

# The Far North Literacy Development Consortium

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# Introduction

Launched in 2021 as a cutting-edge partnership between the Butte County Office of Education and CAST, the Far North Literacy Development Consortium (FNLDC) completed its third and final year in June 2024. Through thoughtful, innovative professional learning, FNLDC supported educators from Butte, Plumas, Shasta, and Modoc counties in designing literacy instruction that is not only accessible and effective, but also deeply responsive to the needs of every single learner.

At the center of the consortium's work is the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, pioneered by CAST. Rooted in research from the learning sciences, UDL provides a powerful and practical approach to reducing barriers and embracing learner variability. By applying UDL principles, educators across the Far North have been able to create learning environments where all students have meaningful opportunities to engage with rigorous, relevant literacy instruction.

Over the course of the three-year initiative, participants engaged in a dynamic sequence of professional learning experiences: in-person convenings, interactive virtual workshops, lesson design studies, instructional rounds,

and personalized coaching. Each experience built on the last, offering opportunities to apply UDL principles in real classroom contexts, reflect on practice, and collaborate with peers across county lines.

Educators in the FNLDC showed remarkable dedication and leadership. Many stepped into new roles as facilitators and mentors, supporting colleagues in bringing inclusive literacy practices to life in classrooms throughout the region. Even as the project concludes, the momentum continues. The structures, strategies, and relationships nurtured over the past three years will carry this work forward, strengthening inclusive literacy instruction across the Far North for years to come.

# Professional Learning Activities

Working alongside educators from the Butte County Office of Education, CAST's Professional Learning team introduced a set of innovative activities that build the capacities of educators from across California's Far North to lead their own professional growth. A central focus of the project has been empowering educators to lead learning within their own contexts, a key factor in the strength and sustainability of the work. This emphasis on teacher leadership has been one of the strongest reasons for the project's success, and the reason CAST is confident the learning will continue long into the future. Learner-centered protocols include:

- Annual Convenings
- Monthly Virtual Workshops
- Instructional Rounds
- Lesson Design Studies
- Journey Mapping



## Annual Convenings

Each year of the Far North Literacy Development Consortium began with a regional kickoff event designed to bring together participants across the four-county region and set the direction for the work ahead. In the fall of 2021, the first year of the grant launched with a two-day introduction to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), where educators explored the foundational concepts and guidelines of the framework.

In Year 2, the work continued with an in-person convening in Redding, California, hosted by the Shasta County Office of Education. The event opened with a keynote from Dr.

Shelley Moore, an internationally recognized educator and speaker whose work focuses on inclusive education. Her keynote invited participants to reconnect with their personal “why” for inclusive teaching, while making clear, practical links to UDL. The following day, participants engaged in a full-day Lesson Design Workshop facilitated by CAST. Working in site-based and cross-county teams, educators explored tools like the Lesson Design Guide and journey mapping protocol to plan instruction that reflects UDL principles and responds to student needs.

The momentum carried into Year 3 with a convening hosted in Chico, California. Participants gathered for an evening at Canyon Oaks Country Club to hear from keynote speaker Jonathan Mooney, a nationally recognized advocate for neurodiversity and inclusion. Mooney's candid and often humorous keynote challenged conventional ideas about learning and inspired the group to recommit to creating schools where all students feel seen and supported. The following day took place on the campus of Chico State University, where participants heard from Dr. Catherine Lemmi, a local professor whose work explores literacy and language in content-area classrooms. Her talk helped frame the ongoing work of designing inclusive literacy instruction across disciplines.

The day concluded with a CAST-facilitated workshop focused on planning for long-term sustainability. Given that this was the final year of the grant, participants were encouraged to reflect on their progress, collaborate across roles, and begin shaping local plans for continuing the work beyond the life of the project. Across all three years, the convenings served as key touchpoints for connection, learning, and reflection. They grounded participants in a shared purpose and helped build the relationships, knowledge, and momentum needed to grow and sustain inclusive literacy practices throughout the Far North.

