

Classroom Observation Toolkit for School Teams

The AESD Inclusionary Practices Project is working to support the development of a culture of observation, data use, and continuous improvement in our buildings. Leveraging the power of asset-based practice, using classroom observation tools helps teachers work smarter, not harder, by building on strengths while closing gaps. School Teams will have options in selecting the tools, resources, and processes that support their needs as well as strategic plans at the district level.

"Continuous improvement is not about the things you do well — that's work. Continuous improvement is about removing the things that get in the way of your work. The headaches, the things that slow you down, that's what continuous improvement is all about." - Bruce Hamilton, Johns Hopkins University

Universal Truths of Inclusionary Practices

Inclusion is the belief and practice that all students have the right to meaningfully access academic and social opportunities in general education settings. We want to dispel the myths surrounding this work, including the idea that students with disabilities are the only target for inclusionary practices work. We also want to provide [guidelines on the effective use of paraeducators](#) to support students with disabilities in general education settings. To further clarify your understanding about inclusionary practices, please take a moment to help [dispel myths by reviewing this important resource](#) directly from OSPI.

In addition, we need to orient inclusionary practices within the framework of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Inclusionary practices are the foundation for successful provision of universal supports at Tier 1, the fundamental building block for the provision of supports at Tiers 2 and 3, respectively. The importance of this connection is articulated in [Michael McSheehan | How MTSS and UDL Fit Into Inclusive Education by The Think Inclusive Podcast \(anchor.fm\)](#).

[Common vocabulary](#) is also critical to this work. Research consistently supports a positive link between access to instruction and social interactions in general education settings and improved outcomes for students. The project is centered around the belief that ALL students learn and demonstrate knowledge in a variety of ways (Learner Variability), and that offering universal supports at Tier 1 (general

education settings) increases the capacity of general education settings to meet the learning needs of each child to the maximum extent appropriate.

“Inclusion means that all students have a right to meaningfully participate in the general education setting, both academically and socially. Inclusion is realized when all students, regardless of their designation to receive special education services are provided with targeted services, supports, and accommodations; allowing them to learn in the general education classroom, interact with peers, and engage the core curriculum. Inclusive instruction rebukes the problematic perspective that students receiving special education services need to ‘fit in’ or ‘earn their way’ into general education classes. The belief that general education instruction is not malleable and that students should be making adaptations to be included in the general education setting has contributed to the continuation of two parallel systems of education in which students receiving special education services are marginalized and devalued because of their environmental segregation.” --Washington Inclusionary Practices Project

Inclusionary practices work has a goal: that all students, including those with IEPs, m/ELs, and other documented needs, spend 80-100% of their school day in general education settings interacting with peers and engaged with grade level standards¹.

How then, are we to shift our systems of support and instruction from a deficit-focused model (what a child can't do or doesn't know) to an asset-focused model (what a child can do and does know) which leverages cognitive science? Research is clear that the brain learns best when several conditions are present: 1) a low threat environment (reduced stress), 2) an intentional focus on building core capabilities and skills, and 3) a direct link to reinforcing a responsive relationship ([Harvard Center on the Developing Child](#): 2022). These conditions hold true for adult learning, and providing opportunities for practice, reflection, and peer feedback are as important for staff as for students.

Dr. Katie Novak tells us another component is necessary for shifting systems and growing capacity in her UDL Playbook (p.65):

“You can use a number of tools to measure the level of UDL implementation in your classrooms. The most critical step is ensuring that all teachers have a voice in selecting the tool

¹ We recognize that a small percentage of students have standards other than grade-level standards targeted in an individual learning plan, which may see services recommended for specialized settings.

and measurement and how it will be used to determine growth, differentiate support, and increase the outcomes of students”.

Using an inclusionary practices philosophy and aligned best practices, including progress monitoring for educator skill growth, provides the platform for increasing educator, student, and family skill sets in the universal supports surrounding academics, social-emotional learning, and behavior. This toolkit focuses on growing educator skills in the [construction and provision of universal supports](#) in Tier 1 settings, that is, in general education settings.²

Some Ways to Use these Tools

One of the most productive and rewarding practices for educators is working collaboratively to observe instructional practices and provide asset-based feedback for future options in a non-evaluative context. Educators have a number of options when thinking about how a classroom observation process can be used to provide a meaningful context for self-reflection as well as low threat opportunities to grow skills, practice new techniques and strategies, and adapt current best practices to be even more effective.

