Advancing ALTELLA

Supporting Success for English Learners with Disabilities

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Introduction and Overview

- Who are English Learners with Disabilities?
- Identification of English Learners with Disabilities
- Supporting English Learners with Disabilities in the Classroom
- Resources

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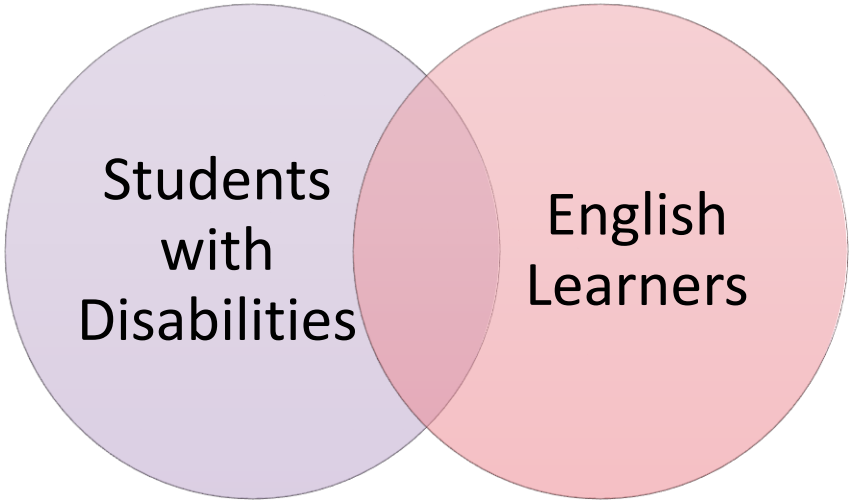
Who are English Learners with Disabilities?

Who are English Learners with Disabilities?

English learners with disabilities are individuals who have one or more disabilities as documented in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the English language.



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Individual Characteristics Questionnaire

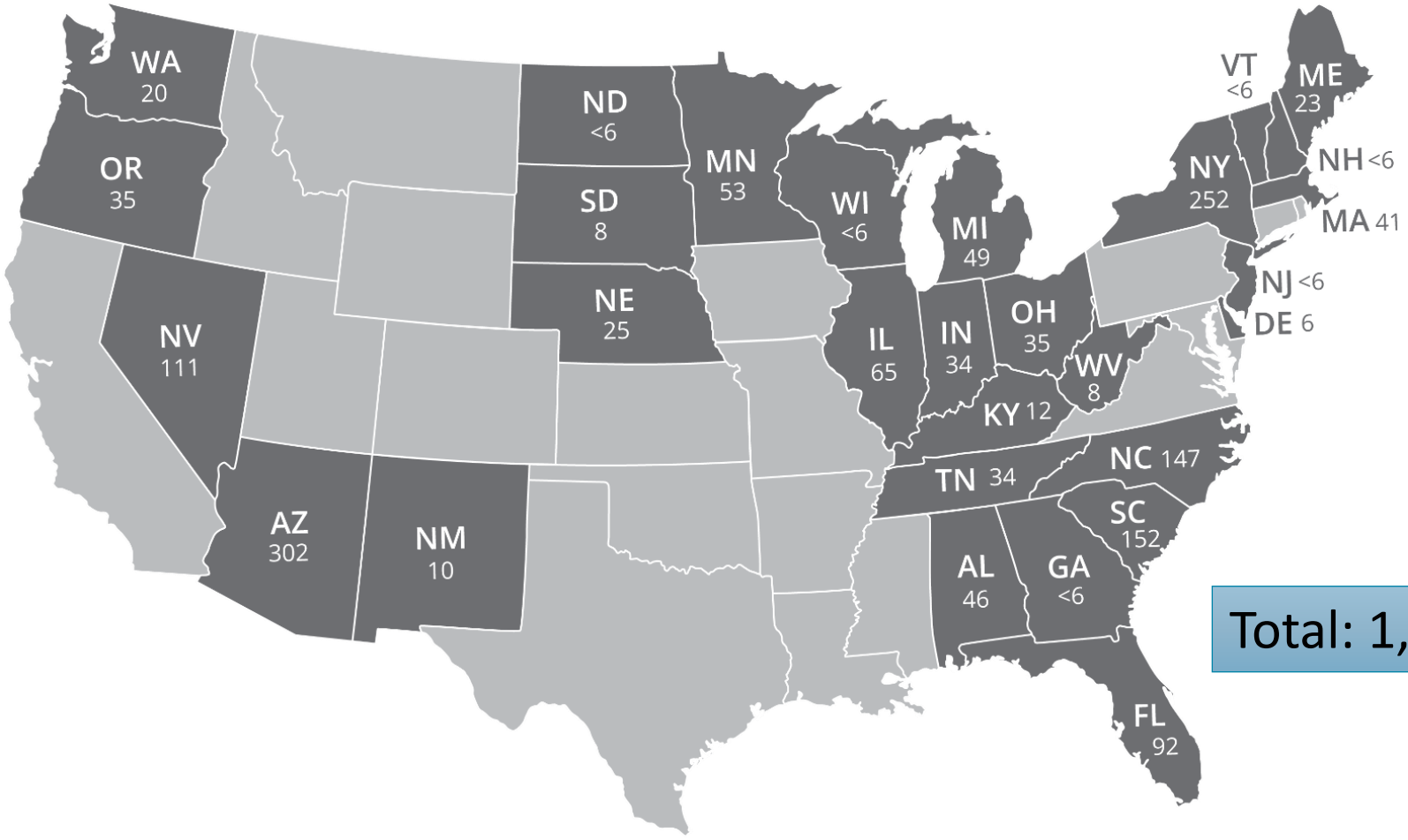
- Purpose: To learn more about the characteristics of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities.
- The ICQ asks for information on students' use of language including English and other languages as well as students' needs related to their disabilities.
- The ICQ does not request any personally identifiable information.
- Educators completed one ICQ for each student.
- Most surveys were completed in under 15 minutes.

Individual Characteristics Questionnaire

Data Analysis

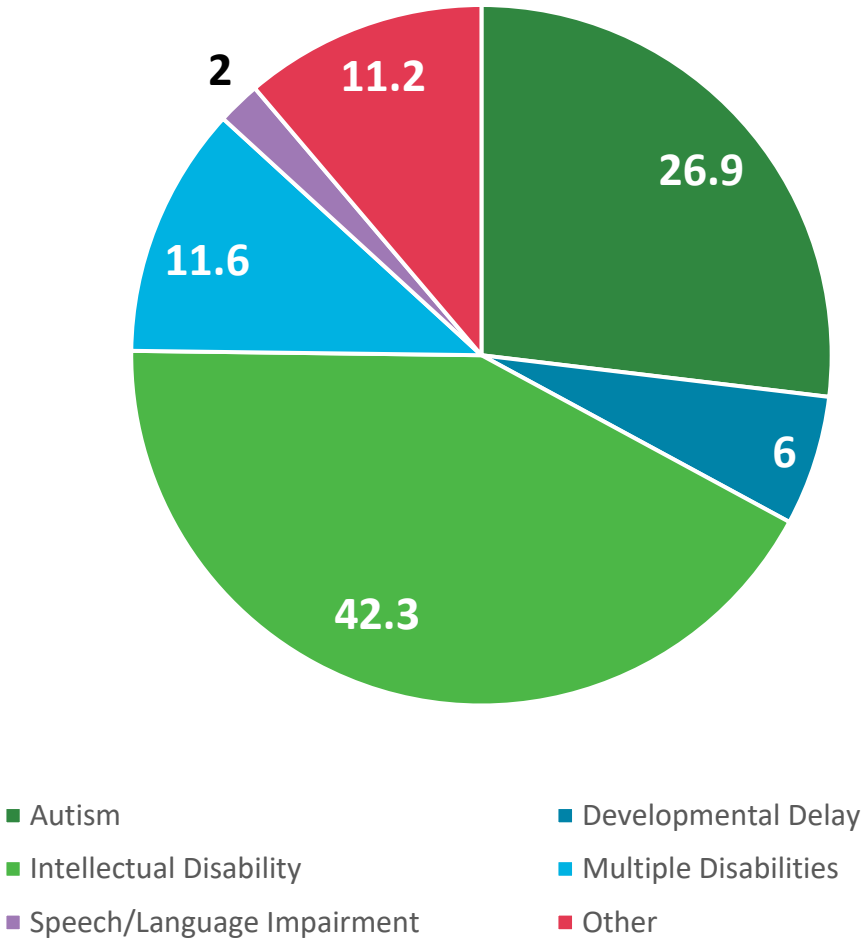
- Original analysis reported as descriptive statistics
- Results are reported in Christensen, Mitchell, Shyyan, & Ryan (2018)
- Secondary analysis provides descriptive statistics of ICQ data by primary disability categories:
  - Autism
  - Developmental Delay
  - Intellectual disability (mild, moderate, profound)
  - Multiple disabilities
  - Speech/Language Impairment
  - Other

Individual Characteristics Questionnaire



Total: 1,578*

Primary Disability



- Most students have an intellectual disability as their primary disability.
- Out of the 646 students who have a secondary disability, 186 (45.7%) have a speech/language impairment. 53 (14.9%) have an intellectual disability.

