

*Understanding the Learning Organization:  
Insights and Lessons Learned from  
Experienced Users of  
Understanding by Design*

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## **The “Big Ideas” About Understanding by Design Most Often Cited by High-Level Users**

1. Understanding by Design is both a framework of research-based best practices and a language for unifying educators’ work in promoting high levels of achievement and understanding among all students. It should not be presented to staff as “one more program to do” since most staff members already feel overloaded with accountability programs and related initiatives.
2. A primary value of Understanding by Design is its ability to force educators to confront and identify the core ideas and questions that form the infrastructure of the content/disciplines they teach. In effect, it “forces” the conversation about what is essential or core to our curriculum.
3. This focus upon underlying concepts and questions provides a tool for educators to address the issue of time constraints, identifying an elegant curriculum that promotes understanding for all students while ensuring time for in-depth inquiry, questioning, and conceptual exploration.
4. Understanding by Design requires that its users have a genuine knowledge and understanding of the content for which they are designing curriculum. For many users, the framework has opened up professional dialogue and insight concerning the purposefulness and universal implications of subjects and programs.
5. The backward design process provides a set of principles that reinforce educators’ attention to the unpacking of accountability standards. By beginning with the end in mind, educators collaboratively work on determining what students should know, be able to do, and understand as they master content and performance standards.
6. In these times of high-stakes accountability testing, Understanding by Design provides a powerful rationale for expanding assessment repertoires to include performance-based assessments and student reflections. The framework provides a rationale, tools, and processes for emphasizing a photo album approach to monitoring student progress, rather than one-shot, exclusively test-driven assessment measures.
7. Understanding by Design reinforces educators’ ability to integrate assessment and instruction, leading toward genuine differentiation to accommodate the unique strengths and needs of all students. Stages Two and Three should be seamless in that teachers should be constantly monitoring student achievement, modifying instructional and learning behaviors to address emergent strengths and needs.
8. Because of the relative youth of Understanding by Design, we have little quantitative data to confirm the “value added” of the framework. Therefore, a major priority for the future of this framework must be longitudinal evaluation studies to determine the impact of UbD implementation upon student achievement, staff performance, and organizational productivity.

9. A central idea whose time has come is that while Understanding by Design emphasizes unit development, its next logical phase is an exploration in multiple districts of its implications for and use in broader systemic curriculum design, development, and implementation. Until participants' unit designs are showcased and contextualized within a district's curriculum, they remain stand-alone artifacts.
10. To this point, several key aspects of Understanding by Design have point been either ignored or underemphasized and need much more current attention:
- The critical need to create a national database synthesizing student achievement data in schools and districts with high levels of Understanding by Design. Such a database can begin to form the basis for a series of program evaluation studies to determine the impact of the framework.
  - The need to do much more with the connection between Understanding by Design and special populations, including Special Education, gifted and talented, Limited English Proficiency, and the socio-economically disadvantaged.
  - The necessity to articulate the relationship between Understanding by Design and other widely-disseminated professional development and school improvement initiatives such as differentiated instruction, What Works in Schools, continuous improvement and strategic planning, and performance assessment.
  - The need to reconcile the connection between Understanding by Design and high-stakes accountability testing, including helping educators to overcome misconceptions about test preparation. Almost universally, high-level users decried the phenomenon of the “teach to the test” mentality that pervades many districts these days.
  - An imperative to involve administrators to a far greater degree in working with Understanding by Design, including showcasing schools and districts where strides have been made in making UbD a part of organizational cultures and instructional leadership. We need models and exemplars aligned with best practices in continuous improvement.
  - An almost universal recognition that we are in the beginning stages of using electronic technology to create a national and international learning community regarding Understanding by Design. In addition to educators' struggles to access and integrate the UbD Exchange, including its evolving structure and resources, participants recommended a much more integrated, holistic approach to informing educators about and modeling for them the uses of videotapes, on-line courses, and Exchange-based exemplary units.
  - A consensus-backed acknowledgment that one-shot training sessions without meaningful follow-up (e.g., lesson study, inquiry teams, action research) produce little if any substantive and sustained organizational change. Almost universally, participants stressed that sustained, long-term collaborative inquiry must accompany effective Understanding by Design implementation.
  - The need to build more cross-institutional partnerships involving colleges, universities, and school districts responsible for integrating Understanding by Design into pre-service teacher preparation and professional development

schools. Although the number of pre-service training institutions using the framework is growing, there is a continuing perception that it should be reserved for more senior staff. It is not yet viewed as an entry-level requirement in many districts.

