

UDL Leadership Fellowship: Moving Forward at the District Level

Elizabeth Berquist

Towson University
Towson, Maryland, USA
eberquist@towson.edu

George Brown

Allegheny County Public Schools
Cumberland, Maryland, USA
george.brown@acpsmd.org

Christina Schindler

Queen Anne's County Public Schools
Chester, Maryland, USA
christina.schindler@qacps.org

Wendy Barnes

Baltimore City Public Schools
Baltimore, Maryland, USA
WNBarnes@bcps.k12.md.us

William Burke

Baltimore County Public Schools
Towson, Maryland, USA
wburke@bcps.org

Abstract

Maryland is the first state in the nation to have regulations about UDL (COMAR 13A.03.06.) In order to help districts scale their implementation work, the Towson University UDL Project, sponsored by Dr. Nancy Grasmick, former MD State School Superintendent, recruited four UDL fellows during the 2015-2016 school year. The UDL fellows will share their work in a panel presentation, with specific emphasis on district level UDL implementation related to curriculum development, selection of instructional materials and professional learning.

Keywords

Universal Design for Learning, Implementation, Systemic Change

BACKGROUND

On June 1, 2012, the first draft of Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.03.06 Universal Design for Learning was released for public comment. This marked the first state law regarding UDL. Regulations included the integration of UDL principles into the development and provision of curriculum, instructional materials, instruction, professional development and student assessment by 2014. As part of an effort to help local school systems promote the application of this regulation, the Office of the Presidential Scholar at Towson University has supported a series of UDL implementation projects at the K-12 school and university levels. In 2015, with the goal of scaling the work from 2012-2014 projects, the Office of the Presidential Scholar recruited four UDL Leadership Fellows from local school districts.

UDL FELLOWSHIP GOALS

The goals of the UDL Leadership Fellowship Program are to help schools and districts promote the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by building a cadre of highly skilled UDL leaders to support district efforts to move from UDL exploration/preparation to UDL integration, modeling and supporting the implementation of UDL through professional learning opportunities, and supporting school and district capacity related to the UDL framework with specific attention to:

- integration of UDL principles and guidelines in curriculum
- selection of instructional materials
- design and delivery of professional learning opportunities

Each UDL fellow was tasked with identifying a goal relating to curriculum design, instructional materials or professional learning as outlined in COMAR. After identifying the goal, each fellow developed an action plan with measurable objectives. Each project was aligned with COMAR and district priorities.

SUMMARY OF FELLOWSHIP PROJECTS

Allegheny County

During the 2016 – 2017 academic year, the Allegheny County Public Schools will be initiating the “Gradual Release of Responsibility” instructional framework into daily lessons in grades 4-12. This instructional framework is based on the work of Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey, and can be found in *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching* (2014). This framework aligns with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards as the intent of both is to provide students with learning environments that will prepare them for post-high school life. This notion, coupled with the primary goals of UDL which are to eliminate learning barriers and to help students become expert learners, leads to the integrated goal for the UDL Leadership Fellow Project: The alignment of the “Gradual Release of Responsibility” instructional framework (Fisher & Frey, 2014) to the UDL principles and guidelines (CAST, 2015) by three cohorts made up of Grade 6 Science teachers, High School Government teachers, and Grade 9 ELA teachers. Then, each cohort will use the Lesson Study Model (Doig & Groves, 2011) to collaboratively plan, teach/observe, and participate in post-lesson reflections to determine if learning barriers were eliminated and if all students learned what was taught during each lesson.

Baltimore County

BCPS is fundamentally transforming teaching and learning for students and teachers by focusing on student-centered teaching that personalizes and customizes instruction for

each and every student. BCPS is revising its high school curriculums to support student-centered teaching and learning aligned with the guidelines and principles of UDL. Curriculum is written and accessed through a digital learning management system that provides pathways using low-tech and high-tech options for multiple means of representation, engagement and expression for students that flexibly responds to learning preferences and learner variability. BCPS will create and implement professional learning modules for high school teachers based on changing teacher practice to provide students with lessons that address student choice, relevance and authenticity. BCPS will institute instructional rounds as job-embedded professional learning for high school teachers as a way of modeling and demonstrating student-centered teaching and learning aligned with the guidelines and principles of UDL.

Baltimore City

During the 2013-14 academic year, City Public Schools was selected to be part of The School-wide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) initiative. SWIFT is a national K-8 center that provides academic and behavioral support to promote the learning and academic achievement of all students, including those with the most extensive needs. Maryland is one of the five states that was chosen for the four year SWIFT initiative and Baltimore City Public Schools has four schools that are implementing the SWIFT Framework. Being that the SWIFT framework establishes quality instruction based on the principles of UDL, and the need for continued explicit professional development of the UDL principles for City Public Schools, four focus UDL Learning Centers will be created at the SWIFT sites to serve as models to support UDL training and implementation district-wide.

Queen Anne's County

In the past year, QACPS has began a digital revolution equipping all students in grades 5 - 12 with a 1-to-1 device. This has caused heated conversation concerning how UDL fits within this new 1-to-1 environment. Are students getting "flexible options" if everything is now done on a device? QACPS is attacking this problem three ways. First, they are designing professional development for administrators, specialists and teachers using the SAMR model to purposefully embed UDL principles into daily instruction. This will be enhanced with UDL content-specific learning walks conducted by a team of supervisors, school leadership and the Facilitator of Digital Teaching and Learning. Second, QACPS has audited their existing technology, online curriculum and 2016-2017 operating budget for flexible instructional materials. Finally, QACPS is committed to developing a new 5-year curriculum cycle framework that will embed UDL principles and personalized learning strategies during the summer of 2016.

MOVING FORWARD

Following project completion, fellows will have opportunities to network with colleagues in other schools who are engaged in similar UDL implementation work. In addition, they will share their work with colleagues in other local school systems interested in scaling UDL practices. Finally, we anticipate that UDL fellows will continue implementation and coaching work in the future by teaching courses, coaching professional learning communities, presenting at future academies and conferences and advising their district as they continue in the UDL implementation journey.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the grant funding provided by the Towson University Foundation. We are indebted to Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Towson University Presidential Scholar, for her visionary leadership, guidance and unwavering support of UDL implementation.

REFERENCES

- Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.03.06 (2012). Available at http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=13A.03.06.*)
- Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network.
- National Center on Universal Design for Learning. (2012). *UDL Implementation: A Process of Change* [Online seminar presentation]. UDL Series, No. 3. Retrieved from http://udlseries.udlcenter.org/presentations/udl_implementation.html