

# 2026 District Day of Learning Summary and Report

## Executive Summary

The **2026 District Day of Learning**, held on January 12, 2026, advanced Maricopa’s districtwide focus on “*Moving from Accessibility to Access*” by reframing accessibility as a proactive, student-centered design practice rather than a compliance obligation. Featuring a keynote by nationally recognized Universal Design for Learning (UDL) expert Dr. Thomas J. Tobin, along with a showcase of Maricopa faculty and instructional designers, the event emphasized progress over perfection, practical strategies, and shared responsibility. With a modest \$5,500 budget for the keynote speaker, the event delivered a high return on investment through strong engagement, overwhelmingly positive satisfaction ratings, and clear evidence of learning transfer.

Participation exceeded expectations, with an estimated **750 participants** across all ten colleges through hybrid attendance options, including campus watch parties and individual virtual participation. Evaluation data (n=504) indicate that **93.8% of respondents were faculty**, with strong representation from both residential and adjunct instructors. Satisfaction levels were exceptionally high: **98–99%** of respondents agreed that the keynote met expectations and aligned with the event theme, while the Maricopa Showcase and Panel also received strong approval. Importantly, **94.2% of respondents reported improved understanding of accessibility and UDL**, and **90.1% indicated intent to apply for Faculty Professional Growth (FPG) credit**, signaling both engagement and follow-through.

Qualitative feedback revealed a significant mindset shift among participants—from viewing accessibility as a mandate to understanding access as an inclusive design practice that benefits all learners. The POUR framework (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust) emerged as a key takeaway for translating complex standards into actionable teaching strategies. Faculty reported increased confidence and reduced anxiety, particularly due to the emphasis on incremental improvement, modeling of accessible practices, and realistic expectations ahead of the April 2026 Title II deadline. Participants identified immediate actions they plan to implement, including early anonymous student check-ins, mobile-first course review, prioritizing high-impact accessibility fixes, and expanding flexible options for engagement and assessment.

Looking forward, respondents expressed strong interest in future events that prioritize **hands-on, discipline-specific application**, particularly for PDFs, Canvas accessibility, video captioning, STEM and equation-heavy content, and UDL in practice. There was also growing interest in ethical uses of AI to support accessibility and assessment design. While overall satisfaction was high, feedback suggests that future iterations would benefit from deeper dives into fewer tools, structured practice opportunities, and targeted breakout sessions. Collectively, the results demonstrate that the 2026 District Day of Learning successfully advanced

Maricopa’s culture of access, equipping faculty with the mindset, strategies, and confidence needed to translate accessibility principles into everyday teaching practice.

## Program

The District Day of Learning was held on January 12, 2026, with a theme of “Moving from Accessibility to Access.” To facilitate this, we invited author, faculty member, and Universal Design for Learning expert Dr. Thomas J. Tobin to serve as our keynote speaker. Afterward, we held a Maricopa Showcase and Panel featuring Vanessa Agee (Residential Faculty, CGCC), Jennifer Avila (Residential Faculty, SMCC), and Carla Ghanem (Instructional Designer, DO MCLI). The budget consisted of a single item, the keynote speaker’s fee of \$5,500.00.

## Participation

All ten Colleges hosted a watch party, and participants could attend in person or participate virtually on their own. Before the event, there were 802 pre-registrations. The registration process was managed through the Employee Learn Center.

We only have partial attendance numbers as not all participants signed in or out as directed. For example, 283 participants signed in for the Virtual portion, but the system recorded 588 participants online at one time and reported 653 unique logins (including at least 10 from the College Viewing parties).

The table below shows the preregistration count and confirmed attendance. A participant was confirmed as attending by signing in or out of the event. In addition, we have included the number of evaluation and assessment responses.

