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## **Implementing Meaningful Integration for Students with Significant Disabilities**

Julianne Scheer

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# **Implementing Meaningful Integration for Students with Significant Disabilities**

Julianne Scheer

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

### **Abstract**

This school improvement plan was developed based on the researcher's interest of integrating students with significant disabilities into the least restrictive learning environment, the general education classroom, to access core learning in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate way using the instructional strategies of Universal Design for Learning, also known as UDL. The researcher is in her fifth year of teaching and in their third year teaching students with significant disabilities who are primarily impacted by autism spectrum disorder. The implementation plan provides opportunities for teachers to create learning opportunities for all students to access core learning areas. This requires both teachers and students to have the necessary support to successfully achieve the intended learning outcomes created in individual learning plans.

*Keywords:* Universal Design for Learning, Integration, Students with Significant Disabilities

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### **Implementing Meaningful Integration for Students with Significant Disabilities**

As a result of the civil rights movement in the 1970's, many marginalized people who once were seen as second class citizens, were finally seen as the deserving citizens that they are. In 1975 the Education for all Handicapped Children Act was established and would be the foundation for what we know today, through many years of reform, as the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. It is through this Act in which the United States Department of Education provides laws that set expectations and precedence for how children who are impacted by a disability are to be provided a free and appropriate public education.

The problem is how students with disabilities access their education vary as there are laws explaining what the expectations are, but do not necessarily provide explicit instruction on how students with disabilities are to access their education, or what services should be provided to support students' access and achieve their education as many interpret the law differently. In addition to individuals interpreting the law differently, IDEA allows state representatives to allocate and delegate education funds, resulting in low funds for schools and districts to provide services for students with disabilities. Also large discrepancies

of how students with disabilities are receiving and accessing their education across the United States, and even across individual states. There are various approaches and instructional strategies which are used for serving students with significant disabilities. However, as this improvement plan will address, there is a significant amount of discrepancies to what approaches and strategies schools use to help support students with disabilities achieve their individual goals and grade level expectations.

This improvement plan will help define how students with significant disabilities can access their free and appropriate public education in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate way using the Universal Design for Learning, also known as UDL, to support individual learners with varying abilities. This plan will address what meaningful and developmentally appropriate education looks like for students with significant disabilities, and how to create opportunities for students with significant disabilities to work towards achieving their individual goals and grade level expectations alongside grade level peers in the least restrictive environment. By defining what UDL is, why it is meaningful for students with significant disabilities, and how teachers can use this strategy to help all students access their education through professional learning, the hope

would be ensuring more inclusive learning opportunities will be provided for all students no matter what their abilities are.

Defining what meaningful instruction looks like for students with disabilities to ensure they are given opportunities to equitably access core instruction alongside peers in the general education classroom, is necessary so all students with disabilities are able to learn in the least restrictive environment. Students come to school with varying abilities. When thinking about what kind of environment all students need to meet their fullest potential, Universal Design for Learning, also known as UDL, provides an inclusive and meaningful environment for all learners. UDL is a student-centered approach that enables all learners to learn and grow in ways that best meets their individual needs through meaningful planning and preparation from a collaborative team of teachers. Research that was gathered from peer reviewed articles and sources found through Northwestern DeWitt Library for this school improvement plan all focused on developmentally appropriate education using inclusive integration practices for students with significant disabilities. In addition to using inclusive strategies such as UDL, research was gathered for this improvement plan was



intended to support learners with significant disabilities that have a significant learning gap compared to grade level peers.

UDL allows students with varying abilities the opportunity to learn together while meeting individual learning goals. The UDL instructional approach is the most inclusive model for students with varying abilities including those with significant intellectual delays. Using UDL across all content areas provides meaningful learning opportunities for all students that they would not necessarily receive without the guidance that the UDL provides. When thinking about students who have significant intellectual delays, creating individualized learning opportunities is always a top priority of teachers. The foundation of UDL supports this type of learning environment for learners by creating differentiated representation, expression opportunities, and engagement strategies. (Salend et al., 2017) This foundation, paired with cross curricular collaboration among teachers, creates an environment helping all individuals meet their learning goals integrated together. Through this integration plan, teachers will be able to determine how to equitably create support through adaptations and modifications to core curriculum, so students with disabilities have access to core instruction in a meaningful way that helps support their individual learning

goals and needs. Through this improvement plan teachers will be guided to professional development resources will provide learning opportunities to support teachers' understanding of the UDL teaching strategies so implementing equitable learning opportunities for all students to access the core curriculum is possible.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Special Education Students and Access to Core Instruction**

