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The Teacher & Principal Lens

Opportunities for equitable support for students with learning differences

Learning Heroes is a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating partnerships between families and educators that are grounded in trust and centered on student learning and well-being. Learning Heroes' work consistently bridges research, communications, and action, and our partnership with Understood exemplifies the interconnected, mutually reinforcing nature of our work:

- **National research on parent and educator mindsets, experiences, and perceptions**, which has been the backbone of all of Learning Heroes' work for more than a decade
- **Educator training** that shifts mindsets around family-school partnerships
- **Support for education leaders** during implementation of policy shifts, through improved data sharing and communications
- **Public awareness and action campaigns** designed to close the gap between what parents believe about their child's academic progress and what data show — while equipping families and educators with practical steps to support learning

With support from Understood, Learning Heroes took part in the NeuroEquity Research Collaborative, a 2023–2025 initiative to support research projects aimed at reducing stigma and creating equitable solutions for neurodivergent individuals, regardless of race, gender, or economic status. As part of the collaborative, Learning Heroes conducted a national research project, [*The Teacher & Principal Lens: Opportunities for Equitable Support for Students with Learning Differences*](#). This work builds directly on Learning Heroes' earlier research, [*The Parent Journey: Cracking the Code for Families of Children with Learning Differences*](#), supported by Oak Foundation, which explored how families navigate identifying and supporting children with learning differences.

Together, these two bodies of research provide a more complete picture of the systems surrounding students with learning and thinking differences — capturing both family experiences and educator perspectives. Funding from the collaborative enabled Learning Heroes to go deeper into the learning differences space by adding the educator lens,



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surfacing gaps in training, equity, and communication, and translating findings into actionable tools for schools, service providers, advocates, and families.

This report summarizes the research focus and findings, highlights key recommendations, and describes how Learning Heroes used the research to create and disseminate a [Learning and Thinking Differences Playbook](#), ensuring the work is both practical and actionable.



The NeuroEquity Research Collaborative uncovered new insights and opportunities for young people with thinking and learning differences and their families by tapping into the power of collaboration. With a focus on sharing actionable ideas and data, and teaming up to amplify what was learned, the collaborative made a positive impact for the field, and for the millions of families with children who learn differently.

—Bibb Hubbard, Founder & CEO, Learning Heroes



Background

The Teacher & Principal Lens research was designed to complement and extend our report on *The Parent Journey* by centering the experiences of educators — particularly teachers and school leaders who are often the first to identify learning differences and the primary partners families rely on to navigate support systems.

Ultimately, our research aimed to support families by identifying system-level gaps and opportunities for advancing neuroequity in schools. By focusing on educator perspectives, the research unearthed how educators engage with families at each phase of their journey, identifying what works and what doesn't. We were also seeking to understand educators' perceptions around the level of equitable support services different groups of families may receive.

Research approach

The research included a national, online survey conducted by Edge Research from May 9–30, 2024, among 612 public school educators who work with students with learning differences, including 311 teachers and 301 school administrators. Quotas were used to ensure representation by region, grade band, and demographics. Survey findings

were analyzed alongside parent data from *The Parent Journey* to identify alignment and disconnects between educator and family experiences.

Key findings

Findings from *The Teacher & Principal Lens* reveal a consistent and compelling pattern across educators' experiences: While teachers and school leaders are deeply committed to supporting students with learning differences, they often lack the training, resources, and systemic support needed to do so equitably and with confidence.

Educators frequently serve as the first point of identification for learning differences and share a strong desire to partner effectively with families. The research highlights meaningful alignment between educators and parents around shared language, priorities, and the need for more concrete guidance — signaling clear opportunities to strengthen trust, communication, and collaboration.

Yet we also found many gaps between educators' responsibilities and their preparation to engage students with learning differences, as well as their families. These challenges are compounded by misaligned perceptions between teachers and administrators, uneven access to resources across school contexts, and persistent inequities in how well schools meet the needs of diverse families.

Insights

Trust and communication: Shared priorities, uneven confidence

Educators and parents strongly align on what is needed to better support students with learning differences — but confidence and capacity vary.

- The term “learning differences” has the strongest consensus across parents, teachers, and administrators, signaling an opportunity for shared language.
- Educators and parents agree on the same top priorities, including the need for concrete guidance families can use to support learning.
- While 83% of administrators feel confident having conversations with families about suspected learning differences, confidence drops to 59% among teachers.
- More than 70% of educators say they need additional help building trust with families and creating informal opportunities for engagement.

