

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

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

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# ALTELLA Project Overview



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# ALTELLA Project Goal

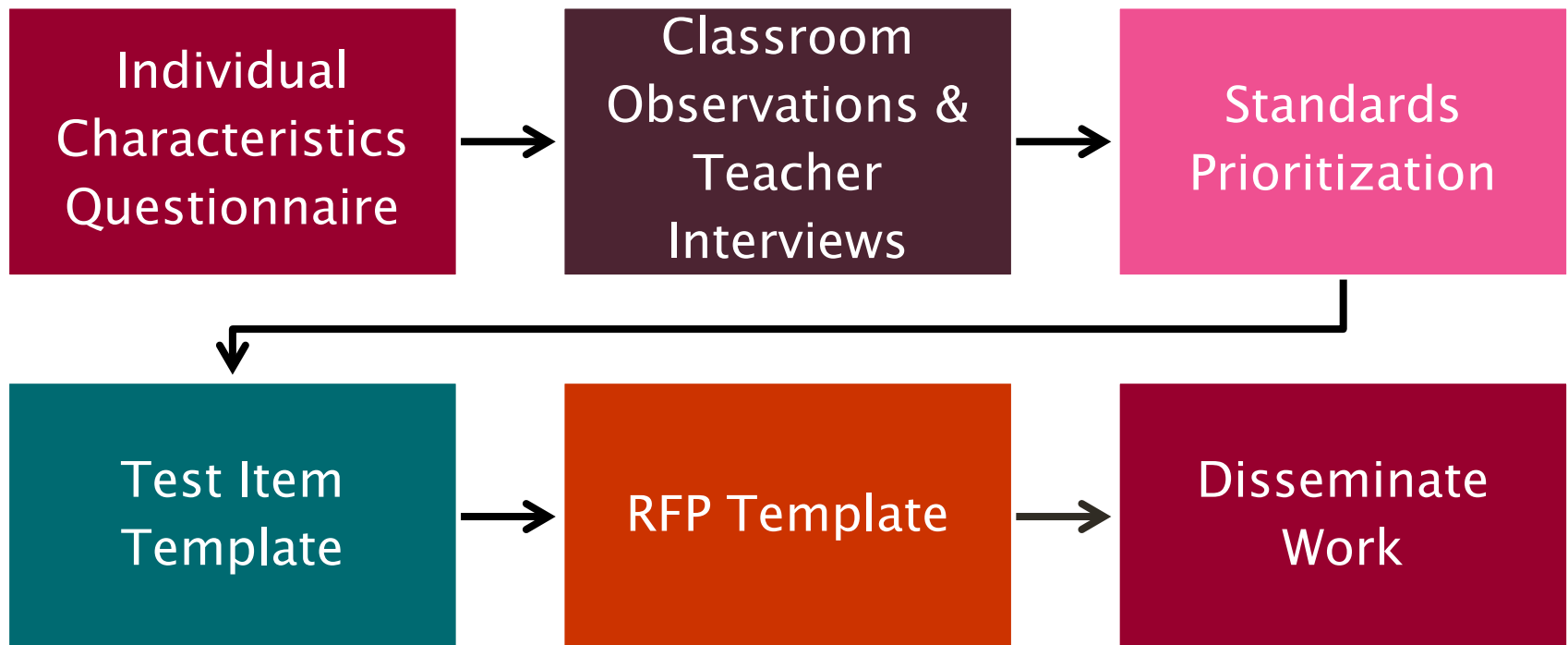
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The ALTELLA project researches instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence-centered design approach that informs our understanding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



# Project Activities

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# Individual Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ)

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- 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](https://go.wisc.edu/altella)



# Types of Questions

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- 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



