

National Conference on Student Assessment | June 28, 2018

Implementing ESSA for English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Lessons We Are Learning from ALTELLA

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ALTERNATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Overview

- 1 • Introduction
- 2 • ALTELLA Project Overview
- 3 • State/District Context: Arizona
- 4 • State Context: Michigan
- 5 • Discussion

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ALTELLA Project Overview



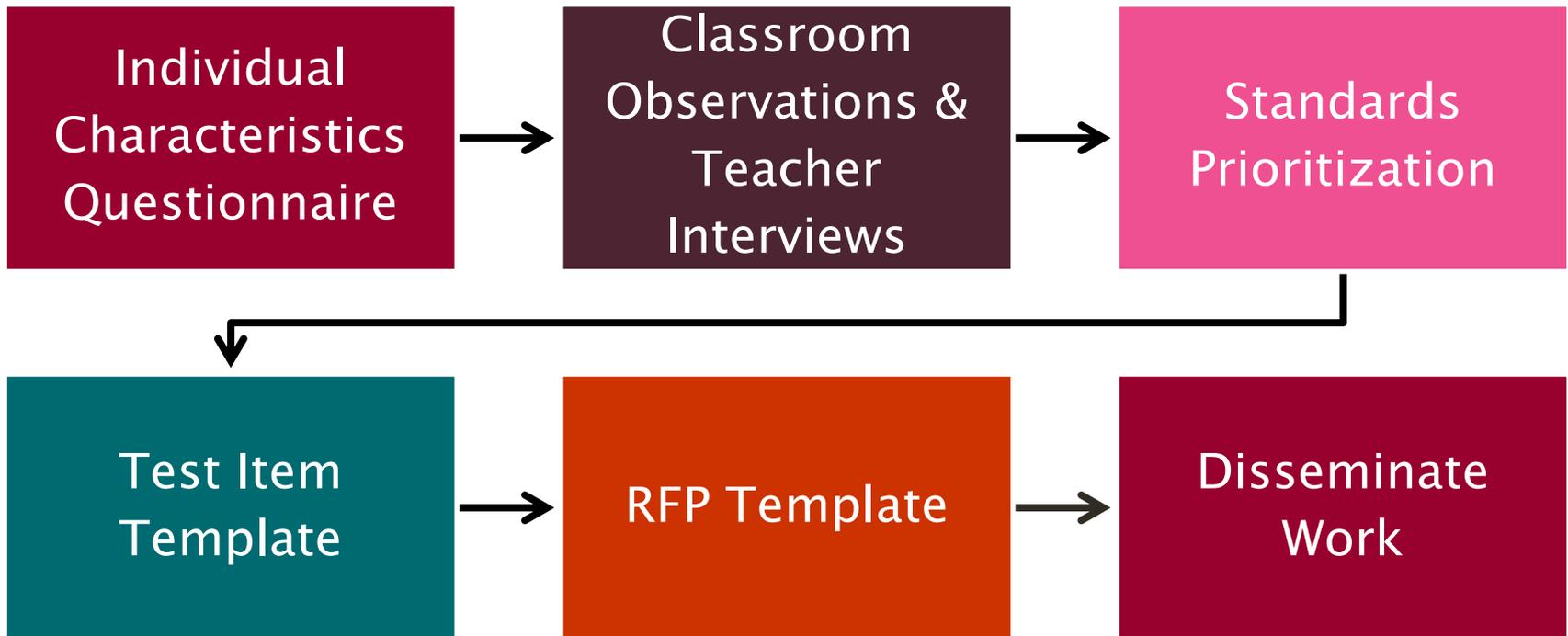
ALTERNATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROJECT

ALTELLA Project Goal

The 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.



Project Activities



Individual Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ)

- Purpose: To learn more about the characteristics of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities.
- The ICQ asks for information on students' use of language including English and other languages as well as students' needs related to their disabilities.
- The ICQ does not request any personally identifiable information.
- Most surveys are completed in under 15 minutes.
- Survey link at go.wisc.edu/altella