Accessing a free and public education in the least restrictive environment is the right of every child in the United States. Students come to school with varying abilities. When thinking about what kind of environment all students need to meet their fullest potential, Universal Design for Learning, also known as UDL, provides an inclusive and meaningful environment for all learners. UDL is a student-centered approach that enables all learners to learn and grow in ways which best meets individual needs through meaningful planning and preparation from teachers.

UDL allows students with varying abilities the opportunity to learn together while meeting individual learning goals. The UDL instructional approach is the most inclusive model for students with varying abilities including those with

significant intellectual delays. Using UDL across all content areas provides meaningful learning opportunities for all students that they would not necessarily receive without the guidance that the UDL provides.

When thinking about students who have significant intellectual delays, creating individualized learning opportunities is always a top priority of teachers. The foundation of UDL supports this type of learning environment for learners by creating differentiated representation, expression opportunities, and engagement strategies. (Salend et al., 2017) This foundation, paired with cross curricular collaboration among teachers, creates an environment ensuring all individuals meet their learning goals.

### **Using Universal Design for Learning to Support Individualized Education Plans**

Determining how students access their learning is complex and there are many factors to consider when thinking about students with significant needs.

“Standardizing learning content and teaching approaches is not considered to be the best practice in contemporary education. This approach does not differentiate learners based on their individual abilities and preferences.”

(Al-Azawei et al., 2017) Finding the access point to engaging with core instruction for students with significant needs requires teachers to consider

sensory input to enhance opportunities for students to engage with their learning.

Sensory considerations along with the maximum amount of time students successfully attend to a task before becoming dysregulated is imperative for UDL to be successful for students with significant needs. This proactive approach of planning will allow teachers to collaboratively create an individualized learning plan opportunity for each student to successfully access their learning.

When thinking about sensory integration to engage students with learning, using tools such as “Sensory Diet Checklist” to help determine individual student sensory needs allows teachers to create an environment that allows students to learn to regulate their body within the classroom environment by using strategies and tools that help students stay engaged and regulated so that they are able to access core instruction. Teachers can meaningfully and purposefully design adaptive learning materials that will provide necessary input for individuals to engage in their learning with peers.

Using peers to help support students with significant needs is not only a great way to enhance social skills and opportunities for students with significant needs, but it is also a way to show the connection of the important

individualized learning occurs for students with such needs and who have an achievement gap is impacted because of their disability, and connect it to the learning in which grade level peers are working towards achieving. For example, if in kindergarten students are working on adding to sets of numbers together, a student with significant needs might be working on identifying quantities and further developing cardinality skills. The skills students with significant disabilities are working on achieving are the foundational skills in which grade level peers use and are fluently using to achieve their learning goals. Both are important, both connect to one another. This allows peers to connect together in learning and creates meaningful social skill opportunities through academic learning.

Peer Mediated Interventions, or PMI's, are an integration strategy teachers can use to help students with significant needs integrate into the general education classroom. PMI's can be meaningfully planned out in the classroom environment to use as a strategy within UDL so students with significant needs gain social skills which will help them successfully interact with peers. (Simpson & Bui, 2017)

### **Supporting Teachers in Professional Development in UDL**

Teachers will absolutely need support and guidance when they are planning their instructional materials. Within UDL there is differentiation that occurs so all students will be able to work on their individual learning goals, especially students with significant delays. For example, when thinking of students who are impacted by significant intellectual delays, the goal areas might be centered around nonacademic skills, whereas students who are typically developing are working on meeting grade level academic goals. (Giangreco, 2017) Both goal areas are equally important for the individuals working towards mastering them.

To create opportunities for students to achieve the goals they are working towards mastering, teachers must meaningfully plan. Understanding age appropriate materials based on where students are cognitively functioning is a crucial consideration teachers must take into account when planning instruction for students with intellectual disabilities. Students with such delays might need materials adapted in a way to ensure necessary help which allows access to the content which is being taught as well as enables them to interact with their peers who are also developing an understanding of a concept being taught.