The possible use of tools includes, but is not limited to the following. Buildings should feel empowered to create scenarios that work best for the individual context.

Here are some options, by functional classification:

- Classroom walk-throughs
- Teacher-to-Teacher
- Use by a PLC or BLT
- Planning and/or self-reflection process

Additional information about each of these options and associated resources can be found [here](#).

² Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one framework for providing universal supports. Resources for those who are new to UDL, and for those who have long practiced UDL, are found in the Resources section.

Choices in the Classroom Observation Tools

A key principle of universal supports is providing “low-threat, optional, and useful” resources for all learners, including adult learners. With this idea in mind, here are a number of classroom observation tools. Created specifically for educators seeking to grow capacity in providing universal supports in classrooms, the highly-vetted tools provide important options. Educators or buildings can “try on” one or more tools before selecting the best option or range of options. Tools range along a continuum from simple to complex. Of course, if you independently locate tools that work better for you, please connect with your Regional Coordinator and share!

[Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Classroom Observation Data Collection for Observing Content Area Instruction](#) --This tool can be used in a variety of contexts, by a range of team size and individual configurations. In addition, the tool works well observing in physical classrooms, remote settings, as well as videos of instruction in practice.

[Here’s What I See- The UDL Implementation Guide Lesson and Learning Environment Observation](#) - Here is a fillable tool that allows each adult learner to establish a baseline for ongoing work in this area, while providing common ground for collaborative discussions as UDL work evolves.

[Massachusetts Observation Tool](#) - This tool contains detailed lists of what educators are doing, what students are doing, and how the classroom functions provide options for targeted or general observations.

[What to look for?](#) This webpage provides a grade-by-grade matrix of “What to Look For” in a UDL classroom in each of the following subjects: English Language Arts and Literacy, Science and Engineering, and Mathematics.

[Co-Teaching Checklist](#) -- Co-Teaching is a foundational option for buildings working to create universal supports in general education classrooms. This tool allows novices or experts to delve into one or more aspects of this important collaborative technique to provide inclusion in general education settings.

Additional Classroom Observation and Reflection Tools

Whether your staff is refining their use of inclusionary practices, or just learning about universal supports for the first time, additional resources add value to the learning and practice cycle of improvement. Here are a number of vetted resources that can help increase understanding about and use of inclusionary practices in Tier 1 (i.e., general education settings).

Materials from Novak Education provide user-friendly resources for educators and administrators looking to grow capacity in and understanding of inclusionary practices.

Novak and Rodriguez's [UDL Progression Rubric](#) - Based on the 2018 CAST Guidelines, this rubric is a useful tool for novices and experts. Individuals can locate their readiness and practice baseline as we all work towards more inclusive general education, or Tier 1 (T1) settings.

Toland's [UDL Implementation Rubric](#) is explained on this webpage, which also provides an option to download the rubric. This tool provides a continuum of learning for each of the three UDL Principles.

The Oakland University Universal Design for Learning Resources provides a comprehensive list of teaching strategies and practices linked to each of the UDL principles:

[Multiple Means of Engagement](#) - offers learners diverse ways to connect with content and the process of learning

[Multiple Means of Representation](#) - offers learners diverse ways to access content in a variety of formats

[Multiple Means of Action and Expression](#) - offers learners diverse ways to demonstrate learning

The Massachusetts Guidebook to Inclusive Practices provides rich resources on their comprehensive website, the Massachusetts Department of Education's webpage, [Guidebook for Inclusive Practices](#).

One tool of note is [The Massachusetts Department of Education Observation Feedback Tool](#), which provides a platform for discussion, analysis, planning and collaboration around the observation of inclusionary practices in the general education setting.

Vanderbilt University provides a wealth of resources in its IRIS Center [UDL Modules](#). Of special note are the resources found within the [Assessment Module](#).

Washington State's Inclusionary Practices Project provides a wealth of resources for buildings and districts growing inclusionary practices. One resource specifically related to classroom observation tools and resources is [Deeper Dive - Classroom Observation Tools](#).

Some Choices for Next Steps for Building Leadership Teams

1. Add to Action Plan
2. Align with School Improvement Plan
3. Align with district improvement work
4. Align with district strategic plan (Align with district initiatives)

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