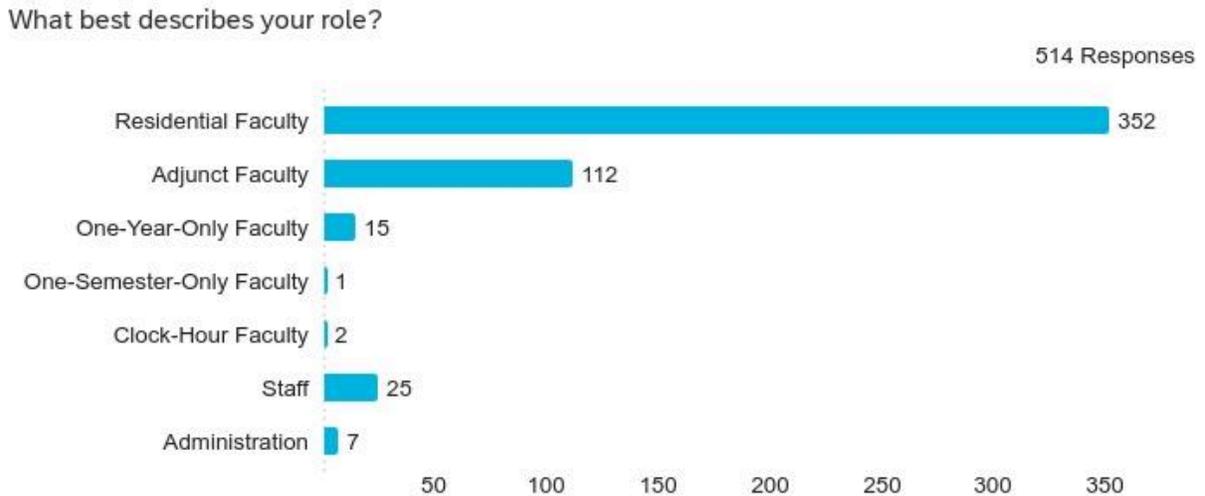
<b>Enrollment Type</b>	<b>Pre-Registration Count</b>	<b>Confirmed Attendance</b>	<b>Evaluation Responses</b>
CGCC Watch Party	55	41	27
EMCC Watch Party	46	20	13
GCC Watch Party	39	19	16
GWCC Watch Party	42	36	15
MCC Watch Party	61	45	29
PC Watch Party	25	13	12
PVCC Watch Party	27	17	15
RSC Watch Party	33	23	14
SCC Watch Party	35	32	22
SMCC Watch Party	23	19	12

2026 District Day of Learning Summary and Report

Enrollment Type	Pre-Registration Count	Confirmed Attendance	Evaluation Responses
Virtual On Your Own	416	283	329
<b>Totals</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>504</b>

Based on this data, we estimated that approximately 750 people participated in the 2026 District Day of Learning.

