Understood Quick Insights Series

Using *Through My Eyes* to help educators see students differently

Note: This brief reflects a small, early cohort within a larger evaluation study that is still underway. These results are not final, but movement in the same positive direction across every measure collected is an encouraging early signal that the professional learning experience is working as intended.

Understood's Through My Eyes is an immersive platform designed to help users gain insight into the real lives of neurodivergent kids. Using the power of storytelling, it illuminates the perceptions and experiences of children and youth with ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia. Its supplementary resources leverage best practices of social-emotional learning that students, educators, and families can use at school and at home.

In 2026, Understood partnered with Teacher Created Materials and Equal Opportunity Schools to co-create a three-part, virtual professional development series for K–12 educators. The series is grounded in Understood's SPARC model of the pathways to thriving, *Through My Eyes*, and Equal Opportunity Schools' research on access and belonging. It moves educators through a progression of:

- Awareness (understanding student experience and barriers)
- Analysis (identifying systems, mindsets, and practices that impact access and belonging)
- Application (implementing strategies at the classroom and systems level)

We conducted a study with a small, early cohort of 14 educators. Our goal was to find out how the professional development affects educators' understanding of ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia — and how it affects their empathy, advocacy, self-efficacy, and capacity to support students.

Why professional development?

- Educators shape whether neurodivergent students feel like they belong — but many receive little formal training on the topic.
- Storytelling can be a powerful teaching tool. First-person stories can build empathy, reduce stigma, and promote inclusion.
- A teacher's belief in their own ability to reach every student — self-efficacy — is closely tied to how well students do.

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Key insights

We surveyed 14 educators before and after they completed the professional development. Here's what they told us.

They felt more informed and more confident.

- Before the professional development, only 29% said they felt very or extremely informed or confident speaking about learning and thinking differences.
- Afterward, 93% felt very or extremely informed about learning and thinking differences, with 86% saying they felt very or extremely confident speaking about them.
- Confidence speaking about dyscalculia — the topic educators knew least about before the professional development — rose from 6% to 71%.

They gained real knowledge, not just confidence.

- 67% increased their knowledge of dyslexia.
- 37% increased their knowledge of dyscalculia.
- 33% increased their knowledge of ADHD.

Their attitudes shifted from pity toward empathy.

- 75% felt more empathy for neurodivergent individuals.
- 67% more strongly believed that neurodivergence can lead to positive gains, like personal growth.
- 58% reduced levels of stigma, specifically their feelings of pity, for neurodivergent individuals.
- 42% wanted to do more to advocate for neurodivergent individuals.

They felt more effective in their classrooms and beyond.

- They increased their sense of self-efficacy and capacity as educators, especially in the areas of:
  - Parental involvement (92%)
  - Community involvement (83%)
  - School climate (83%)
  - Instructional strategies (75%)
  - Classroom management (67%)

Implications

These results suggest that a few hours of story-driven professional development doesn't just change what educators know. It can shift how they think, feel, and act toward neurodivergent students.

- Educators didn't just report feeling more informed. They scored better on knowledge checks.
- They didn't just feel more confident. They reported more empathy and a stronger pull toward advocacy.
- And they left the professional development feeling more capable as educators, especially in areas like family and community partnership, which can matter a great deal for students who are struggling.

That combination matters. Knowledge without empathy can produce technically correct but disconnected teaching. Empathy without self-efficacy can leave good intentions stuck.

For neurodivergent students, a teacher's everyday beliefs and confidence can shape whether school feels like a place they belong. This early cohort suggests that professional development can move the needle on the adult side of that equation. Whether that translates into how students themselves experience school is a question for future phases of this evaluation to answer directly.

Connect with us

We're always looking to collaborate and partner with others on our research. Reach out to our team at evaluation@understood.org to learn more.

Methodology: This survey was conducted online within the United States by Understood.org from June 30 to July 18, 2026, among 14 educators in K-12 classrooms. These data reflect a small, early cohort within a larger evaluation study that is still underway. Results are based on self-report surveys and short knowledge quizzes rather than a controlled experiment, so other factors occurring over the same period cannot be fully ruled out. Even so, movement in the same positive direction across every measure collected — knowledge, confidence, self-efficacy, capacity, and attitudes — is an encouraging early signal that the professional learning experience is working as intended.