

UDL: A Maryland State of Mind

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Abstract

Maryland is one of the first states to incorporate UDL principles into state educational regulations. This paper describes Maryland's path to statewide UDL implementation and provides specific examples for states and other nations that want to explore the feasibility of incorporating UDL in education. It also focuses on the actions taken by the Maryland State Department of Education to build an understanding of UDL and prepare educational leadership to implement the UDL framework within Maryland districts. It includes a description of the initial Maryland UDL task force activities and a UDL self-assessment tool designed for local school systems to reflect on the progress of UDL implementation.

Keywords

UDL implementation, MSDE, A Route for Every Learner

INTRODUCTION

As of the 2014-2015 school year, local school systems in the state of Maryland were required to incorporate UDL principles and guidelines into the development and provision of curriculum, instructional materials, instruction, professional development and student assessments. This was not a top-down decree, nor a casual development. Many stakeholders came together to fully explore whether UDL principles and guidelines should be included in statewide education regulations. This paper describes the actions of stakeholders, as well as the activities used by a state UDL Task Force, to examine the effectiveness and feasibility of UDL. Additionally, it outlines strategies to roll out statewide professional development on UDL, and it describes strategies to foster implementation at local school levels. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has successfully navigated the first three phases of UDL implementation statewide as described by Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) — “Explore,” “Prepare” and “Integrate” — and continues to work toward the next stage to “Scale” the practice of UDL across Maryland schools. (see CAST's implementation phases <http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/planningtemplates/districtresources>)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On May 4, 2010, Maryland became the first state to pass a bill (HB 59/SB 467) that authorized a “Task Force to Explore the Incorporation of the Principles of Universal Design for Learning into the Education Systems in Maryland.” The bill was initiated by the Maryland Down Syndrome

Advocacy Coalition (MDAC), which is part of the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS).

MDAC and NDSS staff first learned about UDL at a conference in September of 2008. The information they received about UDL strongly resonated with NDSS and MDAC members. After reviewing online resources and attending seminars and workshops on UDL, the MDAC decided to make UDL an organizational priority.

MDAC reached out to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), as well as to parent groups, education leaders, local school boards, the state teachers' union, and elected officials. They developed a trifold brochure and a website to communicate their message and used this as a vehicle to “sign on” other stakeholders. They built a coalition that spanned general education, special education and higher education. Working with the MSDE legislative liaison, state legislators and their aides, MDAC successfully navigated the legislative process to pass the bill in both the Maryland House and Senate, paving the way for a state-level UDL Task Force. In Maryland, a parent advocacy group worked alongside many educational organizations to get the ball rolling.

THE UDL TASK FORCE

In October of 2010, then Governor Martin O'Malley formally appointed members to the UDL Task Force. A 22 member volunteer task force was convened, comprised of a State Board of Education member, a local school system (LSS) board of education member, MSDE professionals, an LSS superintendent, university educators, teachers, a representative of a NDSS and a national UDL Task Force, and other educational leaders. Task force members varied in their level of UDL experience. MDSE staff and the chair of the UDL Task Force planned and coordinated the work of the task force. The legislative charge for the task force is described in Table 1.

With just two highly structured face-to-face meetings, and “homework” in between, the task force explored the foundations of UDL, reviewed pertinent literature interviewed a variety of UDL experts and stakeholders, and developed tiered recommendations. These face-to-face meetings were scheduled 3 months apart, during which the planners were cognizant of designing activities that model UDL principles. Appendix 1 describes meeting topics and activities which could be replicated to support similar state efforts. The meeting details can also serve as a procedural recipe for any task force that is assembled to consider the effectiveness and feasibility of UDL.

Table 2. The Legislative Charge of the UDL Task Force (House Bill 59/Senate Bill 467).