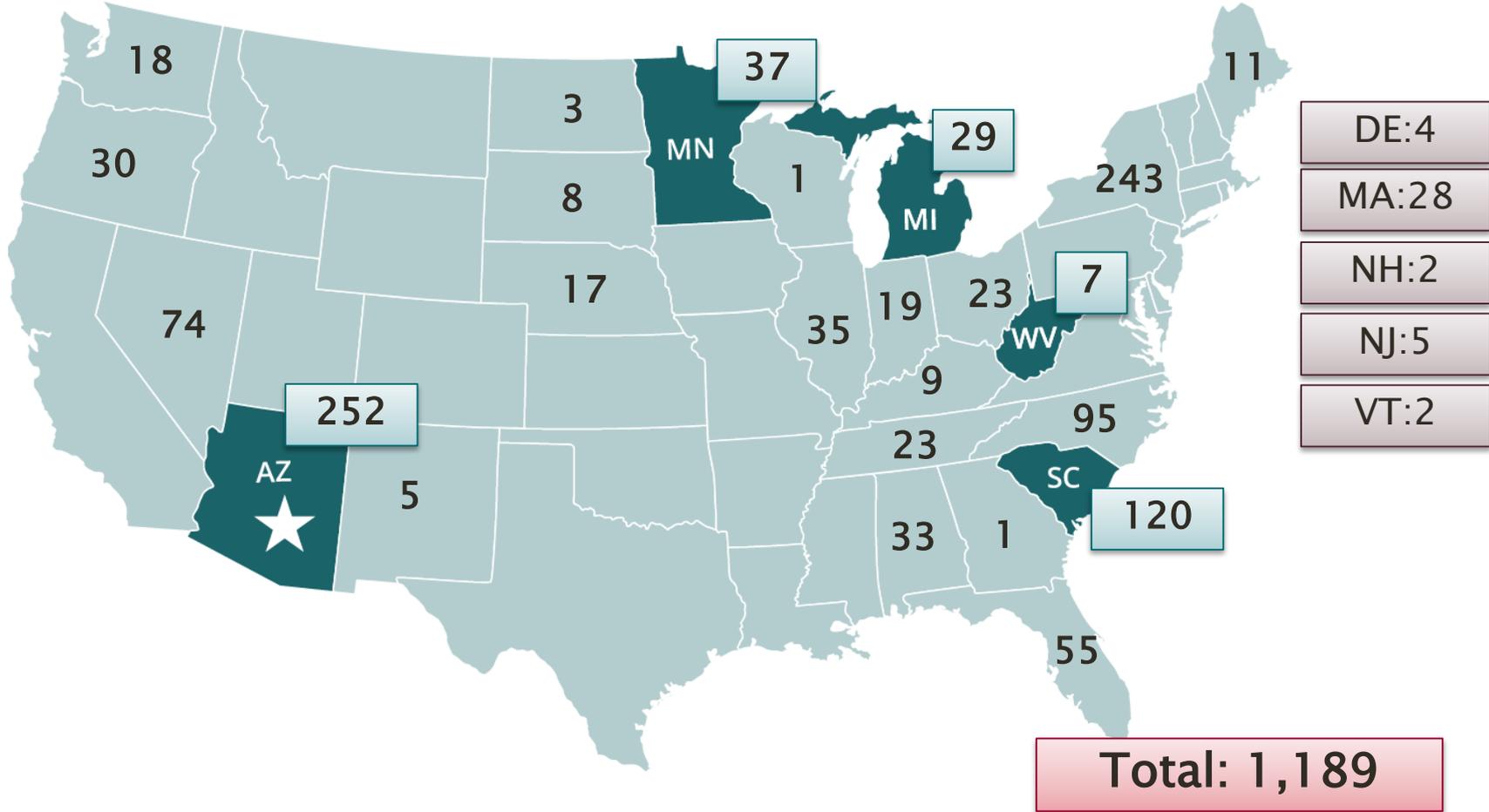
Types of Questions

- Demographic information, including languages across multiple settings
- Disability information
- Communication preferences including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems
- Services received in school, type of classroom setting, and attendance
- Accommodations and accessibility resources during instruction and testing

Types of Questions

- Participation and performance on alternate assessment in English language arts, math, or science (the AA AAS)
- Participation and performance on the English Language Proficiency assessment
- Receptive and expressive communication and engagement in English and/or languages other than English
- Observed performance in reading, writing, and mathematics in English and languages other than English