Primary 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	158	10.4
Total	1,523	100.0

- About 70 home languages represented in the student sample.
- Spanish was the most common home language for all primary disability categories (n=819; 53.8%).
- Most common other primary home languages include English (n=424, 27.8%), Arabic (n = 40; 2.6%).

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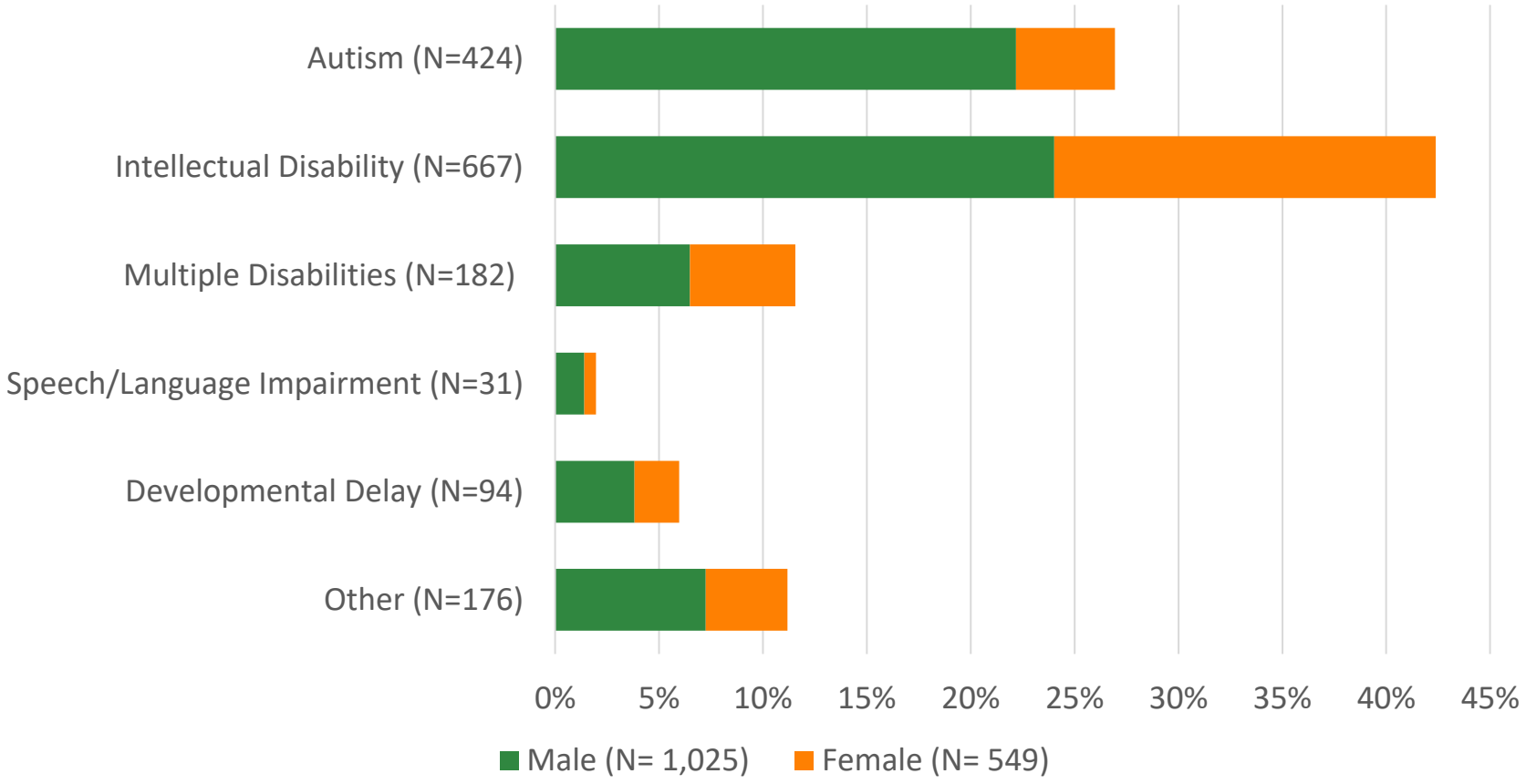
Gender



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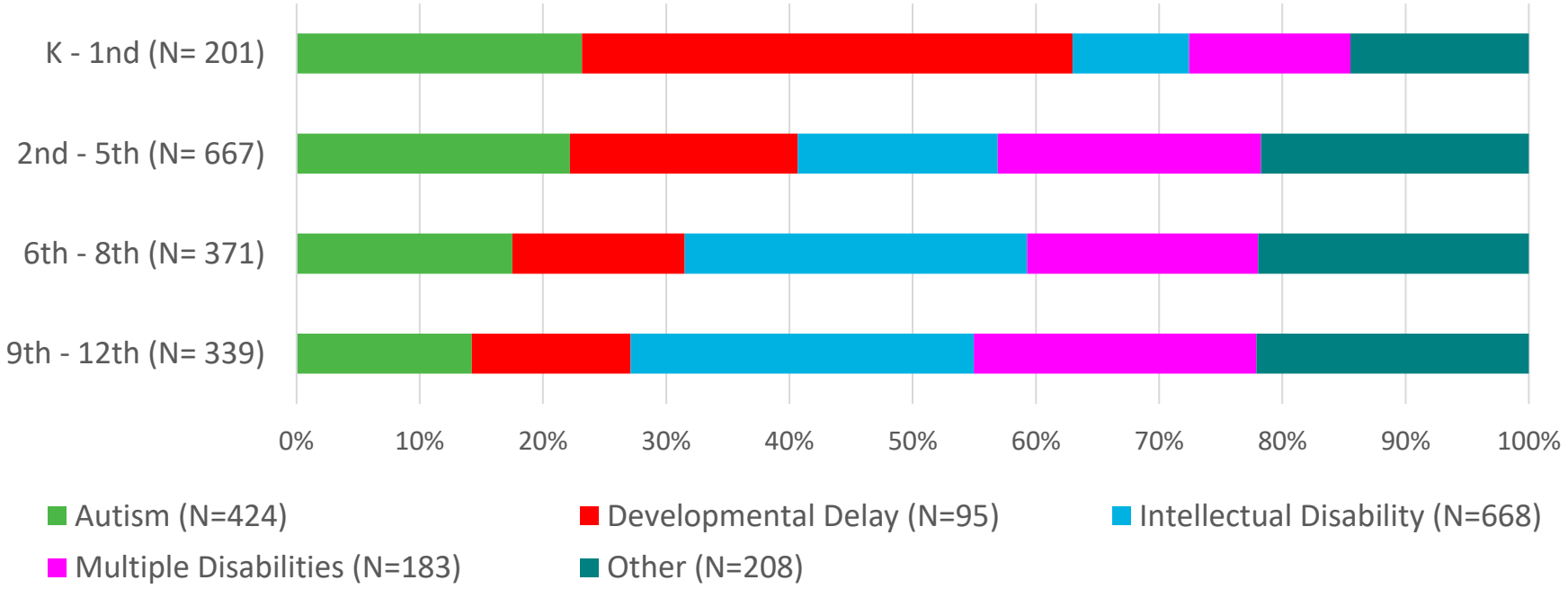
Grade