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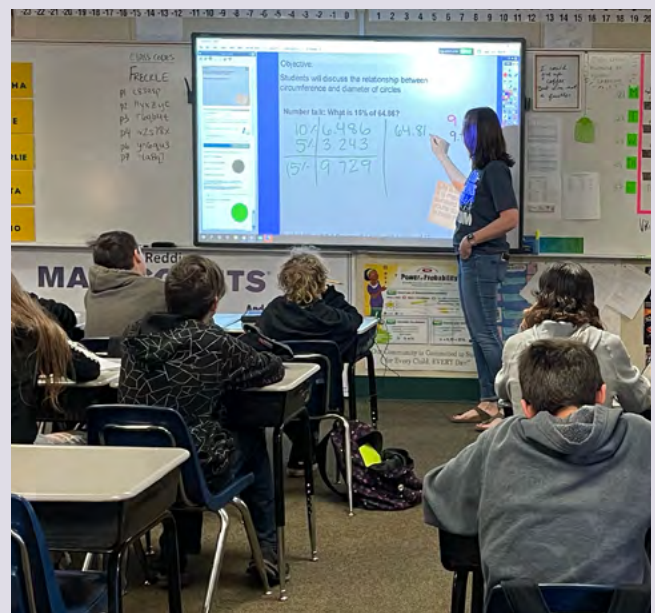
## Monthly Virtual Workshop

Throughout the three years of the Far North Literacy Development Consortium, monthly virtual workshops provided a consistent and collaborative space for educators, coaches, and administrators to deepen their understanding of Universal Design for Learning and its application to literacy instruction. These sessions offered opportunities to explore theory, engage in practical protocols, share classroom experiences, and problem-solve across county lines. Designed with UDL principles in mind, the workshops modeled inclusive, flexible approaches to professional learning while creating shared language and momentum across the region.

In the first year, workshops focused on building foundational knowledge of UDL. Educators were introduced to the UDL Guidelines and explored how each of the three brain networks—engagement, representation, and action and expression—relates to teaching and learning. Workshops included topics such as building expert learners, designing inclusive lessons, and creating flexible learning environments. Participants also practiced using tools like Instructional Rounds and Looking at Student Work protocols to examine classroom practice and student learning with a UDL lens. These early sessions established a strong base from which teachers could begin shifting their instructional design.

The second year emphasized applying UDL principles to literacy instruction across disciplines. Workshops supported teachers in strengthening students' reading and writing skills while designing more inclusive and engaging literacy experiences. Sessions addressed meaning-making, vocabulary development, writing, and assessment, with a continued focus on reducing barriers and clarifying instructional goals. Coaches and administrators also engaged in parallel learning around systems change, using continuous improvement cycles and self-assessment tools to support sustainable implementation in their schools and districts.

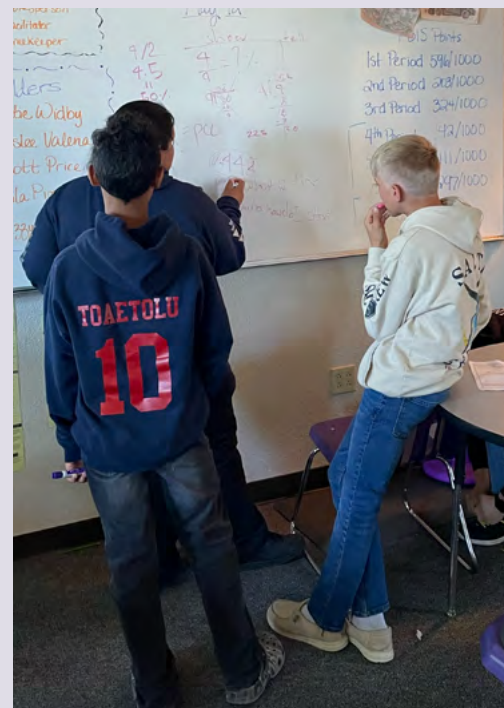
In the final year, the workshops evolved to support sustainability and leadership. Teachers worked on refining their instruction through a deeper understanding of the neurological networks involved in learning and their connection to literacy across content areas. Administrators and coaches addressed systemic issues such as initiative alignment, technical versus adaptive change, and CAST's Schoolwide UDL Implementation Criteria. Coaching practices and teacher leadership development were also key themes. Each of these sessions helped prepare participants to lead UDL implementation efforts beyond the life of the grant, strengthening their ability to support ongoing change within their own contexts.