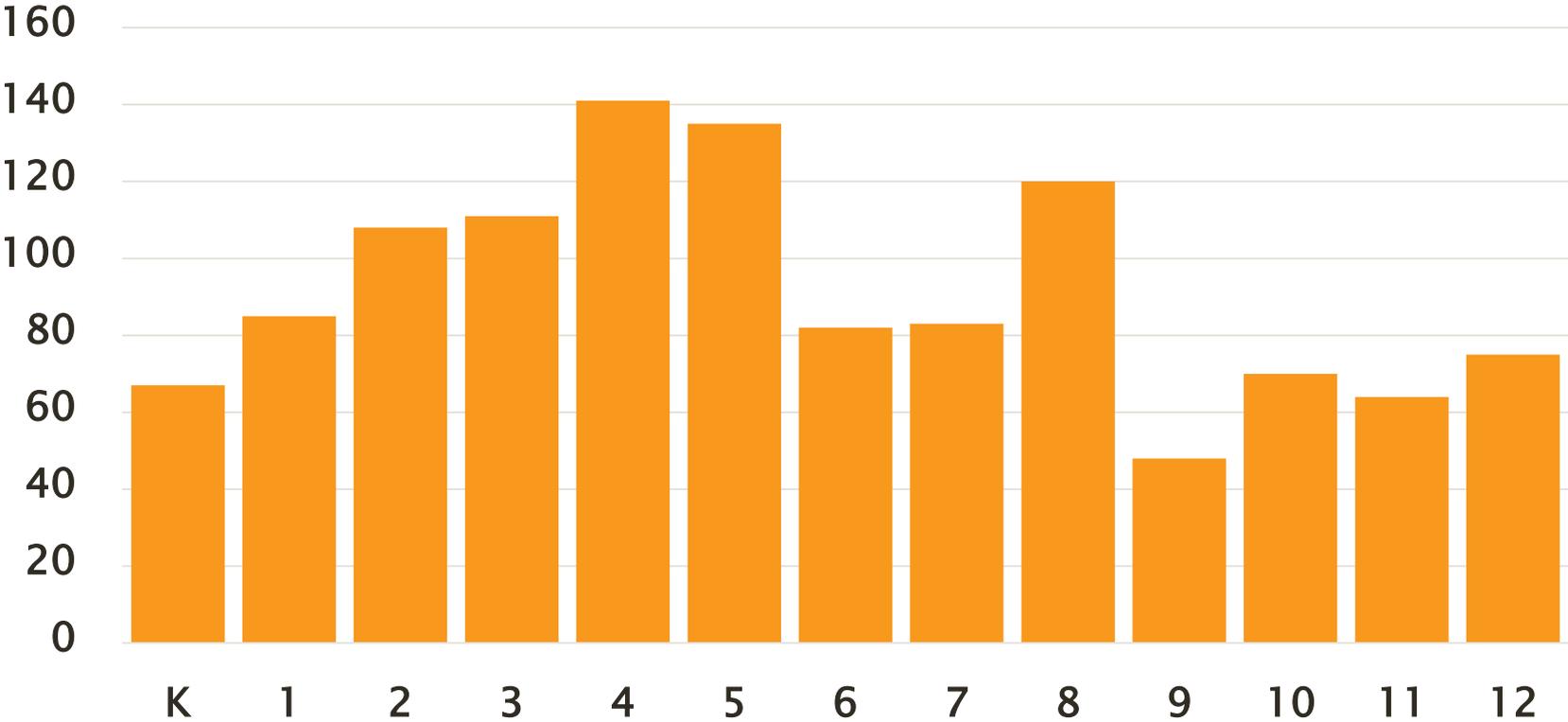
ICQ Responses



ICQ Survey: Data File, Preliminary Results

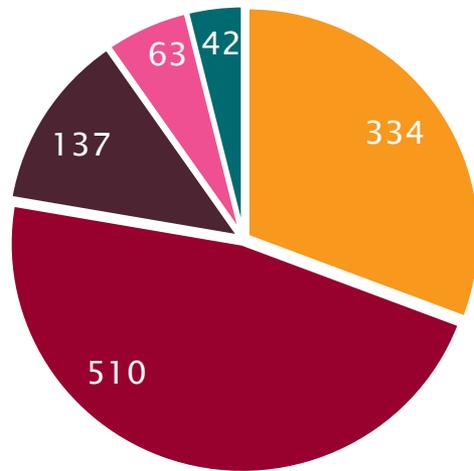
- We have more responses on male students (n=771, 65%) than female students (n=414, 35%).
- Students' home language is primarily Spanish (n=655; 55%). Most common other primary home languages include Arabic (n = 30; 3%), Somali (n = 12; 1%) American Sign Language (n = 10; 1%).

Responses by Grade



Disability Categories of ELs with SCDs

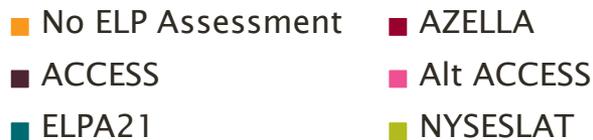
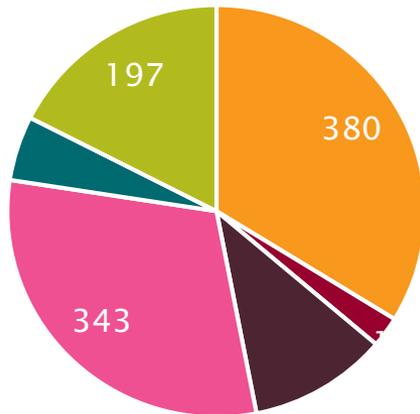
Primary Disability Category



- Most students have an intellectual disability as their primary disability.
- Out of the 479 students who have a secondary disability, 222 (46%) have a speech/language impairment. 77 (16%) have an intellectual disability.

