



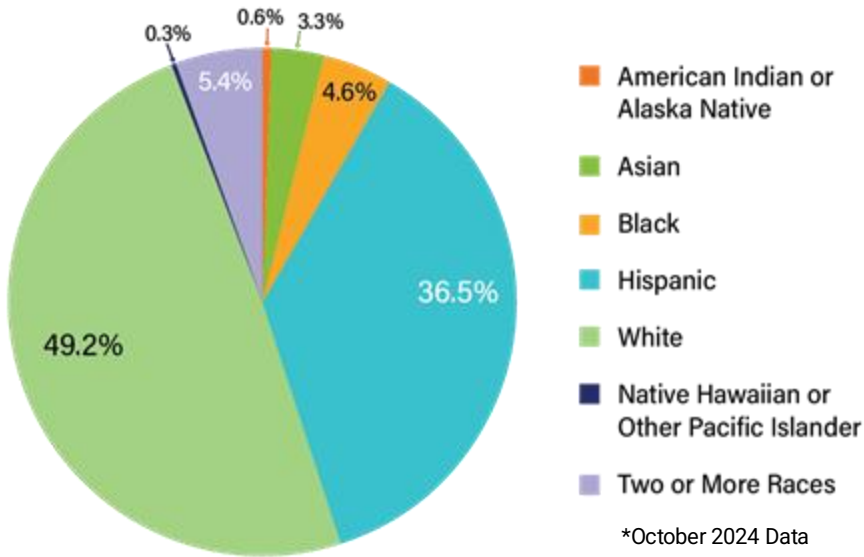
Multilingual Learners and Reading Assessment

Offices of Special Education, Elementary Literacy and School Readiness, and the Assessment Division



Our schools, students, and educators

Student Demographics*



*October 2024 Data

Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch:

394,765 (~44%)

Students with Individualized Education Programs:

117,616 (~13%)

Multilingual Learners*:

105,362 (~12%)

McKinney Vento:

14,498 (~2%)

**Includes both Non-English Proficient and Limited English Proficient students*

178
SCHOOL
DISTRICTS

1,927
SCHOOLS

881,065
PUBLIC
SCHOOL
STUDENTS

Theory of Change

Our Vision

To create an equitable educational environment where *all* students and staff in Colorado thrive

Our Role

To improve student outcomes and ensure students and families across Colorado have access to high-quality schools, we will:

> SERVE

Provide actionable support to local educational agencies

> GUIDE

Implement policy and legislation in an effective way

> ELEVATE

Share the experiences of local educational agencies and students

Our Core Values: INTEGRITY | EQUITY | ACCOUNTABILITY | TRUST | SERVICE

Our Priorities:

Increase Student Engagement

Accelerate Student Outcomes

Strengthen the Educator Workforce

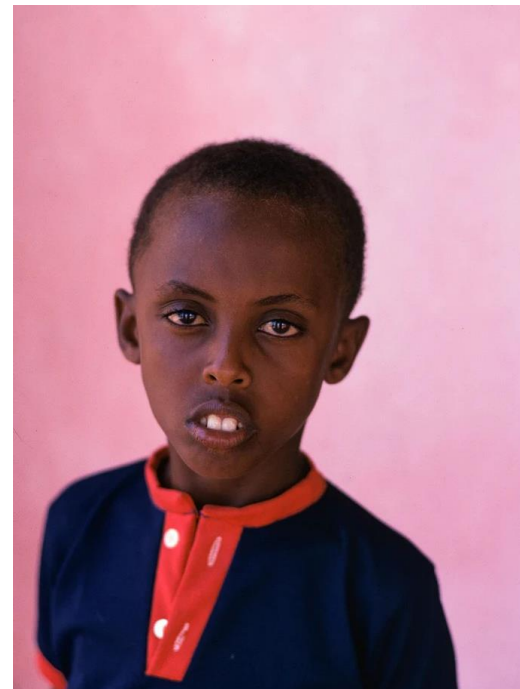
Provide Operational Excellence

Multilingual Learners and Reading Assessment Outcomes

1. Appropriate and Accurate Interpretation of Assessment Data is Key
2. Components of the Body of Evidence to Make Informed Instructional Decisions for MLs who Struggle with Reading
3. Monolingual Assessment Instruments, On Their Own, Can't Definitively Identify The Characteristics of Dyslexia in Multilingual Learners