However, the important factor here is UDL provides differentiated presentations, and opportunities for expression of the students' understanding of the content. In other words, how students with significant delays access the learning content will look different than typically developing students. Similarly, how both sets of students express their understanding of what they are learning will also look different. A typically developing student might write answers down about a topic and draw a picture. Whereas a student with significant delays might use a picture exchange system to help them express their understanding. (Giangreco, 2017)

### **Collaboration**

In order to create these instructional opportunities for all learners through UDL understanding the varying needs of students is critical. Teachers must collaborate with one another so all students have an opportunity to learn in an inclusive environment. When teachers work together across content areas, they are able to identify what barriers might cause students with significant needs disruption in achieving their fullest potential. Working together as a team to proactively plan and set up the learning environment for all students to be successful avoids frustration, and disruption. (Salend et al., 2017) Collaboration

among teachers is the most powerful way to create an environment in which help students be successful. Without collaboration there is not an opportunity to make sure learning materials and plans are being met with fidelity which is critical for student success.

Creating plans focusing on accessibility and helping meet the needs of learners with significant delays also provides teachers the opportunity to make sure students with individualized education plans, or an IEP, is being followed. It is a requirement all IEP's are followed with fidelity by all teachers across all content areas. UDL creates an opportunity to ensure this is done. This does not mean revisions to how instruction might need to be considered. It means, what is written on the IEP is continuously followed and used to help create lessons and learning content. When IEP goals are embedded into the UDL, teachers can be sure they are following any IEP with fidelity and provide accurate information to the IEP team on a student's progress. This is extremely important as students' progress throughout their educational career so that IEP teams can make informed decisions on appropriate placements, and support measures that are used to help the student meet their fullest potential as they grow and develop.



Accessible classrooms are set up to create an environment in which allows for students to organically interact with one another allowing students to authentically learn from one another. For example in the documentary *Including Samuel*, several different examples of inclusive classrooms where PMI's are utilized. One example was provided at the high school level where a student was fully integrated into classrooms across multiple content areas. General education students in the video discussed how they enjoyed being able to work alongside and learn from students who had different abilities. At one point in the video, a general education student states she treats other students from the special education program just like any other peer. This way of thinking is nurtured in students with the help of teacher support. (Including Samuel, 2008)

Teachers have a responsibility to create opportunities for PMI's. Although some teachers might consider this as "one more thing" they have to do. It would be the hope, and it is important to encourage other teachers to recognize special education students are not just the special education teachers' students. Rather all students are teachers' students. Meaning, within each building students are taught and nurtured by a community of educators.

Collectively those educators have the ability to set an expectation for all students within the learning community, have the right to be in every classroom and have the opportunity to learn with all peers.

When teachers realize the power of collaboration not only with other educators but with students as well, amazing, authentic, learning opportunities are created. Through the implementation of PMI's students are able to have these authentic learning opportunities where they are able to gain skills which will take them far beyond the classroom.

Self-determination is critical for all students to gain so they can become successful both inside and outside of school. However, creating self-determination in students with intellectual disabilities is especially critical so they are able to build foundational skills that will benefit them as they grow and develop alongside their peers. Students with intellectual disabilities can and should be included into the general education setting. Developing skills will help them be successful within this setting is something teachers should be working towards achieving.

When students feel supported they are more likely to participate in settings with their age-like peers, and are able to access the content being

taught. (Carter et al., 2015) Teachers must provide necessary support that will help students with intellectual disabilities have meaningful opportunities to learn with their peers. When special education students are successfully integrated, they are more likely to engage with peers and further develop both academic as well as social skills. These skills will benefit students as they transition from school to real world experiences.

Respecting children and creating ways for them to learn in a dignified way is important for teachers to do. (Elias, 2016) When teachers are creating scaffolds to support student's independence in the general education setting, it must be done in a respectful way. Creating individualized manipulatives or engagement pieces for example paired with a lesson other students might be engaging in, both makes the lesson being taught for a student with an intellectual disability meaningful as well as academically beneficial. It also allows them to work on necessary skills that will further develop their learning without being removed from their peers.

