reSources
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California Deafblind Services

In this issue:

- **In Appreciation — Maurice Belote Retires**
  - CDBS Staff
- **Tip of the Hat to Teachers of the Deafblind in California**
  - Julie Maier, Project Coordinator, California Deafblind Services
- **How to Set Healthy Boundaries**
  - Kayla Coburn, Educational Specialist
- **Three Components That Build Trust and Why Trust is Crucial to Learning for a Student Who is Deafblind**
  - Linda Bernett, Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Itinerant Teacher, Los Angeles Unified School District
- **What Does Equitable Access Look Like for Proficient Communicators? Issues and Resources** *- Julie Maier, Project Coordinator,*

In Appreciation!

Maurice Belote Retires from California Deafblind Services

CDBS STAFF

A new year often brings new changes and 2022 has brought a big change to our team as well. Maurice Belote, who so brilliantly led our team for the past 20 plus years, retired from CDBS at the end of December 2021. We know many families and educators across the state equate Maurice's name and face with California Deafblind Services — and for good reason. As Project Coordinator he was awarded five technical assistance project grants from the US Department of Education and expertly coordinated and managed our ever expanding and evolving project initiatives and activities, all while mentoring, encouraging, and inspiring every staff member who's served on the project with him. Maurice also trained and mentored countless teachers in the field, pre-service teachers, and interveners. Additionally, he is also recognized as an experienced and generous colleague and leader within the national deafblind network and contributed to national efforts related to recognition and training of interveners and teachers of the deafblind, deafblind educational standards and practices, transition issues, social relationships, and family partnerships. In March 2021 he was awarded the Anne Sullivan Macy Medal from Perkins International to commemorate his numerous and valuable contributions to field of deafblindness.

Maurice's entire career has focused on ensuring equal opportunities and access and effective intervention and assessment for individuals who are deafblind. First in the classroom and community with students and later as a technical assistance provider, presenter, and coach. Most of Maurice's teaching and advocacy occurred during

training, visits to classrooms, and meetings with families and school teams. However, a good deal of it was also captured in CDBS Fact Sheets, our ***reSources*** newsletter articles, and video trainings on just about every topic related to deafblindness you could imagine. We feel fortunate that we can continue to share the unique insights and expert suggestions offered by Maurice through this media during our technical assistance and training activities. We encourage you to explore and use those Fact Sheets, ***reSources*** articles and recorded trainings whenever you need just a little "Maurice" magic or insights or are wondering "*What would Maurice say?*". It's also reassuring to know Maurice plans to continue working in the field of deafblindness and that will provide all of us with opportunities to continue to stay connected with him.

The rest of the team is still here and our mission to provide responsive and timely support, training, and resources to families of children and youth who are deafblind and educational teams across our state has not changed. Dr. Kathleen Mortier, from the San Francisco State University's Special Education Department, is our Project Director. Julie Maier is the new Project Coordinator and served as one of the CDBS Deafblind Educational Specialists since 2012. Myrna Medina remains our Family Engagement Specialist. Brian Devereux continues to serve as our Administrative Specialist. Kayla Coburn continues as our Southern California Deafblind Educational Specialist and we are happy to welcome Charles Beavis as our Northern California Deafblind Educational Specialist.

We miss Maurice so much already, but we are equally excited about what lies ahead for him. In deep appreciation for his leadership, friendship, and the legacy he's left at CDBS, we offer an enormous CONGRATULATIONS/ FELICIDADES to Maurice!

Tip of the Hat to Teachers of the Deafblind in California

By Julie Maier, Project Coordinator

Over the past two years of the COVID pandemic the CDBS staff has marveled at the resiliency, ingenuity, and compassion demonstrated by educators in our state and across the country. Educators have always earned respect and admiration from our staff and their work on the front lines over the past two years has multiplied these feelings. We witnessed so many teachers of the deafblind and interveners in California expertly addressing the varied and diverse needs of their students and families during the school lockdowns and the return to the classroom and campus. They created and led engaging virtual lessons, brainstormed and configured creative solutions to remedy access issues, and collaborated and supported parents and care providers to implement meaningful lessons and routines at home. Their efforts and any beneficial outcomes that occurred certainly emphasized the importance of a knowledgeable, trained teacher on the educational team—a teacher who understands the unique needs of a student who is deafblind.

