The UDL Schoolwide Implementation Criteria: **Guide**

Developed by CAST

Acknowledgements

As the global education community continues to recognize the importance of proactive and iterative design of equitable and inclusive learning experiences for ALL students, the Universal Design for Learning Schoolwide Implementation Criteria (UDL-SIC) represents a significant development. The UDL-SIC provides solid guidance for implementation pathways for schools that are focused on systemic improvement of their culture and environment, leadership, teaching and learning, and professional development.

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Introduction

Welcome to the Universal Design for Learning Schoolwide Implementation Criteria (UDL-SIC) Guide.

The UDL-SIC provides educators with a framework to design school experiences and environments that support equity, inclusion, and expert learning. Using the UDL-SIC, school teams can develop a common understanding of effective school-wide UDL implementation and plan for systemic and holistic UDL implementation at their school. Whether a team is just getting started or has many years of success implementing UDL, the UDL-SIC is a robust tool for guiding decisions and supporting ongoing schoolwide growth.

Universal Design for Learning in Schools

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for designing educational experiences that give all students equal opportunities to learn (Rose & Meyer, 2002). When the UDL framework is applied systematically and intentionally at the school level, systemwide barriers are reduced and all learners, including those at the margins, can become expert learners (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). To learn more about UDL, visit www.cast.org.

About the UDL-SIC

The UDL Schoolwide Implementation Criteria identifies the critical attributes necessary for high-quality UDL implementation. It serves as a blueprint for schools as they assess, design, implement, monitor, and demonstrate implementation progress. Based on implementation science, UDL-SIC is data-driven, supports continuous improvement, and provides multiple pathways for schools to advance (Fixsen et al, 2013).

The UDL-SIC has two main goals:

1. To provide a roadmap for school communities working toward school-level UDL implementation.
2. To recognize the progress and accomplishments of school communities who are implementing UDL with fidelity.

Purpose of the Guide

This guide helps school teams use the UDL-SIC to improve schoolwide UDL practices or seek UDL school certification. The guide provides:

- an overview of the Schoolwide Implementation Criteria;

- information, tools, and resources related to using the UDL-SIC to improve schoolwide UDL implementation; and

- information, tools, and resources related to using the UDL-SIC to apply for UDL School Certification.

Overview of the UDL-SIC

The UDL-SIC is built around four domains: **School Culture and Environment**, **Teaching and Learning**, **Leadership and Management**, and **Professional Learning**. They provide an organizational structure for thinking about schoolwide UDL implementation. Each domain is defined by its four elements, which guide implementation and are measured during certification. For research purposes, the elements are designated with discrete tags. The tags identify the elements by their organizing domains and the order in which they appear (e.g. the tag D1.E1 represents the first element in the first domain).

The UDL-SIC also integrates five cross-cutting or core design concepts related to UDL implementation practices. These foundational UDL concepts are intentionally woven throughout the domains and elements.

SIC Domains and Elements

A good place to start your UDL-SIC journey is to become familiar with the domains and elements. Familiarity with the big ideas enables school teams to understand the big ideas behind UDL implementation and certification.

School Culture and Environment Domain

In schools that use the UDL framework, school communities work together to create a culture that values equity, inclusion, and expert learning for all. The school community commits to the design of flexible, goal-directed experiences and environments that anticipate the variability of the community itself and has high expectations for all. Rather than sort learners according to a narrow set of skills and knowledge, UDL school communities consider variability and anticipate that all members will become expert learners.

School Culture and Environment Elements

- The school community designs a culture that supports inclusion and equity. (D1.E1)

- The school community designs a culture that supports expert learning. (D1.E2)

- The school community communicates in ways that reflect a commitment to UDL. (D1.E3)

- The school community designs school spaces to support variability. (D1.E4)

Teaching and Learning Domain

The UDL framework can be used as a guide for educators to design learning opportunities that anticipate learner variability so every member can become an expert learner. The [UDL Guidelines](#) are used to proactively and iteratively design curricular goals, assessments, methods, and materials to reduce barriers to learning. Rather than focus solely on classroom learning activities, a UDL school community views all interactions as learning opportunities and designs them with UDL in mind.