Abdi

Abdi is a bright and curious second grader who arrived from Somalia, entering school halfway through kindergarten with no prior exposure to English. At home, he speaks Somali with his family, and while he eagerly participates in classroom activities, he struggles to make sense of the words on the page. During reading time, Abdi often looks to his peers for cues, hesitates over letters and sounds, and grows quiet when asked to read aloud. His teacher notices his strong oral storytelling skills in his home language and his excitement for learning but also sees how being new to using English makes reading in English especially challenging at this early stage.



Deepening our Understanding of Multilingual Learners



Race

Ethnicity

National
Origin

Language other than
"Standard" American English

Sequential

Simultaneous

Vernacular / Dialect

Experiences
Understandings
Ways of knowing
Hopes
Dreams
Aspirations
Opportunities for Deeper
Learning

Circumstantial

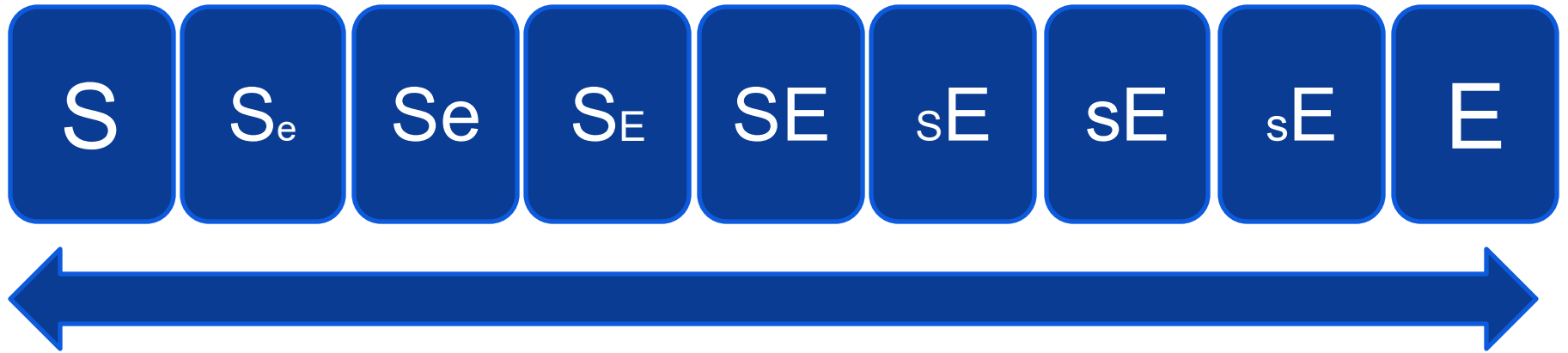
Elective

Grosjean, François 2013



The Bilingual Continuum

S = Spanish E= English



Valdés & Figueroa, 1994

Translanguaging

Expressive

Receptive

Socio-cultural

Code Switching

Translating

Circumlocution

Creating

Language Borrowing

Approximating

Generalize

Garcia & Li, 2018

Language Instruction Educational Programming

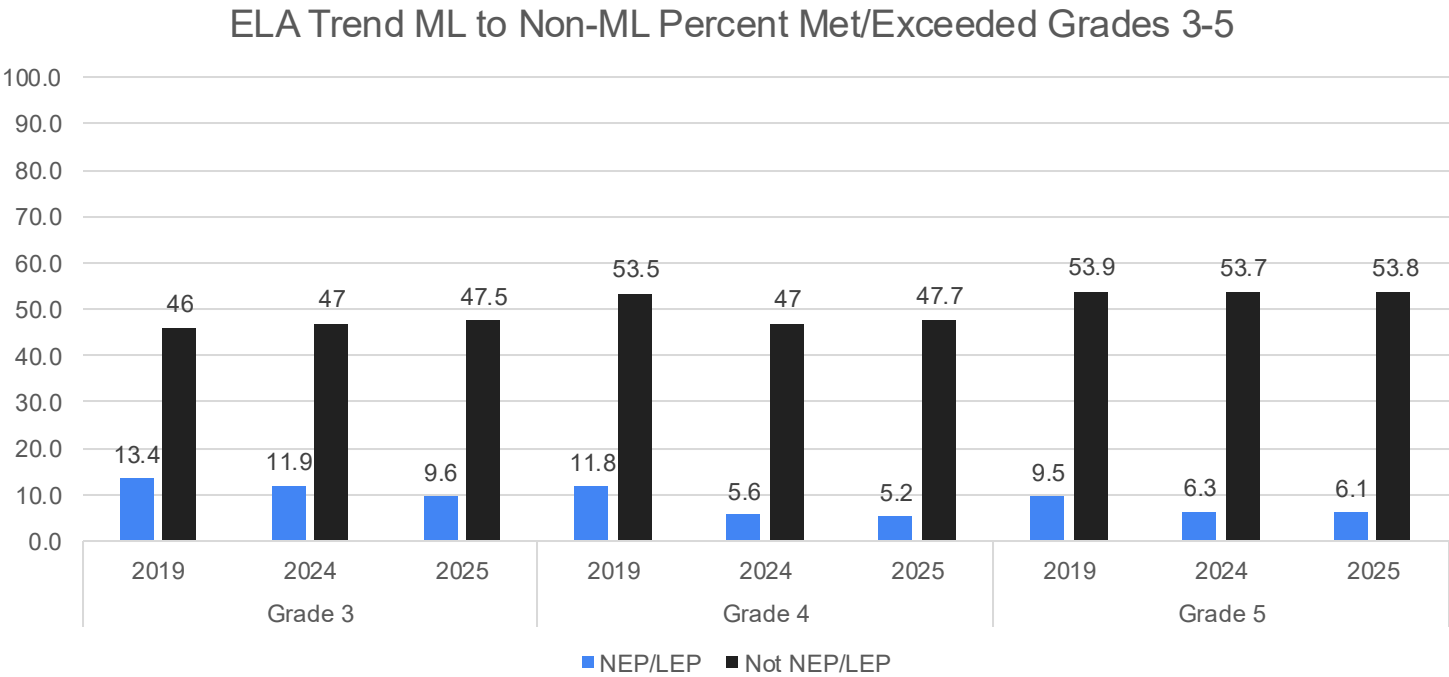
Are we prepared to address the unique learning needs of MLs?

About one-half of teachers serving MLs reported feeling not at all or only somewhat prepared to teach MLs.

*9,000 teachers and principals surveyed nationally

RAND Corp., 2024

CMAS ELA ML Comparison Grades 3-5



Rethinking the Achievement 'Gap'

Critical Interpretation Needed

Teachers and teacher educators must be cautious when interpreting high-stakes test results.