We've shared in past ***reSources*** articles that although there is no longer a deafblind-specific credential in California there are trained, knowledgeable and experienced teachers in our state serving children and youth who are deafblind [see ***reSources*** 24, (1)]. Teachers of Students with Visually Impairments, Teachers of the Deaf, Extensive Support Needs Teachers, and Early Childhood Special Education Teachers hold credentials that authorize them to serve students who are deafblind. Many of these teachers strongly self-identify as a Teacher of the Deafblind from the experiences they have had teaching and supporting students who are deafblind. We want to salute those teachers across our state and continue to support them as much as possible.

CDBS offers trainings and resources to students and faculty in pre-service teacher preparation training programs in the areas of Visual Impairments, Deaf/Hard of hearing, and Extensive Support Needs across the state. These virtual and in-person presentations are where we first meet many of these passionate and caring teachers. After earning their teaching credentials there are many ways for teachers to continue to engage in professional development and increase their knowledge and training in deafblindness. Professional development activities and resources offered by CDBS include: Engagement in child-specific technical assistance; participation in school, district and regional trainings and presentations at state conferences offered by CDBS staff; attendance at the annual *CDBS Symposium on Deafblindness*; and use of resources available on the CDBS website such Fact Sheets, articles from our ***reSources*** e-zine, and archived video recordings or trainings.

An additional support for interested teachers is participation in the *Golden State Teacher of the Deafblind Community of Practice* monthly meetings. This group of educators began meeting in 2019 and the virtual monthly meetings offer teachers an opportunity to connect with others who are passionate about individuals with deafblindness, share successes and challenges, brainstorm possible solutions, and engage in discussion on a variety of topics relevant to deafblind education. If you're interested in learning more about or joining this TDB Community of Practice, contact Julie Maier (jmaier@sfsu.edu) or Kayla Coburn (kcoburn@sfsu.edu).

The National Center on Deafblindness also supports national and states' efforts to build greater recognition of the important role of the Teacher of the Deafblind. The free online deafblind training modules, Open Hands, Open Access, have rich, engaging content on a variety of topics related to deafblind education and intervention. The Interveners and Qualified Personnel Initiative webpage includes several articles and resources related to this unique professional role and information about numerous Professional Development opportunities including online courses. This NCDB initiative also features Profiles of Teachers of the Deafblind across the U.S. and we're thrilled that two of the profiles include California teachers and members of our Golden State TDB Community of Practice:

- Madilynn Sipe, Teacher of the Visually Impaired
- Linda Bernett, Teacher of the Deaf
  Check out Linda's article about the importance of trust and how to build trust in this edition of reSources

If you are an educator looking for deafblind resources, professional development opportunities, and/or community, please contact any member of our CDBS staff. We'd love to hear from you and get connected.

How to Set Healthy Boundaries

By Kayla Coburn

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein has always been a favorite book of mine, until I saw a new rendition of the cover by Topher Payne. Advertised as a parody but with a very important lesson, Topher changed the beloved story to "***The Tree Who Set Healthy Boundaries***." Topher rewrote the portion of the book where the giving tree gives the boy her branches for a home and instead tells the boy, "*no*." The tree explains that their relationship is one-sided and the tree is sad that the boy never asks how she is doing or how he can support her. After a quick lesson in empathy, the boy and tree create a new relationship with healthy boundaries, and it ends with the tree being able to support the boy's future children and grandchildren for generations to come.

It can be hard to say no and to set those boundaries, but in the end the tree reflects on how that challenging choice created a stronger relationship between the two of them. She loved the boy so much and wanted to give him everything but saying no to some requests kept her on the path of not becoming a stump, but a big, beautiful tree. She realized she "*would have had nothing left. Not for herself, nor anyone else.*"

As a former teacher and a current parent, I feel the constant battle of giving to your students/children and the challenges of taking care of yourself as well. As we continue into the unknown of virtual learning, rapid covid tests, and ongoing quarantining, it is getting harder to take the time to care for ourselves and the children we support. Let's focus on how we can set healthy boundaries for ourselves and our children.

When setting up healthy boundaries for yourself as we continue to chug along in 2022, it is important you use your community, get comfortable saying "*no*," and find your happy place. For teachers, find a coworker to keep you accountable.