Teaching and Learning Elements

- Educators intentionally design learning experiences using evidence based, high leverage practices to address learner variability and reduce barriers. (D2.E1)

- Learning goals are clear, flexible, meaningful, and support high expectations for all. (D2.E2)

- Educators incorporate evidence-based, high-leverage, flexible methods and materials that anticipate learner variability and reduce barriers. (D2.E3)

- Educators incorporate flexible assessments that are designed to support learner variability and reduce barriers to learning. (D2.E4)

Leadership and Management Domain

In schools that use the UDL framework, leaders actively support and monitor UDL implementation across school settings. Using an iterative, data-driven design process, leaders model UDL practices and ensure that all learning environments and experiences, including school processes, procedures, and resources, are designed to anticipate learner variability by reducing barriers and promoting equity, inclusion, and expert learning for all.

Leadership and Management Elements

- School leaders actively lead, support, and monitor UDL implementation across the school community. (D3.E1)

- School leaders collaborate to design a systematic UDL implementation process. (D3.E2)

- School leaders collaborate to design school processes, procedures, and structures to anticipate learner variability and promote equity, inclusion, and expert learning. (D3.E3)

- School leaders procure school and classroom resources that align with the UDL framework. (D3.E4)

Professional Learning Domain

In a school that uses the UDL framework, professional learning opportunities are personalized and job-embedded, and they promote ongoing professional growth. Professional learning is designed and facilitated by UDL professionals to be flexible, data-driven, and goal-directed, and to promote the development of educators' expertise.

Professional Learning Elements

- UDL professional learning is goal driven. (D4.E1)

- UDL professional learning is flexible to address staff variability. (D4.E2)

- UDL professional learning supports expert learning. (D4.E3)

- UDL professional learning integrates job-embedded support. (D4.E4)

For more details about the elements, indicators and levels of implementation, see: UDL-SIC Full Criteria (Learning Designed)

UDL-SIC Cross-Cutting Concepts

These foundational UDL design concepts are intentionally woven into the domains and elements. Educators are asked to design for:

- **Equitable, inclusive, and accessible environments**. The design process focuses on creating equitable, inclusive, and accessible environments and experiences for all.

- **Learner variability**. Anticipating the learner variability, educators consider the whole learner, including their social, emotional, cognitive, perceptual, physical, sensory, and cultural strengths and needs when designing learning experiences and environments.

- **Reducing barriers in the environment**. By recognizing that barriers reside in the design of the environment or experience, not in the learner, barriers can be intentionally reduced using the UDL Guidelines and an iterative design process.

- **Expert learning**. Educational experiences are goal directed and designed to keep expectations high for all learners. Expertise includes becoming resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, goal-directed, purposeful, and motivated as learners (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

- **Data-driven, iterative processes**. Learning design is an intentional, iterative process focused on continuous improvement at all levels, using rich and varied data to inform subsequent design.

Using the SIC to Support UDL Implementation

When considering UDL schoolwide implementation, understanding research related to implementation science can help school teams plan more effectively. Key research-backed ideas related to UDL implementation include:

- **Change takes time.** Successful implementation requires dedicated time. Change occurs incrementally. Research shows that implementing a well-constructed, evidence based innovation can take 2 to 4 years (Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001).

- **Anticipate variability.** While there is general agreement around the stages of implementation, the way schools engage, build background, and take action toward implementation will vary. Just as variability exists among individuals, no two schools are alike in their UDL implementation journey.

- **Use data to drive decisions.** Effective implementation planning includes selecting and using rich and varied data to determine a school's UDL strengths and needs. Schools use data to set goals and measure growth and progress. They identify and use evidence-based, high impact teaching practices supported and documented by data.

- **Share accountability.** Change requires commitment from the entire school community. Implementation is most successful when led by a dedicated leadership team.

- **Encourage reflective and recursive practice.** Implementation is reflective, growth oriented, and recursive. UDL leadership teams regularly collect and analyze implementation data and adjust goals to remove any remaining barriers.

- **Provide support for change.** In addition to providing high quality, flexible professional learning opportunities, job embedded support is essential to help educators systematically change practices over time to achieve greater equity and inclusion.

