Parent Advocacy Brief

A Parent's Guide to Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Most parents will agree that both teaching and learning today are full of enormous challenges. Teachers face classrooms full of students with a wide ranges of abilities, speaking an array of languages, and coming from very diverse backgrounds. Students face increased learning expectations as the nation's schools work to improve their academic achievement and enhance their long-term success.

Millions of students also face special learning challenges brought about by **learning disabilities (LD)**. Almost three million students in America's schools receive special education services because of an identified learning disability. For these students, learning in today's environment is daunting, even when provided with specialized instruction, accommodations, and assistive technology.

Fortunately, there is a new approach to teaching and learning that can reduce these challenges, for all students, not only for those with LD. That new approach is called **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**. It is a concept that, if embraced by the field of education, can dramatically change the school experiences and success of students with LD by making broad changes to how information is presented to all students and the ways in which all students are able to show what they know. The application of UDL principles in the development of curriculum and assessments can broaden the horizons for students with LD and shift the focus from a "student deficit" approach to a "student success" approach. Understanding UDL and how it can benefit students with LD is the focus of this Parent Advocacy Brief.

What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a research-based framework for designing curricula—that is, educational goals, methods, materials, and assessments—that enable all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. This is accomplished by simultaneously providing rich supports for learning and reducing barriers to the curriculum, while maintaining high achievement standards for all students.

(Source: www.CAST.org)

Background and Benefits of UDL

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) grew out of the concept of universal design (UD) (see box at right). UD originated in architecture and urban planning, as part of a movement to begin designing buildings and other structures that would accommodate the widest spectrum of users, including those with disabilities, right from the start. Instead of retrofitting buildings with accessibility features such as ramps and elevators, UD considers the needs of all possible building users at the design stage. Architects using this design approach also discovered that UD solutions benefited a wide range of people, not just those with disabilities. One classic example of UD is the curb cut. Originally designed to enable people who use wheelchairs to negotiate curbs, curb cuts also make travel easier for those pushing strollers or delivery carts.

Universal Design for Learning takes this approach even further. UDL recommends ways to provide **cognitive** (or intellectual) as well as physical access to learning. According to the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), where UDL was born, "students are provided with scaffolds and supports to deeply understand and engage with standards-based material. They not only have access to content and facts, but they learn to ask questions, find information, and use that information effectively. They learn how to learn."

Advances in technology have made UDL possible. UDL uses technology's power and flexibility to make education more inclusive and effective for all learners. And UDL provides new ways for teachers to customize their teaching to students with a range of abilities, interests, and backgrounds.

What is Universal Design (UD)?

The term **"Universal Design"** is defined in federal laws—both the Assistive Technology Act of 2004 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004)—as "a concept or philosophy for designing and delivering products and services that are usable by people with the widest possible range of functional capabilities, which include products and services that are directly accessible (without requiring assistive technologies) and products and services that are interoperable with assistive technologies."

Speakerphones, curb cuts, and close-captioned television are all examples of universal design.

Principles of UDL

Through research on how the brain processes information, CAST has identified three primary brain networks and the roles they play in learning. The principles of UDL were developed using these brain networks as a guide. The three UDL principles are:

1. Provide Multiple Means of Representation—(the "what" of learning). This principle is based on the brain's recognition networks—the networks used to identify and categorize what we see, hear, and read. Embedding multiple means of representation into curriculum greatly assists students with LD because these students often have difficulty accessing the traditional "print" curriculum, such as textbooks.

Since all students perceive and comprehend information differently, there is no single way of representing information that will meet the needs of all students. Often, special education teachers need to adapt curriculum for students with LD so they can access content when only one form of representation is provided (such as printed text). The term "universal design" is often mistakenly applied to such after-the-fact curriculum adaptations.

> Multiple, flexible methods of representation start with digital formats. But UDL is much more than just presenting text digitally. Some students may grasp information better through visual or auditory means rather than printed text. To accommodate these differences, the UDL curriculum includes built-in options such as text, speech, video and audio so that students can interact with the content using multiple senses, aligned to their individual learning preferences.

2. Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression—(the "how" of learning). This principle is based on the brain's strategic networks—the networks used for planning and performing tasks. Students differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know.

Students with LD may struggle with strategic and organizational abilities, have language barriers, etc. and will demonstrate their mastery very differently. In reality, there is no one means for expression that will be optimal for all students; providing options for expression is essential.