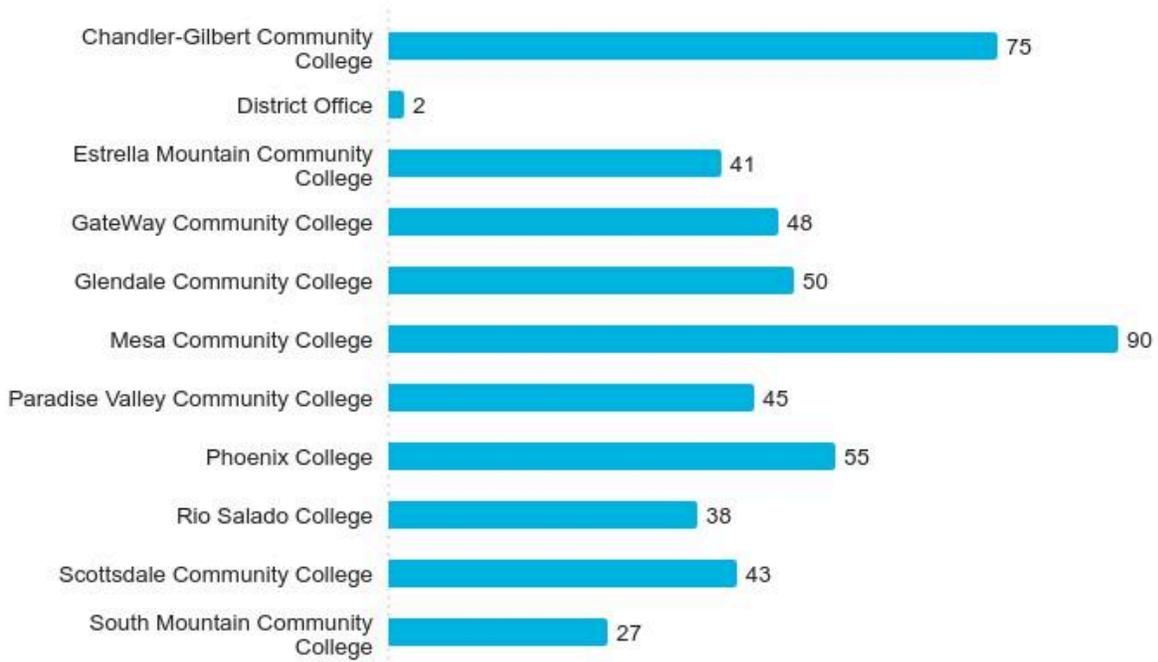
Based on the evaluation responses, the vast majority (93.8%) of participants were faculty. 68.5% of respondents were Residential faculty, with Adjunct Faculty accounting for 21.8%. The image below shows the full breakdown of respondents' roles. We only asked respondents to identify their primary role, meaning that an adjunct faculty member who is also a staff member had to choose the one they felt best represented them.



The following graph highlights where respondents identified their “primary” location. Because adjunct faculty may teach at multiple locations, they were asked to select the one location.

What is your primary location?

514 Responses

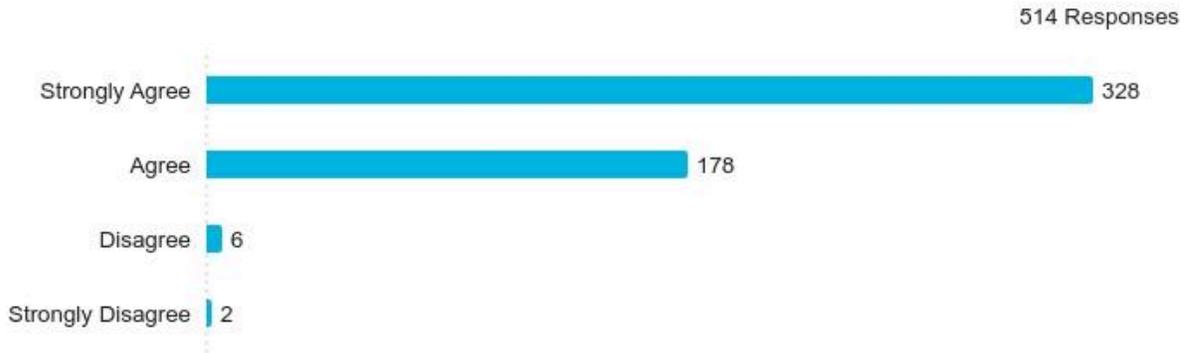


We also asked whether respondents intended to apply for FPG, and 90.1% indicated they planned to do so. However, only 315 people were fully qualified for the 2.25 clock hours of Faculty Professional Growth.

## Keynote Satisfaction

When asked whether the keynote presentation met the respondents' expectations, the response was very agreeable (98.4%).

The keynote presentation met my expectations in terms of providing valuable knowledge and information.



When asked whether the keynote presentation aligned with the theme and met the respondents' expectations, the response was also very agreeable (99.6%).