English Language Proficiency

ELP Assessment



- A great deal of students have not taken an ELP assessment (32%)
- Most students do not have an English language acquisition specialist on their IEP team (n = 461; 39%).

Accessibility Features and Accommodations

Assessment

75% - Extended Time

66% - Read Aloud

65% - Directions Repeated

23% - Scribe

18% - Text to Speech

7% - Do not receive

Instructional

79% - Extended Time

75% - Directions Repeated

73% - Read Aloud

24% - Scribe

19% - Text to Speech

5% - Do not receive



Expressive Language

English

- 430 students regularly combine 3 or more spoken words to accomplish a variety of communicative purposes (36%)
- 239 students usually use 2 spoken words at a time (20%)
- 257 students usually use only 1 spoken word at a time (22%)
- 29 students are unknown (2%)

Language Other Than English

- 249 students regularly combine 3 or more spoken words to accomplish a variety of communicative purposes (21%)
- 239 students usually use 2 spoken words at a time (20%)
- 257 students usually use only 1 spoken word at a time (22%)
- 418 students are unknown (35%)



Receptive Language

English

- 779 students can point to, look at, or touch things in the immediate vicinity when asked (66%)
- 726 students can perform simple actions, movements or activities when asked (61%)
- 565 students respond appropriately in any modality to phrases and sentences that are spoken or signed (48%)
- 70 students – unknown (6%)

Language Other Than English

- 442 students can point to, look at, or touch things in the immediate vicinity when asked (37%)
- 404 students can perform simple actions, movements or activities when asked (34%)
- 302 students respond appropriately in any modality to phrases and sentences that are spoken or signed (25%)
- 532 students – unknown (45%)

Alternate Content Assessment Performance - ELA

MSAA		DLM		SC-Alt		MI-Access		MTAS	
L	Students	L	Students	L	Students	L	Students	L	Students
1	102 (34%)	1	86 (29%)	1	58 (57%)	1	12 (48%)	1	8 (26%)
2	32 (11%)	2	62 (21%)	2	19 (19%)	2	<6	2	<6
3	34 (11%)	3	38 (13%)	3	<6	3	<6	3	10 (33%)
4	<6	4	11 (4%)	4	<6	N	<6	4	<6
N	124 (42%)	N	102 (34%)	N	17 (17%)	T	25	N	9 (29%)
T	297	T	299	T	101			T	31



Teacher Observation & Interviews

- Purpose: To learn more about the classroom-based practices and approaches teachers use in working with ELLs with significant cognitive disabilities
- Focus on strategies used to support English language development
- Inform the development of the assessment and future targeted professional development