When students who have significant needs have self-determination skills, they are more likely to be academically successful. (Burke et al., 2018) Special education teachers and general education teachers must collaborate together

to make these learning opportunities possible. This is done through meaningful planning with a scope and sequence the special education teacher is able to have ahead of time to make the necessary accommodations and engagement pieces for student participation. If teachers are unable to do this, students will not be able to participate in learning content in which is being taught in a meaningful way. This then translates into a special education sitting in the classroom with age-like peers being compliant.

Compliance is not learning, and it should not be tolerated. Special education teachers must ensure when special education students are learning in the general education setting, their time is meaningful. When special education students have the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning, their self-determination skills are able to grow and develop alongside their social and academic skills. This is ultimately what we want for all students.

When students feel a part of a community, they develop self-determination skills that help them achieve both academic and nonacademic goals. UDL supports students in developing self-determination skills and when provided the opportunity to learn and develop alongside their typically developing peers.

Through the UDL model of learning, all students are able to learn and achieve their goals together. Creating an environment ensuring support for students with intellectual disabilities alongside their typically developing peers, creates opportunities for all students to learn skills which will benefit them both inside and outside the classroom.

Classrooms implementing the UDL model of learning create opportunities for students to achieve their individual goals in one setting. By doing this, teachers create engaging learning opportunities which compliment all students' learning styles and preferences in a truly inclusive way. This allows all students to be a part of the learning community where they are able to grow, develop, and meet their individualized learning goals.

### **School Profile**

#### -Student Performance

Current student performance scores are low in both the areas of math and reading. In the area of math students demonstrated 37% proficiency. This is significantly lower than the school district which is 60% proficient , and the state which is 70% proficient. In the area of reading, the proficiency scores are very

similar. Students at CRA scored 32% proficient whereas the district scored 62% and the state scored 68%. (USNews, 2023) CRA has continued to remain a school considered in need of improvement. However, as you will see, there are many factors which impact students in their ability to learn and access their education.

#### -Student and Community Characteristics

The composition of CRA is very complex. Of the student population which attends CRA, 85% live economically disadvantaged and are impacted by low socioeconomic implications such as food insecurity, impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACE's, and typically are transient meaning they often move and have an unstable living condition. Within the student population, nearly 56% of students identify as a part of a marginalized population such as Black, Asian American, American Indian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, or a combination of two races. (USNews, 2023)

The community neighborhood was impacted by the 2008 flood. Many houses were a complete loss, and even the school was shut down until clean up efforts were completed. Many people who lived in the neighborhood did not return after the flood, and many homes were not restored for years after the

flood. "The neighbors in the Taylor South neighborhood in Cedar Rapids are lower-middle income, making it a below average income neighborhood.

NeighborhoodScout's research shows this neighborhood has an income lower than 61.8% of U.S. neighborhoods. With 23.2% of the children here below the federal poverty line, this neighborhood has a higher rate of childhood poverty than 72.5% of U.S. neighborhoods." (Neighborhood Scout, 2020)

#### -School Characteristics

Cedar River Academy at Taylor Elementary, also known as CRA, is a magnet school located downtown in the heart of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. CRA served 241 students in the 2022-2023 school year ranging from preschool to fifth grade. The magnet theme of CRA is sustainability. CRA teaches students daily about sustainability of self, sustainability of community, and sustainability of environment through creative curriculum, project based learning, and many field learning experiences. CRA is also well known in the community and serves as a partner to many including Mathew 25, a non-profit agency in town. Through this particular partnership, students grow produce in hydroponic towers are used in a free will restaurant in town called Groundswell. This restaurant provides meals for free, no questions asked, to those who are in need and also

allows others who are able to pay and make donations to the restaurant. This is one example of many ways CRA students create and sustain relationships within the community while working towards meeting academic expectations.

Another characteristic of CRA is it previously housed what was referred to as the "Special Education Autism Program." The school previously had 3 classrooms specifically for students who were either diagnosed with autism, or shared characteristics of autism impacting students in a way in which students access a majority, if not all of their education in the special education classroom. In the 2022-2023 school year, the district started to implement a "new plan," which will place all students in their neighborhood schools rather than having students who required more individualized programming to attend a different school where a program was placed such as the one at CRA. The district is now placing Strat II teachers in each elementary school building so each school is equipped to help serve students with significant disabilities in their home school to access their education. This is where the inspiration for this school improvement plan lies so it will provide guidance and support for teachers who have not necessarily served students with such significant needs before. The hope of this improvement plan will aid teachers in understanding



how to integrate students in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate manner in addition to connecting student learning with achieving their individual goals while accessing the common core with grade level peers.

