

# Preliminary Findings of the Alternate English Language Learning Assessment Project

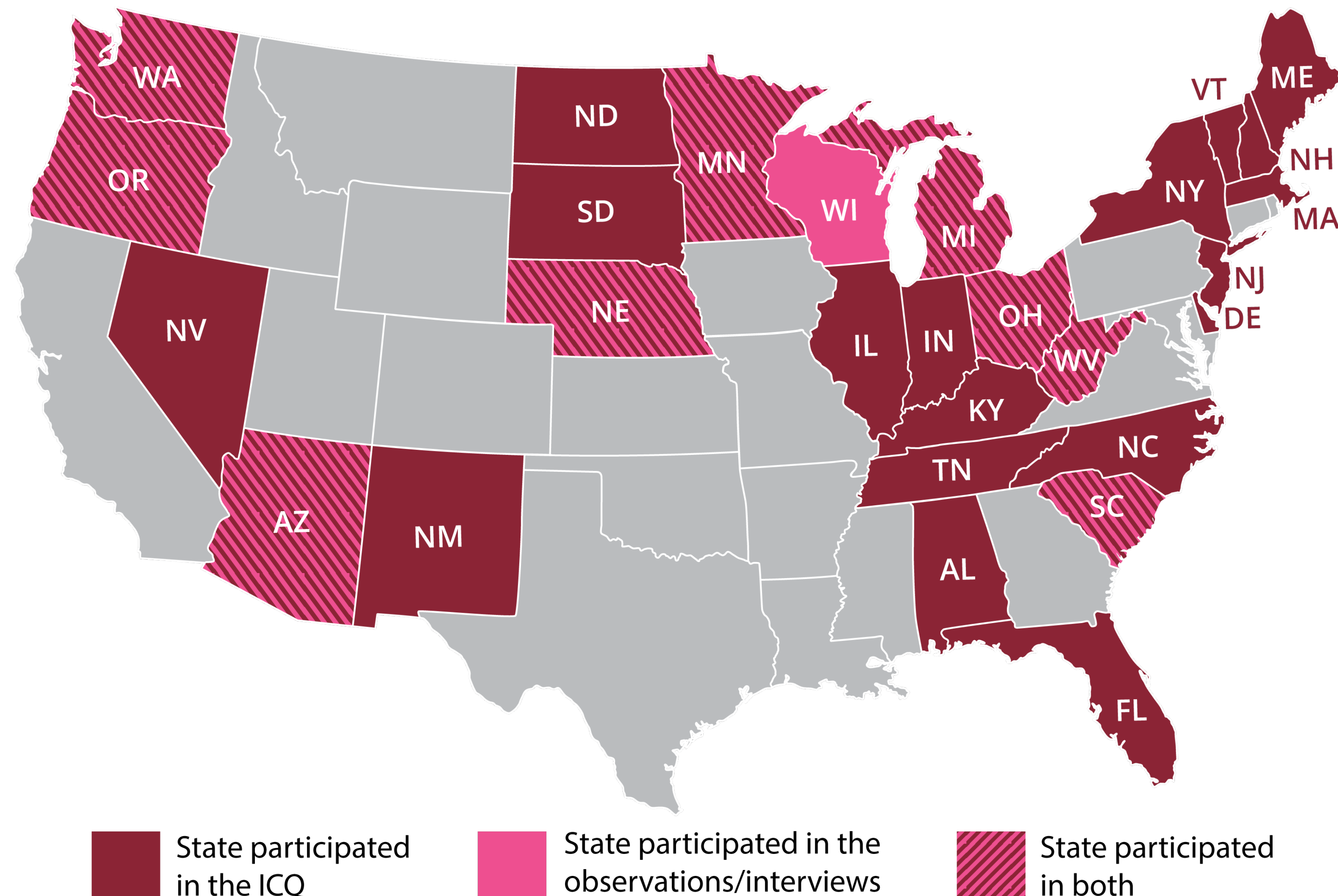
## Project Background

The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) project researches instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence-centered design approach that informs our understanding of alternate English language proficiency assessment for these students.