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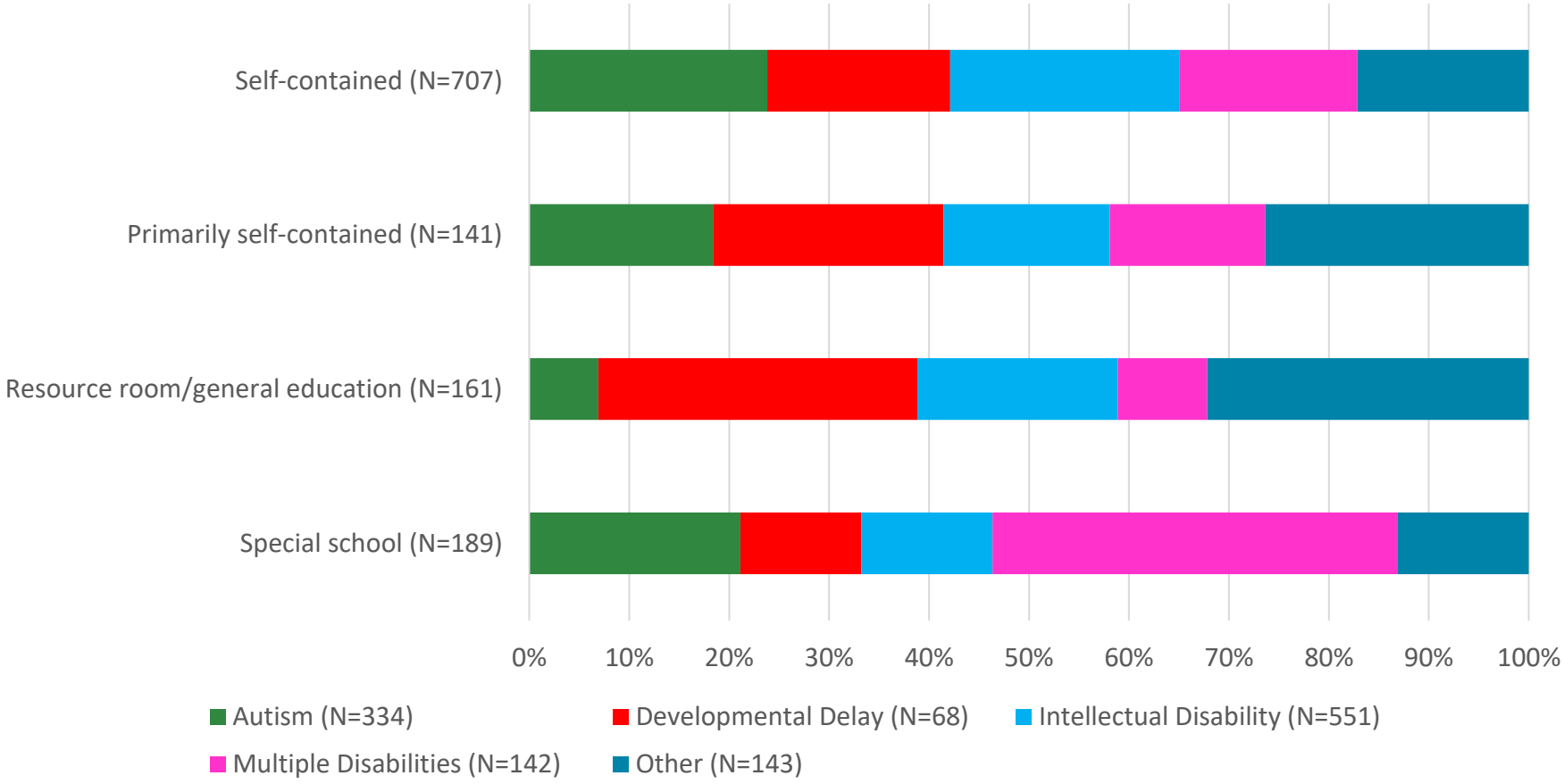
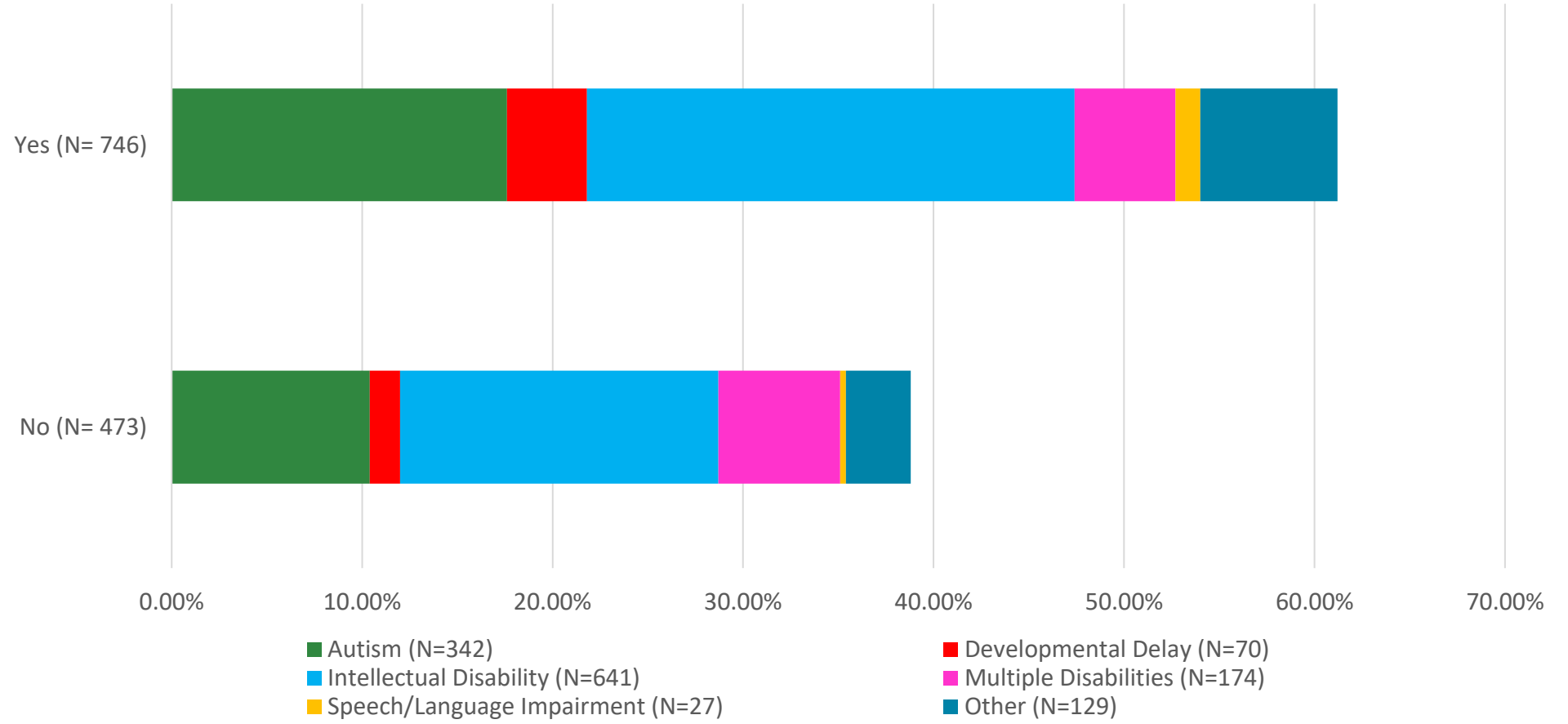
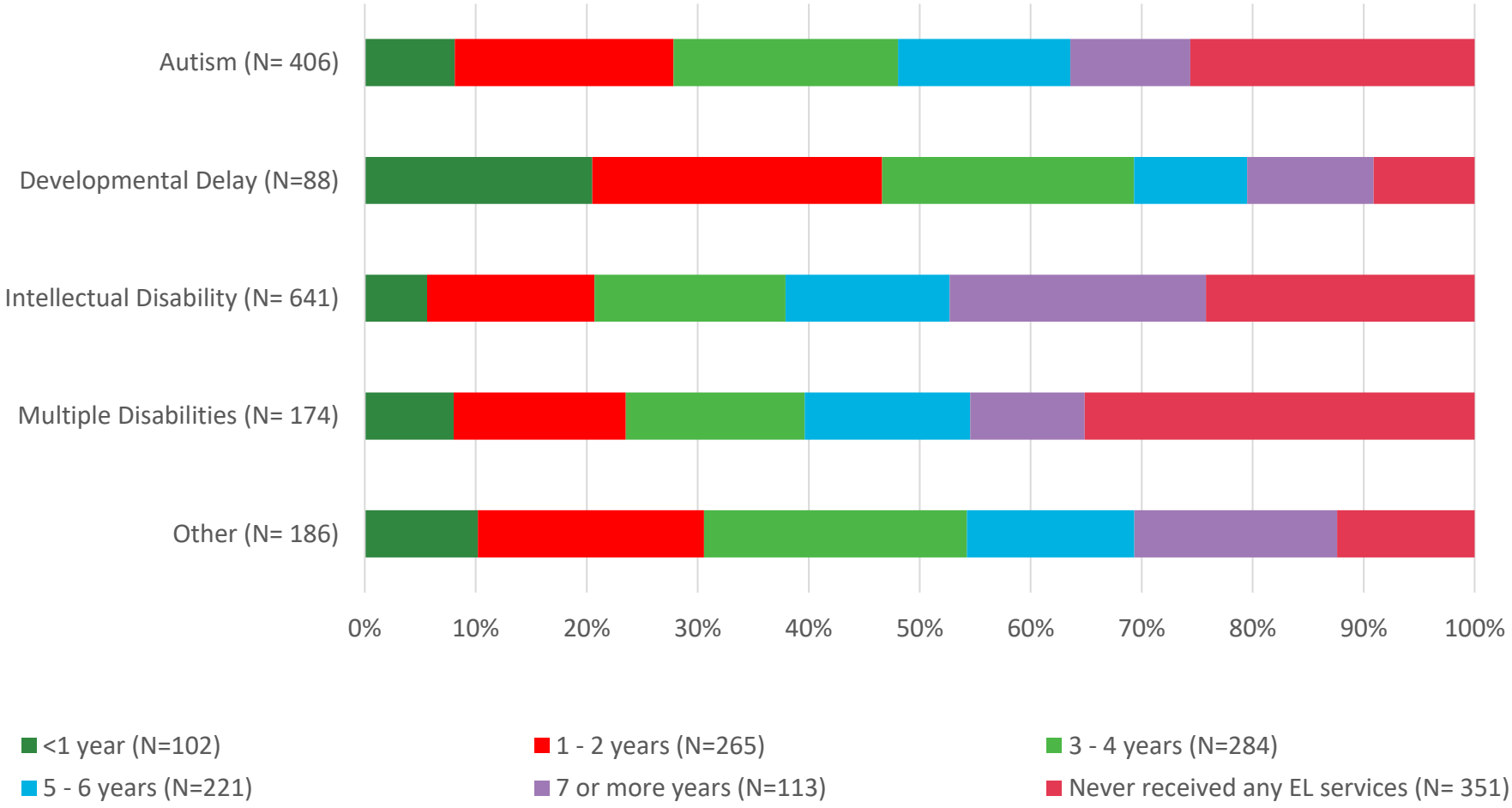
Primary Classroom Settings