#### -Parent Involvement

As previously mentioned, the demographics of the population of students and their families are diverse. Many of the families who have students at CRA, have multiple children and have been a part of the school community for many years. Parent involvement looks quite different at CRA. Whereas you might typically think about schools having a PTA, or Parent Teacher Association, CRA is supported primarily by volunteers from local churches, Boys and Girls Club, and other community partners. Families and parents of CRA are often supported by CRA through receiving 100% free and reduced lunches for kids, weekend food bags are provided, and other individual support is needed for families. CRA is extremely fortunate to have a full time Tanager Place therapist who is staffed full time to help support not only students who are in need of mental health services but also their families. There are often many families and students in crisis and fortunately there is normally support to offer at CRA and if not, a path for direction to help find support for families.

### -School Mission & Vision

“Our mission is to develop a community of high achieving future ready learners with a passion for the sustainability of the environment, community, and self. “

The mission of CRA is centered all around sustainability. This magnet theme for the school was intentionally selected. For students and their families, it is important to teach and provide sustainable relationships to support growth in all areas of life. Through the mission of sustainability, students and their families are given opportunities to learn how to create a sustainable lifestyle for themselves, the community, and within the environment.

### -Current student learning goals

As a school, we are currently working on tracking student data collaboratively with each individual student. The rationale behind this is if students are able to collaborate with their teachers and have ownership in their learning, they will be more engaged in their learning. The impact and hope of this initiative is that student scores, such as those in math and reading, improve.

In the 2022-2023 school year, every student took part in tracking data and it was displayed in some way in each classroom.

-Curriculum, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and professional development

CRA has 69 staff members, one of the largest staff at the elementary level in the school district. Over the past years, the staff retention rate has certainly improved, however there is still quite a bit of turnover. There are many reasons for this, however knowing and understanding trauma informed teaching practices is critical for success at CRA. Unlike many other schools, academics do not necessarily come first at CRA. Instead, staff at CRA are aware of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs and have an understanding that basic needs such as safety, food, and shelter are not provided for students, then those students are not ready to learn. Often students do not know how to communicate their needs because they have not been taught, and often will communicate those needs in a less desirable way. To learn not to engage in a power struggle is a skill which is necessary for teachers to be successful. Instead teachers who practice trauma informed teaching understand the importance of relationship building and not engaging in a power struggle with students, but rather they create an

environment which allows students to feel safe enough to allow themselves to be vulnerable to learn from and trust their teacher. When this happens, the academics follow.

When academics are the primary focus, students work hard to achieve their learning. Students participate in the required ninety minutes reading and math learning blocks. During these times, students engage in group learning, small groups are supported by Title teachers, and engage in individual work. The ratio of staff to students at CRA are 1:12, a considerable ratio for students to get the attention they need and deserve. As a school receives extra funding due to being at Risk, there is considerably significant amounts of support for students to make gains academically.

The curriculum used at CRA is mandated by the school district. However, as CRA is a magnet school, there is a uniquely designed creative curriculum for each grade level which allows students to work towards achieving grade level expectations while learning about the magnet theme of sustainability. There are many project based learning opportunities for students to do this with, and students will even travel to field experiences during these learning opportunities as well.

Teachers engage in professional development regularly to work on helping students achieve growth. Understanding how to help students make growth in the areas of both academic and social emotional learning is necessary for students to achieve expectations to be successful. Many of the students at CRA receive special education services. 61 students out of 241, nearly one fourth of the student body have an individualized education plan. Understanding the content is being taught to students and how to collaborate as colleagues to differentiate learning opportunities to meet the needs of all learners is provided regularly to teachers through professional learning communities, also known as PLC's. At CRA every grade level team PLC's weekly with both the principal and the instructional design coach. Through these collaborative meetings, student data is reviewed, and action plans are created to implement, collect data on, and then reflect on the data at a later PLC meeting time. This collaborative norm within the school community keeps everyone focused on reaching the common goal of helping students achieve growth.