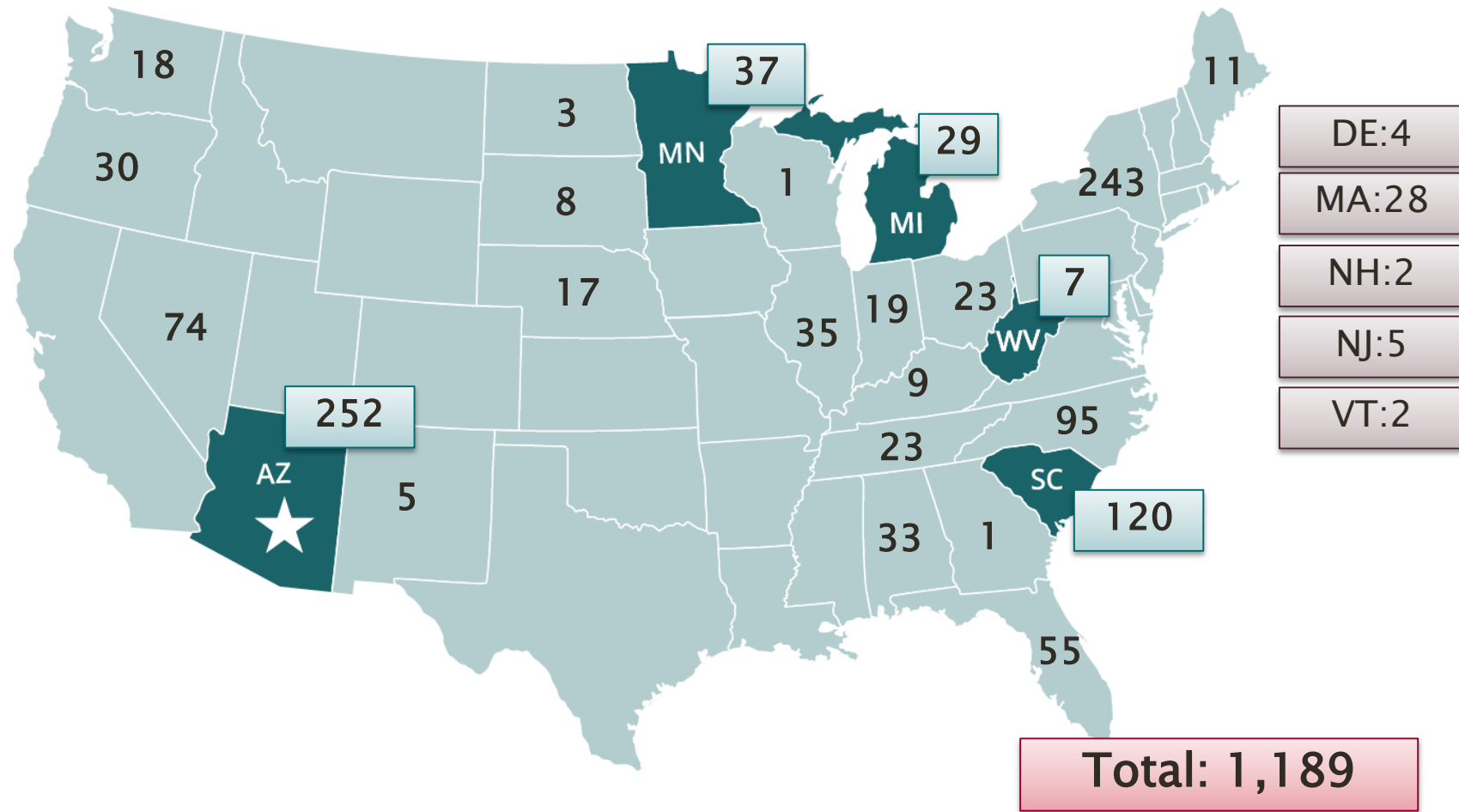
# Types of Questions

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- 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