> Multiple means of action and expression provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate what they have learned—ways like multiple choice tests, group projects and oral presentations. These alternatives are particularly useful for students with LD, who often have difficulty with traditional forms of assessments, such as pencil-and-paper tests.

3. Provide Multiple Means of Engagement—(the "why" of learning). This principle is based on the brain's affective dimensions. Students differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn. Some may desire strict routines and predictable activity while others are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty. In reality, there is no one means of engagement that will be optimal for all students; providing multiple options for engagement is essential.

> Multiple means of engagement offer solutions to the problem so often faced by students with LD—a lack of motivation to learn due to the obstacles posed by their learning difficulties. Instead of watering down the curriculum to assist students with basic skill deficits such as reading, a UDL designed curriculum offers multiple ways to provide novelty in the learning environment and allows teachers to alter the design based on the student's particular learning strengths and weaknesses while maintaining learning expectations.

For more detailed information with specific examples of the components of a UDL curriculum, see *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, Version 1.0* available at www.cast.org/publications/UDLguidelines

UDL and Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) plays an important role for students with LD. UDL and AT are complementary supports that use different approaches to ensure the access, participation and progress by lowering the barriers to achievement.

The goal of UDL is not to eliminate the need for AT, but rather to design learning environments that—from the beginning—do not contain barriers. Many barriers have to be addressed on an individual basis in typical educational environments, but in well-designed UDL environments, the technology supports most commonly needed by students with LD are frequently built into the materials and technology used by all students. As a result, fewer students with LD will need the individualized solutions that can only be provided through AT. Since individualized AT is often costly and difficult for schools to provide on a consistent and reliable basis, less dependence on such supports is beneficial to both schools and students.

It is important to note, however, that considering each student's individual need for AT—both devices and services (see box at right)—remains a necessary part of planning for both the student's instruction and participation in assessments.

UDL and Accommodations

For years, accommodations for both instruction and assessment have been used to lessen the effects of the disability for students with LD. Accommodations are designed to "level the playing field" and are not intended to reduce learning expectations. Yet too often, the provision of accommodations is dependent on school personnel—the student's teacher or teacher's assistant, for example. Such dependency reduces the likelihood that accommodations will be provided consistently and in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan. And, many accommodations, while well-intended and appropriate, are still crude attempts to fix the inaccessible materials so often used in teaching— materials such as printed textbooks and pencil-and-paper tests.

Curriculum and assessments designed using the principles of UDL can reduce the need for accommodations. Teachers will be able to more easily tailor instruction to student characteristics by using the multiple and flexible elements embedded in the curriculum. Equally important, students with LD will not be subject to the stigma that often comes with using accommodations in classroom instruction and testing.

Important Terms to Know

Assistive Technology Device: Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. (20 U.S.C. 1401 (1))

Assistive Technology Service: Any service that directly assist a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. (20 U.S.C. 1401 (2))

The need for assistive technology devices and services must be considered when formulating a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

UDL and UD in Large-scale Assessments

All states are required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as the No Child Left Behind Act or NCLB)—the nation's federal education law—to administer annual tests in reading/language arts and mathematics to all public school students in grades 3 through 8. In addition, high school students must be tested sometime during grades 10-12 in both reading/language arts and math. NCLB also requires that all students—including those with disabilities like LD—participate in these assessments, taking either the general education assessment or an alternate assessment. Results of these assessments are used to hold schools and school districts accountable for the academic performance of students in an effort to improve achievement.

Many states add other tests to their statewide testing programs, both more frequent tests and tests in more subjects. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) requires that all states incorporate universal design principles in developing and administering all state- and district-wide tests, to the extent feasible.

Universally designed assessments—developed in accordance with Universal Design for Assessments (UDA) guidelines—provide students taking general education assessments a fair opportunity to show what they know and an accurate way to measure what they have learned. Universally designed assessments are meant to increase access, but they **do not** change the standard of performance of assessments.

Dr. Christopher Johnstone, researcher at the National Center on Educational Outcomes and lead author of *A State Guide to the Development of Universally Designed Assessments,* says this about UDL and assessments: "The biggest difference between UDL (Universal Design for Learning) and UDA (Universal Design for Assessments) is that in UDL there can be more flexibility with helping students to understand concepts. With UDA, the way we design tests and support students must be carefully considered so we do not change what an item is trying to test."