Website [altella.wceruw.org](http://altella.wceruw.org)

## Data Collected

As of May 2018, researchers visited over 50 schools in 10 states. Educators from 27 states completed the Individual Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ) over 900 times.



## Who are English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities?

English learners with significant cognitive disabilities are individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly impact their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding.

## Project Partners

ALTELLA is funded by an Enhanced Assessment Instruments grant from the U.S. Department of Education awarded to the Arizona Department of Education. ALTELLA is a partnership between five state departments of education and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

## Findings

### Classroom Observations

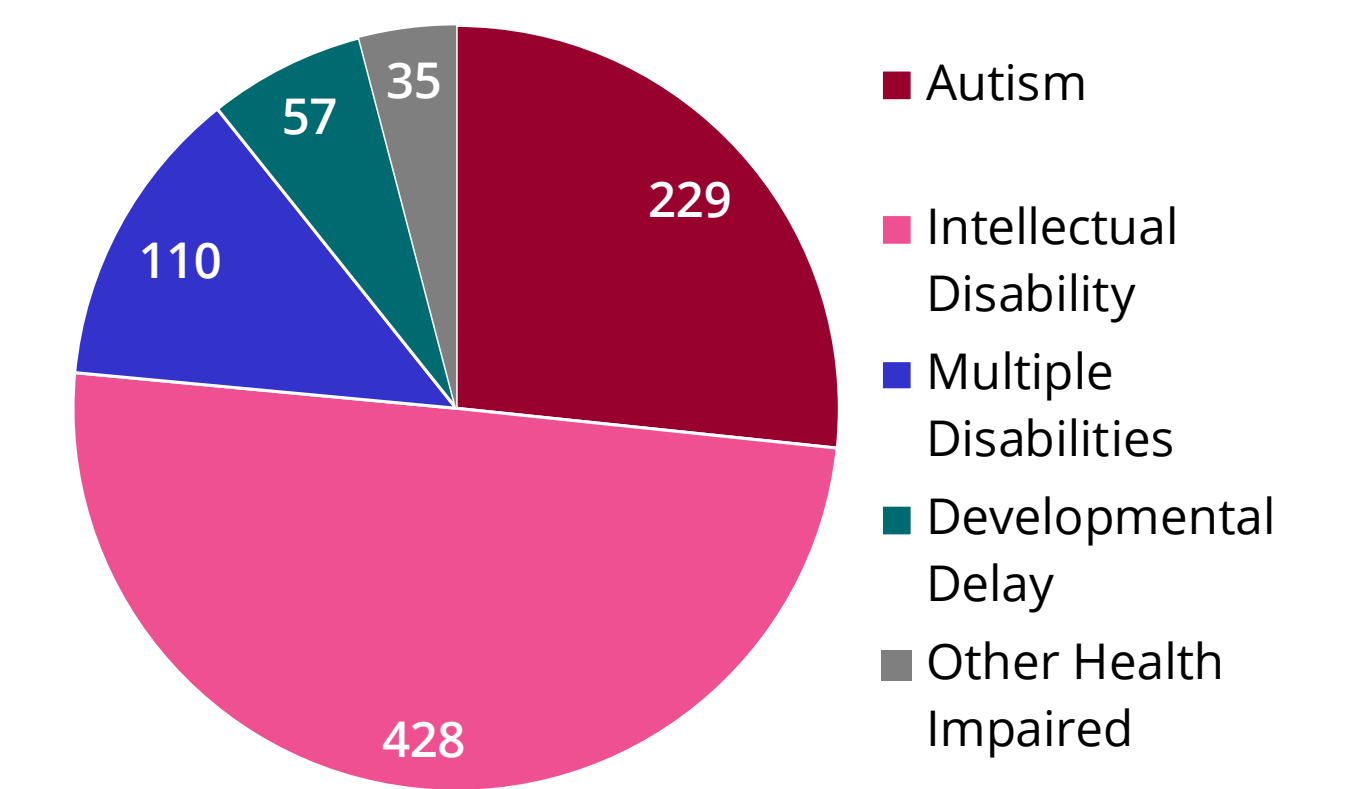
- Students with significant cognitive disabilities who are English learners are primarily served in self-contained classrooms with special education teachers.
- Teachers very rarely make use of the student's home language.
- Even in the best academic classrooms, there is little attention to strategies that support language development or awareness of existing home language development.

