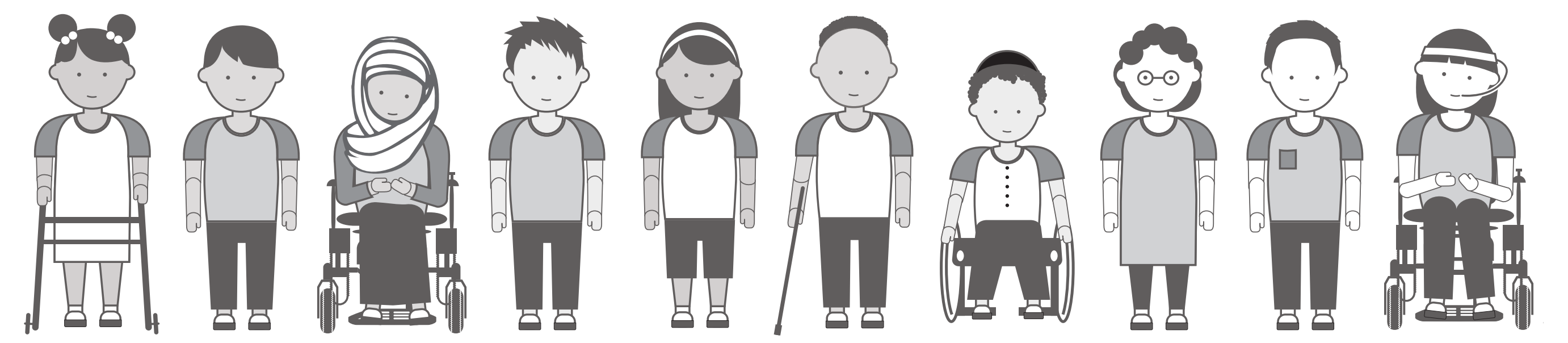


# Characteristics of English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities



## Project

### Overview

The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment 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)

### Research Team

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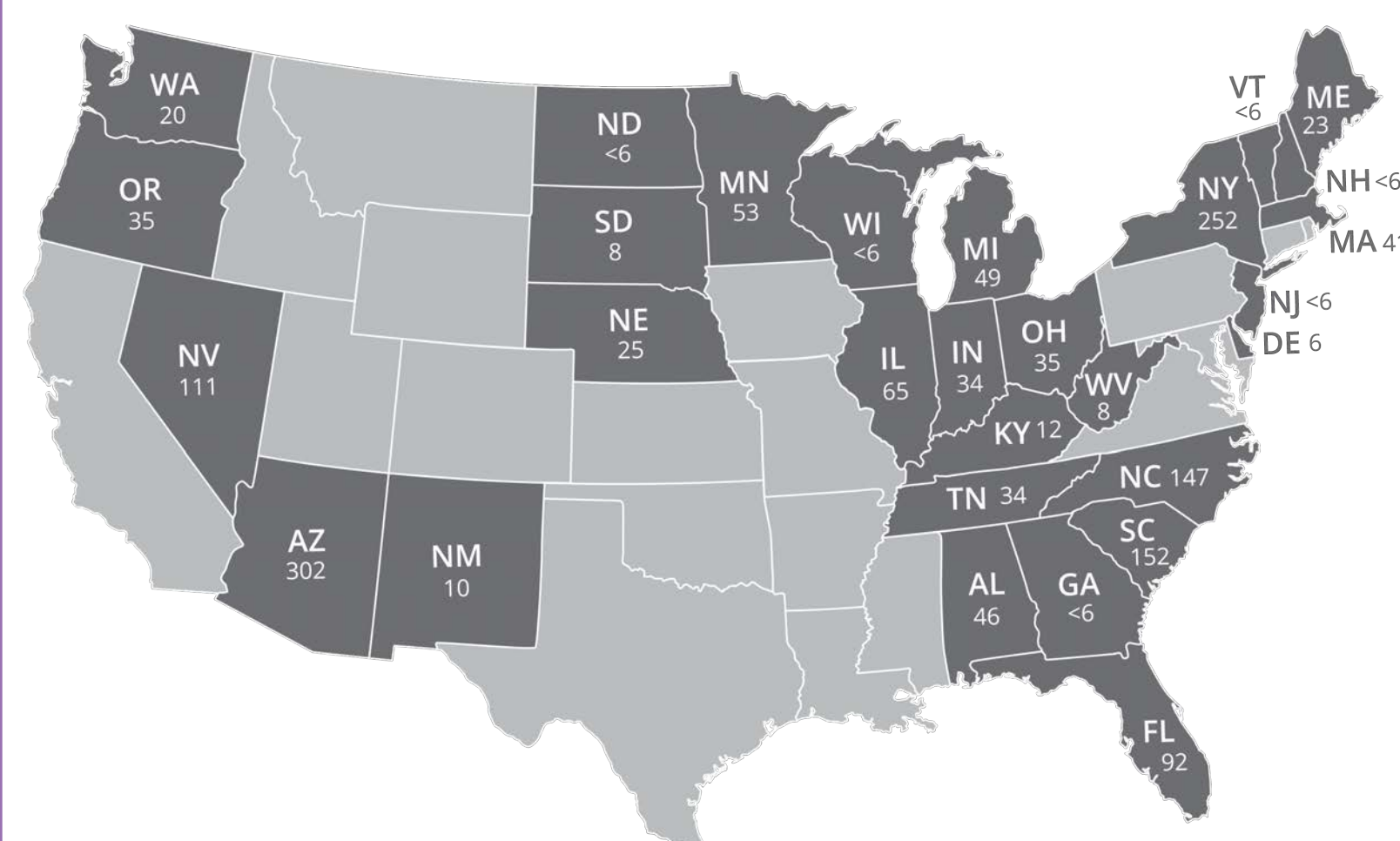