Educator Recruitment

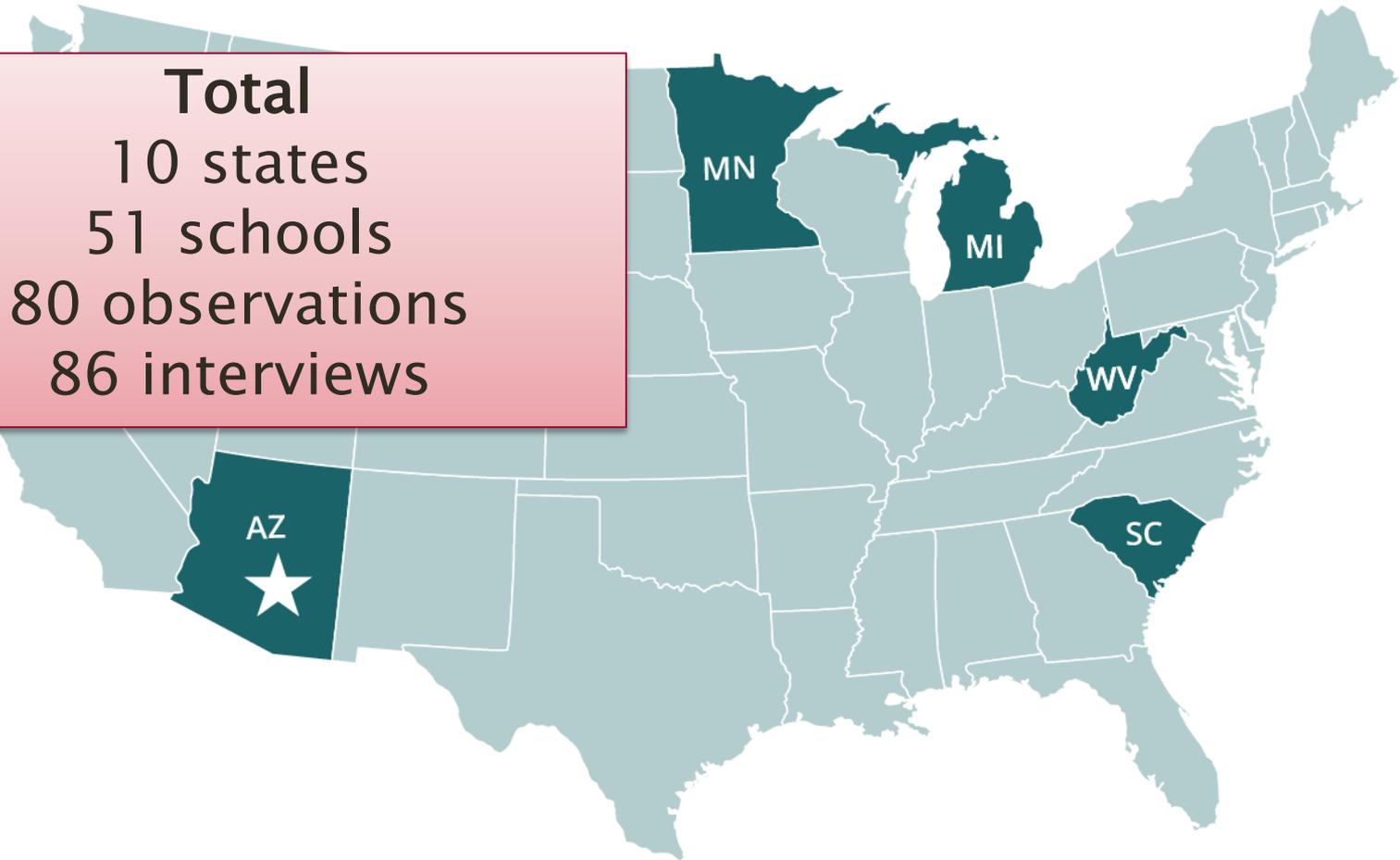
- Worked closely with partner SEAs
 - Teachers with at least one EL with a significant cognitive disability
- Goal of 100 observations and interviews
- Expanded beyond project states
 - Information disseminated through CCSSO, ELPA21, and WIDA
 - Direct contact with educators at conferences and professional development workshops

Data Collection Procedures

- Observations in teams of two (or more)
- Interviews
 - One person asks the questions
 - One person takes detailed notes (no recordings)
- Observations are “reconciled” at the end of the day
- All materials are returned to WCER
 - Scanned
 - Transcribed by James and Sonia
 - Transcriptions are reviewed for accuracy

Observations and Interviews: August 2017 – May 2018

Total
10 states
51 schools
80 observations
86 interviews



Types of Observations

- Pull out English language development
- Small group/small classes (classrooms with 3 students)
- Large group/large classes
 - 1 class with 18 EIs with significant cognitive disabilities
 - 1 class with 20+ students and 1 teacher
- Content observed:
 - Calendar time!
 - English language arts
 - Math
 - Science

Overall Impression: It's complicated!

- No formal definitions for identification of ELs with SCD
- Policy and guidance lack clarity
- Few guidance documents to support LEAs, for example the state participation guidelines
- State reporting systems can not identify these students easily within the data
- Participation criteria and who should take the assessment

Preliminary Findings: Observations

- Students with significant cognitive disabilities who are English learners are primarily served in self-contained classrooms with special education teachers
- Even in the best academic classrooms there is little attention to strategies that support language development or an awareness of existing native language development
- Disabilities focus—more disability strategies used than language strategies
- The EL specialist while part of the formal IEP team, rarely provides any EL service or interacts in any meaningful or consistent way with students
- Limited understanding or considerations for native language and culture

Preliminary Findings: Interviews

- Belief that the focus is on communication, not language or opportunity to learn (“All of my students are English language learners.”)
- Greater awareness of the need to support language if the student is recently arrived or is a refugee
- Limited awareness that native language and culture bring anything different to the academic table (“You’re SPED, you can handle this.”)
- Limited understanding or consideration of how to assess or support language or how measure student progress in English language acquisition (“I don’t even know the correct wordage.”)
- Students rarely receive EL service and language development needs are not typically written into IEPs
- Lack of awareness of how to think about whether students need to take the general or alternate ELP assessment



Assessment Considerations

- Many teachers expressed concerns over the alternate content assessments
 - Too long
 - Too much scrolling
 - Too hard
 - Topics aren't always relevant to the student

Assessment Considerations

- Even in WIDA states, most teachers were not familiar with the Alternate ACCESS
 - Alternate ACCESS administered by a DAC or EL coordinator, not the classroom teacher
 - Teachers had not seen Alternate ACCESS score reports and did not include this information in IEPs or other lesson planning



Assessment Considerations

- An alternate English language proficiency test should...
 - Use technology, but have a paper option
 - Use lots of visuals
 - Relate to student experiences and/or classroom curriculum
 - Be interactive

Teacher Voices

- “You do what you CAN do so that you can learn something new.”
- “In our classroom, we’re ALL teachers.”
- “We are all here for the same reason.”



