



**BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HOWARD COUNTY
MEETING AGENDA ITEM**

TITLE: Universal Design for Learning **DATE:** April 24, 2014

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PRESENTER(S): Access Team

OVERVIEW:

In March 2011, the Task Force to Explore the Incorporation of the Principles of Universal Design for Learning into the Education Systems in Maryland, submitted its report, *A Route for Every Learner*, to the Maryland State Board of Education. Subsequently COMAR modifications were passed and adopted that require every Maryland school system to incorporate the principles and practices of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into curriculum, instructional materials, instruction, professional development, and assessments. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on how this effort is moving forward within the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).

RECOMMENDATION/FUTURE DIRECTION:

Continue to embed principles and practices of UDL in HCPSS curriculum, instructional materials, instruction, professional development, and assessments.

**Submitted
by:**

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INTRODUCTION

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a research-based framework that addresses learner diversity at the beginning of the design or planning effort. Using UDL principles allows educators to embed flexibility into all aspects of instruction from the beginning.

This report will:

- Provide background information on the UDL Principles and Guidelines.
- State the rationale for the incorporation of the principles of UDL into the HCPSS curriculum, instruction, the curriculum development process, and professional learning opportunities.
- Describe the COMAR requirements and how HCPSS is meeting those requirements.
- Describe the current approach for the implementation of UDL resources for staff and teachers.

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING?

UDL helps meet the challenge of variability in learning by suggesting flexible instructional materials, techniques, and strategies that can empower educators to meet the varied needs of their students. The principles of UDL help educators refine how we approach **who we teach, what we teach and how we teach**. Through the use of the framework of UDL, educators can plan and deliver flexible and meaningful lessons that emphasize problem solving, project-based learning, and student choice. Exposing novice learners to innovative content acquisition and application supports their development as *expert* learners. Expert learners are individuals who know how to learn, who want to learn, and who, in their own highly individual ways, are well prepared for a lifetime of learning.

Three primary principles guide UDL and provide structure for the instructional guidelines:

- **Provide Multiple Means of Representation** (the “what” of learning). Students differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them.
- **Provide Multiple Means of Expression** (the “how” of learning). Students differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know.
- **Provide Multiple Means of Engagement** (the “why” of learning). Students differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn. Some students are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty while others are disengaged, even frightened, by those aspects, preferring strict routine.

The UDL Principles and Guidelines assist educators in designing flexible lessons and curricula that reduce barriers to learning and provide innovative and supportive learning to meet the needs of *all* learners. These principles and guidelines can also help educators evaluate existing curriculum goals, materials, methods, and assessments.

The framework of Universal Design for Learning...

- provides multiple ways of representing information to meet the needs of all learners.
- uses learner-centered proactive instructional design that includes both learning strategies and (low to high tech) tools.
- designs instruction that connects and supports the critical understanding of the big ideas.
- embeds reflective instructional practice that rapidly responds to learners through continuous feedback, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making.
- integrates multiple means of expression for students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, critical thinking and synthesis of ideas.
- leverages the supports, engagement, and flexibility offered by technology.
- overcomes instructional, curriculum, and environmental barriers that impede learner success.
- leverages innovation that emerges from addressing the needs of diverse learners.

COMAR REQUIREMENT

On May 4, 2010, Governor O'Malley signed the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) bill (HB 59/SB 467), establishing a Statewide Task Force to Explore the Incorporation of UDL Principles into Maryland's Education Systems. The Task force's report, *A Route for Every Learner*, was published in the spring of 2011. In July of 2011, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) passed the COMAR regulation 13A.03.06.05 Universal Design for Learning. To date, Maryland is the only state with a regulation specifically requiring the implementation of UDL. There are currently nine (9) states that have initiatives underway to incorporate UDL into their school systems and schools. These states include Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota and New Jersey.

Beginning in SY 2013-14, this COMAR regulation requires all school districts to develop or revise curricula incorporating UDL and certify they are using UDL principles and guidelines for ongoing curriculum development.

UDL IMPLEMENTATION IN HCPSS

Beginning in November 2004, the Department of Special Education (DSE) began exploring UDL through full staff meetings with faculty and support staff. DSE continued work focusing on the UDL Principles in 2005-2006, through the Designing Quality Inclusive Education (DQIE) initiative. In the summer and fall of 2010, staff in the Division of Curriculum, Instruction, and Administration began to explore the principles of UDL. Staff participated in a variety of professional learning opportunities to learn about the principles of UDL and the application of these principles to their work. During workshops held in January, February, and March of 2011, curriculum specialists, coordinators and resource teachers began working toward incorporating the UDL Principles into curriculum writing resources and professional learning experiences offered in the summer of 2011. During this time, HCPSS also led the development of and launched the blended learning course, the interactive Educator Checklist wheel, and the UDLlinks mobile application.

The continued implementation of the UDL Principles into the instructional program directly supports translating the vision of the strategic plan into reality. This work supports the following strategies from the strategic plan:

- Strategy 1.1.2 Embed multiple opportunities for acceleration into the instructional program.
- Strategy 1.1.3 Provide learning experiences that promote depth of knowledge.
- Strategy 1.2.3 Incorporate inclusive practices and presumed competence of students with disabilities.
- Strategy 1.4.3 Provide personalized education experiences.
- Strategy 1.4.4 Provide authentic learning experiences to solve real-world problems.
- Strategy 1.6.2 Implement assessments (formative and summative) that account for growth, and provide timely, meaningful information to help teachers adjust instruction.
- Strategy 2.1.5 Provide professional learning to foster effective communication, respect, and collaboration in a diverse environment.

The following actions are underway in HCPSS to address the implementation of UDL in curricula, instructional materials, instruction, professional development, and student assessment.

1. Establish a UDL workgroup to address challenges, align efforts, and develop strategies for system-wide implementation.

2. Provide the Universal Design for Learning and Next Generation Teaching and Learning course (#11-13-05) developed by and taught by HCPSS staff as a continuing Professional Development offering. This is a blended course that uses technology tools and resources and models best practice in UDL for participants.
3. Incorporate UDL principles into the unit plan template being used for new units of study aligned with Common Core. All curricular areas are required to include UDL principles and guidelines in their instructional materials beginning in 2012-13.
4. Support professional learning system wide by maintaining a website with resources, information, and videos related to UDL.
(<http://udlhcpss.weebly.com>)
5. Develop resources, presentations, and materials to support curriculum writing and revision of curricular units.
(<http://udlhcpss.wordpress.com/curriculum-writing-training-materials/>)
6. Set a systemic expectation that all educators will grow in their understanding and use of UDL principles and practices.

Currently, several HCPSS staff members are members of the state-wide UDL Implementation Network and Workgroup. Meetings convene three times a year and the work centers on goal setting, best practices, research from the field and case studies of how educators across the country are implementing UDL.

FUTURE DIRECTION

In future years it will be necessary to:

- Continue development of a variety of learning opportunities for staff and administrators on the principles of UDL and their applications to the classroom.
- Provide more options for blended learning opportunities to learn about UDL and how to connect these ideas to existing county initiatives.
- Enhance criteria for the selection of instructional materials to strengthen the focus on UDL.
- Use UDL when choosing student assessment systems and technology systems for student and staff use.