<p>1. Study the effectiveness of UDL as a framework for guiding curriculum design including goals, teaching methods, instructional materials, and assessments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide flexibility in the ways information is presented, students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and students are engaged • Reduce barriers in instruction and provide appropriate accommodations, supports and challenges while maintaining high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency
<p>2. Study the feasibility of incorporating and applying the principles of UDL into the elementary, secondary and postsecondary and higher education systems in Maryland with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum development; the evaluation and selection of textbooks and other instructional materials; the purchase and use of technology for instructional purposes; teacher preparation and staff development; the development of classroom, district and statewide assessments and state grants
<p>3. Make recommendations relating to the incorporation of the principles of UDL by county boards of education in the development of local school system policies and procedures</p>
<p>4. Draft and recommend proposed regulations incorporating the findings of the Task Force</p>

During the initial meeting, task force members formed three subcommittees to address the legislative charge:

1. Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment Subcommittee
2. Materials & Technology Subcommittee
3. Teacher Preparation and Postsecondary Instruction Subcommittee

Using a table of references, each subcommittee selected articles to review that would help them to address their areas of interest. Members of each subcommittee were asked to note key ideas, relevance to educational challenges in Maryland, alignment with Maryland educational initiatives, UDL effectiveness, UDL challenges, and UDL feasibility at all levels of Maryland education systems. Members were also asked to take note of compelling quotes and real world examples of UDL in action. To supplement the readings, each subcommittee was asked to identify structured interview questions and conduct phone interviews with targeted policy and research leaders, state and district leaders, university leaders, teachers engaged in UDL implementation, as well as parent and industry leaders.

Midway between the two meetings, web-based meetings were scheduled with each of the subcommittees to track progress, finalize questions for interviewees, and discuss lingering questions and concerns based on the readings. Prior to the second meeting, each subcommittee submitted summaries of selected readings, as well as phone interview capture sheets.

At the second and final UDL Task Force meeting, subcommittees assembled recommendations based on the literature on UDL, web resources and interviews. Recommendations were developed at the state, district, school and classroom levels, as well as at the postsecondary instructional level. At the conclusion of this meeting, the UDL Task Force reached a clear consensus that UDL principles constitute a common sense framework for education and recommended the incorporation of UDL principles into the education systems in Maryland. Exit feedback indicated that the Task Force meeting agendas and homework assignments constituted an efficient means for making decisions regarding UDL in Maryland.

A ROUTE FOR EVERY LEARNER

A written report was an expected outcome of the UDL Task Force. While members of the task force served as unpaid volunteers, MSDE funding was allocated for a professional report writer to expedite the writing process and meet the legislative deadline. A 75-page report, entitled *A Route for Every Learner: UDL as a Framework for Supporting Learning and Improving Achievement for All Learners in Maryland, Prekindergarten Through Higher Education*, was published summarizing the work of the UDL Task Force and its recommendations (MSDE, 2011; <http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/instruction>)

The report included the following:

- UDL efforts nationally and in Maryland
- How UDL can potentially improve student outcomes, based on available literature
- Summaries and tables describing the work of the UDL Task Force
- Recommendations for:
 - The Maryland State Board of Education
 - The Maryland State Department of Education
 - Local school systems in Maryland
 - Schools and classrooms
 - Institutes of higher education faculty and teacher education programs

Following publication of the report, a comment period engendered support from Maryland educators, educational organizations and parents.

SCALING UDL IN MARYLAND

The Maryland State Department of Education continues to support the implementation of UDL. Table 2 provides an overview of the initiatives that have been conducted by MSDE to support UDL. Professional development on UDL has been provided to a wide variety of general education academies and conferences. It has been incorporated into grants and other initiatives including the School Wide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT; <http://www.swiftschools.org>). To Maryland's credit, UDL is not perceived as a special education-only initiative, but a framework to support the learning and achievement of all learners.

Table 2. Statewide initiatives

Statewide professional development on UDL:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maryland education systems• Principals' Academy• Governor's Academy• Gifted and Talented educators• Maryland Co-Teaching Network• Master Teachers Professional Development• Education Effectiveness Academies with follow up webinars• Specialized Educators Community of Practice• College and Career Ready Conference• State Professional Development Grant (SPDG)• School Wide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT)
Integration of the UDL framework into:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Maryland's Blackboard Learn site which hosts UDL resources embedded in lesson seeds, plans and unit frameworks to support Maryland College and Career Ready Standards• Online biology, algebra, Government and English courses as part of Enhancing Teaching and Learning Through the Use of Technology

Maryland institutions of higher education have also begun to implement UDL more systematically. UDL principles have been embedded into general and special education instruction at Johns Hopkins University, Towson University and Goucher College. Each year, McDaniel College sponsors a conference that focuses on classroom implementation of UDL.