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ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

ALTELLA Lessons Learned

Arizona



Identify the Stakeholders

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- There is a diverse group of stakeholders.
- All stakeholders currently are not communicating or collaborating.
- Stakeholders need to find ways to work together.



Who are these students?

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- Don't know how to define EL for this population.
- Don't know how to differentiate language need from cognitive disability.
- ICQ and Teacher Interviews will provide a "gold mine" of information



Students are Not Identified in the State Data Systems

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- Students are not being identified as EL in the state data systems so there is no official identification.
- Without identification are students receiving EL services?
- EL students should be making progress toward English proficiency.
- Without identification there is no EL funding.
- ELSWCDs need to be included in accountability systems.



Definition of Language is Treated Differently for SWSCD

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- SPED educators want broader definitions of the 4 domains to be more generally “receptive” and “productive.”
- SPED educators have greater understanding of alternate approaches to measuring the 4 domains including transcription/scribing for writing, and sign language for listening and speaking.



IEP Teams Don't know the EL Rules

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- Most IEP teams currently do not include an EL specialist.
- Teams need to know federal and state rules for identification, assessment, and accountability for EL students.
- In Arizona, many SPED educators do not know that bilingual instruction and assessment are allowable for students with disabilities.



Adopting Alternate ELP Standards Needs to be Done at the Highest Level

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- ALTELLA is not providing Alternate ELP Standards – only a process for developing these.
- Alternate ELP Standards appear to be fairly generalizable across states and collaboratives if we focus on high level skills.
- Arizona will need to create their own Alternate ELP Standards or adopt high level standards from collaboratives.



State Responsibilities

ARIZONA'S ASSESSMENTS

- The state needs to provide LEAs with general guidelines and procedures for identifying these students.
- The state needs to provide LEAs with general guidelines on who should be included in IEP team.
- The state needs to meet federal requirement to provide a valid assessment of ELP for this population.
- The state needs to ensure participation in statewide ELP assessments.



SUNNYSIDE
EVERY CHILD *College & Career Ready*

Leila E. Williams, PhD
Exceptional Education Director

District Demographics

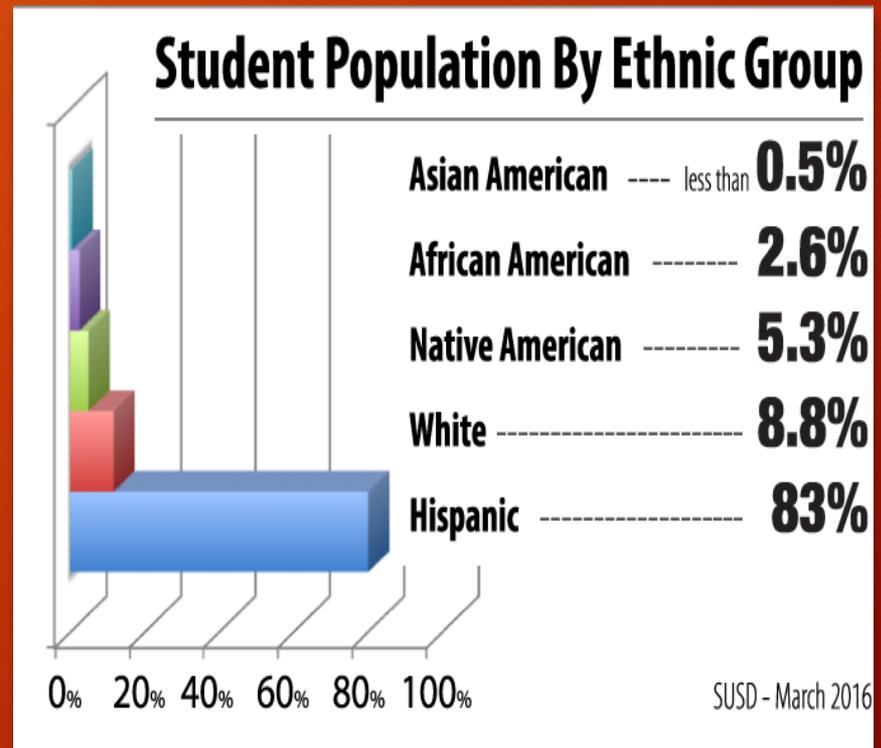
Sunnyside Unified School District is the second largest school district in Tucson, Arizona with approximately 16,813 students in the 2015-2016 school year.