Fairness & Validity

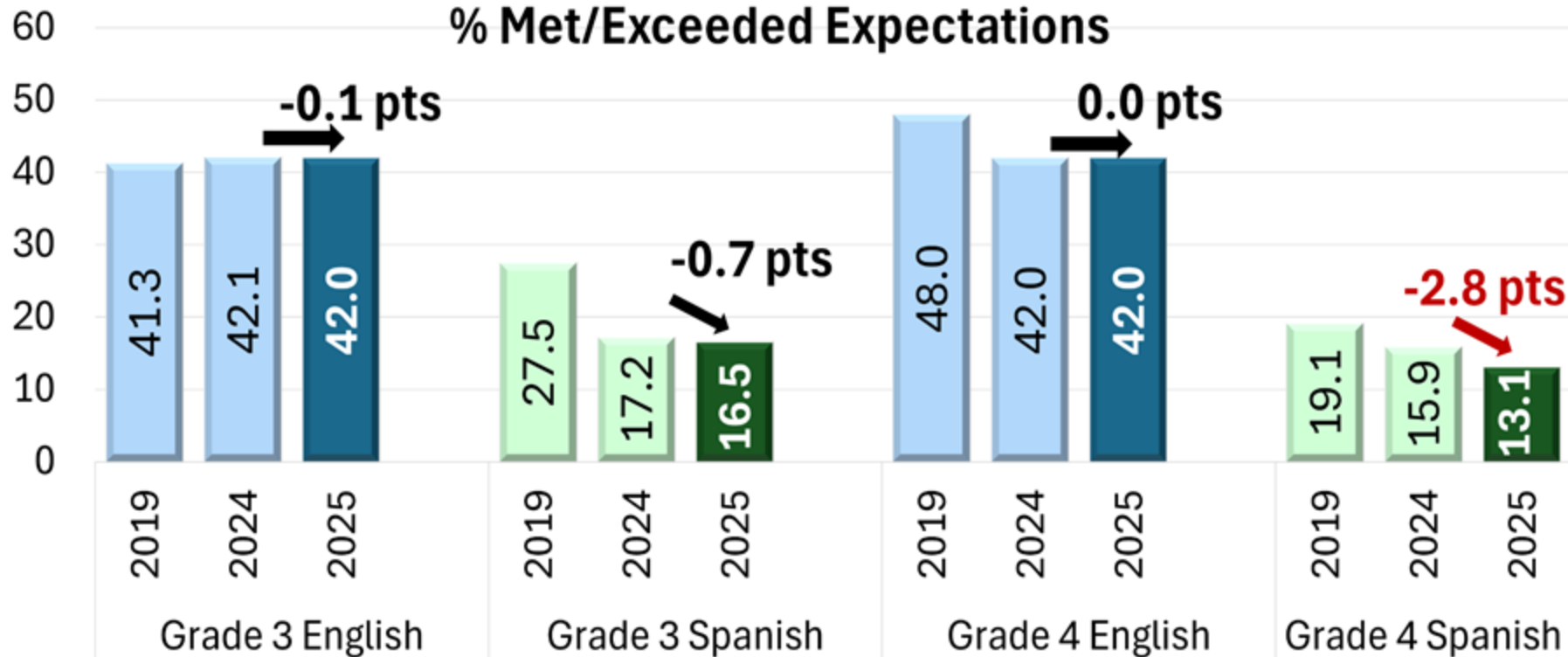
Tests should account for subgroups, including multilingual learners, in normative design and interpretation.