UDL-SIC Levels and Alignment to UDL Implementation Phases

The UDL-SIC levels of certification and the stages of UDL implementation science are closely aligned, but not synonymous. The phases of UDL implementation reflect the progressive actions and decisions made by an implementation leadership team. Existing research indicates that successful implementation begins with a shared vision of a need for change. It is recursive and occurs over time through predictable phases: Explore, Prepare, Integrate, Scale, and Optimize (Fixsen et al., 2015). The UDL-SIC certification levels reflect a school's current status related to a specific element, which may or may not correlate with a school's overall phase of implementation. Below is a summary of how the UDL-SIC works with the phases of implementation to support schoolwide UDL implementation.

Level 1 and Explore and Prepare Phases

In UDL-SIC Level 1, the UDL Leadership team determines the extent to which the school currently meets element indicators. The leadership teams identify areas of strength and need related to school UDL practices. This aligns with the Explore phase of UDL implementation, where the goal is for the leadership team to align UDL practices to their "needs for change."

Also in UDL-SIC Level 1, data from multiple sources are used to set goals and develop a plan to move toward greater alignment. The UDL Leadership team determines which data it will use to monitor progress toward meeting the school certification elements identified. This correlates with the Prepare phase of UDL implementation, in which the leadership team decides on an area of focus and prepares a plan to make that happen. Both the Prepare phase and Level 1 include the UDL Leadership team and a few early adopters, who together plan to implement UDL practices.

Level 2 and Integrate Phase

In UDL-SIC level 2, the school community uses the UDL framework to guide the development of a systematic implementation of UDL practices across the four domains; school culture and environment, teaching and learning, leadership and management and professional learning. The UDL Leadership team continues to collect data from multiple sources, analyzes the data to monitor progress, and revises UDL implementation goals in all domains. This aligns with the Integrate phase of UDL implementation, in which staff members make changes in practice, monitor progress, and iterate on the implementation strategies that align to the UDL framework. In both the Integrate phase and the Level 2, at least half of educators in the school are implementing UDL practices.

Level 3 and Scale Phase

At UDL-SIC Level 3, the school community uses the UDL framework to guide improvement of UDL implementation practices in the four domains. The UDL leadership team monitors UDL implementation and student data and adjusts plans based on their findings. This aligns with the Scale phase of UDL implementation, in which the school community is making changes to practice that support the "need for change" to support expert learning and to iterate design decisions based on data/feedback collected. In both the Scale phase and the Level 3, a majority of educators in the school and some school community members are implementing UDL practices.

Level 4 and Optimize Phase

At UDL-SIC Level 4, the UDL leadership team members share their UDL implementation story, including lessons learned, strategies and successes, and data that shows a significant change in target outcome with the broader education community. They mentor other schools implementing UDL and help advance the UDL community by designing and implementing innovative UDL practices. This aligns with the Optimize phase of UDL implementation in which the school identifies other schools in the district

to collaborate with and mentor in UDL implementation. At both the Optimize phase and Level 4, almost all educators in the school and many school community members are implementing UDL practices.

Tools to support the UDL-SIC

Readiness for Change

[UDL-SIC Implementation Readiness Indicators](#)

For schools new to UDL implementation, the UDL Implementation Readiness Indicators are a great place to start. Readiness is defined as the developmental point at which a person, organization, or system has the capacity and willingness to engage in a particular activity. "Creating readiness for change is a critical component of both initiating and scaling up the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations in education" (Fixsen et al., 2015).

Using the [UDL-SIC Implementation Readiness Indicators](#), teams identify areas that need attention prior to implementation. Determining readiness helps avoid the potentially costly mistake of launching implementation efforts prematurely. The following are the Readiness Indicators necessary for successful UDL implementation.

- **Shared vision for change**. Educators have a collective understanding that the current system is not producing the intended results and that change is necessary. This helps ensure that school stakeholders are primed to adopt new practices and processes.

- **Leadership commitment**. School leaders are prepared to champion change and monitor the successful implementation of new practices and innovations. Engaged leadership is essential at every level of implementation, and is particularly important during the adoption phase (Fixsen et al., 2005).

- **Educator support**. School leaders have the capacity to provide faculty with engaging, actionable, job-embedded professional learning that prepares them to develop and employ new evidence-based, UDL practices.

- **Infrastructure support**. The school has a systematic process for collecting and using data to make informed decisions. Educators need access to a robust data system that allows them to efficiently and effectively identify, collect, analyze and respond to changes in data.