### **Needs Assessment**

Based on the school profile of Cedar River Academy, there is a need to support a high percentage of students with interventions which will help students achieve learning goals and close achievement gaps. Creating this learning environment provides an opportunity to create a learning community within the classroom and ensures it is set up to help all students work towards achieving their grade level standards in addition to any individualized education learning goals that are tracked according to students' IEPs.

Using data to determine the needs of the students, will help create which groups can be used to differentiate instruction, provide interventions, meet individual learning needs, all while building a learning community that is welcoming to all students. This is especially true for students with significant disabilities who might have previously only been accessing core learning instruction in the special education classroom. By using UDL teaching strategies, students who might be on alternate assessments, or very discrepant from grade level peers, such as those with significant disabilities, are able to work on meeting their individual learning goals alongside their peers by linking their learning goals as the foundation they are building to work towards achieving

the same grade level standards grade level peers are working towards achieving.

Setting up a classroom environment using UDL not only provides individualized learning support for the students with the most significant needs, it also seamlessly creates a natural inclusive environment and community does not discriminate based on abilities. When this foundation for the classroom environment is created, differentiation instruction to meet the needs of every student in the classroom can cohesively be achieved.

### **Data Analysis**

Using data to create a map as an outline to build the foundation of an inclusive classroom environment utilizes universal design for learning for all students to access core learning will allow teachers to identify what are the key areas needed for each individual class and students to achieve grade level standards and individual learning goals.

Data can be used to determine classroom needs and individual student needs can come from state standardized tests. For example, students at Cedar River Academy participate in FAST, the state mandated tests. Each grade level and individual can use these scores to identify and determine what the gaps

are in students' learning. This allows teachers to come together as a professional learning community and determine what learning strategies would best be used as an instructional intervention to help students close gaps.

For Cedar River Academy, the school is not proficient in both the areas of reading and math by a significant amount. In the area of math only 20-24% of students are proficient and in the area of reading only 25-29% are proficient. This data depicts a need for intensive, explicit direct instruction for a majority of the students, and well planned interventions to create opportunities for students to acquire skills to decrease individual learning gap.

Using this information to create an overall arching goal to improve student learning outcomes as a school community within the school building helps focus the school as a learning community to work together to achieve common goals. This also creates an opportunity for grade level teams to create goals for individual classrooms and individual students so as a collaborative team, designing a learning plan and environment can be achieved.

The teacher to student ratio at Cedar River Academy is 1:12. This ratio plays as a strength in planning of Universal Design for Learning. As a comprehensive school, which is persistently at risk, there is additional funding



provided to help the school provide more equitable services and support for students so they are able to receive more individualized and intensified support will help close the achievement gap. This also allows for more learning opportunities for students with significant needs to participate in the interventions with grade level peers as the creation of intervention groups are considered and established.

Further data such as duration of uninterrupted time attending to tasks will benefit professional learning communities as they are planning for students with significant needs to participate in learning within the general education classroom, and any other students who might benefit from learning strategies or other considerations are used for students with significant needs. This will help teams determine meaningful integration into learning opportunities with peers and also establish the individual learning needs will need to be addressed as the universal design for learning is being established and implemented.

### **Action Plan**

To begin the process of laying the foundation for integrating students with significant needs into the general education classroom, student profiles will need to be reviewed and important information should be gathered which will impact how students will access their learning. In order to discuss the considerations and meaningfully plan to create accommodation and make modifications to help students, professional learning communities need to be established and individual teams need to be defined.

PLC teams should be made of any person in the school setting that has a role in planning core learning instruction such as grade level general education teachers, instructional coaches or support personnel from area education agencies, and any special education teacher who supports students are accessing the core learning instructions or creates specially designed instruction for individual students. PLC teams will be arranged into teaching cohorts consisting of grade level collaborators or collaborators which teach the same content area and consistent weekly or bi-weekly meetings will be scheduled and prioritized by all members of the PLC team.

Creating the PLC team and consistent meetings allows for collaboration among educators to define areas of needs for the students, design a plan and implementation timeline ensures support for all students accessing the core instruction, create data collection forms and expectations, and plan for individual students based on individual education plans. This allings to best practice strategies such as those mentioned in the journal article, *Preparation and Experiences for Implementation Teacher Candidates' Perceptions and Understanding of Universal Design for Learning*, where the importance of teacher training and coaching is proven to be necessary and critical for both the success of teachers implementing UDL and the success of students accessing core learning and achieving both individual goals and grade level expectations.

