

# Widening the Circle

## *Celebrating Neurodiversity in Faith Based Schools*

### **Focus Strategy:**

### **Representing Content for Instruction and Assessment**

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When designing lesson plans, units for instruction over a week or a month, or full semesters of curriculum with assessments to monitor progress along the way, it is beneficial to consider the various ways the content you will use can be accessed by all the students. Providing several ways with which students can view, listen to, read, or create curriculum resources when lesson is initiated reduces the need to add on supplemental resources or accommodations for specific students. ALL students benefit when instruction and assessment is designed for ALL learners.

#### **Accessibility that is Multisensory**

Students may have preferences for content that is provided visually through graphs, pictures, or charts, while others may prefer to read about an event or concept to process the information independently before sharing ideas with peers in the class. These preferences may promote engagement with the content for the neurotypical student when there are options for either modality, while engagement may only occur for a neurodiverse student when there are a variety of content to learn from.

#### **Connecting and Enriching**

When educators connect prior knowledge with new learning, or bridge content from one core area with another, the students' brains build stronger pathways for the memory of the new learning. This new learning is often richer than recall of facts and can be applied in a new situation, used to analyze and evaluate, as well as to create original ideas. Exploring patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships across core subject areas sets the stage for critical thinking skills that are necessary for all members of our communities.

#### **Building Learner Agency**

Accommodations for students who struggle with initiating a task, sustaining attention, or finishing the activity and submitting it for credit can benefit from intentional check-ins, chunked tasks or content, as well as explicit prompts for each step along the way that keep ALL students focused on completion. When these strategies are incorporated into lesson design, students practice strategies that work outside of the K-12 classroom, build knowledge of the strategies that work best for themselves as individuals and can reflect on what accommodations to advocate for in college and the workplace.



## Introduce Key Accessibility Features

Do you know how to access the text-to-speech or speech-to-text feature on the laptop or iPad the students use? This is an easy entry point for accessibility! If you are not sure of where to begin, consider an option below:

- Lean on an IT expert on campus if available
- Learn if there is a faculty member with an interest or expertise in the accessibility features of the software used
- Ask the parent network if there is someone willing to volunteer to provide instruction for faculty and/or students
- Consider a student IT group that can aid and assist the community with technology

## Small Change, Big Impacts!

Demonstrate how using font size, color, shape, highlighting, pictures and symbols can make instruction more visually appealing and engaging while reducing the words students need to read on a slide. Videos and audio files can also be played at various speeds to accommodate preferences. Some students may sustain attention to faster speech while others may prefer a slower rate of speech to aid processing. These are easily adapted on a personal laptop once a student knows how to make the adjustment!

## Resources:

CAST- [The UDL Guidelines](#)

[When you design for Everyone, Everyone benefits from the design](#)

[Key Questions to Consider When Planning Lessons](#)

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## Parent Connection:

Online classrooms and homework may look different to parents. The use of accommodations or accessibility features may feel like “cheating.” Share the principles of Universal Design for Learning with parents. Engaging ALL learners through instructional content that is accessible for K-12 students fosters independence, builds metacognitive skills, and strengthens student agency.