For parents, have a friend or partner keep you accountable. Once we, as adults, can create healthy boundaries, we can pass the lessons along to our students and children. Have your accountability partner check in with you, even if it is just a quick text saying, "*What did you do for yourself this week?*" Support each other when someone says "*no*" to something. Sometimes all we need is a verbal support system.

As someone who identifies as a "giver," the word "*no*" is rarely used in

my vocabulary. I say "*yes*" because it's easier… for the other person. It is one less thing for them to worry about because I "*got this*." The problem with that mindset is that I **don't** "*got this*." If you take on everyone else's challenges, where do you put yours? When do you focus on yourself? After saying "*no*" the first time, you will discover that other people are capable. You can also adjust your mindset by noticing that you are helping them by saying "*no*." You are teaching them to figure out a problem for themselves and teaching them about responsibility. You don't need to say "*no*" to everyone but learn to set boundaries, so you don't become overwhelmed. Set a time to leave work, set a time to be done with house chores, and set a time for an activity that brings you joy. Learn to delegate responsibilities and teach other's how to be responsible for themselves.

Image from: stacieswift.com

Finding a happy place, or a moment to look forward to, can also help you set healthy boundaries. At one of my former schools, the teachers would all go off campus for a very quick lunch. It did feel rushed at times coming back to campus, but the weekly change of scenery gave us something to look forward to; it kept our spirits high. And guess how many times my students or aides needed me back on campus for an emergency? None! Now this type of activity might not be possible now but try to think of something that brings joy or excitement that can happen weekly. You can get food delivered to campus, you can have an easy social game to play once a week, or you can have a potluck. These types of activities can help create a safe place to ask for help, vent to each other, and get the support you need.

Lastly, carve out time for yourself. Write down your daily schedule and find times to sprinkle joy into your life. It can be going for an outdoor walk, trying a new recipe, or watching a movie, and any of these can even be done with your students or children. Do you need alone time? I personally can't appreciate "alone time" inside my house. I plan a meal with a friend and put it on the shared calendar with my partner, so they know they will need to be the responsible adult in the household for that timeframe. It may take planning and forethought, but it is doable!

Learning how to care for yourself will also help you teach your students/children the importance of empathy for themselves and others. When you learn to set boundaries, the people around you learn to set boundaries, and this will create a happier community for all of us. Unfortunately, we can't control the pandemic, but we can control how we are going to take care of ourselves and the people around us. Focus on your own branches and trunk, the stronger a tree you are, the more children and students you can help.

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Three Components That Build Trust and Why Trust is Crucial to Learning for a Student Who is Deafblind

by Linda Bernett
Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Itinerant Teacher: Los Angeles Unified School District

Trust is the key to teaching a student who is deafblind. Why? When a person doesn't have full sight and hearing, they do not have the same freedom in exploring the world the way typical children do.

Learning happens right from birth, for all of us and a lot of that learning happens naturally, or incidentally, through sight and hearing. With help from our parents, and others in the world we meet and trust, we start to make sense of the things that we see and hear, and our knowledge grows from there.

Sighted and hearing children usually feel safe when exploring the world, however even with full sight and hearing, children sometimes feel too afraid to experience something new. Any child can get into trouble when exploring or acting without enough knowledge, such as crossing the street without knowing the rules and risk. In these cases, children rely on those with more knowledge (e.g. parents and caregivers) to explain the hazards to them and limit their access to "danger." This balance continues until they are they are old enough to understand different rules and risks on their own. Through it all, sight and hearing are central to these lessons children receive from parents or care providers without consciously having to consider the involvement of either sense.

Now consider the world of a person who is deafblind. With issues involving vision and hearing, a lot of what is learned naturally through those two senses is lost. But it can be taught in a different way. Exploration can be facilitated by other trusted people (e.g. parents, care providers, teachers, interveners, etc.) and the more trust the deafblind person has, the more inclined to want to explore more. *Trust is essential.*

How does one gain trust? Trust is built over time. Trust comes from repeated, and then expected, good outcomes for the person who is deafblind. Trust requires *consistency*.

Consistency builds trust between a deafblind person and their parent/facilitator/intervener/teacher. With limited sight or hearing, the individual depends on consistency in what is done, when it's done, and how it's done. Inconsistency leads to anxiety and anxiety leads to fear, which is a roadblock to exploring and learning.