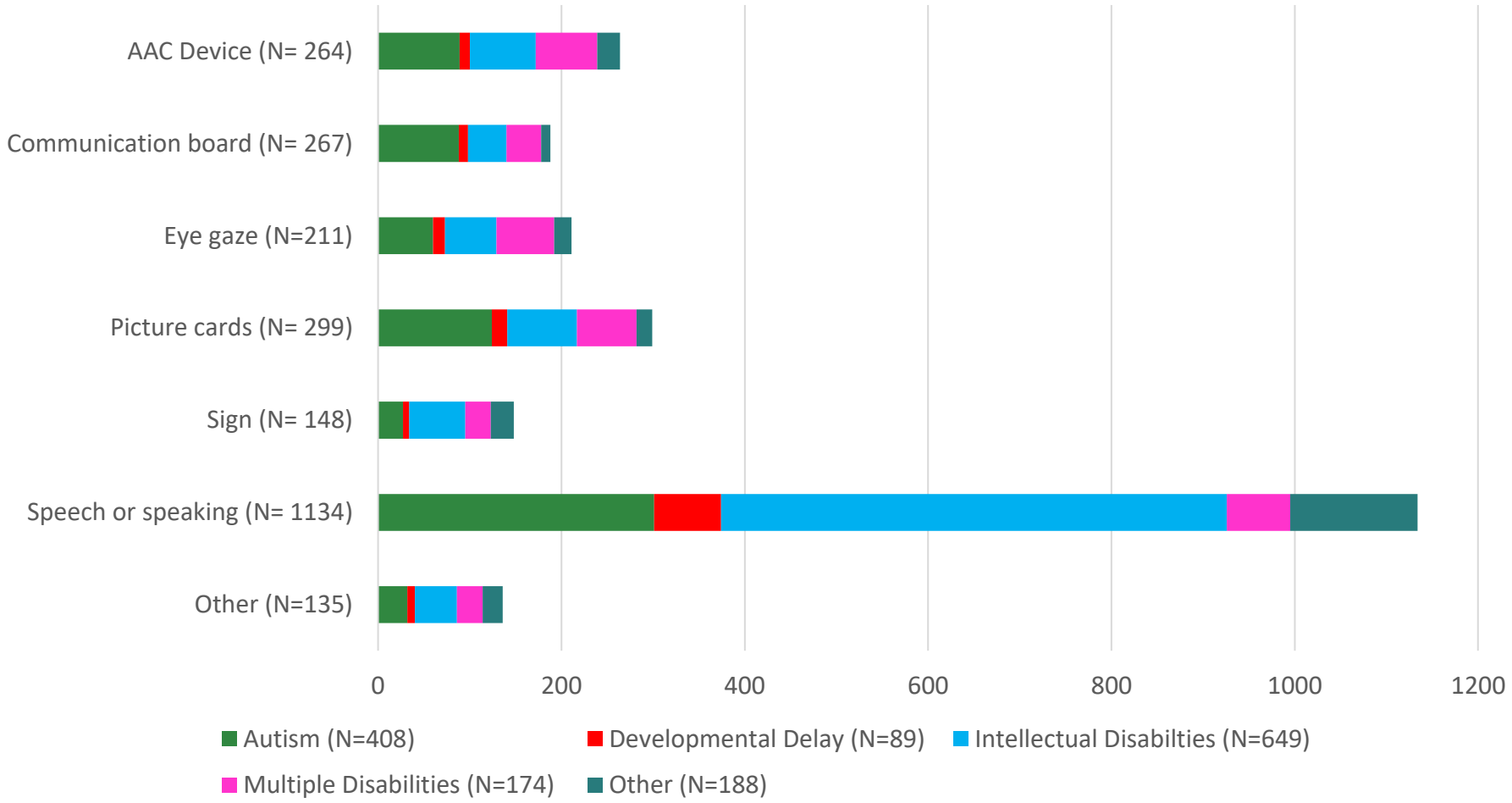
English Language Acquisition Specialist on IEP Team



English Language Services



Ways Students Communicate



Resources

- Christensen, L. L., Gholson, M. L., & Shyyan, V. V. (2018, April). Establishing a definition of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (ALTELLA Brief No. 1). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA_Brief-01_Definition_070218.pdf
- Christensen, L. L., Mitchell, J. D., Shyyan, V. V., & Ryan, S. (2018, September). Characteristics of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities: Findings from the Individual Characteristics Questionnaire. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ICQ-Report.pdf
- Shyyan, V. V., Christensen, L. L., Mitchell, J. D., & Ceylan, I. E. (2018). ALTELLA Individual Characteristics Questionnaire. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA-Individual-Characteristics_Tool.pdf

Identifying English Learners with Disabilities

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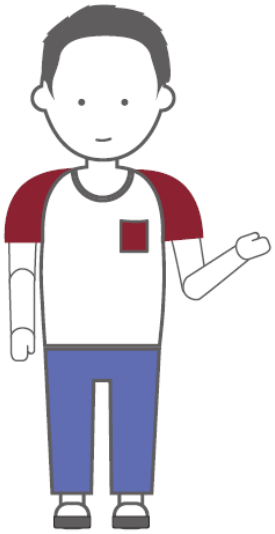


Two Primary Identification Issues:

1. Identification of a disability in a student who is already identified as an English learner
2. Identification of English learner status in a student who is already identified as having a disability

Identification Requires Balance!

Under-Identification

Some ELs who need special education services don't receive services

Over-Identification

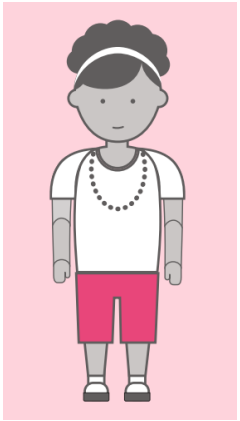
Some ELs who do not need special education services may lose instructional time

Just Right!

All ELs, including those with disabilities, get the services they need!