## Background

### Individual Characteristics Questionnaire

- English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities are an understudied population.
- Knowing more about this population has potential to
  - Inform special education and English learning program models
  - Influence professional development for English language educators as well as special education teachers
- Questionnaire collects information to create a foundational knowledge base of population.
  - Adopts questions from the Learner Characteristics Questionnaire (Kearns, Kleinert, Kleinert, & Towles-Reeves, 2006) and the First Contact Survey (Nash, Clark, & Karvonen, 2015)
  - Provides new questions, such as students' use of other languages, performance on state alternate assessments and English language proficiency assessment, and academic skills in their other language.
- Educators serving this population completed the survey on behalf of their students.

### Data Collection



## Results

### Demographics

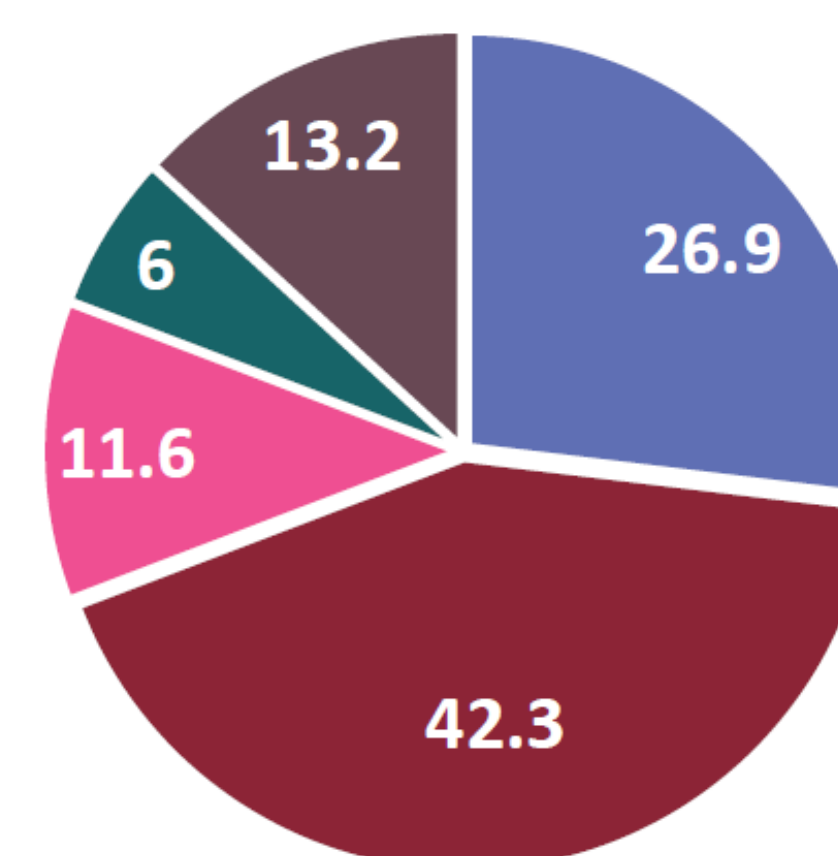
- More male (n=1,025, 65%) than female students (n=549, 34.8%)
- Most students are between 8-13 years old (57%).
- Majority of students are in grades three to five (33.7%).