Sunnyside covers 93.6 square miles and serves the southern part of the City of Tucson and areas adjacent in Pima County, including the San Xavier Reservation.

Population

During the 2015-2016 school year:

- 14,113 (86%) students qualify to receive free and reduced-price meals
- 3385 (21%) of students are classified as English Language Learners
- approximately 599(4%) of Sunnyside's students are identified as homeless.
- approximately 13% of the District student population receives Special Education services
- Serving Unique Needs (SUN) gifted program serving 988 (6%) who have been identified as having a least an **above average ability** (7th stanine or above on a group or individual IQ measure)



Special Education Program

- We provide a continuum of services to include an “inclusive model.”
- Most students who take the state Alternate Assessment - MSAA are typically in a Self-contained program (MOID, A, MD)
- Most EL students who are eligible for the MSAA have not taken AZELLA (ELP assessment)
- Most EL Students who are eligible for the MSAA do not have and English language acquisition specialist however most special ed teachers are SEI endorsed
- Historically, exempt from ELP assessment - “Special Ed Trumps EL services for this population.”

Instructional Model and Language support

- Lifeskills curriculum with embedded academics curriculum -language acquisition is not purposeful.
- Most instructional paraprofessionals provide Spanish support
- Inconsistent use of communication - AAC- therefore it's a priority- established an AT/AAC team.
- Most class sizes are 10 to 15 students with teacher and paraprofessional support.

Identification of ELs and Policies

- Most teachers who serve this population are not completely familiar or understand the Policies in our state.
- At registration, parents respond to the 3 State required questions:
 - Primary Home Language Other Than English (PHLOTE) Home Language Survey (Effective April 4, 2011) Arizona Administrative Code, R7-2-306(B)(1), (2)(a-c).
 - 1. What is the primary language used in the home regardless of the language spoken by the student?
 - 2. What is the language most often spoken by the student?
 - 3. What is the language that the student first acquired?

Teachers Perceptions

Sincerely care about their students.

Stressed by the needs beyond the students disabilities (life outside of school).

Want training that is meaningful.

Less testing or shorter testing time.



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Michigan

**JENNIFER PAUL
EL & ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT SPECIALIST
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

English Learners

- How many ELs does Michigan have?
 - Current total population of ELs: Over 100,000 students in K-12
- How Many ELs with Disabilities does Michigan have?
 - ACCESS for ELLs 2.0: 8,892
 - Alternate ACCESS for ELLs: 940
- Is the population increasing?
 - Yes. Average total population increase of 6,000 EL students per year

Language Groups

- Most frequent languages spoken:
 - Spanish
 - Arabic

Variation

- Local control state
- Over 900 districts
- No statewide IEP
- No statewide IEP software

Exemptions

- Annual exemption process aids in awareness of at least testing
- Request process for students for whom we do not have an appropriate accommodation or alternate ELP assessment
 - Examples:
 - ✦ No Alternate Kindergarten WIDA ACCESS
 - ✦ No braille Kindergarten WIDA ACCESS
 - ✦ No braille Alternate ACCESS for ELLs
- Approximate number of exemptions/year: 200

Identification

- No differentiation for ELs with disabilities at time of enrollment
- Standard Home Language Survey and subsequent screener (WIDA Screener) used for all students

Additional Challenges

- Anecdotal Information Confirmed by ALTELLA:
 - Lack of understanding of language development & second language acquisition
 - Lack of understanding of WIDA English language development standards
 - Lack of awareness of WIDA Alternate Model Performance Indicators
 - Disagreement that a student is an EL
 - Belief that a focus on the disability takes precedence over second language learning
 - Lack of knowledgeable staff to help with IEP, instruction, supports/accommodations

Challenges lead to belief that assessing ELs with disabilities amounts to checking off a box

Lack of Accountability

- Accountability for ELs at the building level
- N-count of 30
- Greater than half of the buildings will show no transparency into the performance of ELs

Perpetuate and increase lack of awareness in general of ELs, including ELs with disabilities

Why is this work important?