## **The Essential Questions About Understanding by Design Most Often Asked by High-Level Users**

1. How do we overcome educators' anxiety and tension associated with the changes in mindsets and practice required by Understanding by Design?
2. How can we expand our ability to access models, benchmarks, and exemplars of Understanding by Design units and related curriculum products?
3. How can we move toward the next phase of Understanding by Design implementation, moving beyond the initial training phase to make it a natural part of our organizational culture and operating practices?
4. How can we overcome the misconception that Understanding by Design is just for the "best and the brightest," not all our students and staff?
5. How can we transform staff attitudes and perceptions about standardized testing through our work with Understanding by Design, overcoming archaic notions of drill-and-kill teaching and test preparation?
6. How can we acquire and ensure the long-term availability of resources required to sustain successful Understanding by Design implementation (e.g., time, materials, curriculum development)?
7. How can we integrate Understanding by Design into our efforts related to continuous improvement and strategic planning?
8. How can we help teacher move beyond unit design and into unit implementation, using the design principles and strategies associated with each stage of backward design?
9. How do we make Understanding by Design a full staff effort, with instructional leadership provided by administrators and teacher leaders who model and "own" this framework?
10. How can we ensure that Understanding by Design is a clear and natural part of instruction and learning for all members of our student population, including learners in primary grades, Special Education, English as a Second Language, and the socio-economically disadvantaged?

**What Have We Learned About Understanding by Design?  
A Summary of Preliminary ASCD Survey and Focus Group Results**

**I. High-level UbD users tended to:**

- A. Use the UbD unit design as a regular part of their professional duties.
- B. Participate in some form of collaborative follow-up to their initial training, including study groups, action research cohorts, and/or peer reviews.
- C. Be responsible for helping to synthesize the relationship between UbD and other district/school accountability initiatives.
- D. Articulate UbD as a framework and/or language to describe best practices, rather than as a discrete or stand-alone program.
- E. Express a clear perception of the connection between UbD design principles and universal “best practices” within their field.

**II. Successful and sustained UbD professional development tended to:**

- A. Avoid one-shot sessions with little if any follow-up.
- B. Emphasize the alignment between UbD and other district and school-level accountability initiatives, esp. standards and accountability testing.
- C. Involve all appropriate system stakeholders, not single groups or cohorts.
- D. Ultimately involve some form of professional collaboration, including initial study groups, peer review sessions, and action research projects.
- E. Lead practitioners to express the need for “value-added” evaluation studies.

**III. School and district staff emphasized the alignment of UbD with other district initiatives by:**

- A. Avoiding the presentation of UbD as another “required program.”
- B. Articulating the relationship between UbD and district standards.
- C. Using a content analysis of high-stakes accountability testing designs to articulate areas in which UbD supports student achievement on those tests.

- D. Integrating enduring understandings and essential questions into district curriculum frameworks and standards documents.
  - E. Describing the underlying design principles of UbD and their connection to such district-wide initiatives as literacy development, mathematical problem-solving, and differentiation of instruction to ensure the success of all student populations.
- IV. UbD has impacted the curriculum and assessment processes of high-use schools and districts by:**
- A. Providing controlling principles for unifying the articulation of standards and standards implementation.
  - B. Establishing a technology (via the three-circle audit process) for establishing a viable core curriculum.
  - C. Suggesting tools and methodologies for unifying curriculum design and avoiding fragmentation.
  - D. Emphasizing the need for a “photo album” of assessment results, including constructed-response test items, reflective assessments, academic prompts, culminating performances and projects, and holistic and analytic rubrics.
  - E. Establishing a coherent set of instructional design principles via W.H.E.R.E.T.O.
- V. Additional recurrent conclusions and recommendations include the following:**
- A. The next logical leap in UbD evolution is toward systematic evaluation of its impact upon student achievement and organizational productivity.
  - B. Although the electronic learning community for UbD has an established infrastructure, its potential has not been realized due to lack of staff familiarity and/or ease of access.
  - C. UbD implementation typically begins with a cohort of early adopters; however, sustained implementation is successful only when it is organically blended into other systemic professional development and accountability programs.
  - D. Systemic UbD implementation is a process of organization development, i.e., the reculturing of buildings and districts. Implicit norms include collegiality, commitment to excellence and understanding, sensitivity to equity issues, professional development that is collaborative and job-embedded, and awareness of the learner as the genuine center of the learning process.

