

What? Instructional Rounds is a collaborative process where educational leaders and practitioners observe multiple classrooms over time to deepen their understanding of Universal Design for Learning. The ultimate goal is to continuously improve student outcomes across the system by developing, reflecting on, and refining UDL practices.

Why? Instructional Rounds help deepen understanding of Universal Design for Learning, build a shared vision of effective teaching and learning through a UDL lens, empower educators to take ownership of their professional learning, and provide valuable data to guide and inform UDL implementation over time.

What is the process?

1. PLAN: Identify a question (about UDL in instruction and/or around an area of focus) that you want to observe and explore together. For example:

- What evidence is there that instruction is universally-designed at our school?
- What evidence is there that we are building agency in our learners?

2. OBSERVE classrooms and collect data related to the identified question:

- Data must be observational, not evaluative.
- Answer, “what are students saying and doing?”, “what does the teacher say and do?”
- Also look at the learning environment.

3. DEBRIEF

First, align data to UDL Guidelines. Do you notice patterns or themes? Summarize data.

Next, small groups disaggregate the data. Study the data by UDL principles.

Then, small groups share out with large groups centered around data collected for focus area.

Finally, large groups consider next steps.

4. NEXT STEPS/GOAL SETTING

- Use reflective questions to further thinking. For example, what would this look like in my context? Do all students have equitable access?
- Tie steps to an initiative or priority (e.g., Universal Design for Learning, MTSS).
- Use the process to take your team to the next level of instructional planning.

“99% of school reform initiatives stop at the classroom door.”
~ Unknown

Where does planning start? At the start of an Instructional Round session, the principal and leadership team identify a guiding question or “problem of practice” that focuses on core instruction, is directly observable, actionable, and aligned with the school or district’s improvement goals. This question, rooted in data, dialogue, and current priorities, helps concentrate the team’s attention on an area that, if improved, could meaningfully enhance teaching and learning.

1st Instructional Round: because we are learning about this protocol and deepening our understanding of the UDL Guidelines, we will focus specifically on questions that will support this learning.

What evidence is there that instruction is universally designed at our school?

How might we implement the UDL Guidelines in a way that most effectively builds agency for all learners?

2nd Instructional Round: here are some questions to help you form a focus question. Use these questions to articulate some possible problems of practice, and then use your observations to gather more information.

*What data are we using?
What patterns or trends do we see?
What do we notice in classrooms among learners and teachers?
How is the environment supporting learning?
What do we see in our student’s work?*

The Debrief Process

- After classroom observations:
 - Review your notes
 - Highlight evidence related to the focus question
 - Select 3–5 key pieces from each classroom
 - Write each one on a separate post-it note
 - Place it on the chart paper labeled with the three UDL Principles

- In small groups:
 - Analyze the data
 - Identify patterns or themes
 - Make predictions about their impact on students
 - Share key findings with the larger group

- As a group:
 - Set next steps and goals to improve learning design
 - Consider how to strengthen instructional practices together as a community of reflective, empowered learners.
 - Discuss actions that can be taken in the next week, month, and by the end of the year