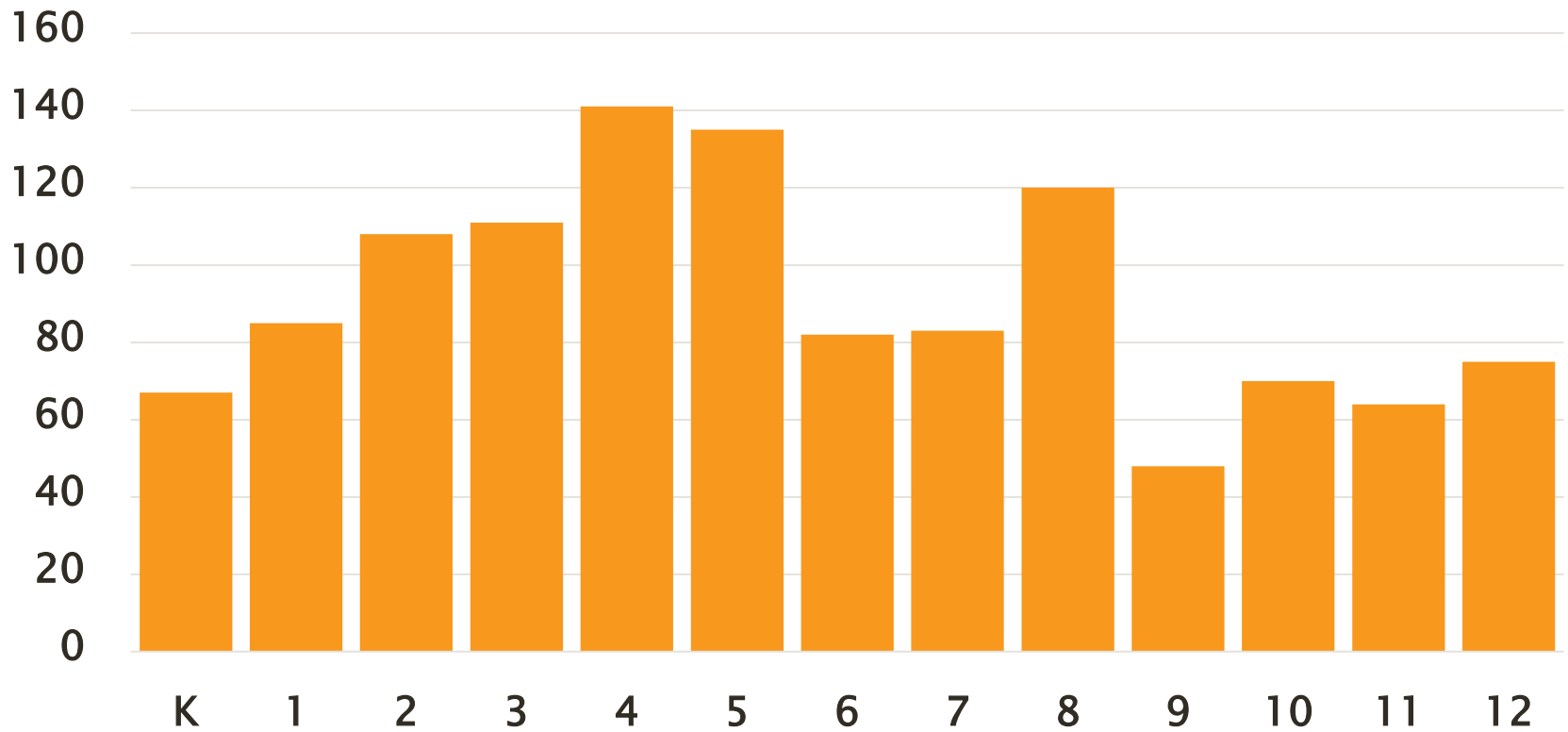


# ICQ Survey: Data File, Preliminary Results

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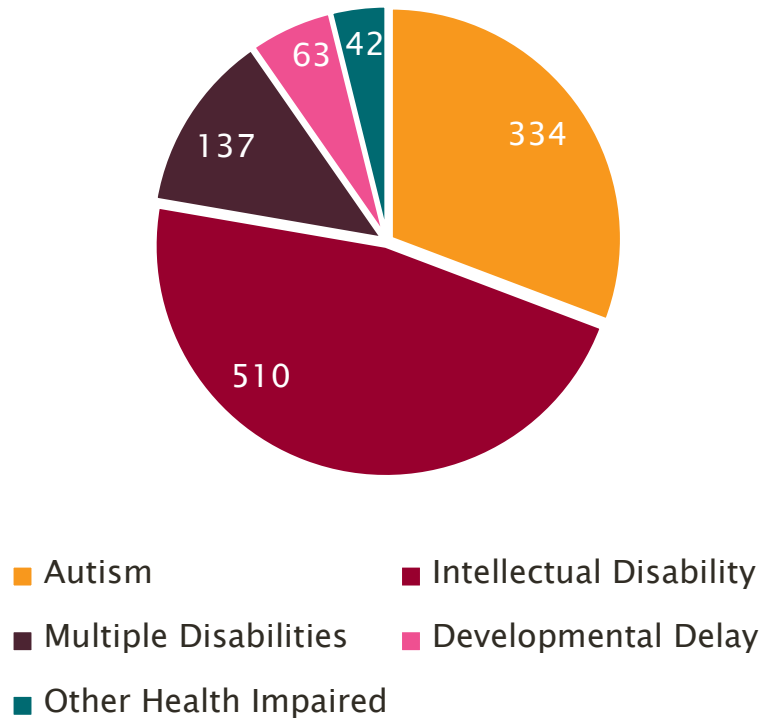
- We have more responses on male students (n=771, 65%) than female students (n=414, 35%).
- Students' home language is primarily Spanish (n=655; 55%). Most common other primary home languages include Arabic (n = 30; 3%), Somali (n = 12; 1%) American Sign Language (n = 10; 1%).

# Responses by Grade



# Disability Categories of ELs with SCDs

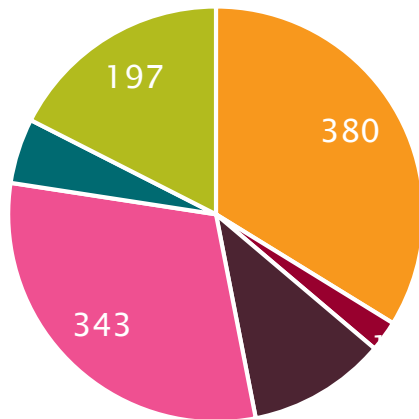
## Primary Disability Category



- 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



■ No ELP Assessment  
■ ACCESS  
■ ELPA21  
■ AZELLA  
■ Alt ACCESS  
■ NYSESLAT

- 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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- 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

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- 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