Identification Considerations

- Schools must identify ELs suspected of a disability in a timely manner
  - Learning disability? Language learning issues? Cultural adjustment?
  - Lack of instruction or limited proficiency in English cannot be a reason for a special education referral
  - Initial evaluation started within 45 days of referral; completed within 60 days
- Include a ESOL-endorsed teacher in the referral process



Identification

Questions to consider:

1. Does the EL receive standards-based content instruction?
2. Have appropriate accommodations and modifications been used and documented?
3. Has input from the student's family been gathered?
4. Other factors? (e.g., trauma, attendance, limited experience with schooling)

Identification Considerations

Considerations for ELs with cognitive disabilities:

- Challenges in determining EL status
- EL screeners may pose access issues
- Communication needs are critical
- Linguistic deprivation may influence both disability and linguistic identification
- Determine whether or not the student should take ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS

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Identification Resources

- Identifying and Serving English Learners with Disabilities: Policy and Resource Guide
- English Learner Toolkit (Chapter 1) https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html
- Center for Applied Linguistics Immigrant and Refugee Integration Projects https://www.cal.org/areas-of-impact/immigrant-refugee-integration
- WIDA Alternate ACCESS Participation Guidelines https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Alt-Access-Participation-Criteria-Diagram.pdf
- Advancing ALTELLA Q&A with Sheri Wells-Jensen https://advancingaltella.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AdvancingALTELLA_QA_MLLsBlindVisuallyImpaired_Wells-Jensen.pdf
- Advancing ALTELLA Q&A with Stephanie Cawthon https://advancingaltella.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AdvancingALTELLA_QA_MLLsDeafHardofHearing_Cawthon.pdf

Supporting English Learners with Disabilities in the Classroom

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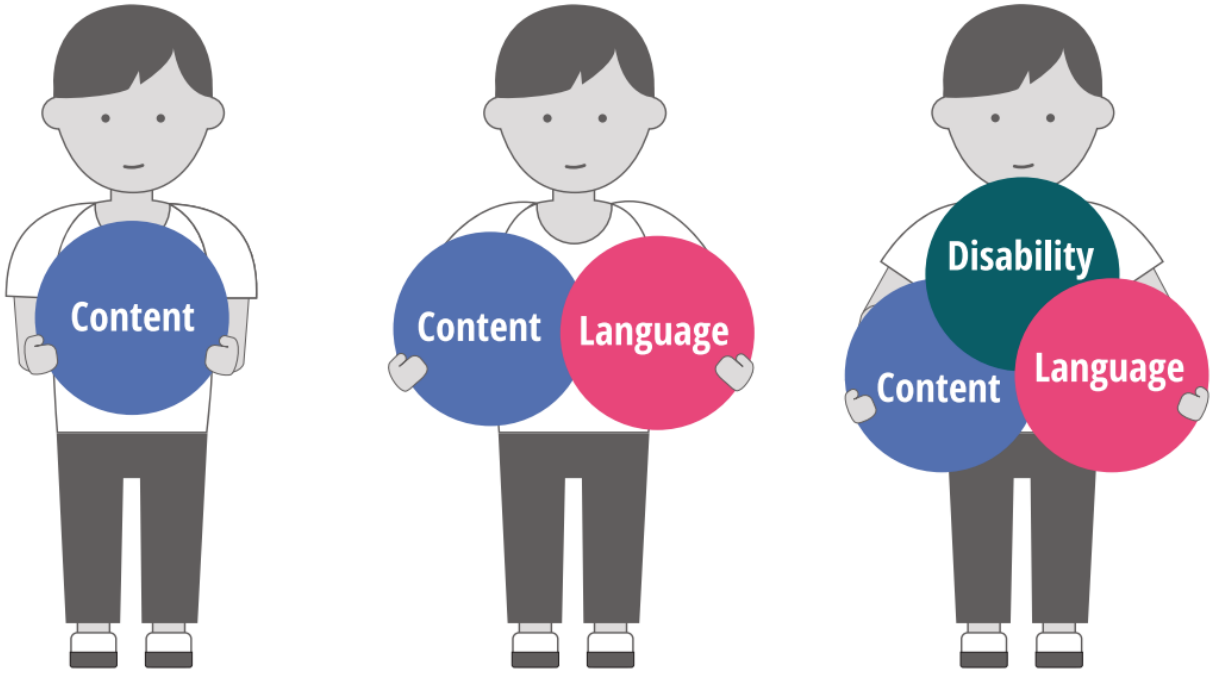
ELs with Disabilities: Doing Triple Work



Native English speakers without disabilities

English learners without disabilities

English learners with disabilities

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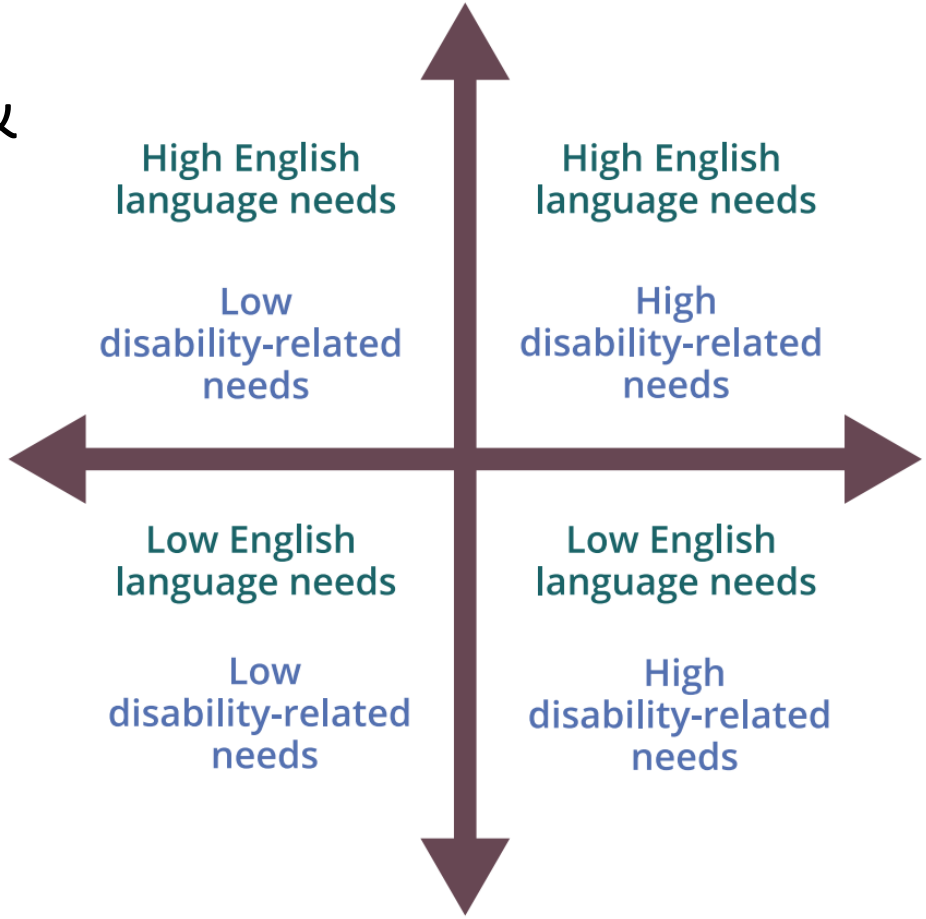
English Language & Disability Needs Framework



(Source: Shyyan & Christensen, 2018)

Teacher Observations & 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

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Instructional Setting

Instructional Setting	Number
General Education Class	1
English Language Development Class	6
Special Education Class with Non-disabled Peers	1
Special Education Class with Students with Disabilities Only	81
Related Services	2

Instructional Group Setting	Number
Large Group Instruction	57
Small Group Instruction	21
Independent Work	8
1:1 Instruction	22
Other	5

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Content Area Observed

Content Area	Number	%
English Language Arts	31	35.2
Math	26	29.5
Science	6	6.8
English Language Development	12	13.6
Other	41	46.6

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Instructional Delivery

Instructional Delivery	Number	#
General Education Teacher	2	2.3
Special Education Teacher	70	79.5
ESL/Bilingual Education Teacher	15	17.0
Paraprofessional	27	30.7
Related Service Provider	2	2.3

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Student responds to opportunities to demonstrate language skills	Number
Expressive Language	86
Receptive Language	88
TOTAL	88

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Domains Observed

Domain	Number
Listening	83
Speaking	83
Reading	74
Writing	43

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Types of Language/Communication

Adaptive equipment (AAC)	25
Head nods	69
Picture exchange cards (PECS)	16
Pointing	77
Signing	25
Verbal levels	4
Verbalization	31
Vocalizations	34

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Options students have for language access during instruction	Number
Concrete objects	30
Bilingual resources	3
Picture cards	53
Simplified syntax	45
Symbol based text	16
Tactile cues	23
Text reader	11
Other	66
None	3

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Interactive Tasks	Number of Classes
Cloze	11
Cooperative Learning	9
Drills/Repetition	62
Experiential Learning	11
Guessing Game	27
Information Gap Activities	5
Interviews	0
Jigsaw Tasks	0
Negotiating Meaning	29

Interactive Tasks	Number of Classes
Problem Solving	16
Read Aloud	34
Retelling a Story/Event	9
Role-Play	0
Simulations	4
TPR	34
Other	43
None	1