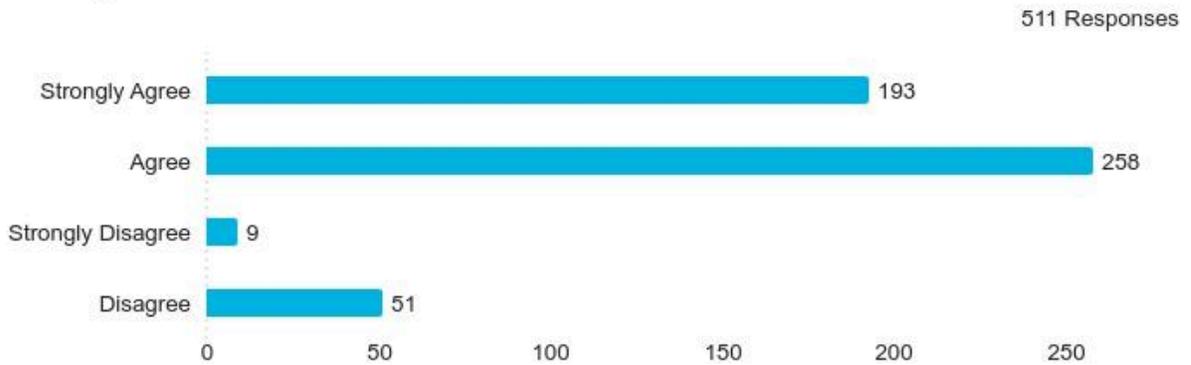
The keynote presentation aligned with the conference theme: Moving from Accessibility to Access.



## Maricopa Showcase and Panel Satisfaction

The respondents were also generally satisfied with the Maricopa Showcase and Panel, but not to the same extent as with the Keynote. In meeting their expectations, the respondents were generally agreeable (88.3%).

The Maricopa Showcase and Panel met my expectations in terms of providing valuable knowledge and information.



As for alignment, the agreeability rate was at 97.9%.

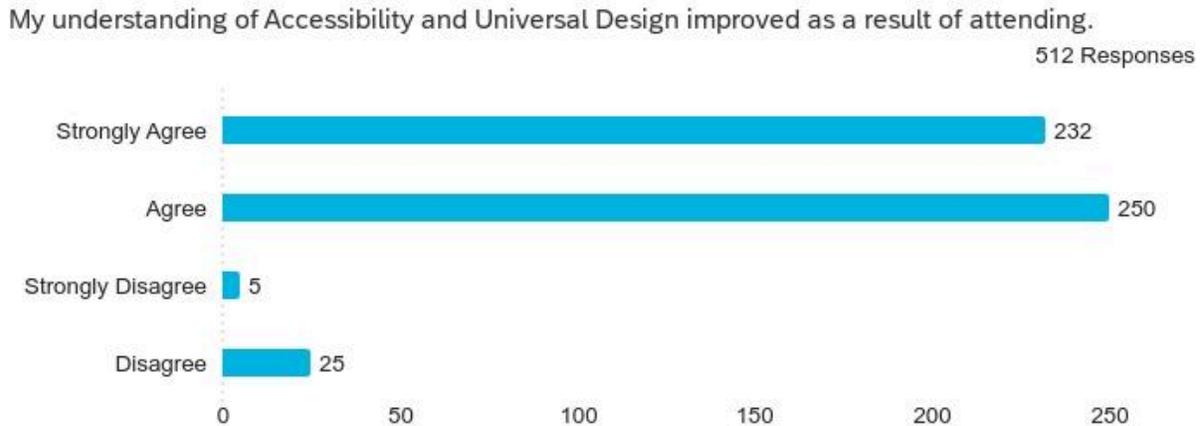
The Maricopa Showcase and Panel aligned with the conference theme: Moving from Accessibility to Access.



## Overall Impression

We asked one Likert-scale question and several open-ended questions.

Respondents indicated that this event improved their understanding of Accessibility and Universal Design by 94.2%, as shown in the graph below.