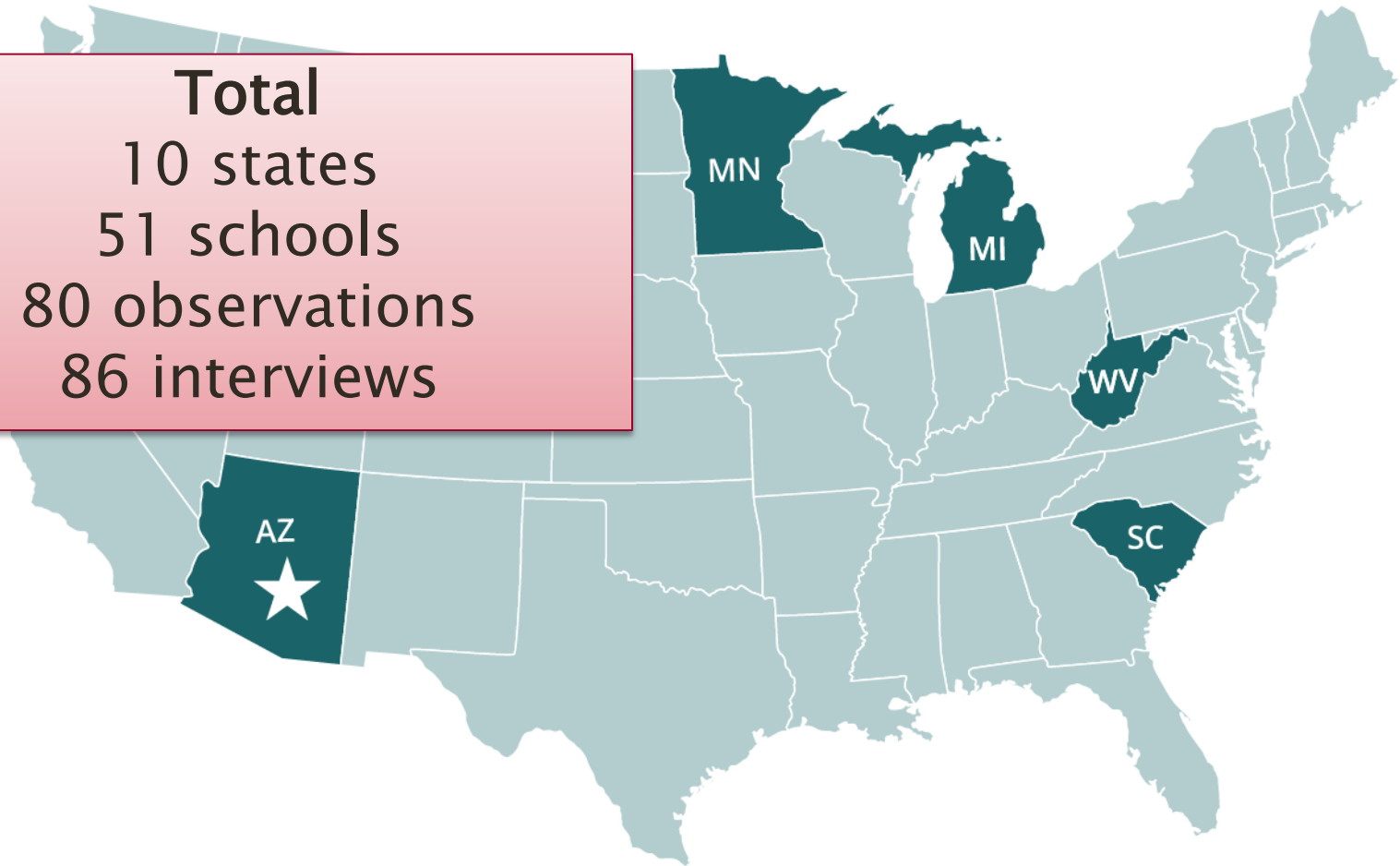
# Data Collection Procedures

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- 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

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- Pull out English language development
- Small group/small classes (classrooms with 3 students)
- Large group/large classes
  - 1 class with 18 Els 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!

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- “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

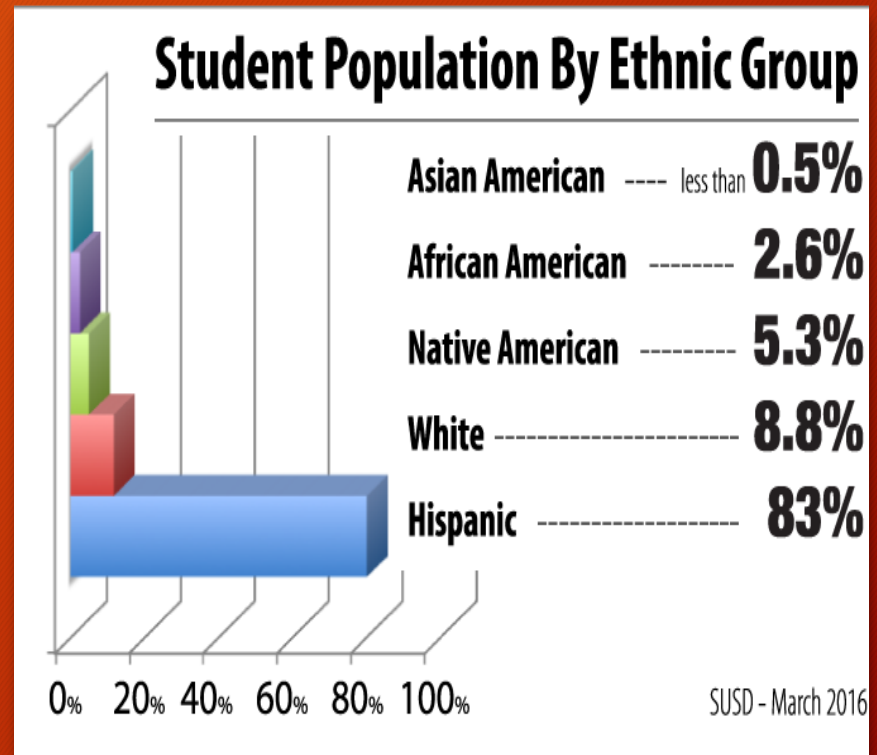
Sunnyside Unified School District is the second largest school district in Tucson, Arizona with approximately 16,813 students in the 2015-2016 school year.