### Home Language

| Primary Home Language | #     | %     |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Arabic                | 40    | 2.6   |
| English               | 424   | 27.8  |
| French                | 10    | 0.7   |
| Haitian Creole        | 14    | 0.9   |
| Mandarin              | 19    | 1.2   |
| Russian               | 15    | 1.0   |
| Somali                | 14    | 0.9   |
| Spanish               | 819   | 53.8  |
| Vietnamese            | 10    | 0.7   |
| Other                 | 159   | 10.4  |
| Total                 | 1,523 | 100.0 |

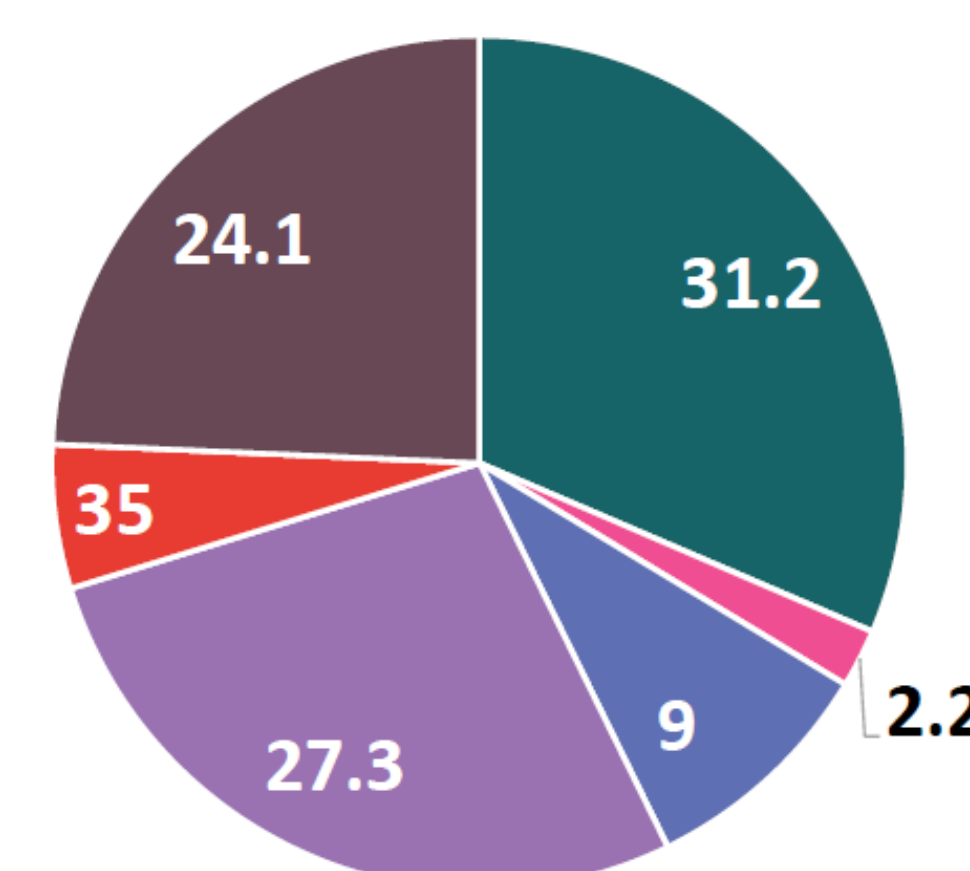
N=1,523

### Primary Disability Category



- Autism
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Developmental Delay
- Other