## Key Takeaways

Participants consistently described a significant **shift in mindset from viewing accessibility as compliance to viewing it as a student-centered design practice**. A dominant takeaway was that accessibility benefits *all* students—not only those with documented disabilities—by reducing barriers for working learners, caregivers, mobile-only users, multilingual students, and those with invisible or undisclosed needs. Many noted that reframing accessibility in this way reduced anxiety and made the work feel purposeful rather than punitive. The **POUR framework (Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, Robust)** emerged as the most cited and valued concept, praised for translating complex WCAG requirements into a clear, memorable, and actionable lens. Participants also emphasized reassurance that **progress matters more than perfection**, with strong appreciation for the message that no one is expected to reach 100% compliance by the April deadline as long as meaningful, incremental progress is underway.

Faculty also highlighted **practical strategies they could implement immediately**, including prioritizing known pain points in courses, working module by module, and starting with high-impact fixes rather than attempting to address everything at once. The idea of **early student feedback**, particularly a brief anonymous check-in during weeks one or two, was repeatedly cited as a powerful way to identify access barriers before students fall behind. Participants valued seeing accessibility **modeled in practice**, especially through verbal image descriptions and inclusive presentation techniques, which made accessibility feel achievable and relevant across modalities. Many also noted the importance of viewing courses from a **mobile-first perspective**, recognizing that most students access materials on phones. Overall,

respondents left feeling less overwhelmed, more confident in next steps, and encouraged by the availability of tools, resources, and collaborative support across the district.

## Aspects of the Event Seen as Most Valuable

Participants consistently identified the keynote as the most valuable aspect of the event, particularly praising its engaging, calming, and highly practical approach. The keynote helped shift perspectives away from accessibility as a compliance-driven mandate toward access as a shared, student-centered responsibility grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Attendees valued the clear explanations of why accessibility matters, the realistic framing of progress over perfection, and the reassurance around the April 2026 timeline. Modeling strategies in real time—such as verbally describing images, structuring content in an accessible way, and prioritizing high-impact changes—made accessibility feel manageable rather than overwhelming and significantly reduced faculty anxiety.

Equally valuable were the actionable strategies, shared resources, and sense of community fostered throughout the event. Participants highlighted the usefulness of the POUR framework as a clear organizing lens, concrete examples they could apply immediately in Canvas and course materials, and the extensive links to tools and guidance for continued learning. Faculty panels, Q&A, chat discussions, and campus watch parties reinforced that instructors are not working in isolation and that many share similar challenges. Overall, respondents emphasized that the combination of practical techniques, peer examples, and collaborative support made accessibility feel achievable, sustainable, and beneficial for all students—not just those with documented disabilities.

## Future Event Themes

Participants consistently expressed a strong desire for future District Day of Learning events to move beyond conceptual overviews and focus on **hands-on, practical, and discipline-specific application**. Across responses, faculty emphasized the need for step-by-step demonstrations, live working sessions, and real-time examples that show *how* to make materials accessible rather than reiterating *why* accessibility matters. The most frequently cited challenges centered on **PDF accessibility, Canvas accessibility (including Panorama), video captioning and transcripts, and Universal Design for Learning in practice**. Math, STEM, and other visually or equation-heavy disciplines surfaced repeatedly as areas needing targeted support, with faculty seeking clear guidance on accessible equations, handwritten notes, graphs, diagrams, and assessments. Many respondents also requested faculty showcases, before-and-after examples, and walkthroughs of real Canvas courses to understand better understand what “good” accessibility looks like in practice.

In addition, participants highlighted growing interest in **AI, assessment design, and student engagement**, particularly how AI can be used ethically to support accessibility while maintaining academic rigor and integrity. Faculty asked for practical strategies for AI-aware assessments, time-saving workflows, and clearer guidance on third-party tools and content. There was also a

strong call to center **student perspectives**, including insights from students with disabilities and neurodivergent learners, to better understand lived experiences and barriers to access. Overall, respondents conveyed a sense of urgency and overwhelm and asked for clearer prioritization, institutional guidance, scalable support for adjuncts, and deeper dives into fewer tools at a time—framing future events as spaces for sustained, applied learning that helps faculty confidently translate accessibility and UDL principles into everyday teaching practice.