- E. Recurrent problems associated with UbD implementation include: (a) staff misperceptions that it is a stand-alone “program”; (b) staff members’ lack of deep understanding of their content (and its big ideas, generalizations, and paradigm); (c) professional desire for “quick fixes” and initiatives that do not require staff tolerance for ambiguity or complexity; (d) misperceptions about “teaching to the test”; (e) erroneous assumptions that teaching for understanding is for the gifted only; (f) beliefs that not all children can achieve deep levels of understanding; (g) fears about relinquishing the locus of control to the learner and deeply-entrenched desires to manage classrooms via lecture and teacher-dispensed information sources; and (h) failure to provide financial resources to ensure sustained professional development that is site-based and job-embedded.
- F. A majority of respondents emphasized the critical need to articulate the alignment between “No Child Left Behind” legislation and UbD to avoid what many perceive as an inevitable backsliding toward teach-to-the-test models of instruction that overlook the critical need for students to understand the content (both declarative and procedural) on which they are being assessed.

**Lessons Learned:  
Organizational Practices That Promote Understanding for All**

To what extent is each of the following Understanding by Design principles operational in your school or district?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. We share a common philosophy of learning that emphasizes student understanding, not just knowledge/recall.				
2. Our standards clearly identify what all students should know, do, and understand.				
3. Our curriculum cues teachers and students into the big ideas and essential questions of each content area.				
4. The objectives in our curriculum emphasize students' ability to explain, apply, and interpret what they are learning, not just repeat or memorize it.				
5. We reinforce students' ability to analyze perspectives and express empathy wherever possible.				
6. We encourage a "photo album" approach to assessment, emphasizing performance assessment and self-reflection as key elements.				
7. Instruction emphasizes active student engagement and experience with the learner at the center of the learning process.				
8. Professional development emphasizes study groups, inquiry teams, and action research processes.				
9. Our long-range planning emphasizes a commitment to ensuring that all students develop a deep understanding of our curriculum.				

## **Curriculum Design Principles Identified by Understanding by Design High-Level Users**

1. Curriculum should be viewed as a system for managing student learning, not as just a series of documents.
2. Curriculum must be elegant and realistic for time and resource constraints within the district and school. The three-circle curriculum process can support this priority, encouraging staff to determine: (a) what is worth being familiar with (i.e., curriculum content that can be eliminated or given abbreviated attention, if necessary); (b) what all students should know and be able to do; and (c) what all students should understand at a deep level.
3. State and district standards should form the basis for framing all major curriculum questions. In effect, curriculum is the tool through which learning organizations “unpack” their standards. This process requires consensus building and interpretation: educators may not immediately interpret or understand standards in the same way.
4. Effective curriculum requires that key framework documents (e.g., Scope and Sequence charts) articulate not just content standards (i.e., what all students should know and be able to do) but big ideas, enduring understandings, and essential questions. In effect, curriculum should be organized conceptually, with these universal elements forming the infrastructure for curriculum programs, subjects, courses, and units.
5. Conceptual organization of curriculum requires that designers and developers achieve consensus regarding horizontal elements (i.e., what should be taught within a particular time period); vertical elements (i.e., how various time periods and grades interrelate); and spiral elements (i.e., big ideas, questions, and competencies that are to be revisited across time periods and content areas).
6. High impact curriculum models for instructors how to address content standards, big ideas, and recurrent universal questions so that all students learn them at increasing levels of conceptual understanding.
7. To promote continuous improvement, curriculum must demonstrate to teachers how they can use a range of assessment tools (i.e., tests and quizzes with constructed-response items, reflective assessments, academic prompts, and culminating projects) to monitor student achievement and adjust instruction to accommodate emerging strengths and needs.
8. Curriculum guides need to reflect research-based best practices that embody the following design principles: (a) assuring that all students know where they are going and why; (b) incorporating warm-up activities that engage student ownership, purpose, and authenticity; (c) allowing students to explore big ideas and essential questions; (d) encouraging students to be self-reflective and self-evaluative; (e) reinforcing students’ capacity for self-monitoring, self-assessment, and self-presentation; (f) tailoring and differentiating instruction to address the needs of all learners; and (g) moving students from concrete experience to conceptual understanding.