At the local level, implementation continues to grow and scale upward. Two Maryland school districts were awarded the Bill and Melinda Gates UDL grant. (<http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/fourdistricts>) Additionally, a number of school districts are working directly with CAST to facilitate implementation. Two districts have collaborated with Towson University to sponsor summer institutes, with opportunities for presenters from Maryland institutions of higher education and local school districts. To further facilitate UDL in Maryland schools, the Maryland UDL Network was formed as a statewide professional learning community. The network continues to plan and support professional learning opportunities on topics pertinent to UDL.

MSDE'S LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM UDL SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Members of the Maryland UDL Network drafted and submitted a school-level self-assessment rubric for MSDE consideration. Subsequently, MSDE reviewed and revised this draft to develop the Local School System Universal Design For Learning Self-Assessment Tool (see Appendix 2 and the link below) to help local school systems evaluate the progress of UDL implementation within their districts. (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/instruction/docs/UDLImplementationContnuumAug2014.docx>). This tool goes beyond the basic principles of UDL, focusing on specific benchmarks for UDL in the curriculum, in

instructional materials, in instruction, as part of professional learning, and in student assessments. For example, as a measure of UDL in the curriculum, local school systems are encouraged to examine the degree to which they provide model lessons or exemplars in all curriculum areas. Local school systems are also prompted to identify specific objective UDL criteria that guide district and school-level purchasing of paper, digital and online instructional and assessment materials that support a full range of learner variability and multiple levels of content understanding. All districts are required to report on how they are incorporating UDL into their Bridge to Excellence Master Plans, and are encouraged to use this self-assessment tool to prepare to develop those plans.

CONCLUSION

It takes the concerted efforts of a variety of stakeholders to take a big idea and incorporate it into state educational practices. Frisch (2014) cites eight important practices to convert ideas into reality (Table 3). Parent stakeholders in Maryland used many of these practices, resulting in the development of a UDL Task Force to explore the incorporation of UDL. They committed time and effort, worked to communicate the importance of UDL, and navigated roadblocks to legislative action. The UDL Task Force helped to build a case for UDL and inspire action, while the MSDE continues to build a base that supports the implementation of UDL through professional development, the design of curriculum resources and the development of a rubric to foster discussion on the progress of implementation across school districts and higher education settings.

Table 3. Eight important practices to convert ideas into reality (Frisch, 2014)

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Anchor your idea in reality2. Commit to your goals3. Communicate your ideas effectively4. Identify roadblocks to success5. Plan with accountability6. Build your bench — those who support your idea7. Build your case— to inspire others to action8. Build your base — to move forward together
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As stated in CAST's National Center on UDL Universal Design for Learning Series, implementation is a gradual process of systematic change. (http://udlseries.udlcenter.org/presentations/udl_implementation.html). According to CAST, while there are five recursive phases of UDL implementation, each educational organization will approach implementation in unique ways. This paper serves as an example of one state's unique path to implementation. In Maryland, the path to UDL implementation has involved stakeholders at the state, local, and community levels, all working together toward continuous improvement of education in Maryland.

REFERENCES

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Denise DeCoste is an occupational therapist and a special educator with over 25 years of experience in the field of assistive technology (AT). She was instrumental in building awareness of UDL across Maryland's Montgomery County Public School District, and in the systematic implementation of UDL in MCPS schools. In 2010, she was appointed by the Governor to chair the UDL Task Force.

Marsye Kaplan is a speech language pathologist and special educator with over 40 years of experience. As team leader

for assistive technology in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), Marsye led the Universal Design for Learning Initiative, building awareness and implementation. Marsye was instrumental in writing and facilitating the CAST Bill and Melinda Gates UDL Grant in BCPS. Currently, she is the Section Chief for Specialized Instruction in the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services at the Maryland State Department of Education.

