CCSSO Inclusive Leadership Webisode #9: 
*Forward Together: Policies and Practices to Support Students Who Learn Differently*

Meghan Whittaker, NCLD  
Shivohn Garcia, Understood for Educators

*Wednesday, February 12th 12-1PM ET*

For more information about the CCSSO Inclusive Leadership Webisode Series, please e-mail kizzy.blackwell@ccsso.org
**Tech Norms**

- Log in to the WebEx system
- Engage camera (helps with understanding in virtual meetings)
- Upon entering, please share your name, role, and organization in the chat pod
- Be in control… mute and unmute yourself
- Please ask questions either via chat pod (at any time) or by raising your hand in WebEx (hand icon during discussion pieces)
## CCSSO Inclusive Principal Leadership Webisode Series

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<td><strong>Forward Together: Policies and Practices to Support Students Who Learn Differently</strong></td>
<td>This webisode will focus on findings from NCLD’s <em>Forward Together: Helping Educators Unlock the Power of Students Who Learn Differently</em> report and an associated school leader’s guide on creating inclusive schools. Meghan Whittaker of NCLD and Shivohn Garcia of Understood for Educators will present.</td>
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Agenda

- **Overview and Framing** – James M. Paul and Kathleen Airhart
- **Question and Answer and Conclusion—Moderated** by James M. Paul, CCSSO (10 min)
We, in partnership with the National Collaborative on Inclusive Principal Leadership (NCIPL), CEEDAR Center, and Oak Foundation believe inclusive principal leaders are vital to supporting students with disabilities and other diverse learners.

Together, we released *Supporting Inclusive Schools for the Success of Each Child: A Guide for States on Principal Leadership* ([www.ccssoinclusiveprincipalsguide.org](http://www.ccssoinclusiveprincipalsguide.org))
Strategy 4: Promote Principal Development on Inclusive Practices

- Articulate a clear set of practices that advance inclusive and learner-centered leadership as guidance to augment current principal development work

- Provide and promote effective systems of in-service support, evaluation, and professional development for principals at the state and local levels using those practices

- Establish incentives for principal mentoring, coaching and induction programs to include a deliberate focus on supporting the skills leaders need to establish optimal inclusive learning environments

- Ensure that all leaders are knowledgeable of evidence-based and high-leverage practices teachers need to advance positive outcomes for students with disabilities

- Consider developing and using micro-credentials to ensure principals pursue professional development opportunities that hone their skills to support students with disabilities
FORWARD TOGETHER
Helping Educators Unlock the Power of Students Who Learn Differently
Introductions

Shivohn Garcia
Senior Director, Impact
Understood

Meghan Whittaker
Director, Policy & Advocacy
NCLD
1. **Forward Together**: Understanding the Context and Findings
2. Reflection & Questions
4. Final Reflection & Questions
Forward Together
The Research:

Background
1 in 5 children struggle with brain-based learning and attention issues that affect reading, writing, math, organization and focus.
The 1 in 5 have average or above-average intelligence and yet lower self efficacy and worse academic outcomes than their peers without learning and attention issues. In 2013, more than 96 percent of 8th graders with learning disabilities scored below proficient in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Our education system is systematically failing the 1 in 5.
Because we’re not yet effectively reaching and teaching the 1 in 5, outcomes for students with learning disabilities are poor:

- 3x as likely to drop-out of high school
- 41% college completion rate
- 2x as likely to be jobless
- 50% chance of involvement with the criminal justice system
Low-income students, students of color, and English language learners are more likely to be identified as having specific learning disabilities.

Black and Latino students are more likely to attend schools in high-poverty districts that lack the resources to provide them with the services they need to catch up.

- **1 in 4**: Black males with IEPs received out of school suspensions compared to **1 in 10** white males with IEPs.