### English Language Proficiency Assessment



- No ELP Assessment
- ACCESS
- ELPA21
- AZELLA
- Alt ACCESS
- Other

- Majority of students on all assessments scored at the lowest performance level.
- Generally, students performed best in the listening domain.

### Students' Communication

| Ways Students Communicate                             | #     | %    |
|---|-------|------|
| Augmentative and alternate communication (AAC) device | 264   | 17.5 |
| Communication board                                   | 188   | 12.5 |
| Eye gaze  | 211   | 14.0 |
| Picture cards   | 299   | 19.8 |
| Sign  | 148   | 9.8  |
| Speech or speaking                                    | 1,134 | 75.2 |
| Other   | 138   | 9.2  |
| Total   | 2,382 | -    |

Note: Multiple response question. N=1,508.

| Expressive Communication Abilities with Speech | English |       | Language Other Than English |      |
|--|---------|-------|-----------------------------|------|
|  | #       | %     | #                           | %    |
| Regularly combines 3 or more spoken words      | 433     | 35.8  | 251                         | 20.7 |
| Usually uses 2 spoken words at a time          | 242     | 20.0  | 126                         | 10.4 |
| Usually uses only 1 spoken word at a time      | 259     | 21.4  | 151                         | 12.5 |
| Student does not use spoken language           | 239     | 19.8  | 252                         | 20.8 |
| Unknown/Not sure                               | 37      | 3.1   | 430                         | 35.5 |
| Total  | 1,210   | 100.1 | 1,210                       | 99.9 |

Note: Totals do not equal 100 percent due to rounding. N=1,210.

| Expressive Communication Abilities With an AAC Device | English |       | Language Other than English |       |
|---|---------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
|   | #       | %     | #                           | %     |
| Regularly combines three or more symbols              | 44      | 8.2   | 19                          | 3.6   |
| Usually uses two symbols at a time                    | 75      | 14.0  | 20                          | 3.7   |
| Usually uses one symbol at a time                     | 215     | 40.2  | 134                         | 25.0  |
| Unknown/Not sure                                      | 201     | 37.6  | 362                         | 67.7  |
| Total   | 535     | 100.0 | 535                         | 100.0 |

N=535.

| Receptive Communication Abilities   | English |      | Language Other Than English |      |
|---|---------|------|-----------------------------|------|
|   | #       | %    | #                           | %    |
| Can point to, look at, or touch things in the immediate vicinity when asked                       | 796     | 65.1 | 454                         | 37.2 |
| Can perform simple actions, movements or activities when asked                                    | 741     | 60.8 | 415                         | 34   |
| Responds appropriately in any modality when offered a favored item that is not present or visible | 593     | 48.6 | 332                         | 27.2 |
| Responds appropriately in any modality to single words that are spoken or signed                  | 575     | 47.2 | 309                         | 25.3 |
| Responds appropriately in any modality to phrases and sentences that are spoken or signed         | 571     | 46.8 | 328                         | 26.9 |
| Follows 2-step directions presented verbally or through sign                                      | 512     | 42   | 270                         | 22.1 |
| Unknown/Not sure  | 75      | 6.2  | 541                         | 44.4 |
| Total   | 3,863   | -    | 2,649                       | -    |

Note: Multiple response question. N=1,219.

## Who are English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities?

English learners with significant cognitive disabilities are individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented in their Individualized Education Programs, and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding (Christensen, Gholson, & Shyyan, 2018, April).