Susan Spinnato has been a teacher and curriculum/professional development specialist for over 40 years, and is currently the Director of Instructional Programs at the Maryland State Department of Education. Prior to coming to MSDE, she was the Coordinator of World Languages and ESOL for Baltimore County (MD) Public Schools. She was a member of the UDL Task Force and continues to collaborate with colleagues at MSDE to implement UDL statewide.

Appendix 1. An outline of the structured activities used by the MARYLAND UDL task force to explore the incorporation of the principles of universal design for learning

Topics	Formats
Initial Meeting Agenda:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Framing the conversation ○ Reviewing the charge of the UDL Task Force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group ice breaker activity • Presentation on UDL Task Force expectations and outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to UDL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Principles ○ Effectiveness ○ Feasibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on UDL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What we know and need to know to respond to the charge of the task force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group reflection activity and share out of what is known and what needs to be known about UDL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form subcommittee work groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment ○ Materials & Technology ○ Postsecondary Teacher Preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each subcommittee reviews essential questions and develops structured interview questions. Share out of interview questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role and timeline clarification for all subcommittees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review timeline ○ Clarify subcommittee tasks ○ Identify subcommittee leaders to facilitate and report on subcommittee findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group presentation on tasks and responsibilities of the subcommittees going forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review and interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review articles and outside professional contacts ○ Establish dates for each subcommittee to meet online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each subcommittee selects articles to review, selects outside professional contacts for structured interviews on the feasibility and effectiveness of UDL, and submits a subcommittee plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration of online tools to access articles on UDL, and documents (e.g., interview scripts, interview questions, interview capture sheets, literature review summaries and conclusions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online tools demonstration (e.g., Google docs, Diigo)
Wrap up and feedback	Exit card feedback
Web-Based Meetings with Individual Subcommittees	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the progress of the subcommittees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss selected articles and information from websites focusing on UDL • Discuss interviews with professional experts and other stakeholders regarding UDL • Discuss overall findings and outstanding questions
Second Meeting Agenda:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and a review of the work of the UDL Task Force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented a summary of captured themes, recurring issues and subcommittee recommendations based on readings and interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current status of UDL at the State level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSDE presentation on activities to build UDL understanding statewide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current knowledge and resulting recommendations for UDL in education systems in Maryland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group activity to apply the knowledge gleaned from subcommittee readings and interviews to draft recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UDL implementation in schools districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multimedia presentation (using Animoto) to facilitate thought on school system UDL implementation strategies and challenges

Topics	Formats
Second Meeting Agenda:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refining UDL Task Force recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small group activity to refine recommendations for school systems and higher education on UDL Gallery walk activity to share Task Force recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing UDL in classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video examples with guided notes demonstrating examples of UDL implementation in classrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations for schools and classroom to implement UDL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small groups develop a visual representation (i.e. poster of graphics and text) of recommendations for classroom level UDL implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrap up and UDL Task Force closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the outline for the final report and the extent to which the task force met the legislative charge to draft recommendations for education systems in Maryland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UDL Outreach brainstorming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task Force members listed strategies for outreach and what they can do to propel UDL as part of their everyday work roles.
Feedback exit survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pollseverywhere.org

Appendix 2. Local School System Universal Design For Learning Self-Assessment Tool

Note: Please Go to the following link to download the document and format it to your specification.

<http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/instruction/docs/UDLImplementationContinuumAug2014.docx>

Local School System Universal Design for Learning Self-Assessment Tool



COMAR 13A.03.06 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, local school systems shall use UDL guidelines and principles, consistent with Regulation .03 of this chapter, in the development and provision of: (1) Curriculum; (2) Instructional materials; (3) Instruction; (4) Professional development; and (5) Student assessments.