### Suggested Improvements for Future Events

Overall feedback reflected **high satisfaction with the 2026 District Day of Learning**, with many participants indicating that no changes were needed and praising the event as well-organized, valuable, and engaging. Attendees strongly appreciated the **hybrid format**, including virtual attendance, in-person viewing parties, and flexibility, noting that these options reduced barriers and increased access. The keynote speaker was widely viewed as engaging and informative, and participants valued the opportunity to connect through chat, Q&A, and shared resources. Many respondents encouraged continuing this overall structure, describing the event as one of the stronger professional learning experiences they have attended.

Suggestions for improvement clustered around a desire for **greater interactivity, practical application, and discipline-specific relevance**. Participants frequently requested hands-on workshops, real-time demonstrations, and step-by-step examples showing how to make course materials accessible, particularly within Canvas and common document formats. Many faculty—especially from math, science, and CTE disciplines—expressed that panel examples did not sufficiently address their instructional contexts and recommended discipline-based breakout sessions instead. Additional themes included refining the faculty panel structure, improving alignment and accessibility of slides, clarifying transitions and expectations, sharing resources in advance, allowing more time for Q&A, and building in structured opportunities for discussion at viewing parties. Collectively, the feedback suggests that future events would benefit from shifting some time from broad presentations to **guided practice, focused breakouts, and deeper application** to help participants move confidently from awareness to action.

## Participants' Planned Actions

The FPG asks event organizers to assess participants' learning. We do this by asking what actions they plan to take in the near future. These questions are directly aligned with the event's learning objectives:

- Frame the principles of UDL within the access needs of all students at your institution
- Talk with your colleagues about individual and campus-wide efforts that lower barriers, reduce costs, and increase student persistence and retention rates
- Collaborate on accessible design efforts among your teaching and support-staff colleagues that increase student agency, autonomy, and satisfaction
- Implement specific strategies for improving the access of your course

## How the Principles of UDL Can Assist Students

Participants consistently described Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a **proactive approach to access** that reduces barriers by anticipating learner variability from the outset rather than relying on individual, retroactive accommodations. By embedding flexibility into course design, UDL helps ensure that materials, activities, and assessments are accessible to the widest range of students. Respondents emphasized that this shift moves the focus from “accessibility for some” to “access for all,” minimizing the need for special exceptions while creating clearer structure, consistency, and usability across courses.

Across responses, faculty highlighted the importance of **multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression** as central to meeting student access needs. Providing content in varied formats (text, audio, video, captions, visuals) and allowing flexible ways for students to demonstrate learning were seen as critical for supporting students with disabilities, multilingual learners, mobile and working students, and those facing temporary or situational barriers. Participants noted that these practices increase engagement, equity, confidence, and persistence—benefiting not only students with documented accommodations but also improving learning experiences and outcomes for all learners.

## How Colleges Are Working To Lower Barriers, Reduce Costs, and Increase Student Persistence Rates

Participant responses consistently emphasized that colleges are lowering barriers and reducing costs primarily through the widespread adoption of **Open Educational Resources (OER)** and zero- or low-cost course materials, ensuring students have access to required content from the first day of class. Faculty and libraries play a central role in this effort by replacing expensive textbooks with open, instructor-created, or library-provided resources, thereby reducing financial stress and preventing early course withdrawals. At the same time, colleges are prioritizing **accessibility and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** through extensive professional development and tools such as Canvas accessibility checkers, YuJa Panorama, and captioning and multimodal content strategies. Respondents repeatedly noted that proactive accessibility

benefits all students—not only those with documented disabilities—by reducing cognitive load, supporting nontraditional learners, and minimizing the need for individual accommodations.

In addition to affordability and accessible course design, participants highlighted a strong focus on **student persistence and retention through early intervention, wraparound support, and flexibility**. Colleges are using early-alert systems, Dropout Detective, CARE reports, and direct faculty outreach to identify and support students before challenges escalate. Wraparound services—including advising, tutoring, counseling, food pantries, technology loans, and student success navigators—address both academic and basic needs barriers. Flexible learning options (online, hybrid, asynchronous, accelerated courses), clear pathways, and regular faculty-student interaction further support students balancing work, family, and school. Together, respondents described these efforts as a shift toward a shared culture of access, care, and proactive support that strengthens engagement, persistence, and long-term student success.