**Curriculum Design and Development:  
Curriculum as a Vehicle for Managing and  
Promoting Understanding Among All Learners**

To what extent does curriculum in your school or district reflect each of the following recommendations from Understanding by Design practitioners?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. Our curriculum is clearly aligned with our approved content standards.				
2. Curriculum documents emphasize the big ideas and essential questions of key content areas.				
3. Curricular objectives align with one or more of the six “facets of understanding.”				
4. Our curriculum reinforces the need for teachers to use a range of assessment tools, including performance tasks, reflective assessments, and culminating projects.				
5. Curriculum materials reinforce the need for students to be clear about where they are headed and why.				
6. Student engagement and sense of ownership of the curriculum is a priority in all content areas.				
7. Our curriculum emphasizes self-reflection and self-assessment.				
8. Our taught curriculum emphasizes the need for differentiation to meet the needs of all students and maximize their demonstration of evolving understanding.				
9. Our curriculum is organized conceptually, moving students along a continuum from teacher-guided experiences toward independent application, interpretation, and explanation.				

## Student Behaviors Evident in Learning Environments That Promote Understanding for All

To what extent do all students in your school or district demonstrate the following behaviors identified by high-level Understanding by Design users as evidence of high levels of student understanding and achievement?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. All students demonstrate a clear understanding of where they are headed and why they are going there.				
2. All students can explain the purpose of a particular lesson and its key structural elements.				
3. All students can describe the connection between their learning activities and the standards for which they are responsible.				
4. All students can identify and explain the big ideas and essential questions that are at the heart of the content they are studying.				
5. All students demonstrate the ability to explain and interpret the significance of the key facts, concepts, generalizations, rules, and principles they are learning.				
6. All students demonstrate a capacity for independent application of the skills, procedures, and processes they are acquiring.				
7. All students can describe, analyze, and evaluate contrasting perspectives associated with controversial ideas, issues, and events they are studying.				
8. Where appropriate, all students demonstrate empathy for individuals and groups about whom they are studying.				
9. All students demonstrate a clear understanding of the evaluation criteria being used to evaluate their achievement.				
10. All students play an active role in evaluating their own performance and its growth relative to identified standards.				
11. All students demonstrate proficiency in expressing their achievement in multiple modes of assessment (e.g., tests, quizzes, academic prompts, reflections, and culminating performance-based projects).				
12. All students are active learners who reflect upon, revise, rethink, and revisit their growing knowledge, skills, and understandings.				

**Assessment and Evaluation in the Learning Organization:  
The Photo Album Approach to Monitoring Results**

How evident is each of the following recommendations for effective assessment and evaluation practices identified by Understanding by Design users?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. Our core curriculum contains rigorous content and performance standards for all learners.				
2. We have designed our curriculum so that teachers can monitor all students' progress and adjust instruction to accommodate individual students' strengths and needs.				
3. Assessment clearly aligns with the desired results of our curriculum.				
4. All teachers in our school or district emphasize a "photo album" approach to assessment, rather than a "snapshot" of student achievement.				
5. Tests and quizzes include constructed-response items in which students are engaged in some form of timed or untimed performance.				
6. Self-assessment is a major part of monitoring student progress, including the ongoing use of journals, logs, other reflective writings, and peer review and coaching.				
7. Rather than merely "assigning" assessment activities, teachers present them in the form of academic prompts which identify format, audience, topic, and purpose.				
8. At key points in our taught curriculum students have the opportunity to engage in independent culminating performance tasks and projects.				
9. Students are an active part of the assessment and evaluation process, with continuing emphasis upon their self-reflection and self-assessment relative to articulated standards.				
10. Our testing program represents only one of multiple elements of our approach to assessment and evaluation of student progress and organizational effectiveness.				