Still, universally designed curriculum and assessments go hand-in-hand. Providing enhanced learning opportunities through UDL designed curriculum while continuing to use rigid tests to measure learning is unfair to students. Universally designed assessments result in tests that are more accessible to greater numbers of students and are more responsive to student differences. Equally important, such assessments will provide results that are more valid.

Universally designed assessments are not meant to replace accommodations or meant to replace the need for an alternate assessment for some students with disabilities. Accommodations may still be needed for some students. But universally designed assessments can reduce the need for accommodations, which come with an array of issues discussed earlier. Still, the IDEA requires that the IEP of every student address the need for any appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the student's academic achievement and functional performance of a student on state- and district-wide assessments.

Below is the traditional approach and UDA approach to a fourth grade math test item.

Question: Parents and students attended Back-to-School night in the school auditorium. In the front of the auditorium, there are 76 chairs arranged equally in 4 rows. How many chairs are in each row?
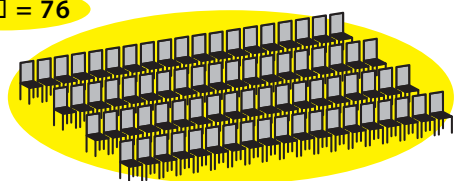
Traditional Approach	UDA Approach
	$4 \times \square = 76$
A. 12	**A.** 12
B. 15	**B.** 15
C. 18	**C.** 18
D. 19	**D.** 19

(Note: The amount of supporting information that can be provided in large-scale assessments will vary depending on the precise skill being measured.)

Large-scale assessments with high-stakes consequences

Increasingly, states are requiring all students to pass tests in order to receive a regular high school diploma — including students with disabilities. Currently 26 states have or plan to begin administering exit exams (or an exit exam) that students must pass to receive a regular high school diploma. Such "high-stakes" tests are often presented in rigid formats that create barriers for students with LD, who frequently have deficits in core academic skills such as reading (see box at right).

Universally designed tests increase the likelihood that students with LD can perform satisfactorily while requiring fewer accommodations. Since the results of these tests are used to make important decisions that impact the futures of students, it is particularly critical that they be designed with UDA in mind. High-stakes testing has been noted as a possible factor that contributes to a student's decision to drop out of school, another important issue discussed next.

UDL and School Completion

The graduation rate of students with LD is unacceptably low. Latest information places the rate of graduation with a regular high school diploma at approximately 62 percent nationwide. One in four (25 percent) students with LD drops out of school. Failure to earn a high school diploma poses significant lifelong consequences for students with LD — consequences such as lack of access to postsecondary education, persistent unemployment or underemployment, and increased risk of mental health issues.

Research has shown that dropping out of school is a process of disengagement that begins early. Engaging students with LD in school and learning is a key ingredient in preventing dropout and keeping them in school through graduation.

The use of UDL designed curriculum provides new and different ways to engage students with LD, increasing their interest in learning and decreasing their risk of dropping out.

Did you know …

- Two-thirds of secondary students with learning disabilities are reading 3 or more grade levels behind.

- Twenty percent are reading 5 or more grade levels behind.

Source: Youth with Disabilities: A Changing Population and The Achievements of Youth with Disabilities During Secondary School. Reports from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)2003
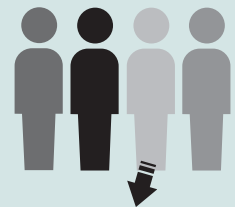
One in every four students with LD will drop out of school.

Only two-thirds (62 percent) of students with LD will graduate from high school with a regular diploma.

LD Talk: Universal Design for Learning (UDL):
Effective Technology-based Teaching Practices for All Struggling Learners

Dr. David Rose is Co-Founder and Chief Scientist, Cognition and Learning at CAST. In 1984, David Rose helped to found CAST with a vision of expanding opportunities for all students, especially those with disabilities, through the innovative development and application of new technologies, resulting in the development of the theory and practical framework of Universal Design for Learning.

Below are excerpts from the LD Talk with Dr. Rose conducted on February 20, 2007.

Question: I think the idea of universal design makes perfect sense. School topics SHOULD be taught in ways that are inviting and interactive and give every student a chance to learn in the style and with feedback that suits them best. What I don't understand is how, as a parent, I can get my daughter's school to 'get with the program'.

Dr. Rose: We have started to reconceptualize this problem a bit. We are beginning to speak about schools as having "print disabilities." They are limited in the kinds of learning and teaching that they can do because of their print disabilities. The disability limits them in three ways:

First, it limits them in WHO they can teach, in the kinds of students with whom they can hope to have success. Students with LD are the victims of this kind of school-based disability.