## How You Can Increase Student Agency, Autonomy, and Satisfaction in Courses

Participants consistently emphasized that **student agency and autonomy are strongest when courses are intentionally designed around meaningful choice, accessibility, and clarity**. Faculty highlighted offering multiple ways for students to engage with content and demonstrate learning—such as varied assignment formats, topic selection aligned with student interests, flexible pacing, and multiple learning modalities—as central to helping students take ownership of their learning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emerged as a foundational approach, not only to meet accessibility needs but to proactively remove barriers for all learners. Clear expectations, transparent rubrics, predictable course structures, and accessible materials were repeatedly described as empowering students to navigate courses independently, reduce frustration, and focus on learning rather than logistics.

Student satisfaction was most often linked to **early and ongoing communication, feedback, and relationship-building**. Many participants described using early-term anonymous surveys (often in weeks two or three) to identify barriers, gauge engagement, and make real-time course adjustments, noting that these practices help students feel heard and supported. Regular, substantive interaction—through timely feedback, check-ins, reflection activities, and opportunities for revision—was seen as critical to building confidence, trust, and a sense of belonging. Across responses, satisfaction was framed not as a separate goal, but as the natural result of courses that combine flexibility, accessibility, responsiveness, and genuine instructor presence.

## Strategies for Improving the Access of Courses

Participant responses to the 2026 District Day of Learning evaluation reveal a strong, shared commitment to improving course access through **proactive, student-centered design**. A dominant theme was the use of **early, anonymous student check-ins—often in week two of the course—to identify barriers related to time, format, technology, and workload while**

**there is still an opportunity to adjust instruction.** Faculty emphasized moving away from assumptions and toward actionable feedback that supports retention and success. Many respondents also highlighted the importance of **simplifying course organization**, reducing unnecessary content, reviewing courses on mobile devices, and making Canvas materials easier to navigate.

Equally prominent was a focus on **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** and core accessibility practices, particularly **captioning and transcribing videos, describing images and visuals, remediation or replacement of inaccessible PDFs, and offering content in multiple formats** (text, audio, video, and visuals). Participants frequently noted plans to provide **flexible, low-stakes assessments and multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning**, normalizing choice rather than treating it as an accommodation. The use of **district-supported tools** such as Canvas accessibility checkers, YuJa Panorama, Grackle, and AI-assisted reviews was cited as a way to sustain accessibility work over time. Collectively, the responses reflect a clear shift from compliance-driven fixes to **intentional design practices that remove barriers for all learners.**

## Planning Committee and Support

The 2026 District Day of Learning planning team included the following members of the Faculty Developers Committee:

- Melissa Bunte (MCC)
- Elizabeth Cantú (EMCC)
- Eric Haas (SCC)
- Nikki Nieset (CGCC)
- Steven Crawford (DO)
- Patty Finkenstadt (DO)

Each College had a Point of Contact that represented the work behind hosting their viewing party. These Points of Contact were:

- Nikki Nieset (CGCC)
- Elizabeth (Liz) Cantú (EMCC)
- Meghan Kennedy (GCC)
- Nicky Hightower (GWCC)
- Melissa Bunte (MCC)
- Rhonda Barrett (PC)
- Polly Laubach (PVCC)
- Gina Pinch (RSC)
- Eric Haas (SCC)
- Jennifer Avila (SMCC)

Logistics for the overall event, including hosting the virtual viewing option, were provided by the Maricopa Center for Learning and Innovation:

- Steven Crawford
- Serena Lindsay
- Carla Ghanem
- Debbie Baker
- Rob Morales
- Patricia Guillen

For questions or clarifications, please contact Steven Crawford, District Director for the Maricopa Center for Learning and Innovation.