Teams can differentiate instruction based on individual student needs. To determine these needs, student data such as data from FAST or other state standardized testing, or district curriculum formative assessments can be used to create groupings. Additionally individual IEP specially designed data and instruction applied to students accessing core learning can be used to create groups when differentiating based on areas where growth is needed. For

students with significant needs who are often working on foundational skills which need to be developed to work towards mastering grade level standards and expectations, opportunities to further develop these skills can be planned for when creating differentiated instruction as a PLC team.

As a PLC team, gathering important information about individual students with significant needs such as duration of attending time, sensory needs, meaningful peer interactions, adult support needed such as a support from a paraprofessional, and any other individual needs impact how the students access core learning should be reviewed and discussed so the strategies can be embedded into the UDL plan. As a PLC team, using this critical information and data ensures all individuals on the PLC team knows and understands what the needs, goals, accommodations, and/or modifications are needed for all students to access core learning. This ensures the PLC can implement a plan that complies with IEPs and meaningfully creates opportunities for students to achieve their goals alongside their peers in a way which is the least restrictive for the individual. This aligns with the principles of UDL and is considered best practice in alignment with providing a free and appropriate public education in accordance with the law.

Embedding specific content plans of UDL will be done when creating the scope and sequence of yearly grade level plans, and in individual units within the scope and sequence. Therefore each UDL learning plan will look individualized for specific grade levels, classrooms, and even specific students. However, the pillars of UDL will remain the same within each plan. Collaboration, accessibility, integration, individualization, developmentally appropriate content, and meaningful interactions with peers should be found in each UDL plan.

**Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

Outlook and Overview

<b>Action Step</b>	<b>Implementation Process</b>	<b>Considerations</b>	<b>Estimated Time Frame</b>
Special Education Rosters Established by SPED Team	Review goal areas  Establish students on special education teacher rosters	Student needs -1:1 support needed -sensory needs -student grouping for success -Alternate Assessment	2-3 two hour planning meetings depending on the amount of IEP's within building
IEP at a Glance	Create IEP at a glance form provides goal areas, LRE, SDI minutes, etc.	-Develop an organization system is accessible and understandable	Individualized based on teachers roster

		for collaborators to utilize	
SPED Team Scheduling	Create a collaborative schedule to ensure that all SDI minutes are met in alignment with IEPs in the building.	Utilizing SPED team to collaboratively deliver SDI and integrate students into groups based on academic and individual needs rather than roster teacher	2 two hour meetings
PLC Team	Define differentiated groups and needs of students	-Sensory needs -academic/ skill grouping -peer models	Scheduled weekly meetings minimum of 40 minutes
Collaboration in Daily Schedules with General Education Classroom Teachers	Break down daily routines	What do we want to know? How do we get them there? How do they know when they are done? What do they do next?	Break down individual grade level routines  Use sensory needs and attending time to plan for students with significant needs.
Embedding SDI and meaningful learning opportunities into the daily schedule	Accessibility to core learning -work systems -peer to peer models	Use developmentally appropriate interventions based on individual IEPs to implementing embedding	Individualized based on IEP needs and individual

Review, Reflect, & Revise Collaboration and coaching	PLC Team weekly information	Use data to revise grouping and further opportunities for students with significant disabilities	Based on team needs, areas of growth, etc.

### **Special Education Rosters**

As a special education team with the support of building administration and coaching support, explicitly review IEP goals as a building and define how many building goals there are, and what type of goals are prevalent based on data. This information will help the team make informed decisions about how to best support students and what special education teacher would be the best person to serve each individual student. Things to consider when you are placing students on rosters might be: goal types, accommodations, modifications, students personal experiences (trauma informed teaching), alternate assessment, etc.

### **IEP at a Glance**

As student rosters are finalized, begin creating an IEP at a glance form. There are many types of documents which are already made that are accessible to teachers and can be edited and student information can be added into the existing template. However, teachers may also want to make their own IEP at a glance . What is important is necessary information on it for collaborating teachers.

Information which should be considered to put on the IEP at a glance are student goals, SDI minutes, sensory information, modifications, accommodations, medical needs, and social emotional needs. When the IEP at a glance forms are finished, collaborators engaged with the individual special education teachers should be given a copy of the form so they can be aware of important information from IEP's and so they have an opportunity to ask any questions or communicate areas which they might need support with.