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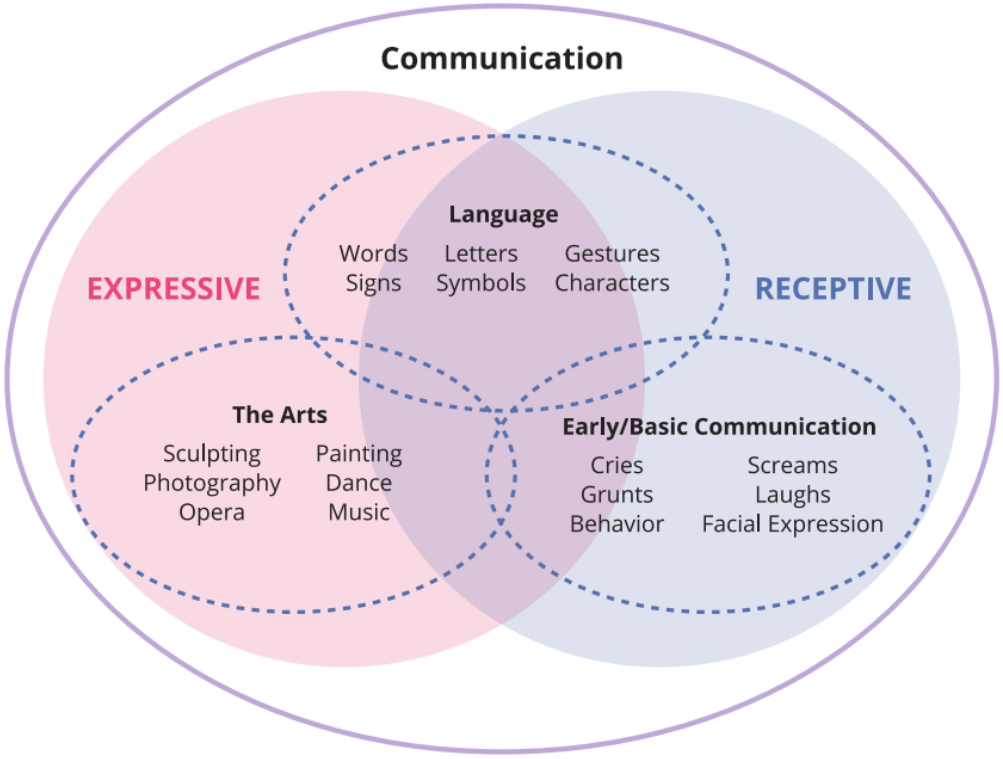
Importance of Language & Communication



- **Communication** is a social event that requires sending and receiving messages with shared understanding of meaning.
- **Language** is a structured and shared form of communication like spoken and written words, figures, characters, and gestures, or a combination of these.

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Importance of Peer Interaction in Developing Proficiency in English

- **Peer interaction** is a critical element in the development of communication and language skills for English learners with disabilities.

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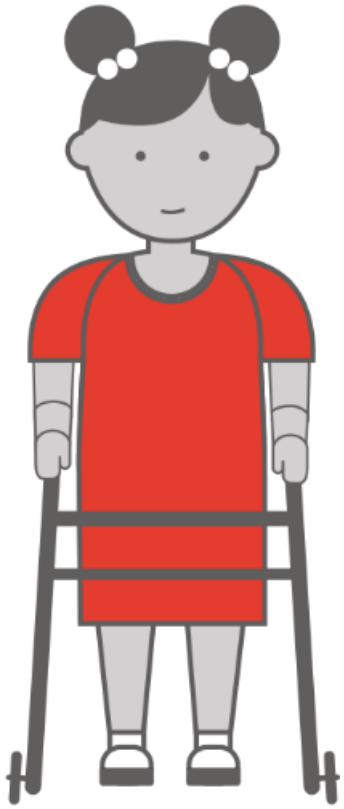
Language and Communication Application

- What are your student's communication related needs?
- What are your student's language related needs?
- How can you identify the student's proficiency in their home language? How can you use the student's home language and culture to support learning at school?



Development of Alternate Can Dos

- Can Do Descriptors are examples of what students Can Do with English at each grade and performance level
- Alternate Can Do Descriptors will inform the development of new items for the revamped Alternate ACCESS and also provide instructional support materials
- Meeting held in November 2019
- 20 states represented, including WIDA and non-WIDA states
- Developed draft Can Dos that address expressive and interpretive domains

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Draft Alternate Can Do Descriptors

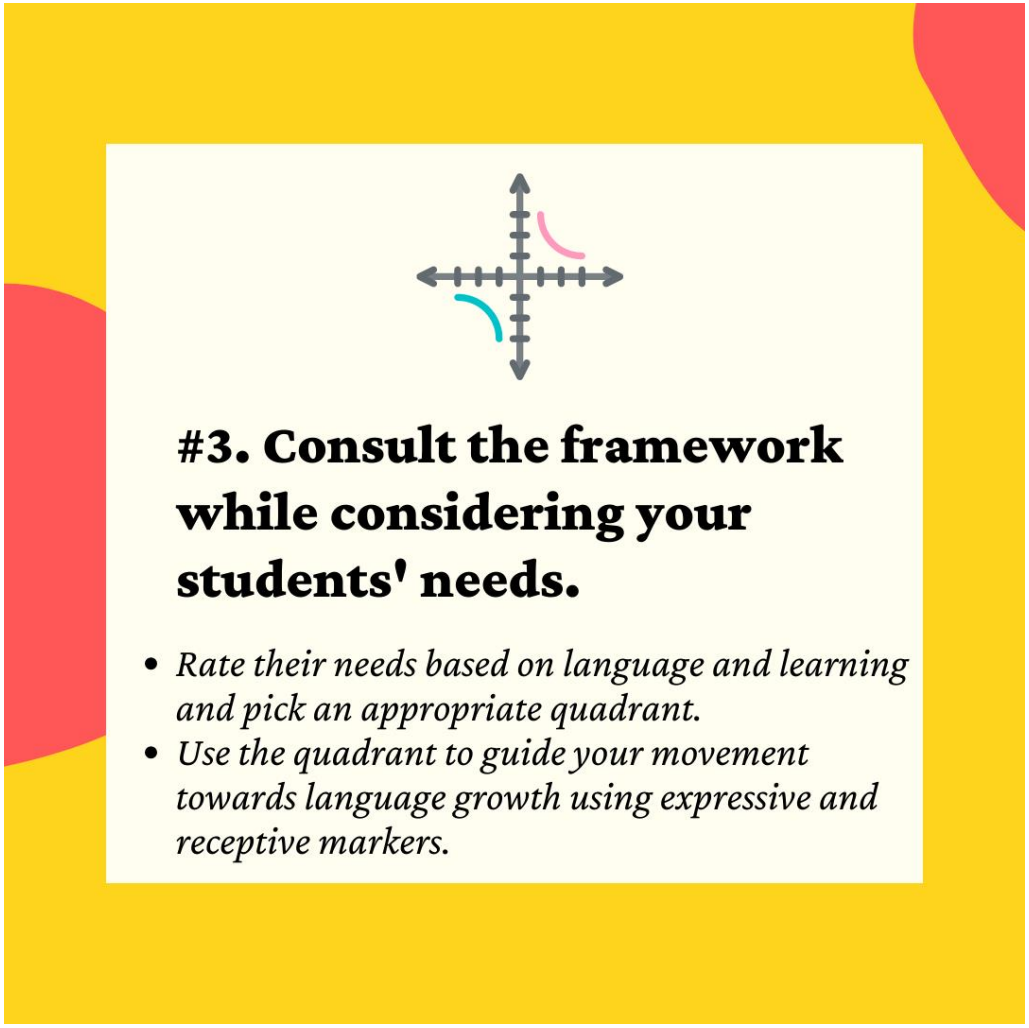
Expressive 3-5 Science Alternate Can Do Descriptors

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Represent cause and effect relationships when given options. Understand what a model is.	Show and interpret data.	Produce simple statements about cause and effect relationships in familiar contexts.	Compare items or substances using weights or measures.	Explain cause and effect relationships . Explain a model in detail [using a variety of sentence structures].

Application to Instruction

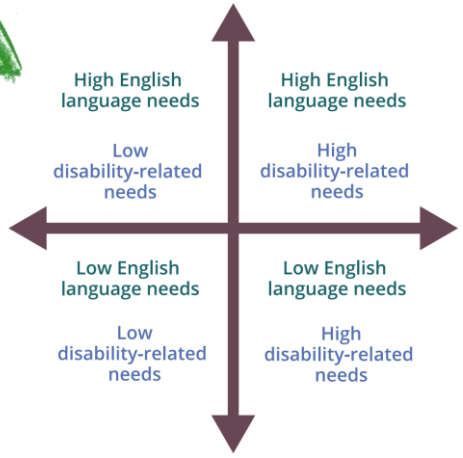
If you are a content teacher, use the Alternate Can Dos to guide your unit

- They are designed to be applicable to multiple topics/themes and grade levels.
- While the content itself is important information, we are focusing on the language needed to access the content.



Application to Instruction

- Develop learner profiles to determine how to best use the descriptors to guide the lesson.
- Based on the quadrant placement, focus on our main questions:
  - How will student access information?
  - How will student demonstrate understanding and show growth?