Second, it limits them in WHAT they can be successful in teaching. Many subjects, math and science for example, are poorly taught in a textbook-dominated manner, for any student.

Third, it limits them in HOW they are preparing students for their future. Students who are taught primarily in a world of print are not being prepared for the literacies and tools that will be critical for their future. No one believes that modern technologies are unimportant for their future literacy, but schools are the one place that acts as it does.

So, schools need to "get with the program" of overcoming their print disabilities—they need to move into this century where the students are already living.

I say all this because it is not just that your school needs to "get with the program" in order to be effective with your daughter, it is that the school needs to get with the program to overcome its own disabilities. That is worth doing, for every single student.

Question: Someone told me that printed books for people with disabilities are like "stairs" because they are filled with information but not accessible unless you can use them to get to where you want to go. I can see why this might be so for people with physical disabilities, but with books on tape and other types of audio-based listening opportunities, why would universally designed materials be helpful to people with LD such as dyslexia?

Dr. Rose: I never heard that analogy before, but I like it. Indeed books for many students are like stairs that they can't use to get anywhere.

Books on tape and other types of audio-based listening opportunities are important ways to make books more accessible - they are like putting a ramp in the building so that individuals with disabilities can get to the right floor. Such retrofitting is necessary, but costly, often ruins the design or integrity of the building, and often is not very accessible.

So, as you ask, why do we need universally designed books? The advantage of universally designed books is that the books are designed to support students of many abilities right from the start. Just like designing a building with ramps and elevators right from the start—its cheaper, better designed, more accessible, etc.

What does a universally designed book do better? Well, you don't have to find a tape for it, because the book is a talking book right from the start. But, more importantly, there are many options for how it can support

struggling readers (it can also sound out words, provide strategy support, vocabulary help, etc.). All of these supports are built in. The downside of books on tape, etc. is that it is often hard for students to follow where they are in the book and many students stop trying to read: they just listen. Since we want them to continue learning to read, that is not a good thing.

In the universally designed version, students can point at any word to hear it spoken aloud. That helps them just when they want it. Or, if they need more help, they can have the book read aloud automatically (like the audiotape) but the words are highlighted as they are spoken. That helps students follow the text and encourages them to both read and listen, not just listen.

And, better than the audiotape, the universally designed books can read fast or slow or in-between, at whatever pace is just right for the student.

But, we have found that the other supports than read-alouds, like built-in supports that help students with comprehension strategies or building vocabulary, are just as important for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

[*Editor's Note:* Since this interview, CAST has released several free online tools that demonstrate what Dr. Rose is talking about regarding the power of universally designed books. Parents and teachers can use these free resources to help build literacy skills. *UDL Editions* available at udleditions.cast.org and *Book Builder* available at bookbuilder.cast.org]

Question: What applications of universal design do you envision being implemented in high stakes testing? Do you ever envision children being able to use digital literacy during reading portions or a computer's ability to recognize and correct spelling or grammar errors to assist children who suffer from dyslexia or other similar language based learning differences? Are we only testing specific processes? Shouldn't we be more interested in a child's ability to contribute and participate in a global economy?

Dr. Rose: The important point in considering assessment is to know what the underlying purpose of items are, what are they trying to measure? Only when we know that, and that becomes a fixed or anchor point, can we effectively decide how to make sure that the item will be accurate for all students. If we want to know whether students can solve math problems of a specific type, for example, we need to make sure we are really measuring that ability and that we are not inadvertently measuring something else—like their reading ability, or even their rote calculating ability, and certainly not their vision or hearing. All too often, tests mix up lots of different abilities, and we don't know what we are measuring. This is not a huge problem of accuracy for many students who are typically achieving. It IS a huge problem for students who have atypical learning profiles—the very definition of students with learning disabilities. And yes, we should be measuring things that matter for student's future in a global economy, NOT just their skills in 18th century literacies.

Question: Sometimes teachers provide adaptations for students and offer them assistive technologies that allow them to make use the existing materials (like textbooks) in the classroom. The problem as I see it is that these special adaptations can water down the concepts and skills that are part of the curriculum, and this makes it virtually impossible for these students to catch up. At a time when high-stakes assessments are required for grade promotion and graduation, it seems to me that these special provisions are not much ore than a prescription for failure. Is universal design for learning a potential solution?

