in the regular classroom....”

NEW MEXICO

“Instructional planning and implementation: the teacher plans lessons that provide for the success of students with exceptionalities, including learning disabilities, visual

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Spotlight on New York

New York requires its teacher candidates to complete 100 hours of field experience related to coursework prior to teaching, and 15 of those hours of field experience must focus on understanding the needs of students with disabilities.

New York is the only state that has both standards/coursework and practicum requirements for teacher candidates.



Spotlight on New Jersey

New Jersey requires its teacher candidates' clinical experience to include two different classroom settings, one of which must be a special education setting.

and perceptual difficulties, and physical or mental challenges.”

“Inclusion: (1) The teacher understands special education rules. (2) The teacher understands the differing levels of disabilities. (3) The teacher understands the development and use of individualized education plans (IEPs). (4) The teacher understands their responsibilities in implementing objectives set in an IEP. (5) The teacher develops lessons according to IEPs. (6) The teacher monitors achievement and growth as set by an IEP and recommends changes when necessary. (7) The teacher collaborates with special education teachers for individualized program implementation. (8) The teacher adjusts lessons and strategies for students with exceptionalities with regard to academic levels, physical environment, and emotional needs. (9) The teacher understands the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of students with exceptionalities. (10) The teacher assists students to understand social responsibilities. (11) The teacher assists students with exceptionalities to have positive experiences in the regular classroom.”

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Actions for Impact at Every Level

District Leaders Can Positively Impact Teacher Preparation and Classroom Practices by:

- Creating partnerships with teacher preparation programs at local institutions of higher education that set high standards for their teacher candidates, including coursework and clinical experience that specifically relates to students with disabilities and fosters the mindsets and skills teachers need to effectively serve the 1 in 5.
- Issuing guidance and resources to help schools develop cultures of inclusion and implement evidence-based instructional strategies that support all learners and systems such as MTSS and PBIS.
- Providing high-quality professional development for educators that includes the topics of Universal Design for Learning, MTSS, PBIS, and evidence-based instruction and interventions that can help all learners.

States Can Positively Impact Teacher Preparation and Classroom Practices by:

- Working collaboratively with accrediting bodies and decision makers to revise state licensure and credentialing standards to include standards, course requirements, and field experience requirements relating to understanding, instructing, and effectively serving students with disabilities in elementary and secondary school.
- Issuing guidance and resources to help schools develop cultures of inclusion and implement evidence-based instructional strategies that support all learners, and to help schools develop systems such as MTSS and PBIS.

Teacher Preparation Programs Can Positively Impact Teacher Preparation and Classroom Practices by:

- Reviewing and revising coursework for teacher candidates to ensure they are receiving the knowledge and information they will need to understand and effectively instruct students with disabilities.
- Reviewing and revising clinical field experience requirements to ensure that every general education teacher candidate receives meaningful experiences engaging with and instructing students with disabilities who have a wide variety of needs.
- Actively seeking feedback from former graduates to determine how well their program of study prepared them for entering the classroom and taking responsibility for children with diverse learning needs, including students with disabilities.

Learning and attention issues...

...are brain-based difficulties in reading, writing, math, organization, focus, listening comprehension, social skills, or motor skills, or a combination of these. Learning and attention issues are not the result of low intelligence, poor vision or hearing, or lack of access to quality instruction.

Examples include specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia); ADHD; executive function deficits; dyspraxia; non verbal learning disabilities

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