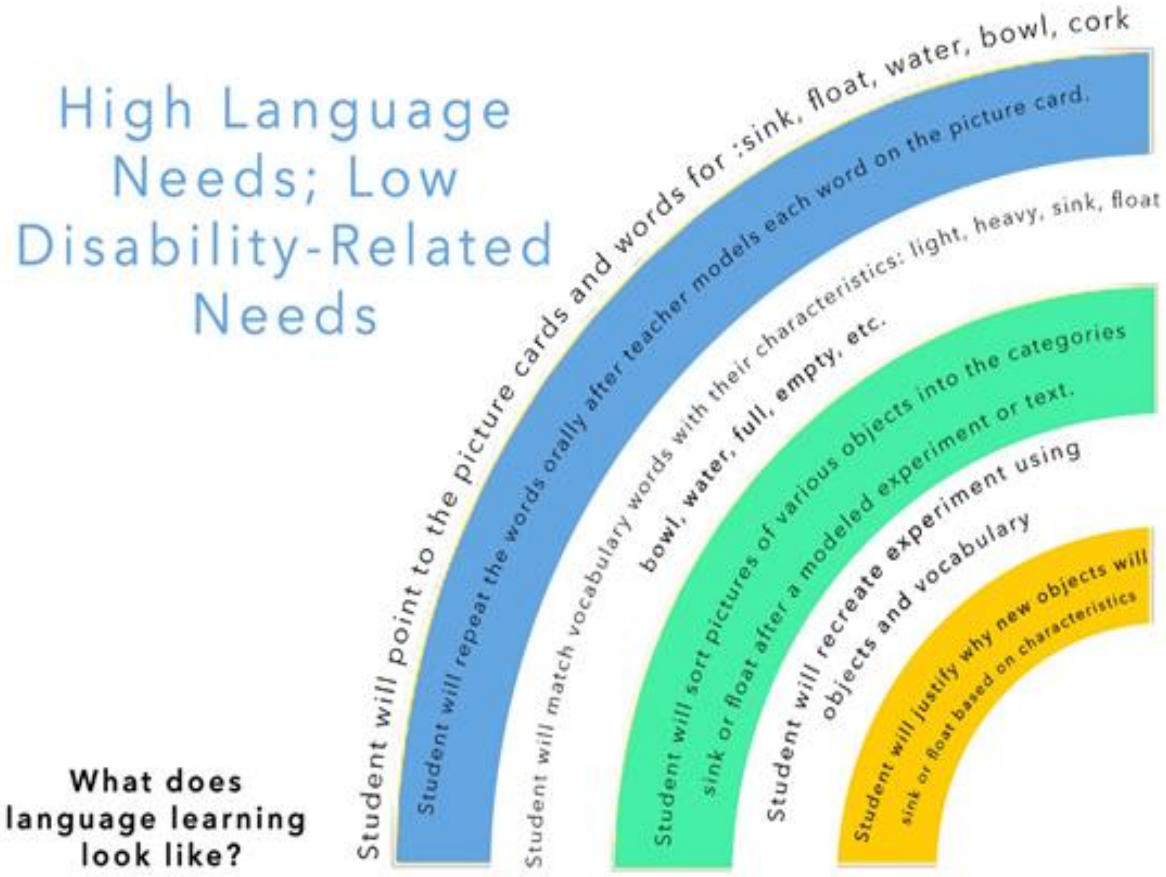


(Source: Shyyan & Christensen, 2018)

Jorge is a 9-year-old who came from El Salvador. He was held in a detention center for 90 days. His mother reports that he struggled with paying attention and was often sent home from school early, but did not have an IEP or any equivalent education plan or accessibility supports in place. He has no physical disabilities other than some fine motor coordination challenges and articulation/speech goals. On initial assessments, the student is able to write numbers to 10, trace basic shapes and letter shapes, and can write his first name, but not his last name. He is able to identify 12 out of 26 letter sounds in Spanish. Currently, he receives instruction primarily from a Special Education teacher, but also is in a co-taught class (with regular education and ESL teacher) for a portion of the reading and writing (ELA) block.

Application to Instruction

Create objectives with increasing receptive and expressive language demand.



Accommodations

Accessibility tools and accommodations are changes in materials or procedures that allow students to participate fully in instruction or assessments.

Accessibility tools and accommodations reduce the barriers caused by a student's proficiency in the language of instruction and/or a student's disability.

Accommodations Considerations

- Not all accessibility tools and accommodations used in the classroom may be used on assessments
- Accessibility tools and accommodations may differ on content and English language proficiency assessments
- ELs with disabilities can participate in regular ELP assessments with or without accommodations, or they can participate in alternate ELP assessments.
- Accommodations can be decided across all four domains or for a single domain.

Resources

Shyyan, V. V. & Christensen, L. L. (2018, September). A framework for understanding English learners with disabilities: Triple the work (ALTELLA Brief No. 5). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA_Brief-05_Framework.pdf

Parker, C. E., & Christensen, L. L. (2018, September). Individualized Education Programs for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities. (ALTELLA Brief No. 4). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA_Brief-04_IEPs.pdf

Christensen, L. L. & Mitchell, J. D. (2018, September). Classroom perspectives on English learners with significant cognitive disabilities. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/Classroom-Perspectives-Report.pdf

Language and Communication Resources

- The role of language and communication in the education of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (ALTELLA Brief No. 7). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA_Brief-07_Language-and-Communication.pdf
- Christensen, L. L. & Shyyan, V. V. (2018, August). Nonverbal communication in diverse classrooms: Intercultural competence considerations for supporting English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (ALTELLA Brief No. 3). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA-Brief%2003-Nonverbal-Communication.pdf
- Communication Matrix: https://communicationmatrix.org/

Accommodations Resources

- WIDA Accessibility and Accommodations Supplement https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/ACCESS-Accessibility-Accommodations-Supplement.pdf
- Shyyan, V. V., Gholson, M. L., & Christensen, L. L. (2018, June). Considerations for educators serving English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (ALTELLA Brief No. 2). https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA_Brief%2002_Considerations.pdf

Final Thoughts

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English learners with disabilities CAN…

- English learners with disabilities **can** learn complex language and communication systems.
- English learners with disabilities **can** improve their measures of academic and language growth.
- English learners with disabilities **do** have specific learning needs that are different from those of other students with disabilities.
- Students who do not respond **do** understand.
- English learners with disabilities **do** benefit from English development services.
- Others?

The Least Dangerous Assumption IS to Presume Competence!

Acting on the presumption of competence provides students with the opportunity to learn, achieve, and ultimately become more independent.

Resources

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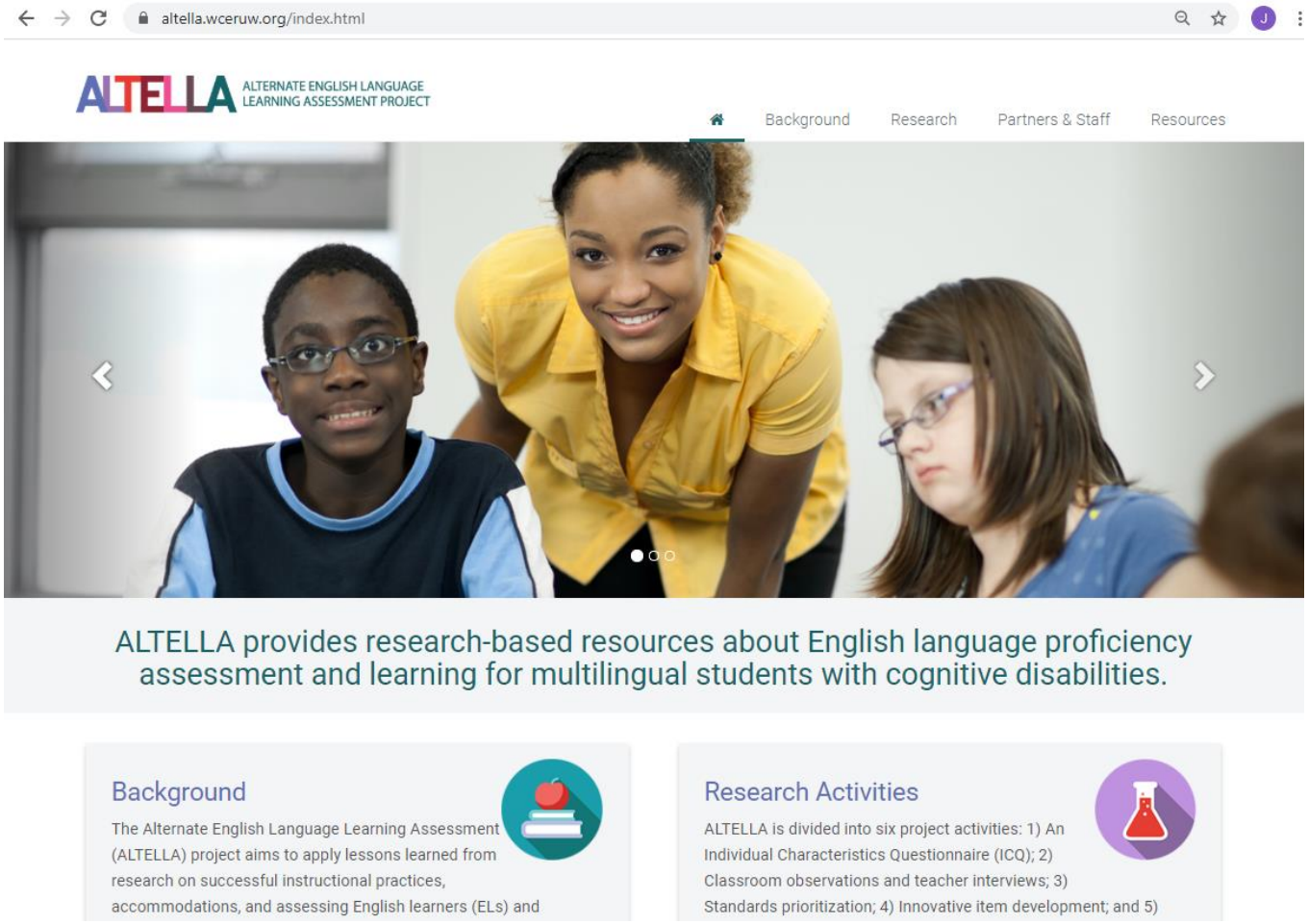
Resources - ALTELLA