Dr. Rose: Yes, I hope so. Universal design is not a prescription for dumbing down the curriculum but for smartening it up. And you are right that it is a very bad idea to accommodate the curriculum in ways that actually undermine learning for students. We need higher standards for students with disabilities, not lower standards. To get there, we will need much more powerful, and effective, curricula. To be more effective, curricula will have to do what good exercise machines do—they are adjusted to each individual who is working out. By doing so, they provide just the right support and resistance to maximize every individual's time. Curricula, on the other hand, are one size fits all, as if every student was the same. Think what that would be like if you came into the gym and all the machines were fixed at the same height, and all the weights were exactly the same weight. Only a few people would do well. Unfortunately, that happens too often in school.

Universal Design for Learning
Case Story: Reading Challenges in Social Studies

Adapted from, Case story: *Reading challenges in social studies.*
Retrieved May 30, 2008, from www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/casestories/cs1/.

> UDL provides a framework to create and implement lessons with flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that support learning for all students. This case story illustrates how UDL can be used to improve upon the traditional approach used in teaching while keeping expectations for learning high.

Teaching Challenge

Mrs. Jones, a fourth grade teacher, is concerned that her students' diverse reading abilities prevent them from understanding social studies material and achieving the standards set for fourth grade. She is frustrated that she only has 45 minutes per day for Social Studies instruction.

She has 29 students — 14 girls and 15 boys. Her students represent a heterogeneous mix of backgrounds and abilities. She has six students who have identified disabilities and an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Of these six students, four have a specific learning disability, and two have speech and language disabilities. Four other students are English language learners. In addition, there is a great diversity of reading ability across the classroom population, particularly in the areas of decoding, comprehension, and language. Although Mrs. Jones can provide instruction for groups and individuals to accommodate individual needs during the 1½ hour language arts time, the 45-minute time allocation for social studies does not allow time to differentiate instruction.

Her fourth grade classroom is equipped similarly to the other elementary classrooms in her district in terms of instructional materials, computers, and access to the Internet. There is a complete encyclopedia available, both in print and electronically on a CD-ROM. Students use the print version of the district-adopted Social Studies textbook. Each student has a textbook, and a paraprofessional is available for 30 minutes per day during the reading instruction time.

Mrs. Jones' challenge is how to help all students achieve the social studies lesson goals given the short time period and the widely diverse skills levels of students.

Goals

> Clear goals, distinct from the means for attaining them, enable teachers to offer students varied pathways to learning and scaffolds to support areas of need that do not bear directly on the learning goal.

For this lesson, Mrs. Jones' goal is to engage her students in doing research on the physical and topographical characteristics of a region in order to draw a map. She plans to expand her traditional instructional approaches to include a Universal Design for Learning approach in her instructional methods.

Mrs. Jones designs instructional goals for the unit that are linked to the standards and that are specific to content and learning activities. She is careful to ensure that the means for accomplishing the goals are not interwoven into the instructional goals. Providing options for meeting goals enhances student engagement.

Traditional Approach

- Student groups create a map containing political, topographical, and resources in the selected state of study.
- Students will orally present and describe the state and map results to the class.

UDL Approach

- Students *map* the political, topographical and natural resources of a selected state, compare patterns across the maps, and *present* results to demonstrate understandings of the state and resources.

Methods

Methods are the instructional techniques the teacher uses to facilitate student learning.

Certain instructional techniques are very effective in supporting students as they learn to recognize patterns; other techniques are better suited to supporting students as they learn strategic skills or as they build engagement with learning. Teachers can accommodate diverse learners by using a repertoire of teaching strategies.

Mrs. Jones expands her traditional instructional approaches to teaching this lesson to include Universal Design for Learning approaches.

1. Introducing the Topic

Traditional Approach

- The teacher provides a brief lecture on the home state. She reminds students of previous studies of land and resources, and the impact of natural resources on population growth, political and land use issues.
- Teacher divides the students into working groups to complete their research, map-making, note-taking, and presentation.

UDL Approach

- Avoid limiting presentation style. There may be students who do not respond, comprehend, or attend well to a lecture style. Consider the use of media with the presentation, concept maps, or graphics to enhance and illustrate concepts and topics that are introduced and reviewed.
- When opening the lesson, consider frequent questions, statements of clarification, and solicit student participation.
- Consider assigning students to working groups by mixed abilities (heterogeneous grouping) for complementary skills.
- Provide demonstrations of performance expectations.