- **~35%**: Black, Hispanic, and Native American students with disabilities left HS without a regular diploma compared to **25%** Asian and White students (2014-2015).
We sought to unpack and address this problem by asking four critical questions:

- **Who are the 1 in 5 and what is their experience in the classroom?**
- **What do general education teachers currently know and believe about teaching the 1 in 5?**
- **What do general education teachers need to know and believe about teaching the 1 in 5?**
- **How can teachers build the effective mindsets, knowledge, and skills to positively impact the 1 in 5?**
Our Approach in Brief

- 1,350 teachers surveyed nationally
- 13 teacher focus groups conducted
- 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.
Research Partners

LRP
LAKE RESEARCH PARTNERS
Strategy  Precision  Impact

SRI Education

Education Counsel
Policy  Strategy  Law  Advocacy
WHAT TEACHERS SHARED

What do teachers currently know and believe?
#1: Many teachers feel unprepared to teach the 1 in 5

Only 17% of teachers feel “very prepared” to teach students with mild to moderate disabilities
Many teachers have engaged in professional development classes on teaching the 1 in 5

Two-thirds of teachers have taken professional development classes for teaching students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

However, teachers report that most of these trainings were not effective or intentional

- Few teachers believed it was beneficial or still relevant
- On-the-job training and trial-and-error learning informed how they taught the 1 in 5
Their perceived level of preparedness depends on the severity of the student’s disability or issue

Focus group teachers felt that they were prepared to teach struggling learners depending on the type of “struggle” the student faces

While they may be equipped to teach a child with dyslexia or slower processing skills, they are not prepared to teach an emotionally disturbed student

The students who struggle to learn and also exhibit behavioral issues provided teachers with the largest amount of trouble, regardless of school type or teacher mindset

Managing behaviors takes more time and has a greater impact than learning issues

Focus group teachers said if there are 3-4 students with learning & attention issues, then they can usually manage them, however, when there are more than 3-4 students, they are not prepared
Most state standards and licensure requirements do not articulate the specific skills, knowledge, or training that general educators should have for working with the 1 in 5

| 7 states have **specific coursework** for teaching students with disabilities at elementary and secondary level |
| 2 states have **comprehensive standards** related to teaching students with disabilities |
| 2 states require **specific clinical experiences** with students with disabilities |
| 1 state has **standards, coursework, and clinical preparation requirements** |
#2: Teachers’ understanding of 1 in 5 learners is incomplete

A portion still hold on to misunderstandings that have been debunked by research
Teachers are more aware of the effects of learning and attention issues than the cause

Looking at the following behaviors, which, if consistently exhibited by a student would indicate to you that there may be an underlying challenge to address?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaving in ways that can be disruptive</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty with grade level reading, math, writing</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble following rules, directions or schedules</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble paying attention — easily distracted or daydreams a lot</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall lack of engagement in learning</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty navigating social situations and/or socializing with peers</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of self-confidence academically and/or socially</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty initiating or completing tasks in school</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration with schoolwork</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is quiet or withdrawn</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty completing or handing in homework</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble sitting still</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble with organizing and planning</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty grasping abstract concepts</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for help a lot</td>
<td>35</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some express beliefs suggesting they are unaware of evidence showing these are based on differences in brain structure and function.

- 1 in 4 believe learning and attention issues can be outgrown.
- 1 in 3 view students’ learning and attention issues as laziness.
- 1 in 4 believe ADD/ADHD is a result of bad parenting.
#3: Many feel overwhelmed and unsupported in teaching the 1 in 5, but want to improve

Only 30% feel that when they try their best, they can be successful with the 1 in 5
Teachers report finding students with behavioral challenges most difficult to teach

Surveyed teachers report that students with behavioral challenges are the most challenging to teach, more so than disabilities.

Q: How challenging is it for you to teach the following types* of students?

*Truncated for formatting (omitting “Students with” or “Students who are”)

- Behavioral challenges
- Mental health challenges
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Intellectual disabilities
- Reading, writing, math chall. but don’t have identification
- Experienced trauma
- ADHD
- Organization or focus chall., but don’t have identification
- Twice exceptional (identified as gifted & having a MMLD)
- English Language Learners
- MMLD
- Living in poverty
- Gifted and talented students

Very challenging (8-10)

Total challenging (6-10)
But rank interest in learning more about the 1 in 5 in their top choices

Teachers are highly interested in learning about “strategies for supporting struggling learners.”