https://altella.wceruw.org/resources.html

Resources - Advancing ALTELLA

https://advancingaltella.org/contact/

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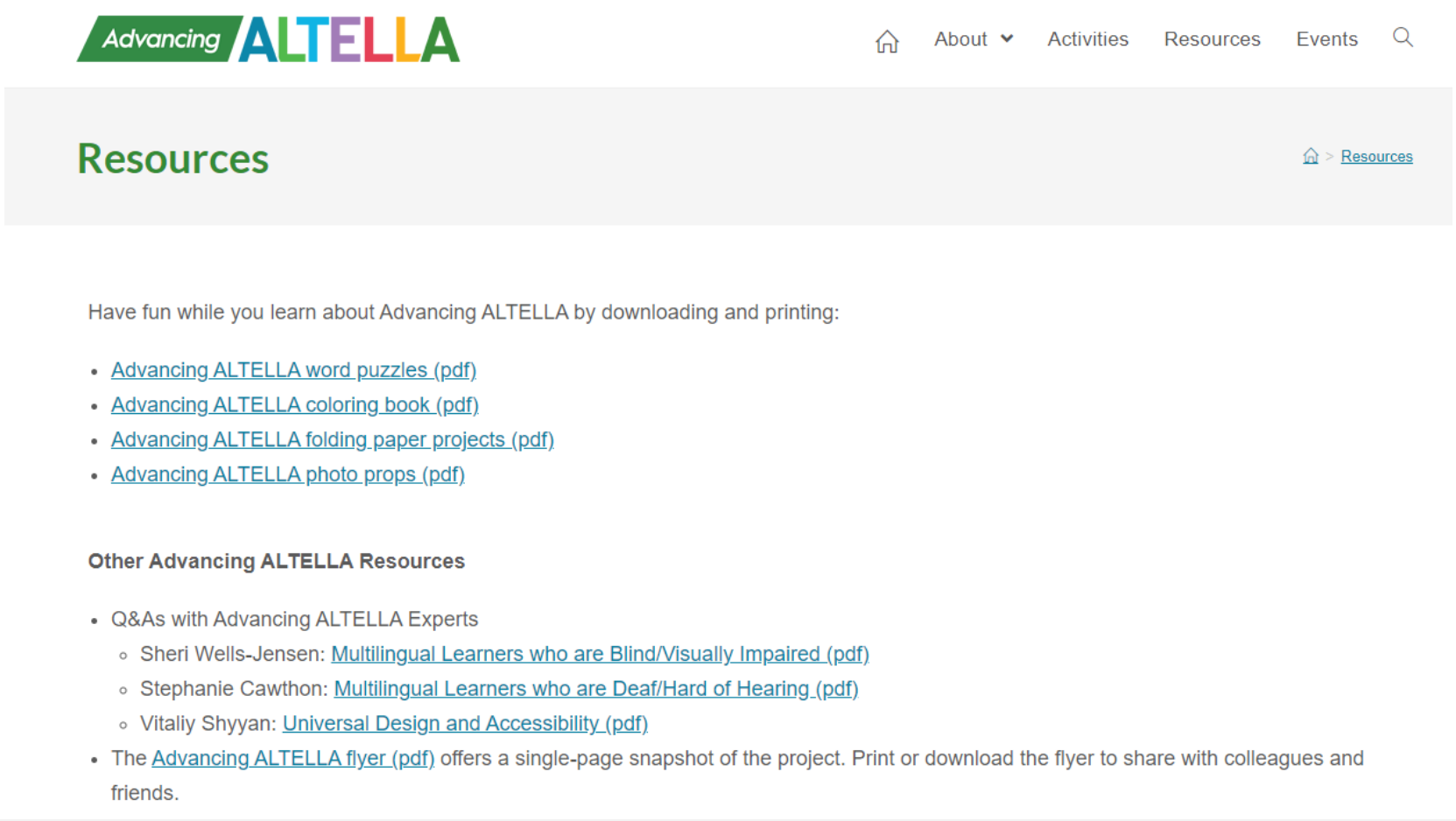

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About Activities Resources Events

Resources

Resources

Have fun while you learn about Advancing ALTELLA by downloading and printing:

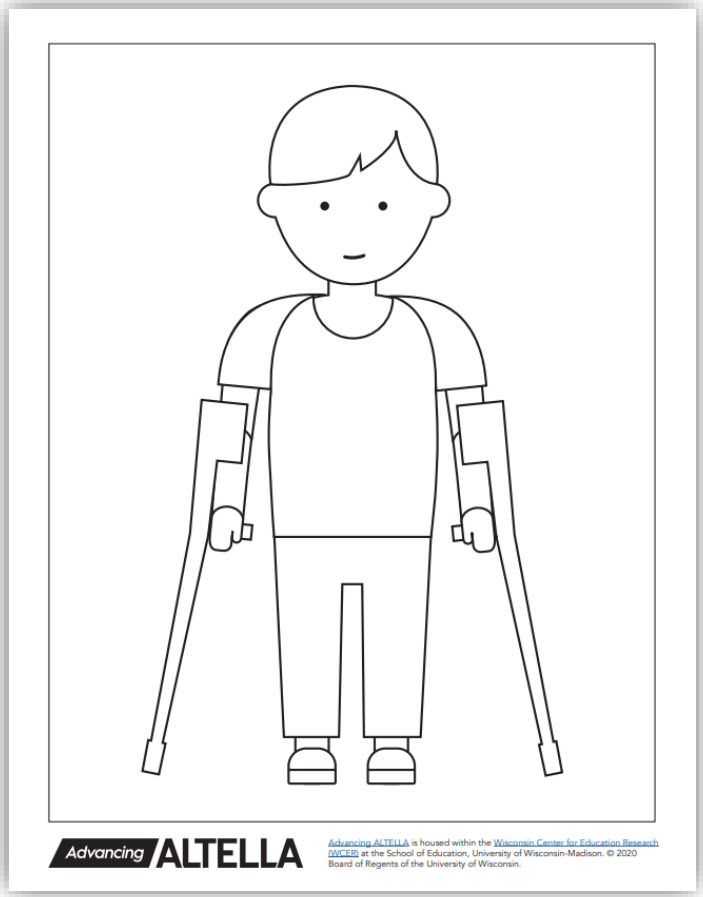
- Advancing ALTELLA word puzzles (pdf)
- Advancing ALTELLA coloring book (pdf)
- Advancing ALTELLA folding paper projects (pdf)
- Advancing ALTELLA photo props (pdf)

Other Advancing ALTELLA Resources

- Q&As with Advancing ALTELLA Experts
  - Sheri Wells-Jensen: Multilingual Learners who are Blind/Visually Impaired (pdf)
  - Stephanie Cawthon: Multilingual Learners who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (pdf)
  - Vitaliy Shyyan: Universal Design and Accessibility (pdf)
- The Advancing ALTELLA flyer (pdf) offers a single-page snapshot of the project. Print or download the flyer to share with colleagues and friends.

https://advancingaltella.org/resources/

Coloring Book Pages



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Resources – Facebook Group

https://www.facebook.com/groups/successformllswithdisabilities/

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