2. Guiding Students in Practice and/or Producing Work Products

Traditional Approach

- Students read the textbook chapter on the selected border state.
- Find out about the state resources, boundaries, topography, and populations centers.
- Students are required to use at least one outside resource.
- Student groups must also take written notes to support their research work.

UDL Approach

- Provide multiple means to access resource materials
- Scaffold reading with supports for decoding and vocabulary.
- Support reading strategies with cooperative working groups (e.g., paired reading, discussion sessions).
- Consider alternate means for note taking. (e.g., audio recorded summary, electronic note taking).
- Scaffold note taking by allowing students to use a graphic organizer with information prompts built-in (e.g., Name of state, land mass, geographic location).

3. Closing Activities and Tasks

Traditional Approach

- Oral presentation to the class of the groups' findings on the map, including resource information to the class.
- Each student is to take notes during the presentations.
- Draw and write a compare/contrast chart about the physical, political, and geographical characteristics of the states presented by all groups.

UDL Approach

- Provide students with options for presenting information (e.g., presentation may be written, oral, video, or visual).
- Provide scaffolds and alternate means of collecting information for audience as students make presentations (e.g. recording, notes, response questions).
- Consider alternatives for writing a compare/contrast chart (e.g., oral, pictorial, digital).

Materials

Instructional materials—the materials that teachers use to teach and students use to learn—are the backbone of a curriculum and embody its purpose. Materials are the physical objects or devices that are used to store and distribute knowledge as it is conveyed in various media. Publications, such as textbooks, trade books, videos, CD ROMs, workbooks, floppy disks, and audiotapes, are common examples of materials.

The facts, concepts, information, principles, and relationships that are to be learned must be represented in a media that communicates effectively to students and stored and distributed in a media that is accessible to all learners.

Media is the means of symbolic or physical representation through which knowledge is communicated. The most common media in instructional settings include text, image, speech, video, sculpture, theater, etc. The Universal Design for Learning context differentiates between traditional or "fixed" media and digital media because digital media are flexible and can be adjusted.

Mrs. Jones expands her traditional instructional approaches to teaching this lesson to include Universal Design for Learning approaches.

Traditional Approach

- Social Studies Textbook
- Encyclopedia
- Map Materials
- Tag board
- Colored pencils
- Rulers
- Glue
- Clay
- Trays
- CD software on US geography

UDL Approach

- Printed text may constitute a barrier for students with physical or reading disabilities. If texts are digitally available, teachers and students have options for: text-to speech, Braille, and a variety of display formats.
- Provide various means and materials that students can use to create a map. Examples include: (a) draw a map, (b) create a map with clay, etc., (c) create a map electronically with computer tools (GIS), (d) have students verbalize for others the details of what to place on a map and where.
- Some learners may have organizational deficits making it challenging to understand and make use of library structure and thus the library resource. Provide scaffolds and instruction to find resource materials in multiple formats, text, digital, audio etc.
  - Pre-select possible materials for students to review/research
  - Direct students to area of media center with appropriate resource materials
  - Consider textbook barriers noted in "materials/classroom"
- Some learners may have difficulty using computers with CD hindering access to the resource material.
  - Provide supports and instruction to use CD resource
  - Evaluate access issues for vision, decoding, etc., for the various students in the class.

Assessment

Assessment is a method for determining a learner's knowledge and abilities and is used to make educational decisions. The teacher, testing agencies, or the government may design assessments. Universally designed assessments incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning and are designed to adjust to many individual differences and to focus the questions on exactly what teachers are trying to find out. With flexibility in presentation, expression, supports, and engagement, common errors introduced by single-mode fixed assessments are reduced. Further, that same flexibility allows teachers to align assessment more closely with teaching goals and methods and thus, to assess students more accurately.

Mrs. Jones understands that assessing student progress is a more comprehensive practice than simply preparing and giving a test. She knows that it is necessary to observe her students and provide feedback as they write and to provide flexible structures, such as rubric scoring, to assess her students' progress. One effective method for evaluating students' knowledge is to engage students in activities and assignments.