## Instructional Rounds

Instructional Rounds are a collaborative, non-evaluative process in which small teams of educators observe each other's classes to identify patterns and develop a shared understanding of effective practices. Adapted from the medical field's practice of clinical rounds, this protocol involves educators collecting descriptive data from classes, focused on a specific problem of practice. The observations are followed by a debrief session in which participants analyze the data to identify trends and discuss implications for instructional improvement. The goal is to foster a culture of continuous learning and collective responsibility for student achievement, with teachers themselves leading pedagogical growth and change.

Within the FNLDC, Instructional Rounds were used to enhance inclusive literacy practices across participating counties. Educators worked together to identify challenges related to literacy instruction and led classroom observations themselves. Educators participated in rich discussions of observed practices, reflecting on their instructional approaches and considering strategies for improvement. This process not only deepened educators' understanding of effective literacy instruction but also strengthened cross-county collaboration and a shared commitment to educational equity.



## Lesson Design Studies

Based on Japanese Lesson Study, CAST's Lesson Design Studies allow educators to co-develop, implement, and refine lesson plans with the aim of enhancing instructional effectiveness. Grounded in principles of UDL, this protocol encourages educators to anticipate learner variability and proactively design lessons that provide students with options that minimize barriers to learning. The iterative process involves planning lessons, observing their implementation, gathering feedback, and making necessary adjustments to better meet the diverse needs of students.

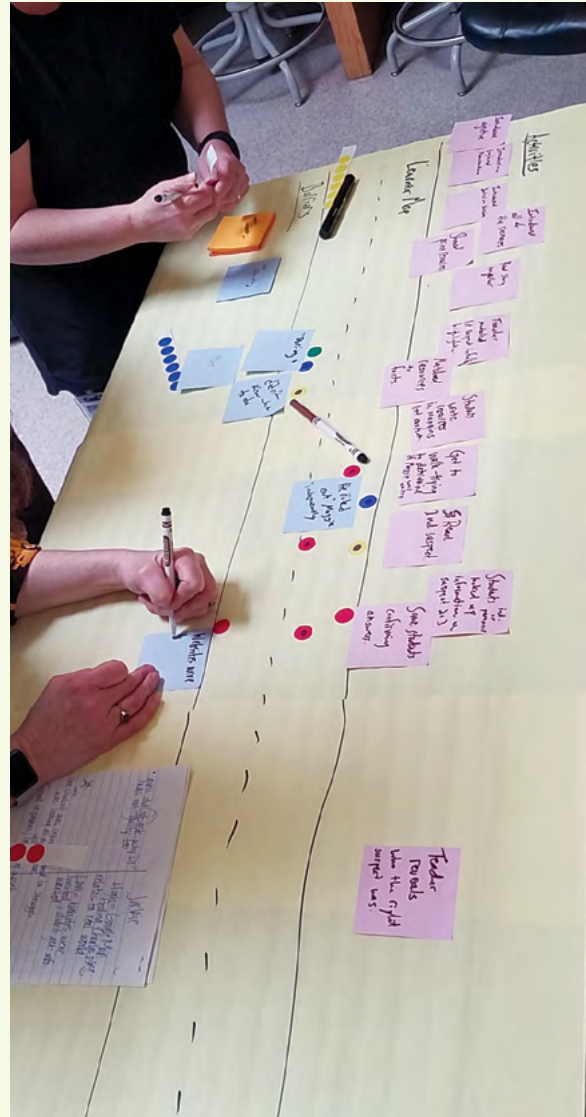
In the context of the FNLDC, Lesson Design Studies served as a platform for educators to apply UDL principles to literacy instruction. Small groups of educators collaborated to design lessons that addressed specific literacy goals while accommodating diverse learning needs. Through cycles of implementation and reflection, educators refined their instructional strategies, leading to more inclusive and effective literacy practices. This collaborative approach not only enhanced individual teaching practices but also contributed to a collective advancement in literacy instruction across the consortium.