The Maryland State Department of Education offers the following continuum to assist local school systems (LSS) in reflecting on the progress of UDL implementation through the application of the Active Implementation Science Frameworks <https://unc-fpg-cdi.adobeconnect.com/ai-lesson-quickstart>

	Exploratory 1	Installation 2	Initial Implementation 3	Full Implementation 4
	LSS is matching needs, innovation requirements, potential barriers and resources. A UDL Implementation Team is identified.	Necessary resources are acquired or repurposed to support UDL implementation; UDL Implementation Team is operating; sources for training and coaching are identified; initial professional learning has occurred; and organizational supports and protocols are in place.	Practitioners attempt to use newly acquired UDL practices in the classroom with students; coaching and data systems support practitioners; and successful implementation of UDL practices is acknowledged.	UDL is embedded in teaching and learning across all classrooms; practitioners routinely provide UDL opportunities to ensure the success of ALL students; and Implementation Teams ensure the gains in UDL practices are maintained and improved over time.
Please reflect upon the current system-wide status of the implementation of UDL guidelines and principles				

	Exploratory 1	Installation 2	Initial Implementation 3	Full Implementation 4
Integration of UDL Guidelines and Principles Indicators				
Evidence of local school system's strategic plan for UDL is documented in LSS master plan.				
(1) Curriculum				
1.1: LSS identifies specific objective UDL criteria to help guide curriculum development.				
1.2: Model lessons or exemplars are provided to illustrate UDL elements for all curriculum areas.				
1.2.a: Model lessons or exemplars include goals and objectives reflecting the UDL principles.				
1.2.b: Model lessons or exemplars include strategies that provide flexible options for presenting content (e.g., options for visual displays of information, for auditory information and language supports.)				
1.2.c: Model lessons or exemplars include options for learners to express understanding in a variety of ways.				
1.2.d: Model lessons or exemplars promote relevant learner choice, self-monitoring and strategic planning when engaging with content.				
1.2.e: Model lessons or exemplars promote collaboration and communication among students.				
(2) Instructional and assessment materials: (Various media are used by, educators to present and assess learning content; and students to demonstrate				

Maryland State Department of Education UDL Implementation Continuum August 2014

knowledge and skills.)				
2.1: LSS identifies specific objective UDL criteria that guides LSS and school-level purchasing of paper, digital and online instructional and assessment materials that support a full range of learner variability and multiple levels of content understanding.				
2.2: LSS has developed a review process using specific, objective UDL criteria by which materials (including hardware, equipment, and software) are considered for system-wide purchase.				
2.3: LSS communicates specific objective UDL criteria for school-level purchase of instructional materials.				
2.4: LSS provides access to instructional materials in classrooms that encompass UDL elements that support a full range of learner variability and multiple levels of content understanding.				
2.5: LSS provides teachers a mechanism for LSS-wide sharing of high quality teacher-created digital materials aligned with the curriculum, and actively encourages sharing across the LSS.				
2.6: LSS provides a mechanism for teachers to access UDL exemplars of paper, digital and online instructional materials that support a full range of learner variability and multiple levels of content understanding.				
(3) Instruction				
3.1: LSS provides lesson planning tools that incorporate UDL elements to school-based leadership to share with teaching staff that support a full range of learner variability and multiple levels of content understanding.				
3.2: LSS provides protocols and/or rubrics to help teaching staff reflect and self-monitor the incorporation of UDL into lesson planning.				
3.3: LSS provides instructional look-fors that illustrate UDL to school-based leadership.				

Maryland State Department of Education UDL Implementation Continuum August 2014

3.4: LSS provides ways to measure the system-wide incorporation of UDL into learning environments and teaching methodologies.				
(4) Student assessments				
4.1: LSS identifies specific objective UDL criteria to consider for development of system-wide assessments.				
4.2: LSS identifies specific objective UDL criteria to consider for assessments developed at the school or classroom level.				
(5) Professional learning				
5.1: LSS provides professional learning on UDL to guide curriculum and assessment developers that support a full range of learner variability and multiple levels of content understanding.				
5.2: LSS provides training on purchasing materials, assessment, lesson planning and instruction within a UDL framework to school-based leadership.				
5.3: LSS provides professional learning to administrators and principals on the implementation of UDL.				
5.4: LSS provides professional learning to school-based staff on lesson planning and delivery within the UDL framework.				
5.5: LSS includes UDL look-fors into supervisory practices.				
5.6: LSS provides all new teachers training on lesson planning and delivery within the UDL framework.				
5.7: LSS provides professional development on integrating technology use by students using UDL principles.				

The results of this survey should be used to guide systemic changes in the implementation of the UDL principles.