## **General Observations About Teaching for Understanding From High-Level Understanding by Design Users**

1. Teaching to promote deep student understanding requires that instructors truly understand at a deep level the content they are teaching. This competency allows them to help students identify and explore the big ideas and questions at the heart of their program, subject, course, and unit.
2. Students acquire deep understanding when they have the time to discuss, explore, and inquire, constructing meaning for themselves rather than being “told” what something means.
3. When students understand content, they are modeling and applying the thinking processes and habits of mind employed by practitioners in that field. For example, an historian compares primary source documents, infers patterns of interconnection among historical events, and acquires relevant and complete evidence to support claims and assertions. Students who understand history reflect these same processes.
4. Teachers who promote deep student understanding integrate the six facets of understanding into daily classroom delivery. They also determine which of the six facets most appropriately reinforce students’ understanding in a given setting or context.
5. These six facets of understanding (i.e., explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, self-knowledge) are not hierarchical or taxonomic. They deserve equal weight and reflect parallel complexity.
6. The most complex and difficult part of teaching for understanding entails educators’ ability to create enduring understandings and essential questions. Frequently, we are trained to see the “trees,” not the “forest,” in our content and, therefore, we may have difficulty seeing the big picture of our program, subject or course.
7. Teaching for deep understanding requires a seamless connection between instruction and assessment. In effect, we are always in assessment mode, modifying what we do and what we have our students do as we collect evidence about their emerging strengths and needs.
8. Students develop deep understanding when they: (a) can articulate why they are doing what they are being asked to do; (b) experience a sense of ownership and purposefulness in their learning activities; (c) explore big ideas and essential questions, not discrete knowledge taught in isolation; (d) receive the mentoring and coaching required for them to complete successfully all required assessment performances; (e) demonstrate a growing capacity for self-reflection and self-evaluation; (f) have their instruction modified according to their expressed needs and areas of interest; and (g) experience instruction that integrates concrete experiences and inquiry with attention to concepts, generalizations, rules, and processes.

**Teaching for Understanding:  
Instructional Practices That Promote Excellence and Equity**

To what extent is each of the following Understanding by Design instructional priorities addressed in your school or district?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. Instructors emphasize unit design, rather than discrete or isolated lessons, and put the learner at the center of the learning process.				
2. Students receive ongoing support to understand where they are headed, why they are headed there, and ways they will be evaluated along the way.				
3. At key juncture points, students participate in activities to engage and “hook” their involvement and imagination.				
4. Instructors emphasize experiential learning that allows students to engage in exploration and inquiry.				
5. Instruction encourages students to reflect, revise, rethink, and revisit their knowledge and growing understanding.				
6. On a regular basis, students have opportunities to self-evaluate and self-express.				
7. Using ongoing monitoring and assessment processes, instructors modify their teaching to accommodate students’ unique strengths and needs.				
8. Instructors organize learning experiences so that students progress from (a) concrete experiences to (b) abstract conceptualization and (c) independent understanding as demonstrated through their ability to (d) explain, interpret, and apply what they have learned in new and/or unanticipated situations and settings.				

**The UbD “Top Ten List”:  
Ten Common Errors in Staff Development Identified by  
High-Level Understanding by Design Users**