These findings highlight the need for practical tools that support communication, trust-building, and partnership — not just awareness.

Educator training gaps: Identification without adequate preparation

- Teachers are most often the first to identify potential learning differences, yet many feel

underprepared to fulfill this role effectively.

- Nearly eight in ten teachers report being the first to raise concerns about a student's learning difference.
- While 70% of teachers say they received training on identifying learning differences, only 59% feel they have sufficient knowledge to do so.
- Although almost all educators report receiving professional development on learning differences, less than half have been trained on specific conditions such as ADHD, dyscalculia, or executive function challenges.
- Six in ten teachers report an increase in learning differences since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- These gaps are especially pronounced among educators in rural, suburban, and non-Title I schools, highlighting uneven access to preparation and support.

Equity and access: Misaligned perceptions and uneven supports

The research surfaced significant differences in how teachers and administrators perceive their schools' ability to support students with learning differences — and clear inequities across family groups.

- Only 51% of teachers say they have sufficient resources to support students with learning differences, compared to 79% of administrators.
- Teachers report larger gaps than administrators in how well schools meet the needs of families of color, multilingual families, and low-income families.
- Educators in Title I and urban schools are more likely to report being able to meet the needs of diverse families than those in non-Title I, rural, or suburban contexts.
- Small class sizes were identified as the most helpful accommodation, yet only 27% of educators report that their schools offer them.
- These findings underscore the importance of applying an explicit equity lens when designing supports for students with learning differences and their families.

Recommendations

Drawing on these findings, Learning Heroes identified three core [recommendations](#) to inform policy, practice, and advocacy:

1. **Build educator capacity** by improving training related to identifying learning differences, understanding specific learning and thinking differences, and communicating and partnering effectively with families.
2. **Apply an equity lens** to ensure sufficient resources for students with learning differences and reduced disparities in services experienced by families of color, multilingual families, and low-income families.
3. **Strengthen family-school partnerships** by advancing policies and practices that foster trust, clear communication, and actionable information for families.

From research to action

The Learning and Thinking Differences Playbook

To ensure that the research is translated into meaningful action by the field, Learning Heroes developed [Learning and Thinking Differences: A Playbook for Schools, Service Providers & Advocates](#). The Playbook synthesizes insights from *The Parent Journey* and *The Teacher & Principal Lens* and transforms them into practical, field-facing tools designed to support educators, families, and advocates in real-world settings.

The Playbook includes research decks and fact sheets, messaging guidance and key messages, a glossary of shared language, videos featuring educators and school leaders, and social media toolkits and infographics.

Over the past year, the Playbook has attracted nearly 17,000 visitors, making it one of the most visited resources on the Learning Heroes website. Visitors explored the content deeply, generating 5,500 engagements and an overall engagement rate of 33%, signaling strong resonance with the materials.

Companion resources linked from the Playbook generated more than 100,000 impressions; the [parent](#) and [educator-facing videos](#) received an additional 115,000 views across platforms. A video featuring school principal Meg Freeman emerged as the most viewed asset, garnering nearly 60,000 views, underscoring educators' appetite for perspectives grounded in practice.

These metrics suggest strong interest in research-informed, actionable resources that support educators and families of students with learning differences.

Learning Heroes Assistant

Building on the success of the Playbook, and in partnership with Understood, Learning Heroes also launched an AI-powered tool, the [Learning Heroes Assistant](#), a chatbot that responds in accessible, parent-friendly language to parents' most pressing questions. The tool is trained on findings from both of our learning differences research studies, as well as from the family and educator pages of our [GoBeyondGrades.org](#) platform, also created in partnership with Understood.

The research was further elevated through its inclusion as a key insight in Learning Heroes' latest report, [Centering Families in the Future of Education](#), released in fall 2025.

Final thoughts

Participation in the NeuroEquity Research Collaborative enabled Learning Heroes to deepen and extend our work in the learning differences space, build on previous research supported by Oak Foundation, and integrate educator perspectives into a more complete, equity-centered framework that has significant value to practitioners and the field. By pairing research with practical tools and broad dissemination, Learning Heroes helped ensure that insights reached educators, families, and advocates who are positioned to act on behalf of students with learning differences.

Learning Heroes is grateful to Understood for its leadership in convening the NeuroEquity Research Collaborative and for supporting work that advances understanding, equity, and partnership for both families and educators.