Traditional Approach	UDL Approach
Assign a grade to each component of each student's work: ■ The group-created map. ■ The class presentation. ■ Individuals' notes regarding presentations. ■ The individual compare contrast chart.	■ Monitor cooperation in working groups and student roles. Provide instruction, scaffolds, and feedback. ■ Observe and record learner use of notes and resources when completing the map. ■ Observe and record student note-taking, using constructed or open-ended formats. Indicate type and accuracy of notes. Determine need for further instruction. ■ Check map contents, organization, and presentation with prepared scoring rubric.

Mrs. Jones also frequently uses tests and student products to evaluate students' understanding of new content.

Traditional Approach	UDL Approach
■ Administer the end-of-chapter test prepared by the textbook publisher and found in the Teacher's Guide. The test consists of multiple choice and short essay answers.	■ Evaluate the constructs measured in the published test. Determine if there is a match of the lesson evaluation procedures to the lesson standards and goals. ■ If this measure is determined adequate for the learning goals, evaluate the accessibility for all learners in the class. ■ Consider alternate means of delivery, such as an oral test, providing untimed sessions, etc.

Mrs. Jones finds that teaching lessons through UDL allows her to consider each student's individual learning needs and allows her to provide scaffolds and supports to ensure that the student can achieve the lesson goals.

Tips for Parents

Parents are powerful change agents who can advocate for making the curriculum accessible to address the diverse needs of their children. As a result of these efforts, all students benefit due to minimizing barriers to learning and maximizing learning opportunities.

Take the time to learn about UDL, a framework for a fully accessible curriculum so you can advocate for its adoption in curriculum, teacher training, and district- and statewide assessments.

Learn:	Become knowledgeable what makes a curriculum accessible for students with LD. To learn more about UDL so you can explain and advocate for its adoption at your school, visit lessonbuilder.cast.org/learn.php to watch a short video, read about UDL, and try a UDL activity. Understanding the difference between UDL, special education, assistive technology, and accommodations will enable you to maximize your advocacy efforts.
Investigate:	Does your child's school know about UDL? Do teachers have access to training on how to incorporate a UDL approach to planning and delivering instruction? If not, direct them to the professional development information and resources available at www.cast.org/pd. Are the assessments being used by your district and state following guidelines for UDA? If not, direct them to information and resources available at www.nceo.info.
Promote:	Encourage your school district to adopt an approach to teaching and learning that values diversity and promotes improved learning outcomes for all students. UDL provides a framework for designing and implementing curriculum that works for all children. Ask the PTA or PTO at your school to sponsor a presentation on UDL for parents.
Inquire:	When formulating annual goals for your child, ask if the proposed goals align to the content standards for the state and reflect the learning expectations for your child's enrolled grade. Do the goals represent only the learning expectation and not the means for attaining them? If the means are embedded in the goal, inquire about how to establish clear goals that are distinct from the means for attaining them.
Expect:	Don't settle for instructional techniques, materials and assessment methods that do not engage your child and enable him to show what he knows. Expect your child's school and teachers to use a variety of instructional approaches, provide an array of materials, and offer multiple ways to measure student learning.
Help:	Assist your school, district, and state in adopting and promoting the use of UDL and UDA. Do this by volunteering at school, helping out with fundraising efforts and playing a role in the use of funds at your child's school.

Resources

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)
www.CAST.org

Center for Universal Design in Education
www.washington.edu/doit/CUDE/

National Center on Educational Outcomes
A State Guide to the Development of Universally Designed Assessments
www.NCEO.info/OnlinePubs/StateGuideUD

National Center *for* Learning Disabilities
® *The power to hope, to learn, and to succeed.*

The National Center for Learning Disabilities works to ensure that the nation's 15 million children, adolescents and adults with learning disabilities have every opportunity to succeed in school, work and life. NCLD provides essential information to parents, professionals and individuals with learning disabilities, promotes research and programs to foster effective learning and advocates for policies to protect and strengthen educational rights and opportunities.

For more information, please visit us on the Web at www.LD.org.

NCLD is a member of the National UDL Task Force, a group of national organizations working together to promote UDL in the school environment. For more information, visit www.UDL4AllStudents.org.

About the Author: Candace Cortiella is Director of The Advocacy Institute (www.AdvocacyInstitute.org), a nonprofit focused on improving the lives of people with learning disabilities through public policy and other initiatives. She also serves on the Professional Advisory Boards of the National Center for Learning Disabilities and Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities. The mother of a young adult with learning disabilities, she lives in the Washington, D.C. area. The author thanks the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) and the National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO) for invaluable assistance with the preparation of this Parent Advocacy Brief.

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