How can you be consistent with a student who is deafblind? Use a daily schedule. Preview the schedule together every morning - the whole day. Utilize an object cue for each activity – use objects that relate to the activity as much as possible. This does three things: 1) Engages the person in their own schedule, 2) helps ease transitions, and 3) signals beginning, middle, end, and next. Before each activity, go to the schedule, remove the object (paired with any means of communication regularly used – spoken language, sign language, both) and take it to the activity. When done, put the object cue in a "finished" container.

Consistency means avoiding surprises for the student as much as possible. Some surprises in life can't be avoided, but those that can – a medical appointment, a special class/family event, a school/family field trip or vacation, etc. – should be prepped. Even if the student has done it before. Prep the student days before, but not before plans are as sure as possible. Talk about it daily, count the days leading up to it, and use an object cue for it.

Repetition is another important aspect of working with a student who is deafblind. It is used when teaching a new skill or routine to a student. Repetition helps the student acquire, retain, and progress in a new skill. Skills and routines are part of every activity on a student's daily schedule (lunch, music, library, math, etc.). However, some targeted skills sets may require a separate lesson added onto the student's schedule, such as daily living skills (e.g. clearing the table and cleaning dishes) or a learning lab (e.g. exploring job skills such as sorting, assembling, packing). This way these skills are practiced

through repetition consistently, at the same time each day, for the same amount of scheduled time (with consistent timed breaks, if appropriate). The student is expecting this activity or routine each day. Targeted skills taught to students will vary with abilities. However, all skills taught have common goals: 1) engaging the student in active learning; 2) promoting communication between student and their communication partner; 3) supporting independence at home (how to do laundry, how to make a sandwich, how to put the recycling out for pickup, etc.); and 4) expanding the student's abilities to include skills for employment, if possible and applicable.

The last component is *structure* which, as you may have guessed, is closely connected to consistency and repetition. Consistency and repetition are part of the structure needed to help ease the anxiety of the student, which then allows for learning. While structure includes consistency and repetition, there is more to it than that. Structure means having things organized in the student's learning/living environments to maximize positive outcomes.

- The teacher/facilitator should be organized for each activity before starting the day with the student.
- Teaching materials should be located nearby and easy to set up and put away.
- Each activity should have a beginning, middle, and end, and the facilitator should guide the student through these sections with appropriate communication, such as "ready" for beginning, "you're doing a great job," for the middle, and "finished" when the student is done.
- Finally, the activity materials should be put back where they belong to help solidify the fact that the activity is over.

Structure doesn't mean the student shouldn't have free time to relax and do what they enjoy. The student simply needs to know when free time occurs through use of their daily schedule and, if appropriate, they can choose between two preferred activities using a choice board.

An Important Note: Every student completing their last year of high school transitions to a "next step" in life, and it is no different for a student who is deafblind. As such, the last year of a student's educational program (and learning at home) should focus wholly on teaching practical skills and knowledge needed for adulthood. This should always include daily living skills to foster the maximum independence possible, but may also include work skills, social skills, use of public transportation, handling money, etc., depending on what path the individual will be transitioning to next.

I hope this clarifies and emphasizes the importance of consistency, repetition, and structure to establishing trust with a student who is deafblind. When trust is there, the learning begins!

Linda Bernett is a credentialed Teacher of the Deaf working in the Los Angeles Unified School District and a member of the Golden State Teacher of the Deafblind Community of Practice. She shared the following about writing this instructional article:

I started working with students who are deafblind 14 years ago and each child I encounter reinforces what I discovered at the outset of this beautiful teaching journey I am on: We all have potential to learn, a need to connect, a desire to be part of a community, and the right to an opportunity for each of those things.

As teachers we are constantly learning in an effort to give our students the best chance for success and happiness in their lives. When the pandemic and distance learning presented very specific (and big) challenges for teaching the students who are deafblind, I had to figure out a way to transfer essential components of daily teaching (i.e., coactive signing, tactile object cues, realia, hand-under-hand exploration) to my students' parents, who were now their teachers. I wrote instructional articles, such as this one, and worked with parents via Zoom. The support helped parents and students learn together, communicate more meaningfully, and build skills. The best part, however, was witnessing parents and their kids learning about each other and finding great joy in each other's company.