## Journey Mapping

Journey Mapping is a design-thinking tool that enables educators to visualize and analyze the student learning experiences over the course of a lesson or unit. By mapping students' progress toward a goal, educators can identify potential barriers and opportunities for support. This process encourages a student-centered perspective, prompting educators to consider how instructional design impacts learner engagement and success. Journey Mapping aligns with UDL by promoting the creation of learning environments that anticipate and address barriers in *designs* instead of identifying problems in *students*.

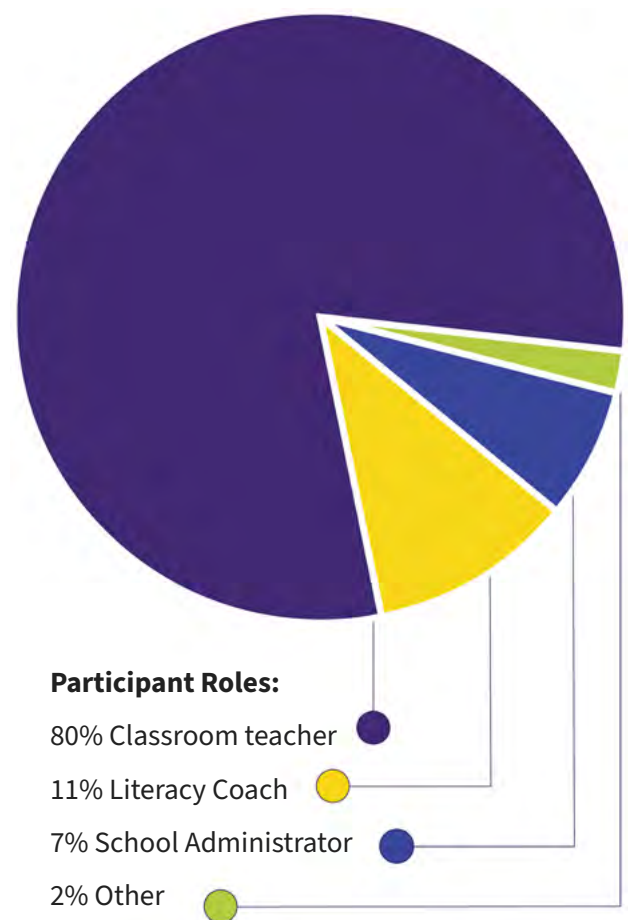
Within the FNLDC, educators utilized Journey Mapping to examine and enhance literacy instruction. By mapping students' experiences, teachers identified points where students might struggle or disengage, allowing for proactive adjustments to instructional strategies. This reflective practice fostered a deeper understanding of student needs and informed the development of more accessible and effective lessons. Through Journey Mapping, FNLDC educators cultivated a more empathetic and responsive approach to teaching, reinforcing the consortium's commitment to inclusive education.



# Impact of the Work

Over the past three years, the Far North Literacy Development Consortium has sparked meaningful change not only in classrooms across the region but also in the educators who lead them. The initiative has equipped teachers, coaches, and administrators with a deep, practical understanding of Universal Design for Learning, turning theory into action, and action into impact. As one educator reflected, “I feel like I am more willing to try new things. I also feel like it has changed my mindset going into my planning. I am always looking for barriers and seeing things from a learner’s perspective.” Others echoed this shift, explaining how they now “offer choice almost always” and feel “more confident in my choices as an educator to do what is best for **all** of my students.” These mindset shifts reflect a deep commitment to creating inclusive, learner-centered classrooms.