Q: Please choose up to five topics from the following list that you would be most interested in learning more about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Tier</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching critical thinking skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Project based learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies for helping struggling learners in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology to support student learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating instruction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping students become more fluent in STEM</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies for small group instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching writing</td>
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<tr>
<th>Mid Tier</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for handling behavior issues that arise in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping students with social &amp; emotions skills including self-advocacy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching 21st century skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching organization, prioritization and self-regulation skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching reading</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching math</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional approaches that help English language learners</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparing students to transition out of high school</td>
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<th>Bottom Tier</th>
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#4: Teachers’ beliefs about inclusion and what the 1 in 5 can achieve vary

Only 50% feel strongly that the 1 in 5 can achieve at grade-level standards
While most teachers feel inclusion benefits students with MMLD, they vary on whether inclusion benefits others:

- **90%** feel inclusion benefits students with mild to moderate disabilities.
- **64%** feel inclusion benefits students without mild to moderate disabilities.
- **50%** feel inclusion benefits them as a teacher.

- “Bad behavior can be a deflection to distract the teacher or other students from what the student can’t do.”
- “The feeling that time is being taken away from the other students”
- “Students who are truly struggling to learn are not receiving the instruction and time they deserve”
- “The challenges of lack of time and the ability to manage the class while also handling behavioral problems or various student needs”
While all believe the 1 in 5 have a right to access and instruction, only half believe they can meet grade level standards

Not all agreed on whether accommodations lower the standards or if they are a tool to get the struggling students to grade level standards.

Teachers had mixed reactions to the statement: “All students, regardless of whether they have a mild to moderate special need or not, should be expected to be on grade level.”

When it comes to accommodations, the teachers recognized that they are in place to help the struggling student, but some question if all of the accommodations are needed.

There was also some talk that there should be a goal of weaning students off their accommodations.

Elementary teachers’ potential mindset is not as strong as upper grades. Less experienced and urban teachers also have weaker mindsets regarding student potential.
#5: There is a connection between teachers’ self-efficacy and their belief mindset

The more experience and belief in their own abilities to be effective, the stronger the teacher’s mindset toward inclusion
Only 30% of surveyed teachers currently feel strongly that they can be successful with students with mild to moderate learning disabilities when they try their best.

Q: I find that I often do not succeed with my students with mild to moderate learning disabilities even when I try my best.
Teachers’ own self-efficacy and experience may drive their attitude toward students

Some teachers focused on their own sense of helplessness or ineffectiveness in meeting the needs of students with these learning and attention issues, rather than a sense that something was ‘wrong’ with the students. The greater experience a teacher had, the higher belief they had in students’ potential.

“Most of the responsibility falls on us. I know we would like to have parents involved...but I feel like a lot of the responsibility falls on us because we are the teachers.”
– CA K-5 Positive Mindset Teacher

“We don’t get to choose the kids that we get...but whoever I get needs me in some way and it is my job to touch each kid and start where they are and grow them as far as I can get them. I feel that is what my job is. It doesn’t matter what they come to me with. I am supposed to meet them. Wherever they come to me that is where I start and we grow from there.”
– NC K-5 Positive Mindset Teacher
WHAT WORKS FOR THE 1 in 5

And works for *all* kids?
Research shows moderate evidence for three critical educator mindsets

- Have a **positive orientation towards inclusion** and take responsibility for all students in their classes.
- Have a strong **sense of self-efficacy**: the belief in their own ability to teach their struggling students successfully
- Have a **growth mindset**: the belief that people can improve their intelligence and performance through practice and hard work
  - **Believe that they can improve their practice as teachers.**
  - **Believe that all of their students can learn.**
Strong evidence for eight key highly effective educator practices