1. **The Inoculation Delusion:** Presenting staff development at the beginning of the year and never revisiting it, assuming that the “first shot” should take care of everything.
2. **The “Stand and Deliver” Pitfall:** Failing to model for adult training participants the kinds of strategies and processes advocated by Understanding by Design, with an emphasis upon content delivery, not deep participant understanding.
3. **The “Outside Consultant” Dependency Model:** An unwillingness or inability to build an internal training cadre for Understanding by Design, relying exclusively on external experts rather than building internal capacity.
4. **The “Atoms, Not Molecules” Approach:** Failing to contextualize Understanding by Design and not demonstrating its alignment with other district priorities and initiatives so that its principles and strategies appear to participants as isolated or unique.
5. **The “Program” Fallacy:** Presenting Understanding by Design as another “program” for which staff are responsible, rather than as a universal framework and a language for articulating research-based best practices.
6. **The Isolationist Dilemma:** Emphasizing elements of Understanding by Design in isolation, rather than within the context of an overall philosophy and approach to instructional design to promote student understanding.
7. **“It’s the Follow-Up, Stupid!” Oversight:** Omitting opportunities for staff to try out key Understanding by Design elements and enlist peer support and coaching to help improve classroom practice over time.
8. **Overlooking the Power of Peer Review:** Failing to model and integrate into all professional development sessions the process of peer review, resulting in a lack of understanding on the part of practitioners about how to evaluate and modify unit designs.
9. **Failing to Put the Action into Action Research:** Treating professional development as exclusively a training process without incorporating practices proven effective in sustaining change and promoting participant ownership, including study groups, inquiry teams, and action research cohorts.
10. **Forgetting the Clientele:** Overlooking the need to engage all stakeholders in the Understanding by Design professional development process by providing training for a limited number of teachers or by failing to engage and actively involve administrators in the work.

**Professional Development as a Tool for  
Promoting Deep Understanding and Staff Ownership**

To what extent is each of the following Understanding by Design principles and practices operational in your school or district?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. Professional development is ongoing and job-embedded, addressing the specific needs of participants.				
2. Staff development emphasizes participant understanding, rather than just “knowing-doing.”				
3. Through initial training and appropriate follow-up, participants grow in their ability to use training knowledge and skills and exhibit one or more of the facets of understanding in their professional practice.				
4. Professional development programs and practices emphasize the need for a collaborative community of learning.				
5. When new training content is introduced, variations of study groups represent the preferred mode of delivery.				
6. Participants receive ongoing opportunities to engage in inquiry and exploration of training content and strategies.				
7. Professional development generally culminates in some form of action research, exploring how the use of key training elements affect student achievement.				
8. We are able to determine the “value added” of our training and professional development, especially its impact upon student achievement, staff performance, and organizational productivity.				
9. Professional development is designed to help participants move along predictable stages of concern, from initial knowledge to ultimate internalization and independent application of training elements.				
10. Through collaboration and ongoing program evaluation, we modify our professional development activities and practices to ensure maximum impact and participant understanding.				

**Building and Sustaining Effective  
Pre-Service and New Teacher Induction Programs  
Using Understanding by Design Principles**

To what extent is your school or district supporting the success of new teachers through mentoring district-sponsored and cross-institutional partnerships aligned with key principles of Understanding by Design?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. We encourage cross-institutional partnerships designed to help us ensure that teachers enter our district prepared for success.				
2. Our partnerships reinforce consensus-driven desired results for our organization related to goals for teacher professionalism and teacher retention.				
3. Our cross-institutional partnerships reinforce our commitment to ensuring that all students achieve a deep understanding of our standards as a result of instructors who have a deep understanding of what they teach.				
4. As part of all our cross-institutional partnerships, we have a comprehensive program evaluation plan that monitors and evaluates the degree of success and retention of our newly-hired staff.				
5. Our program evaluation plan allows us to determine the “value added” of each partnership, including how it affects student achievement, staff productivity, and organizational effectiveness.				
6. We incorporate a variety of formative and summative evaluation processes, generating a professional portfolio of our partnership accomplishments.				
7. Our cross-institutional partnerships include active outreach to universities involved in pre-service training programs.				
8. As a result of partnerships with university pre-service training programs, teachers new to our district have a clear understanding of our expectations for lesson and unit design, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and instructional delivery.				
9. Our new teacher induction program allows new hires to understand our				

school/district's expectations and operations while successfully ensuring that all students are equipped for success.				
10. Our new teacher induction program represents a multi-year commitment to ensuring that new staff receive the support and resources they require to succeed.				

