UDL
national universal design for learning task force
www.udl4allstudents.com

THE FACTS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1) What is Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning?

The term "universal design" refers to the movement within architecture and product development to create places or things that are accessible to as many people as possible, including those with disabilities. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework and set of principles to provide ALL students equal opportunities to learn. Using UDL principles in the general education classroom 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?

As any educator knows, 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.

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 *expression* to provide diverse students with alternatives for demonstrating what they have learned, and
- Provide multiple and flexible means of *engagement* to tap into diverse 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.

4) Is UDL consistent with the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

Both IDEA and NCLB recognize that all learners must make progress in the general education curriculum. NCLB holds schools, districts, and states responsible for demonstrating student progress. By changing the way the general education curriculum is designed, UDL helps educators meet the requirements of these laws. Student performance increases as all students acquire greater knowledge and demonstrate progress when UDL is fully embraced and implemented.

5) Isn't UDL just for students with disabilities?

Absolutely not. UDL was first mentioned in regard to making instruction accessible for students with disabilities, but it is a format

that gives ALL students the opportunity to learn. For example, video captioning is of great help to students with hearing impairments—and is also beneficial to students who are learning English, students who are struggling readers, students with attention deficits, and even students working in a noisy classroom.

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

Increasing physical access and eliminating physical barriers to educational sites or materials, (e.g., providing accessible textbooks) is an essential step in universal design but genuine learning requires much more than physical access—it requires cognitive (or intellectual) access, too.

For example, providing digital text of a novel with built-in comprehension supports is one way to apply the principle of multiple means of presentation to instructional materials. A student who has difficulty accessing printed text due to a visual impairment or dyslexia could use the text reader feature, while a student who needs cognitive access could use comprehension supports. These supports could include vocabulary definitions, highlighted abstract literary concepts, foreign language translations, or animated coaches that assist with answering comprehension questions For examples see http://udleditions.cast.org.

Using UDL as a framework, general and special educators, specialized instructional support personnel and paraprofessionals can ensure that all students have meaningful access to grade level curriculum, valid, accurate assessments and opportunities for meaningful participation.

7) How does UDL fit with school reform initiatives?

UDL is a natural complement to reform initiatives, such as Response to Intervention. Instructional materials include digital texts and media resources, encouraging students to learn and use 21st Century skills.

Eliminating time-consuming adaptations and retro-fitting of materials, UDL allows for efficient use of time and resources.

8) 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 and to promote UDL in the school environment.

Language recommended by the Task Force was incorporated into the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. In addition, the Task Force has recommended UDL legislative language for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and will make recommendations for the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Task Force also 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/.

The National UDL Task Force is comprised of more than thirty national education and disability organizations. For a complete listing of Task Force members, visit our website at www.udl4allstudents.com.

9) Where can I find more information?

We welcome your support - come join us in our efforts. Visit our website at www.udl4allstudents.com or contact Ricki Sabia at rsabia@ndss.org.