What Does Equitable Access Look Like for Proficient Communicators?

Issues and Resources — Julie Maier, CDBS Project Coordinator

In the last edition of ***reSources*** (Fall 2021) I wrote about the importance of educational equity and inclusion for all students and noted how true equity acknowledges the limited access to information experienced by learners who are deafblind. In *Equity and Inclusion: Ensuring Meaningful Participation in General Education* I wrote, "*Equity for students who are deafblind recognizes that the loss or limitations of both vision and hearing, our primary distance senses, fundamentally limits access to information in our world. This lack of information, if not gathered through other senses, affects the development of communicative and social skills and concepts that naturally occur for sighted and hearing children through incidental learning. Equitable practices for students who are deafblind will address environmental barriers, curricular and instructional barriers, and relationship barriers.*" (Maier, 2021).

Photo by Shvets Production on Pexels

In the previous article, I explained how meaningful access to the general education curriculum could be provided to students with emerging communication skills and complex instructional needs. In this article my focus is on students that many in our field describe as *proficient communicators* to distinguish their educational needs from students who are still developing symbolic communication and require more modifications to the curriculum and systematic, individualized instruction, and participate in the alternate general education curriculum. Proficient communicators share these characteristics:

- Experience some level of both vision and hearing limitations, often from birth.
- Use formal, symbolic language to communicate (spoken language, ASL, Tactile ASL, braille).
- Attend general education classes and complete coursework to earn a high school diploma.
- Participate in the state standardized assessment, with or without accommodations.
- Accomplished in the use of a wide array of technology.

Since 2018 the national network of state deafblind projects and other national organizations, such as the Usher Syndrome Coalition and the CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, have been paying more attention to the unique needs of proficient communicators. Although these students share common educational needs with emerging communicators, it appears that these needs are often not as evident or strongly considered with this population. This may be because they have developed formal symbolic language and don't require an alternate curriculum or significant adaptations and modifications to grade-level standards and curriculum. Regardless of the reason, it has become clear to the field that the unique issues and needs of these students must be addressed for them to progress and succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

A national workgroup, focused on issues specific to proficient communicators, developed a tool to help practitioners identify these students, which is the first step in addressing their unique needs. It is called the *Proficient Communicators who are Deafblind: A Tool for Identification* and it highlights six elements that are often associated with his group of learners: 1) language and communication; 2) intellectual ability; 3) curriculum used by the learner; 4) state testing on state adopted curriculum; 5) diploma track and transition trajectory; and 6) social. A student may match all or some combination of these elements. When using this tool, it is important to attend to the explanation of each element and the caveats offered about reasons this element may exist. (Sanders, Blaha, & Belote, 2020).

Some common issues these students share with students who are emerging communicators include: 1) gaps in learning specifically related to concept development; 2) the need for additional time to processing information and complete

certain tasks; 3) issues of anxiety or distress which can lead to behavior issues; 4) and the development of social skills and peer relationships. To ensure equity and inclusion for these students these issues need to be of upmost concern and team needs to be aware of the issues.

Unique issues that arise for *"proficient communicators"* in addition to those listed above include:

- Use of a wide array of assistive technology and equipment which requires time to set up in each class and learn how to use efficiently. Additional time and physical effort are often required to complete class assignments, projects and homework using assistive technology or modified materials.
- Scheduling of related services, such as orientation & mobility or braille instruction, which impacts time engaged in general education classes and curriculum.
- The need for instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum in addition to grade level general education curriculum.
- Assessment and instruction to address gaps in foundational knowledge, or requisite concepts.
- Lack of awareness and understanding by both educational staff and their peers of the impact of their dual sensory losses.

Photo by Sigmund on Unsplash.com

The educational team should address the additional time required to set up and use assistive technology and to transport the equipment from class to class. Preparing for and completing a lesson or assigned project or homework often requires considerably more time and physical and mental effort for these students. Accommodations to the pace of instruction and amount of work are often necessary. The pace of instruction will often need to slow down for the student which will require more allotted time or less assigned work. Decisions will need to be made about what to prioritize within the curriculum so that amount of work is both instructive and manageable. These issues can be addressed by providing additional time to transport and set up assistive technology and complete an assignment and/or by adjusting the assignment or homework. Many students and educational teams find scheduling an extra resource period in their day, perhaps instead of an elective class, provides the opportunity to keep up with assignments, preview or review content from their classes, or engage in other important skill development related to foundational life skills. (O'Donnell & Peterson, 2020). Making these programmatic decisions can decrease the stress and anxiety too many of these students experience when trying to keep pace with the curriculum and classes without proper accommodations.