## Understanding by Design and Teacher Mentoring Programs

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. We offer a variety of multi-year mentoring services for newly-hired teachers designed to help them succeed in our district.				
2. Our mentoring programs support new staff to understand their roles and responsibilities.				
3. Our mentoring programs support new staff to address successfully the professional standards for which they are accountable.				
4. Our mentoring programs support new staff to acquire and apply strategies, practices, and habits of mind that will help them to become successful and achieve identified professional standards.				
5. Our mentoring programs support new staff to use classroom management techniques and strategies demonstrated to promote success for diverse student needs and populations.				
6. Our mentoring programs support new staff to implement research-based instructional design and delivery practices.				
7. Our mentoring programs support new staff to understand the range of human and material resources available to them to ensure their sense of efficacy and job satisfaction.				
8. Our mentoring programs have clearly-articulated desired results for all participants, including mentors and mentees.				
9. We use a range of assessment tools and processes to collect and analyze formative and summative evaluation data in order to determine the value-added and impact of our mentoring programs relative to our desired results.				
10. Our mentoring programs concentrate upon research-based coaching, intervention, and related support strategies				

## Understanding by Design and the Electronic Learning Community

To what extent is your school or district building an electronic learning community consistent with the following Understanding by Design strategies and resources?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. Our curriculum clearly articulates the role of technology in all content areas, including standards for students at all structural levels: primary, intermediate, middle, high, post-secondary.				
2. Our curriculum helps our students understand the significance of technology in our world as well as how to use that technology to enhance their learning.				
3. Our professional development initiatives emphasize staff understanding of technology and ways it can be used to improve student understanding of our curriculum.				
4. We incorporate the Understanding by Design Exchange into our curriculum design, development, and implementation process.				
5. We use the Understanding by Design Exchange as part of our professional development activities related to unit design, assessment, and instruction to promote student understanding.				
6. We incorporate the Understanding by Design videotapes and related resource materials into staff development efforts targeting student achievement and standards mastery.				
7. We use the ASCD professional development on-line courses related to Understanding by Design as tools for individualizing professional development, particularly for new staff.				

***Understanding by Design:  
Implications for Continuous Improvement in Schools and Districts***

<b><u>School/District Goal</u></b>	<b><u>Understanding by Design Implications</u></b>
1. Reinforce district commitment to a coherent core curriculum emphasizing equity and excellence.	1. Use the three-circle curriculum audit process to build consensus about what all students should know, be able to do, and understand.
2. Ensure that all staff members understand district standards and their implications for high-stakes accountability testing.	2. Provide UbD training to help teachers and administrators “unpack” district standards and their implications for required testing.
3. Reinforce students’ understanding of the big ideas and interconnections within the curriculum they study.	3. Integrate enduring understandings and essential questions as “cueing” devices within all curriculum content areas.
4. Make certain that all students achieve high levels of understanding, not just formulaic knowledge/recall.	4. Emphasize the six facets of understanding: application, interpretation, explanation, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge.
5. Ensure that assessment provides a complete and balanced portrait of what all students know, can do, and understand.	5. Adopt the UbD “photo album” metaphor, integrating constructed-response test items, reflective assessments, academic prompts, and G.R.A.S.P.S. culminating projects.
6. Help students to move along a continuum from concrete to abstract, from teacher-guided to independent learning.	6. Organize units so that students’ learning spirals toward independent application, including successful completion of G.R.A.S.P.S. projects.
7. Reinforce all students’ sense of efficacy, purpose, and authenticity.	7. Integrate the “W” element of W.H.E.R.E.T.O. in daily lesson design and delivery.
8. Engage student interest and ownership.	8. Hook” students in key sections of all lessons.
9. Equip all students for success through experiential learning opportunities.	9. Reinforce the first “E” of W.H.E.R.E.T.O., emphasizing hands-on inquiry.
10. Reinforce students’ ability to monitor their own comprehension (i.e., metacognition and self-regulation).	10. Stress the four “Rs”: reflect, revise, rethink, refine.
11. Encourage students to self-evaluate and self-express.	11. Use strategies such as think-pair-share, journaling, interviews, and presentations.
12. Differentiate instruction to accommodate the needs and strengths of all learners.	12. “Tailor” learning activities to address <u>all</u> students’ strengths and needs, including tutorials, coaching, and compacting/acceleration.
13. Organize instruction to maximize learning for all students, including special populations.	13. Organize learning around big ideas and essential questions, revisiting core knowledge and skills with increasing complexity and independence.