While the review shows strong evidence for some educator skills and behaviors, the list is **not exhaustive** and the items are at various grain sizes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit, targeted instruction</th>
<th>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers a framework to design differentiated learning experiences in flexible ways</th>
<th>Strategy instruction teaches students cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies for learning content</th>
<th>Positive behavior strategies help teachers better understand and set expectations for student behavior.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible grouping uses data to frequently rearrange students in the classroom according to needs/strengths</td>
<td>Collaboration involves general educators, special educators, specialists, and paraprofessionals working together in service of students</td>
<td>Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy understands, responds to, incorporates, and celebrates students’ cultural references.</td>
<td>Evidence-based content instruction leverages practices based on multisensory, explicit, structured, and sequential content instruction for literacy and math</td>
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FORWARD TOGETHER

How can we build teacher knowledge, skills, and mindsets?
We all have a role to play to move forward together.
A few actions we can all take

Build a deep understanding of the science of learning and what learning and attention issues are.

- Explore Understood.org and NCLD’s resources and tools that build educators’ understanding of the 1 in 5.

Learn and promote evidence-based strategies and best practices

- The 8 Key Practices are a strong start to better reaching and teaching the 1 in 5 across general education and special education.

Break down silos.

- We all have a role to play in breaking down the silos of SPED, Gen Ed, family partnerships, school and district administration, teacher preparation, and state and federal policy.
DISCUSSION:

What resonated most?
Was most surprising?
What additional questions did it raise?
The Guide:

Background
We designed the guide to reflect on-the-ground experience and intersectional issues.

Two subject matter experts were identified and recruited for each “section” of the Guide.

Additional experts from the following “lenses” reviewed and provided feedback on the Guide:
- Learning Disabilities
- Broader Disability
- Black and LatinX Communities
- Low-Income Communities
- Transition
- School Leaders

Individual educators and schools provided vignettes and experiences to ground some of the practices in the Guide.
School Leader’s Guide: What It Is

- **Introduction, definition** and **examples** of the mindsets and key practices related to success for the 1 in 5.

- **Research for why** these mindsets and practices work for the 1 in 5.

- A **self-assessment (reflection) tool** for leaders to determine how closely their practices align to the practices in the Guide

- **Next steps** educators might take to strengthen their practices to improve outcomes for the 1 in 5.

- A comprehensive resource for professional learning or fully turnkey PD.

- A complete representation of ALL of the features of high quality instruction for all students, including the 1 in 5

- A replacement for evidence-based instruction and specialized instruction designed by special educators or related services providers.
The Guide:

How to Use
Structure of the Guide

Establishing Common Beliefs

Building an Inclusive Culture

Implementing Effective Instructional Practices
What Each Section Includes

- **Vignette:** School Based Example
- **What it is:** Defining the Practice
- **Why It Is Important:** For the 1 in 5 and All Students
- **What It Looks Like:** Examples and Frameworks
- **What You Might Be Thinking:** Common Questions and Challenges
- **For Further Growth:** Additional Resources
- **Related PSEL Standard**
- **Inventory for Action:** Checklist of Practices and Next Steps (for Leaders and Teachers)
- **Planning for Action:** Self-Reflection
How to Use the Guide

- **Read first** for understanding and complete prompts

- Engage your **leadership team meeting** in a self-reflection

- **Prioritize one practice**, based on data and feedback, to focus on as a team and school

- Leverage tools and excerpts for **all-staff meetings** (create a learning sequence over the year to drive to action planning, reflection and practice)

- Begin with **one grade level, subject, or group of priority students**. Start small, but identify strategies for the target students that can be applied consistently across all classrooms these students are in.

- Discuss the guide with your **special educator(s) and/or related service provider colleagues** - identify strategies you can collectively take to support implementation of these practices

- Review the guide with your **district leader and/or regional superintendents** to advocate for district support of critical policies, allocation of professional development investments, consideration of the practices in curriculum decisions, and structure that enable further collaboration
Discussion and Reflection

What questions or comments do you have for Meghan and Shivohn?

What additional questions did the presentations spark for you?

Moving Forward

How could the work and resources Meghan and Shivohn shared be applied in your context?

Do you have resources or work underway that aligns to Meghan and Shivohn’s presentations that could help peers?
Thank you for joining us. Please reach out to James M. Paul at james.paul@ccsso.org with any questions about the webisode series. Please join us for upcoming webisodes.

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