### Educator Interviews

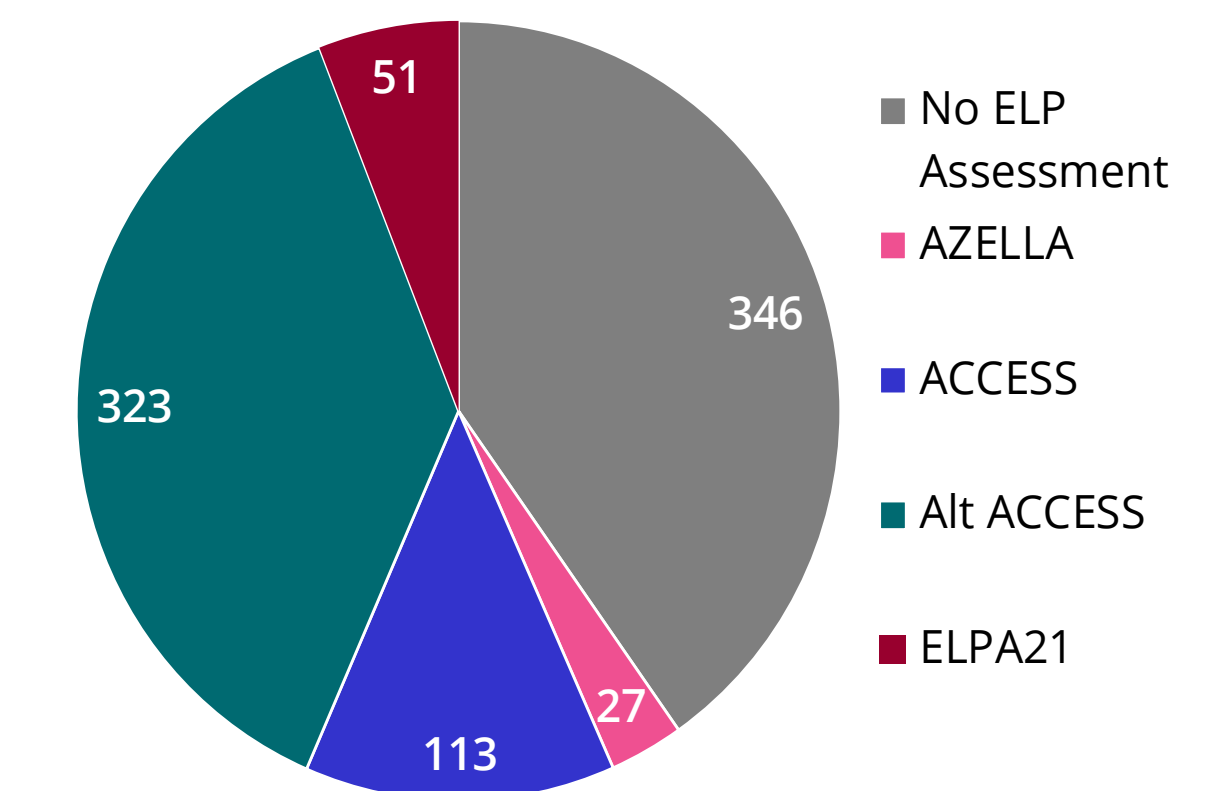
- There is great awareness of the need to support language if the student is recently arrived or is a refugee.
- The focus of lessons are on communication, not language or opportunity to learn.
- Unawareness that home language and culture bring anything different to the academic table.

### Individual Characteristics Questionnaire

- Students' home language is primarily Spanish. Most common other primary home languages include Arabic, Somali, and American Sign Language.
- Primary disability category:



- English language proficiency assessment:



## Key Staff

- Laurene Christensen** | Principal Investigator
- Indira Ceylan** | Project Manager
- Melissa Gholson** | Researcher
- James Mitchell** | Asst. Researcher

"How do I know the difference between language vs. cognitive disability?"  
-Special Education Teacher

"Whatever we do for SPED, we do for ELs at secondary level."  
-Special Education Teacher