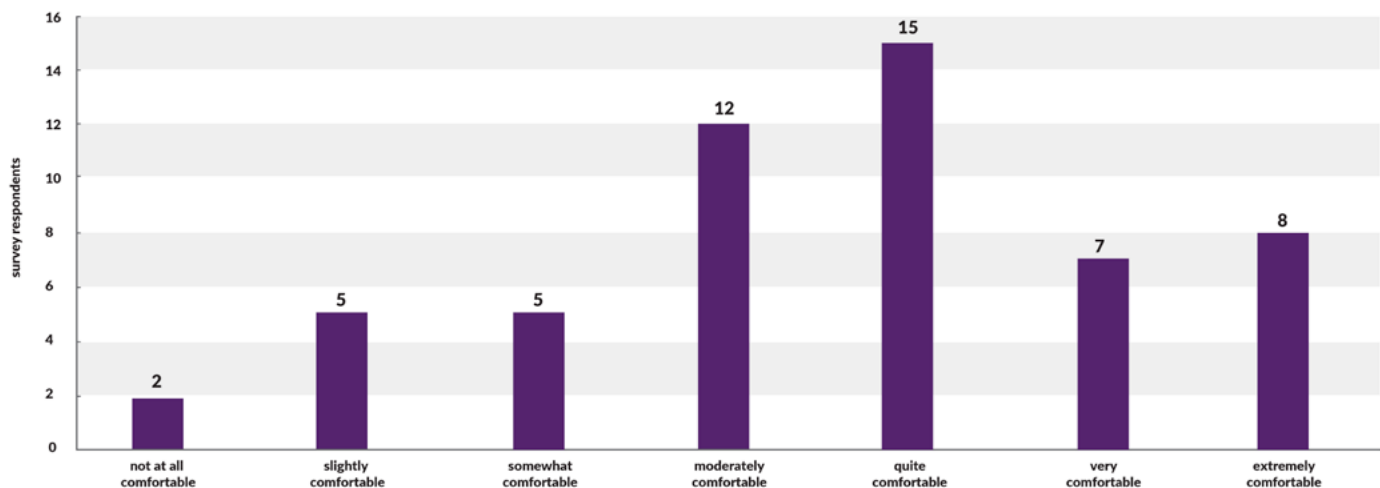
Participants also emphasized the practical tools and shared language they gained through the project. One educator explained, “FNLDC has given me the language and confidence to embrace giving students choice in how they engage and perform in their academics,” while another described how “real-life examples” helped bring UDL to life in their own classrooms. The impact extended beyond individual practice. “It has increased teacher collaboration inside the school as well as across the district,” one person noted, “with a focus on sharing resources and our pedagogical tool kit.” From classroom teachers to coaches and administrators, the Consortium helped build common understanding, foster team learning, and open new possibilities for how literacy can be taught and supported across disciplines and roles.



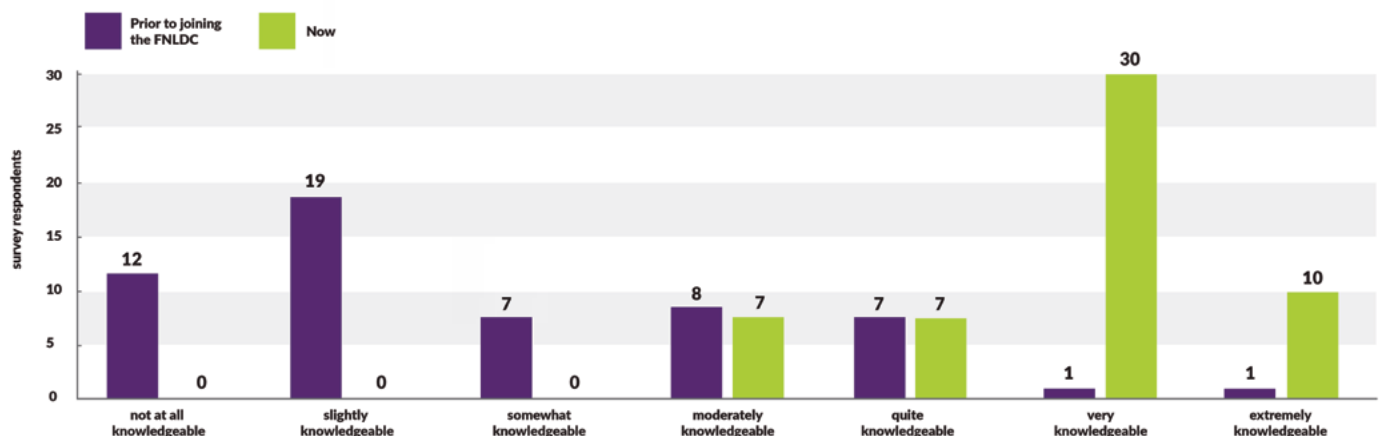
Most importantly, these efforts made a difference for students. Educators observed renewed engagement and motivation, particularly when students were given options to show what they know. “My students enjoy reading more now,” one teacher wrote. “They like choices.” With the help of instructional rounds, lesson design studies, and sustained coaching, teachers sharpened their ability to design for variability and problem-solve barriers as they emerged. As one special education teacher and curriculum coordinator shared, the project “initiated meaningful conversations about what is working and not working for our students, and how to revise and improve our practices together.”

