

Demonstration Classroom: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Demonstration classrooms (“demos”) are re-envisioned professional development platforms and tools that offer educators a chance to observe evidence-based instructional practices in real-time, with an opportunity to debrief what they saw and discuss how they can incorporate the practices into their own classrooms. The Co-op is building a network of demos across the District of Columbia, each highlighting an evidence-based practice, serving as models for schools striving to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Demo Discovery: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a framework and an approach to instruction that draws upon research from the fields of neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and the learning sciences that recognizes learner variability as the norm. Made up of 3 main principles, UDL is designed to remove barriers to learning and deeply engage learners, while creating flexibility to ensure students can access information and demonstrate their knowledge. When applied in the general education classroom, UDL creates equitable access to high-quality instruction for all learners. UDL benefits all students, but is uniquely important for students with disabilities. Bridges, where 35% of students have IEPs, demonstrates that students with disabilities are capable of performing at grade level with the right instruction and support.

Demo Details

- **Materials:** various high and low-tech assistive technologies (AT) including flexible seating options, a smartboard, timers and other classroom tools
- **Training:** teachers receive ongoing training and coaching in UDL, including direct support from AT and UDL specialists, and observation and feedback cycles
- **Infrastructure:** teacher planning time is structured to include feedback from instructional coach to bolster UDL lesson planning

Demo Data

Students in the Demo classroom consistently outperform their peers on grade level assessments. Sixty-four percent of students in Bridges 5th grade, who received 2 years of math instruction in the UDL demo classroom, scored 3+ on the SY22-23 PARCC compared to 43% for the charter sector. Twenty-eight percent scored 4+ compared to 21% of the charter sector. The 4th grade students, who received one year of math instruction in the UDL demo, jumped from 26% to 43% scoring 3+.

“UDL benefits everyone – special education, general education, English language learner and gifted students. If the students are not understanding what we are teaching, it is not them, it is us. We as teachers have to figure out how to make the information accessible and engaging.”

– Mr. Brandon Woodland, demo classroom teacher

Learn more about the Co-op’s demo classrooms: www.specialedcoop.org