The concepts and skills learned through the Expanded Core Curriculum, or ECC, are necessary for success in post-secondary and career pathways. The ECC for students with visually impairments includes nine core components related to foundational skills students with disabilities need for daily life in school, at home and in the community that are strategically taught and integrated into all aspects of their education. (Perkins School for the Blind, n.d.). Many of these are concepts and skills are learned incidentally by their sighted and hearing classmates but need to be directly taught and then practiced by students with visual impairments or deafblindness. Additional foundational skills unique to Deaf or hard of hearing students are included in the Expanded Core Curriculum for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. For many students, IEP goals are developed specific to ECC content skills because the development of these skills is so important to their independence as adults.

These students often struggle with requisite concepts, or the foundational knowledge, necessary to understand a lesson or curricular material. From a very young age sighted and hearing children learn countless concepts incidentally by watching and listening to people and activities surrounding them. Many children who are deafblind miss these learning opportunities due to missing, diminished or distorted information available to them. If they miss concepts learned and

understood incidentally in early years, it creates gaps in understanding new or advanced concepts included in the general education curriculum. The student and the adults teaching them are often not aware of the foundational conceptual knowledge they are missing. This short video, *The Increasing Hole in Learning* provides a simple example of how "a hole" in initial conceptual understanding grows over time without intervention ("Foundations of Learning", 2014).

Each successive year in school, students learn new concepts and facts based on foundational knowledge we presume they hold. This is not always true for a student who is deafblind and it is important that the educators assessing and teaching these students are aware and address this issue. Matt Schulz (2017) wrote a wonderful article in *Texas SenseAbilities* explaining the specific challenges related to concept development called, *Understanding Concept Development and Related Challenges for Academic Students with DeafBlindness*, which I encourage you to read.

The educational team must be mindful and address these unique and specific issues within the student's IEP. The Deafblind Outreach Program at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired developed a list of 12 specific areas that need to be considered during IEP development for these learners called *IEP Checklist for Proficient Communicators*. This useful document provides a clear description and justification for each specific area of need. CDBS recommends that every educational team serving a proficient communicator review and consider each element of this checklist when developing the IEP, class schedule, and program plans for that student. With thoughtful and collaborative planning, the student and their family can work with the educational team to design the accommodations and supports that will provide equitable access necessary to support the academic and social-emotional growth of the student.

The result of these multiple issues is the need for coordination of this student's program by professionals with training and expertise in serving learners who are deafblind. At least one person on the student's IEP team should be designated as the deafblind specialist. For a proficient communicator, this will probably be either the itinerant teacher of the visually impaired or the Deaf/Hard of hearing teacher, both of whom hold California teaching credentials that authorize them to teach students who are deafblind. Additionally, the services of an intervener are necessary and appropriate for many of these students to ensure appropriate access. Access is provided by assisting with management of their technology; offering information about the environment and activities that are occurring; providing explanation of unfamiliar requisite concepts and individualized instructional support when the pace of a lesson needs to slow down or in a resource setting; supporting the development of skills from the expanded core curriculum, such as orientation and mobility practice, self-advocacy, and social interaction skills; facilitating social interactions with peers if necessary; and assistance with managing the physical, mental, and emotional fatigue and stress related to classwork, homework and extra-curricular activities that many students may encounter on a daily basis.

I feel as though I just touched the tip of the iceberg on this topic. I'm encouraged about the growing attention to the unique educational support needs of proficient communicators and I hope the information and resources included in this article are useful to you. I believe as professionals in our field we need to keep learning from the experiences and stories of these students, their families, and experienced professionals serving them to ensure we are providing all students equitable access and opportunities. I'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic, as well as any challenges you've identified and supports and resources you've found helpful. Please feel free to contact anyone on our CDBS team to discuss these issues and available resources.

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Photo of sculpture on San Francisco State University campus — ***Happy Year of the Tiger, everyone!***