### **SPED Team Scheduling**

When student rosters are established, begin to align students with similar goal areas might benefit from small group specially designed instruction together. This allows for students to learn alongside peers with similar needs,



setting the foundation for inclusivity to become a norm rather than always learning alongside grade level peers. When thinking about integrating students with significant disabilities, consider what would be meaningful for the individual students. Often students with significant disabilities are working on acquiring skills are foundational to what grade level peers have learned. Using the norm of meeting students where they are at and creating SDI groups based on this norm, creates a natural way for students with significant disabilities to integrate into groups they will access their learning in a meaningful way. Once SDI groups are established, special education teachers can create their schedules to ensure all SDI minutes are achieved in accordance with IEP's.

### **Embedding SDI for Students with Significant Disabilities**

For students with significant disabilities who are working on acquiring foundational skills such as route skills, teachers can strategically and meaningfully embed goal area skills into daily routines within the classroom setting. From adaptive behavior target skills to academic skills, there are opportunities for students with significant disabilities to further develop and acquire these skills in the general education classroom alongside grade level peers. How the skills are embedded into routines will be individualized based on

each student individually, how the opportunities in daily routines might provide similar opportunities.

Using peer models and a well planned, individualized environment for students with significant disabilities breaks down daily routines into very specific steps using a total communication approach will be foundational for students with significant disabilities to access the ability to participate within the classroom community. Using inclusive, best strategies such as UDL provides seamless opportunities throughout the day to naturally integrate and facilitate peer relationships, a social skill is often an adaptive behavior goal for students in early elementary school.

Gaining route skills such as letter recognition, one to one correspondence, etc. are skills are meaningful and foundational for students with significant disabilities to acquire to work towards growing their individual array of skills. Through work systems, differentiated small groups, and meaningful planning through collaboration of teachers, individualizing the learning within the general education classroom is achievable.

### **Review, Reflect, & Revise**

All students grow and change throughout the school year requiring teachers to constantly reflect on their teaching practices, a necessary skill for student achievement. Teachers use data to make decisions about what students need daily. Some schools who have developed Response to Intervention, or Multi Tiered Systems of Support use PLC teams to differentiate instruction and provide interventions for students who have a learning gap which needs to be addressed. As planning and collaboration discussions are happening as a PLC team, the team can use this time to find ways to ensure meaningful integration and interventions are occurring for students with significant disabilities.

Having intentional conversations centered around developmentally appropriate and meaningful opportunities for students with significant disabilities is necessary, and can also be challenging. Teachers need continued support and coaching as well encourages reflection and revisions. There will be many changes throughout the school year which will be necessary to support students. When changes are proposed or discussed, it is important to collaborate as a PLC team to support not only the student but also to support the PLC team as well. UDL is ongoing and individualized throughout the school

year, and as students continue to engage in participating in the daily routines, they will gain skills that will help them become more independent in engaging in their learning and daily routines. Continuing to review data, reflect on what the data shows, and make revisions support all students in accessing and achieving their goals. Using UDL as a teaching strategy to plan, differentiate, and implement plans will allow teachers to collaborate with one another to support students and each other and have a successful school year integrating students with significant disabilities.

### **Conclusion**

The individualization of UDL allows teachers to collaborate together to better meet the needs of not only students with significant disabilities, but also all students in the learning community. Through the use of UDL, students are able to engage and access core learning alongside peers in the least restrictive environment, the general education classroom. Additionally, UDL is a teaching strategy aligned with best teaching practices such as using data to drive instructional decision making, reflect on teaching practices, and revise learning opportunities based on collaborative discussions from prioritized PLC team meetings.

By using a collaborative team such as a team PLC, ensures constant communication is occurring and the direct impact of teachers and PLC team members clearly, and explicitly all know what the delivery of instruction to core learning is for all students, including those with significant disabilities. This ensures all students are being given equitable opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge together in the least restrictive environment. By prioritizing the collaboration of PLC teams, teachers will be able to feel confident in embedding opportunities for students with significant disabilities to continue to grow in an individualized way according to IEP's, if possible and teachers also feel supported in the planning and implementation process.

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