

Many Schools Get Failing Grades When Teaching Kids with ADHD

A national survey shows schools are not meeting the needs of children with ADHD.

BY ADDITUDE EDITORS

A national survey of over 250 superintendents, directors, principals, and teachers performed by Unique Logic + Technology finds that only 22 percent of the respondents believe their school accommodates the needs of students with ADHD and only 19 percent indicated that their college or university adequately prepared them to teach these students. According to the recent report, many of the respondents admitted ignoring the ADHD problem and ignoring federal laws. (Unique Logic + Technology manufactures the [Play Attention](#) integrated learning system.)

A Texas school administrator says, “I also see a need for the university to address this in teacher prep programs. It would be tremendously helpful for new teachers to have a factual base on ADHD, so they may dispel some of the myths that are associated with this disorder.”

A university educator responds, “When I was in school (graduate), people didn’t really talk about ADHD. It was seen almost as a new diagnosis. Children were still “grouped” as LD. It appears that every 5 or so years we get a new vogue diagnosis. This further compounds the problem in that children are given a label simply because that’s what people are studying at the time; sort of a you see what you want to see and get what you expect phenomenon. (If you are thinking ADHD, you’ll come to a diagnosis of ADHD simply because that’s what you expected.)

Responses indicate that there is a disconnection between the university and the teachers it trains as this Florida teacher points out, “A problem that I found in the university system. The teachers teaching are only theory based professors. They do not have hands on experience with kids with ADHD, so they are working with ideas presented by other people. There is a world of difference.”

Receiving poor training at the university level has also contributed to confusion among educators regarding effective teaching methods for students with ADHD. Only 48 percent of the respondents indicated that they received ADHD training post graduation. This could be attributed to limited school resources. A teacher explains, “A few of the seminars offered are out of town in services and schools simply can not afford to send teams to these sessions. A better option is to educate everyone through local efforts.”

“School personnel are not adequately prepared to assist these students. Any knowledge of the subject is gained outside the college environment,” says a Dallas teacher.

Many educators just don’t have enough information to make intelligent decisions about instruction and management of their students with ADHD. This seems to promote a lack of administrative leadership both at the university level and at district levels.

A Texas administrator says, “Probably because of the conflicting information that we as administrators receive on a regular basis — there are even disputes among medical professionals as to the cause, the treatment, and the academic implications of serving children with ADHD. It is a relatively new phenomenon to which we have not yet figured out how to respond accurately at times”

Another Texas administrator cites, “It’s very evident through lack of training. I would assume most administrators feel very limited in the most current information and/or data they have regarding students with ADHD, and to try and assist teachers who have these students in their classrooms would be an uncomfortable area to address.”

A Tennessee educator notes, “There is very little agreement by even experts about the best way to work with or help individuals with ADHD. Without some kind of consensus and agreement, it is difficult for educators to choose appropriate methods and strategies to teach those who are to work with this special population. I think it is time for the profession to get out of the mode of “theory” and have the professionals actually work *with* the ADHD population, not just try to “contain” or “control” the students while in the classroom. There are positive characteristics of individuals with ADHD and these need to be focused on more than the negative aspects.”

Furthermore, misinformation and lack of necessary training seem to have prompted many educators to just ignore the problem disregarding local and federal laws.

“Another reason the problem exists is that most teachers as well as administrators would like to pretend that students with ADHD don’t exist, unless they are acutely involved with a student or relative. It is only then that the administrator or teacher becomes aware of the need to learn more about these special kids,” says a Florida teacher.

An occupational therapist notes, “Most programs other than special ed. programs simply do not focus on the specific kinds of disabilities like ADHD.”

“I am a special-education teacher and the mother of an 18-year-old son who was diagnosed with ADHD when he was 6 years old. I have dealt with the education system in Texas trying to educate other teachers about his condition. I have been met with resistance by many of my fellow educators who simply do not believe in ADHD. They think it is a fashionable excuse for a parent to get a child out of trouble. I have had to deal with “professionals” who refuse to follow modifications set forth in a 504 plan. They were convinced that my child was acting out on purpose to irritate them. Many of my fellow educators are totally uneducated on the subject and seem less than willing to help work out a reasonable plan of action. My education in the special-education field certainly did not prepare me for dealing with students with ADHD, but I learned through researching all sides of the issue, things that were beneficial, not only to my son, but to other students that I encounter daily.”

If ADHD is the question, what’s the answer?

A Texas administrator responds, “I feel it is time to inform teachers that whether or not they wish to agree, that there are students with many different disabilities, and they are not students [who] act this way because they want to. Teachers need to realize that they are legally obligated to follow modifications and make accommodations for any student with any disability. Parents should not have to resort to using the law to see that their child is being appropriately served. They must realize that *all* students are entitled to a free, *appropriate* public education. Principals and superintendents need insist that the laws be followed and that all students receive the best the teacher has to offer. Special education and 504 law should be as familiar to teachers as how to teach within their area of expertise.”

“Full responsibility for meeting the needs of ADHD can not be left with the school. We encounter some parents who are in deep denial about their child’s needs. Parents must work as partners with schools

rather than adopt an adversarial role,” says a Texas teacher.

“Mandatory training especially for the administrators. Mandatory documented involvement with students who have ADHD, especially by administrators. I recently spoke with a parent of a student with ADHD. She told me how her child was treated by an administrator. It was appalling. This is not an isolated incident either. The school districts, colleges and universities should provide Professional development, in services and workshops on ADHD,” adds a Houston teacher.

A Texas administrator concurs, “I think districts should provide more training on the latest research to administrators and teachers so that these data could be used to more accurately address individual student’s needs.”

The data reflect a gaping hole in the educational fabric of our nation. Training beginning at the university level and continuing at the local level through ongoing in services is a good start. This may enable administrators and teachers to effectively address students’ needs and abide by federal law. Furthermore, current research and technology can empower educators to provide a success-based environment for students with ADHD.

The responses also indicate that change is possible provided educators and parents work together. One Texas administrator remains optimistic, “Hopefully, this is beginning to change. I see more compassion for these students and the difficulties they experience daily in school.”

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