Escamilla, 2005

Sireci & Faulkner-Bond, 2015

CMAS ELA and CSLA

% Met/Exceeded Expectations

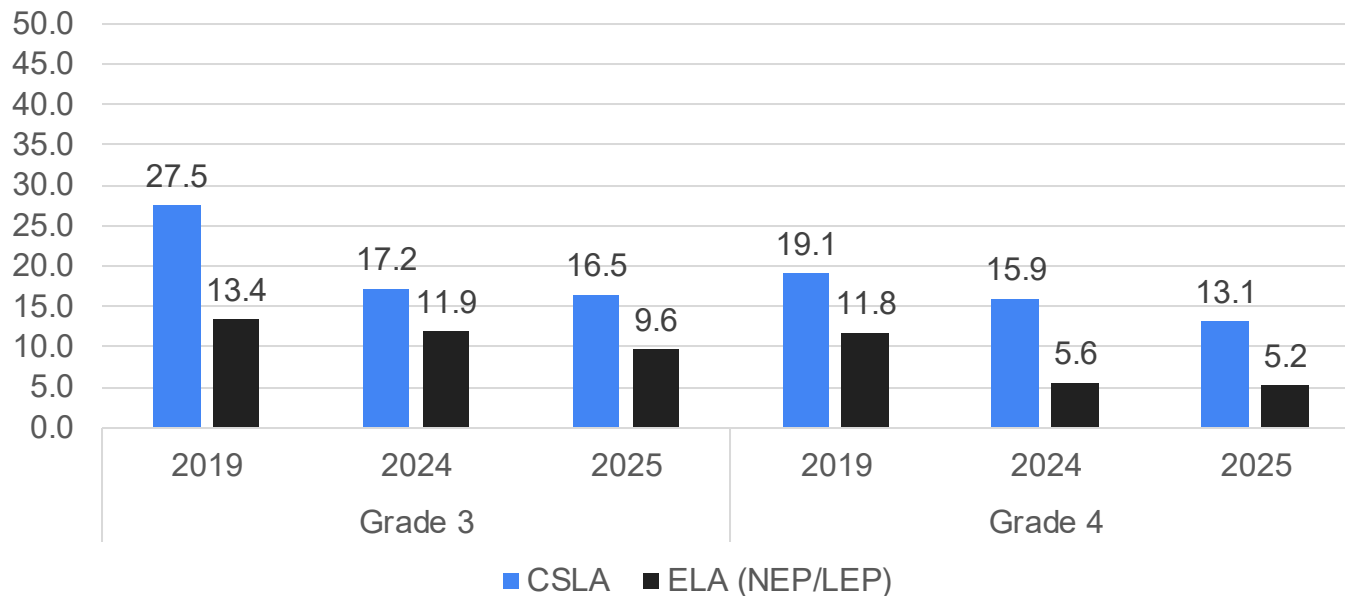


Data retrieved from the August 21, 2025 State Level CMAS and PSAT/SAT Achievement and Academic Growth Results presentation to the State Board.



What story do these data tell?

CSLA compared to ELA NEP/LEP



Data retrieved from [CMAS - Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies Data and Results webpage](#).



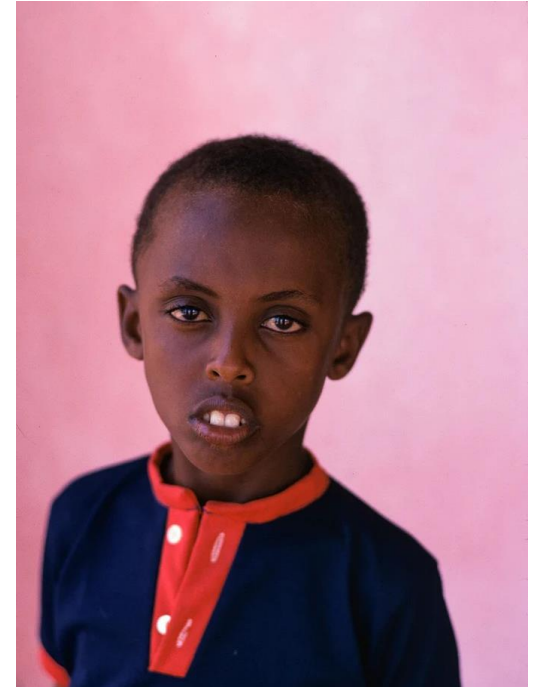


Meeting Proficiency



Abdi is Identified with Characteristics of Dyslexia

Abdi's teacher is concerned based on his performance on the English Dyslexia Screener. She began to see him more frequently in a small group and focused on the areas as indicated by the assessment product which she follows with fidelity as instructed. She committed to a six-week cycle and saw no skill growth. Not knowing what to do, and with no access to a reading interventionist, she shared the heartbreaking news with Abdi's family and decided to make a referral for a special education evaluation to determine if Abdi is eligible under the Specific Learning Disability category.