## Changing Organizational Cultures: Creating Communities of Learning and Inquiry

As your school or district works to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of its organizational culture, to what extent are you addressing the following Understanding by Design recommendations?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. We share an articulated philosophy of learning consistent with the best in current research-based practice.				
2. All changes in curriculum design, including framework documents, evolve from a decision-making process that is consensus-driven.				
3. One of our primary institutional values is a commitment to both excellence and equity, guaranteeing that all students achieve understanding of our core curriculum.				
4. We strive to overcome “initiative overload,” reinforcing staff members’ understanding of the interconnections among our accountability initiatives.				
5. We approach curriculum as a system for managing the learning process, with clear alignment among our written, tested, taught, supported, and learned curricula.				
6. Professional development supports our commitment to creating communities of learning and inquiry.				
7. All staff development activities are long-term and job-embedded, emphasizing staff study groups, inquiry teams, and action research cohorts.				
8. All stakeholders, including students, parents, and community members, understand and support our organization’s vision, mission, and objectives.				
9. Continuing assessment and evaluation of programs and initiatives allow us to determine their “value added,” i.e., the impact of initiatives upon our organizational goals and objectives.				
10. We are committed to the process of continuous improvement, collecting formative and summative performance data to determine how we are doing and how we need to change.				

<p>11. Our continuous improvement process involves our use of multiple forms of assessment and evaluation data, rather than “snapshot” approaches.</p>				
<p>12. Our organizational improvement process emphasizes consensus-driven action planning with clear timelines, benchmarks, and adjustments based upon emerging data patterns.</p>				
<p>13. Instructional leadership involves all personnel in a shared commitment to monitoring and promoting the achievement of all students.</p>				
<p>14. Our commitment to instructional improvement reflects our willingness to differentiate instruction to meet the needs and strengths of all students, including special populations.</p>				

**A Vision for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools:  
Inferences and Implications from Understanding by Design Users**

To what extent is each of the following Understanding by Design factors evident in your school or district’s vision for and approach to education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Factor	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Highly Evident
1. Our vision and mission emphasize our commitment to helping all students achieve deep understanding of our curriculum.				
2. Our learning organization consistently reflects the best in what we now know about the learning process.				
3. We offer a curriculum that is clearly articulated with standards that promote understanding for all students.				
4. We have designed our curriculum to ensure that it identifies the big ideas, conceptual understandings, and essential questions critical for student understanding.				
5. Our curriculum emphasizes what all students should know, be able to do, and understand.				
6. We structure our written curriculum to ensure that teachers and students have the time and resources to explore it in depth, rather than for superficial coverage.				
7. Our curriculum management process reinforces alignment between and among our written, tested, taught, supported, and learned curricula.				
8. Our assessment and evaluation process emphasizes multiple forms of assessment to capture the full range of student understanding and performance.				
9. All instructors effectively use multiple forms of assessment as a tool for monitoring student understanding and achievement.				
10. Assessment emphasizes the need to identify and address the strengths and needs of all students relative to their understanding of our curriculum and its standards.				
11. Teachers differentiate instruction to accommodate the strengths and needs of students, as identified by our assessment and evaluation processes.				
12. Instruction ensures that all students understand where they are headed, why they are heading there, and ways in which they will be evaluated.				

13. At key points in every instructional episode, students' interest and engagement is "hooked" through experiential activities and inquiry-based learning opportunities.				
14. All students are equipped for success through learning experiences that help them explore big ideas and essential questions.				
15. Instructors design learning activities to equip all students for success on final culminating projects and related performance tasks.				
16. All students are self-aware and self-evaluative as a result of organizational commitment to the values of reflecting, revising, rethinking, and refining.				
17. All students exhibit their evolving understanding and mastery of standards through final performances and products.				
18. Instruction equips all students to move from concrete experience toward abstract conceptualization and understanding.				
19. All instructional and professional development activities reflect the backward design process: Stage One—Determining Desired Results; Stage Two—Monitoring and Assessing Achievement of Desired Results; and Stage Three—Designing Learning Activities to Promote Desired Results.				
20. Our learning organization reinforces six major behavior patterns and habits of mind: explanation, application, interpretation, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge.				