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

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- 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

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- Jennifer Paul

[paulj@Michigan.gov](mailto:paulj@Michigan.gov)

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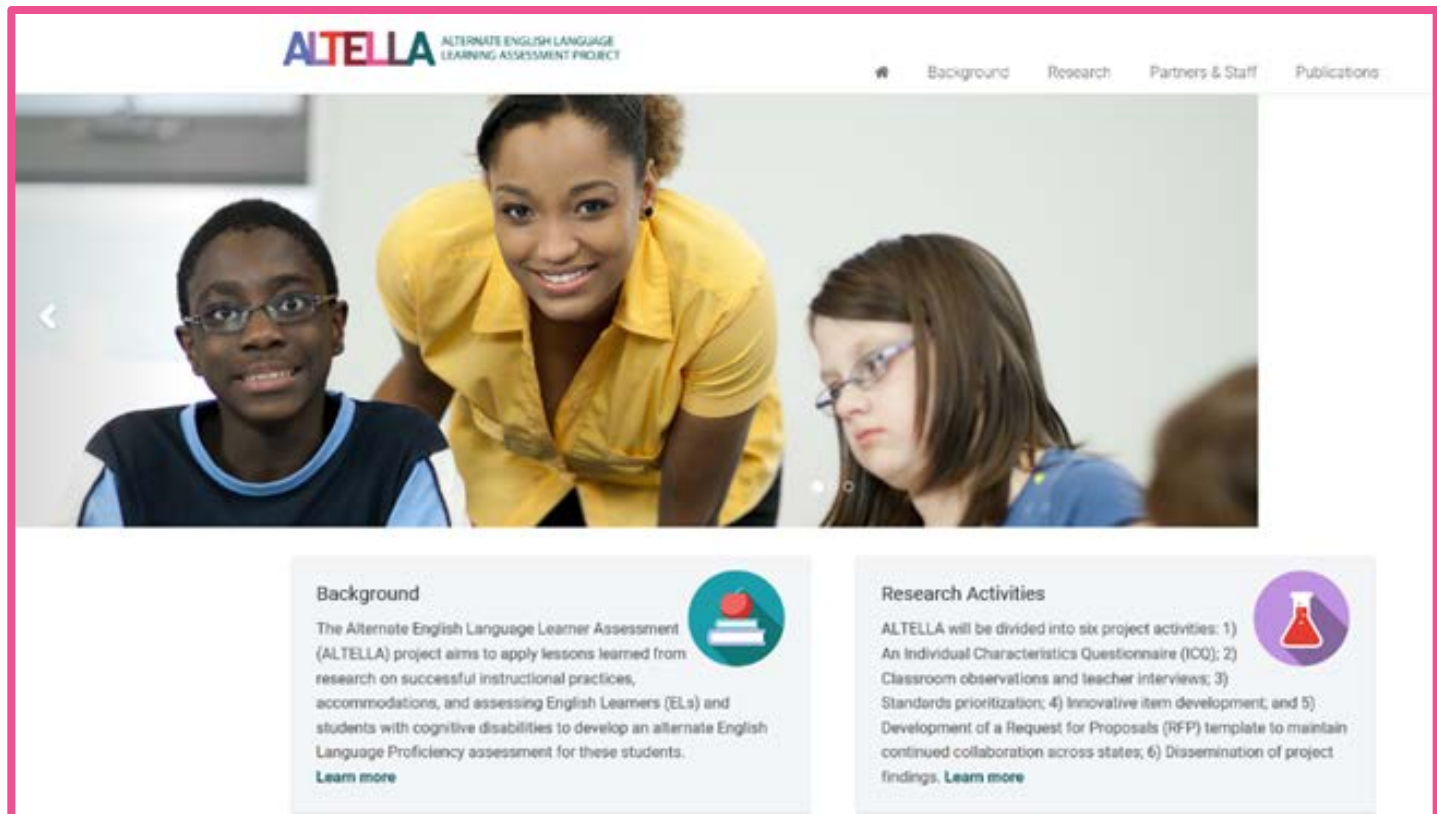
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# Discussion

- Policy needs
- Research needs
- Resource needs



# Thank you!



**altella.wceruw.org**



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