FACT SHEET: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND UDL

1) What is Universal Design for Learning?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework and set of principles to provide ALL students equal opportunities to learn. It allows teachers to choose from a menu of tools and strategies embedded in the curriculum. Using UDL principles in general education and special education classrooms makes curriculum and instruction accessible and engaging for all learners. Curriculum barriers are reduced; learning is supported; students gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning; and their learning is validly assessed.

2) What are the benefits of UDL?

Students come to the classroom with a variety of needs, skills, talents, interests and diverse learning styles. For many learners, the typical curriculum is littered with barriers and roadblocks, while supports are relatively few. UDL turns this scenario around and supports curriculum design that is responsive to today's diverse classrooms.

UDL improves educational outcomes for ALL students by ensuring meaningful access to the curriculum and accurate skill and knowledge assessment. In addition, UDL complements existing school reform initiatives, especially increased use of technology in education.

3) What are the principles of UDL?

- Provide multiple and flexible methods of *presentation* to give students with diverse learning styles various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
- Provide multiple and flexible means of *action and expression* to provide diverse students with options for demonstrating what they have learned, and
- Provide multiple and flexible means of *engagement* to tap individual learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Using these three principles, UDL embeds flexibility into the components of the curriculum: goals, teaching methods, instructional materials and assessments. UDL is more comprehensive than differentiated instruction, which primarily concentrates on teaching methods.

4) How does UDL apply to English language learners (ELLs)?

The UDL framework enables educators to plan their instruction with all kinds of learners in mind. ELLs, while limited in their English proficiency, come to school with tremendous variability in their home language skills, from full oral and literate proficiency, to very limited skill sets.

Rich English-language instruction that provides students with oral and written access to their native languages has at its core the UDL principle of multiple means of representation. Students whose proficiency limits their access to complex English material can often have that material presented in the native language as a way to help them grasp the content in English.

Further, research that targets multiple interactions with science content has shown that ELLs who are able to use their native languages in the service of processing and expressing complex material are far more

likely to retain that content over time, and transfer new learning to English.

5) In what ways does UDL provide access to grade-level curriculum?

UDL guides the development of instructional features that provide ELLs enhanced access to grade-level curriculum. For example, a recently-arrived immigrant ELL 4th grade student may speak, read, and write in Spanish, but still lack sufficient English proficiency to read a Native American folktale about the origin of fire. Even though her teacher does not speak any Spanish, a universally designed lesson might allow the student to compare English and Spanish versions of the story, giving her the opportunity to improve her knowledge of English while meeting the curriculum standard of reading folktales in 4th grade.

Consider another 4th grade immigrant student who speaks Haitian Creole but possesses very limited literacy skills in Creole or French. His universally designed digital text may provide the option to switch between written forms of the relevant languages (English, Creole, French), but also provide a read-aloud option that, with a click of a mouse, provides human voice reading of the text in whichever language the student feels most comfortable.

6) Is UDL for ELLs just about translating into other languages?

Absolutely not. Curricula that are universally designed to meet the needs of ELLs make available a host of language supports, including visual representations of relevant vocabulary, maps that link concepts with words, and options that help students connect their own cultural backgrounds to new learning activities.

Universally designed curricula for ELLs provide both oral and written access to material and activities. As with most language learners, ELLs tend to develop proficiency in speaking English before mastering reading and writing proficiency. Allowing such students the option of listening to content-area texts in English (via audiobooks, readalouds, text-to-speech, etc.) is crucial for providing more generalized access to the curriculum. Also, allowing ELLs the option of writing or, when possible, audio recording to express their learning is also important for both learning and assessment.

7) What is being done to promote the implementation of UDL?

The National UDL Task Force works to incorporate the principles of UDL into federal policy and practice initiatives Recommendations of the Task Force on teacher and faculty preparation to use UDL strategies were incorporated into the recently passed Higher Education Opportunity Act. Recommendations have been made for the reauthorization of NCLB and will also be made for IDEA In addition, the Task Force seeks increased dissemination of information about UDL by the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies. See the UDL Toolkit at http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/UDL/index.asp

The National UDL Task Force is comprised of more than thirty education and disability organizations. A complete list of can be found at www.udl4allstudents.com.

8) Where can I find more information?

Please visit our website at www.udl4allstudents.com or contact Ricki Sabia at rsabia@ndss.org. Also you can find a detailed Parent Guide on UDL at http://www.ncld.org/publications-a-more/parent-aamp-advocacy-guides/a-parent-guide-to-udl. Our efforts will be more effective if policymakers are hearing about UDL from all stakeholders, including parents.

*This material was produced with the assistance of Patrick Proctor, Ed.D., research scientist at the Center for Applied Special Technology (www.cast.org).