Self-Assessment

UDL-SIC Self-Assessment

The UDL-SIC is designed to help teams identify their current status of schoolwide UDL implementation, set goals and plan for continued improvement, monitor progress, and use the results of progress monitoring to iterate on implementation goals and plans. For school teams already implementing UDL, using the UDL-SIC Self-Assessment to determine your baseline status is a great place to begin.

The UDL-SIC Self-Assessment is designed to help school teams map their school's current UDL practices to determine where they are and what steps to take next on their UDL journey. The UDL-SIC self-assessment:

- frames the Indicators for successful schoolwide application of UDL practices;

- provides a roadmap for designing equitable, inclusive environments;

- helps educators gather and analyze school data to identify areas of strength and need related to schoolwide UDL practices;

- helps educators identify potential entry points for improving UDL implementation;

- provides a structure for monitoring UDL implementation progress; and

- helps school teams prepare for applying for UDL School Certification.

Like UDL, the self-assessment is data-driven, supports continuous improvement, and provides multiple pathways for schools to progress through the stages of implementation. Once areas of strength and need are identified, school teams can use the outcomes of the self-assessment to:

- determine area(s) of focus;

- set improvement goals;

- identify ongoing data that can be used to monitor progress;

- develop an action plan; and

- determine a timeline for revisiting and revising the plan in order to meet the goals.

Goal-Setting and UDL Implementation Planning

Implementation planning is crucial to initiating and sustaining a coordinated and strategic UDL approach. The UDL-SIC Self-Assessment helps school teams articulate how UDL will help improve learning for all, and set meaningful, realistic implementation goals. Schools may choose to build on areas of existing strength, or they may focus on areas that have potential for growth. Setting goals across domains ensures a global, holistic approach to UDL school improvement.

School UDL teams can use the [UDL-SICC Goal Setting and Planning Tool](#) to identify goals, plan implementation actions, and prepare for implementation monitoring.

Creating a plan is just the beginning of an ongoing, iterative process of improvement. While scaling up implementation can take 3 to 5 years, the process of continually assessing and monitoring UDL implementation is ongoing. For more about UDL implementation, go to [CAST Professional Learning](#).

UDL-SIC Certification

Purpose of Certification

The purpose of the UDL School Certification is twofold. First, it provides school teams with an opportunity to receive an external formative assessment with a focus on mastery-oriented feedback to improve UDL implementation. Second, it recognizes schools for their UDL implementation success. This section focuses primarily on the second purpose of the UDL Schoolwide Implentation Criteria: recognition for UDL implementation accomplishments.

Certification Process

School level certification is based on the UDL-SIC and is awarded at four levels; Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Schools requesting certification will undergo a two-stage application process:

- initial application declaring an intent to apply for certification; and

- final application supported by a portfolio of implementation evidence.

Submissions are evaluated by an accredited panel of reviewers and certified by a UDL certification board. Schools will be provided with guidance and feedback from certification specialists throughout the application and review process.

With the initial application, a school informs the assessment team of its desire to be certified. This enables the board to establish a certification timeline and provide support to the school as it begins the process. The final application is developed around the UDL-SIC self-assessment and includes an evidence-based demonstration of the school's current implementation status relative to the UDL-SIC. A school's UDL implementation status is validated and confirmed following a review of the portfolio and completion of a site visit by the assessment team.

Certification Portfolio

Portfolio requirements vary based on the level of certification requested. In general, evidence must directly reference the element indicators and include both input- and outcome-related data. The type of evidence submitted to support requirement claims are left to the school to determine; this allows them flexibility in demonstrating successful implementation. School teams are required to provide an explanation of how the evidence submitted addresses the indicators. They must also provide the reviewer with any additional steps they plan to take to further implementation.

Certification Review Criteria

Applications and portfolios are assessed in relation to the indicators for each element in the four domains. The following criteria will be used to assess evidence.

1. **Level of evidence/documentation**. Scores are given based on congruence between the type of evidence (e.g. report, demonstration, quantitative, observational) and the level of certification for which it is submitted.

2. **Adherence of evidence/documentation to the criteria indicators**. Scores are given based on the validity of the evidence submitted to justify the indicators.

3. **Quality of implementation based on evidence**. Scores will be given based on the impact implementation activities have on the intended outcomes.

Domains will be measured by aggregating the scores of each element into a combined domain score. Reviewers will identify strengths and weaknesses within each domain and provide mastery oriented feedback to school teams.

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