- Data to confirm anecdotal information
- Will help inform the work the Michigan Department of Education
 - What additional resources are needed?
 - What professional development is needed?
 - What policies can be changed/enhanced/removed?
- Hopeful this will help inform research and continued assessment enhancements/development from WCER and WIDA
- Hopeful this work will help inform the work of CCSSO for the development of usable and understandable Alternate ELP standards

Contact

- Jennifer Paul

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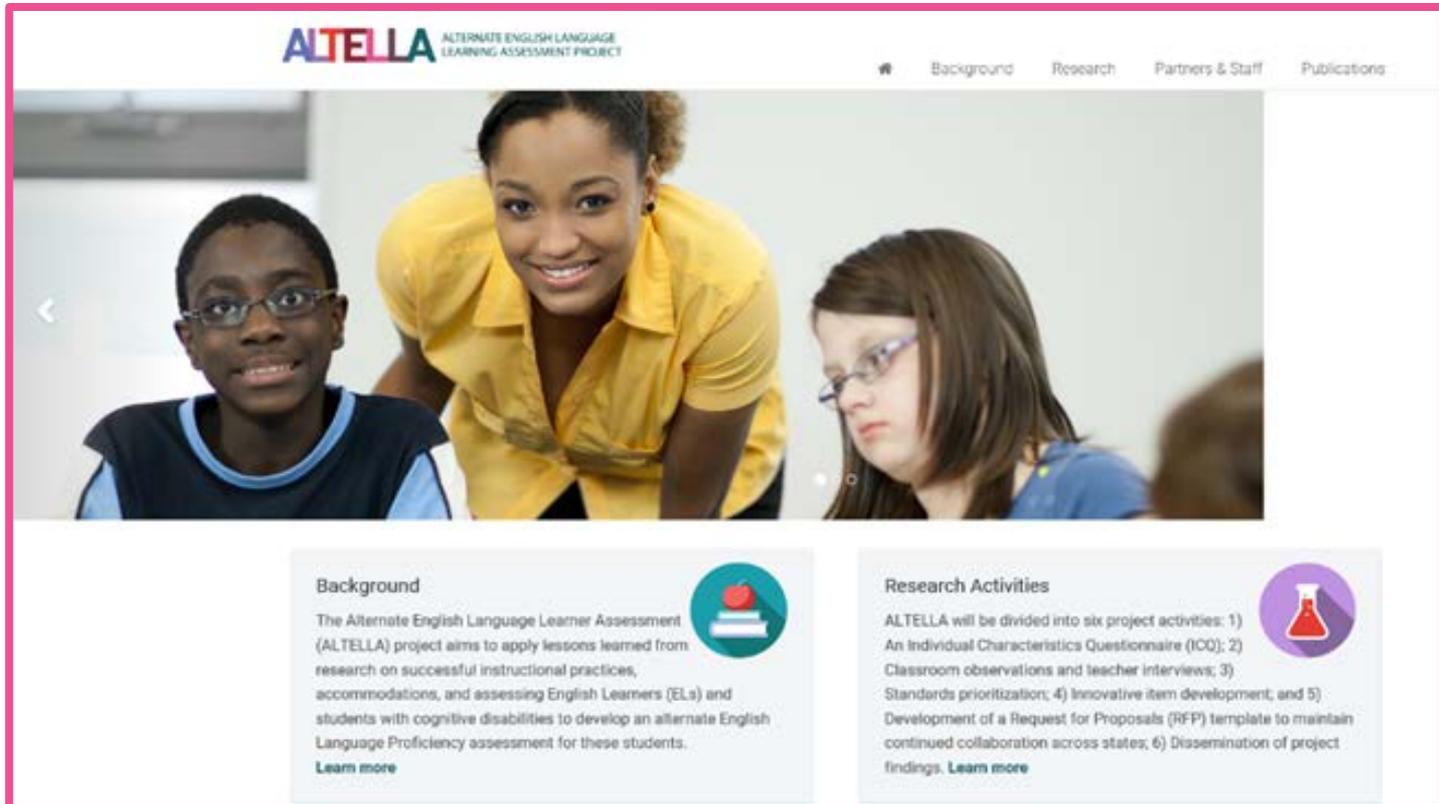
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Discussion

- Policy needs
- Research needs
- Resource needs



Thank you!



ALTELLA ALTERNATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Background Research Partners & Staff Publications

Background

The Alternate English Language Learner Assessment (ALTELLA) project aims to apply lessons learned from research on successful instructional practices, accommodations, and assessing English Learners (ELs) and students with cognitive disabilities to develop an alternate English Language Proficiency assessment for these students. [Learn more](#)

Research Activities

ALTELLA will be divided into six project activities: 1) An Individual Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ); 2) Classroom observations and teacher interviews; 3) Standards prioritization; 4) Innovative item development; and 5) Development of a Request for Proposals (RFP) template to maintain continued collaboration across states; 6) Dissemination of project findings. [Learn more](#)

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