As the project concludes, its influence is clearly just beginning. FNLDC has equipped educators with tools, confidence, and a strong network to carry this work forward. It has created a foundation for inclusive systems change that centers student variability and equity. “I have a better understanding of how diverse practices can provide opportunities for students to reach important learning goals by leveraging their strengths.”

## Comfort with Leading PD on UDL



## Knowledge of UDL over Time



# Partnerships & Connections

The Far North Literacy Development Consortium (FNLDC) has operated alongside a growing statewide movement to expand inclusive practices through the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. One key initiative in this broader landscape is the California Coalition for Inclusive Literacy (CCIL), a partnership between CAST, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), and the California Department of Education (CDE). Like the FNLDC, CCIL focuses on building the capacity of educators and systems leaders to implement UDL effectively and sustainably.

While each project has its own regional priorities, the overlap in goals, partners, and design principles offered valuable opportunities for collaboration and connection. Educators and leaders from the Far North are now well-positioned to engage with colleagues across the state who are also working to embed UDL in daily practice and systemwide change. These connections help extend the reach and impact of the FNLDC's work, allowing for the continued exchange of ideas, resources, and leadership beyond the life of the grant.

## From Participants

*"My participation in the FNLDC has helped me to understand UDL in a more practical way and has provided me with real life examples to implement into the classroom."*

*"The tools and resources to support teachers in the work have been extremely beneficial."*

*"FNLDC has given me the language and confidence to embrace giving students choice in how they engage and perform in their academics."*

*"I'm a special ed teacher and curriculum coordinator so it has initiated meaningful conversations about what is working and not working for our students, and how to revise and improve our practices together, individually, and to support shared students."*

*"It has completely changed the way I design PD for staff trainings."*

*"We are extremely privileged to have been worked with you all... I don't want this to come to an end!"*

# Letter from CAST

As we close out the final year of this remarkable three-year journey, we at CAST want to extend our heartfelt thanks to each of the educators that participated in this meaningful work. Your unwavering commitment to equity, inclusion, and high-quality literacy instruction has been the heartbeat of this work. From Butte to Plumas, Shasta to Modoc, you've shown up with curiosity, generosity, and determination, helping to build a professional learning community rooted in shared leadership and the belief that all learners deserve access to meaningful and challenging learning opportunities.

Together, we've explored Universal Design for Learning not only as a framework but as a mindset. Throughout the years, you've rolled up your sleeves, collaborated across districts, and stretched your thinking. You've reflected honestly, led bravely, and stayed grounded in what matters most: supporting every student to thrive. We have been continually inspired by your creativity, your resilience, and your deep belief in your students—and each other.

Although the FNLDC grant is coming to a close, the work is far from over. The networks you've built, the strategies you've tried, and the leadership you've demonstrated position you to carry this work forward in powerful ways. Thank you for inviting us into your classrooms and communities. It has been an honor to walk alongside you.

With deep appreciation,

The CAST Team

