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Universal Design for Learning

The Arc Michigan supports the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is the design of instructional materials and activities that make the learning goals achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember. Universal design for learning is flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with differing abilities. These alternatives are built into the instructional design and operating systems of educational materials; they are not added on "after-the-fact." (1)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recognize the right of all learners to a high-quality standards-based education. The laws preclude the development of separate educational agendas for students with disabilities and others with special needs. They also hold teachers, schools, districts, and states responsible for ensuring that these students demonstrate progress according to the same high expectations. (2)

Neither law adequately addresses the greatest impediment to implementation: the curriculum itself. In most classrooms, the curriculum is restrictive because its main components—the goals, materials, methods, and assessments—are too rigid and inflexible to meet the needs of diverse learners, especially those with disabilities. Present ways to remediate the curriculum's restrictions—teacher-created workarounds and modifications, alternative placements etc.—are expensive, inefficient, and ineffective for learning. (2)

Universal design for learning is a framework for designing curriculum that enables all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. Universal design for learning provides rich supports for learning and reduces barriers to the curriculum while maintaining high achievement standards for all. Universal Design for Learning calls for

- *Multiple means of representation,* to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge,

- *Multiple means of expression,* to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know,

- *Multiple means of engagement,* to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation.(2)

Universal Design for Learning supports teachers' efforts to meet the challenge of diversity by providing flexible instructional materials, techniques, and strategies that help teachers differentiate instruction to meet these varied needs.

Universal Design for Learning is consistent with federal law. UDL supports the differing abilities of learners to access curriculum in flexible and diverse ways. The Arc Michigan, therefore, calls on every school district, every public school academy, every intermediate school district, and everyone who is affected directly or indirectly by the education of children in Michigan to make Universal Design for Learning a reality.

(1) Adapted from the Michigan Department of Education's Presentation of Proposed High School Graduation Requirements, November 2005.
(2) www.CAST.org