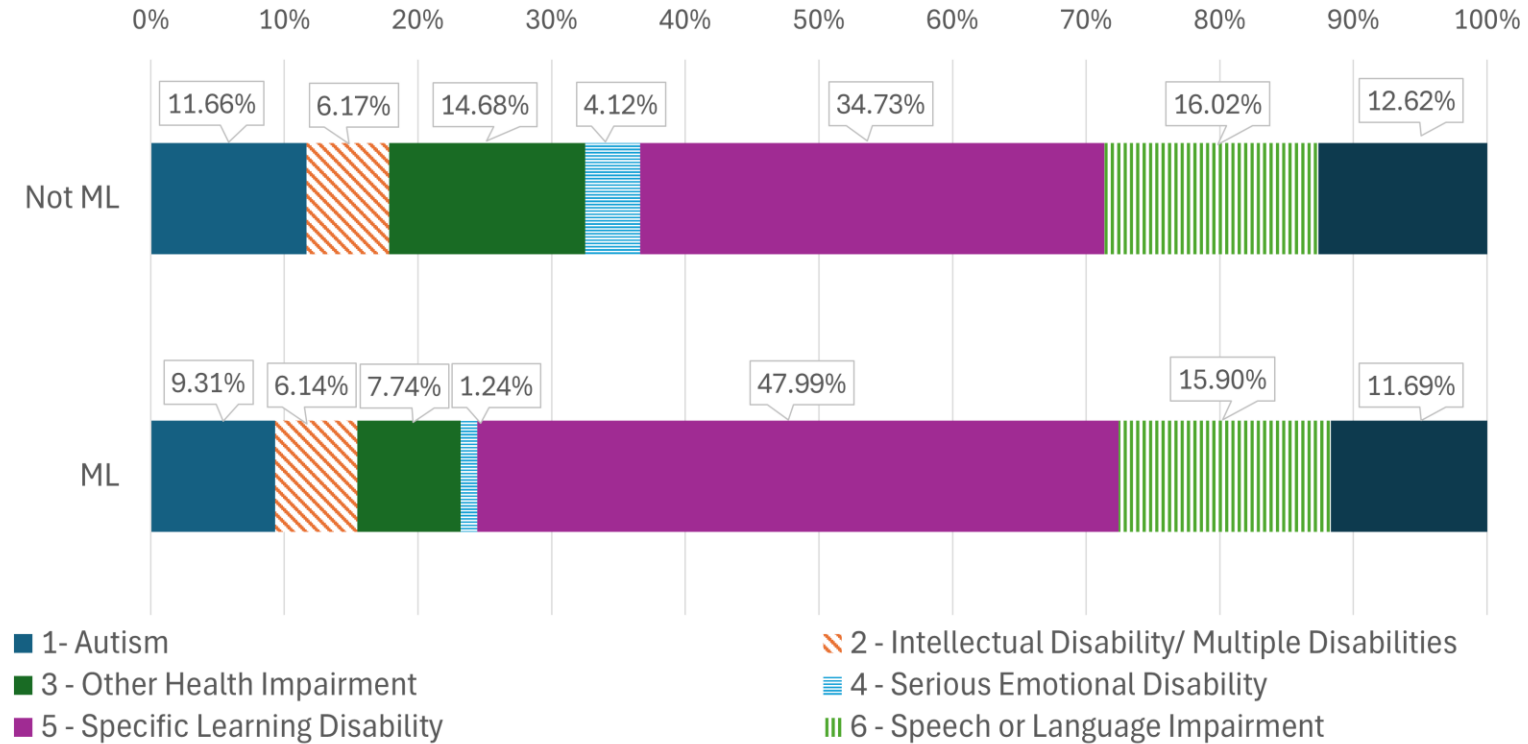


Evaluation of Multilingual Learners (MLs) Suspected of Disabilities

IDEA [34 CFR § 300.304](#) – Key Requirements

- **Comprehensive & Nondiscriminatory**
 - Use multiple tools & strategies (multimodal and multidisciplinary);
 - no single test as sole criterion
 - Assessments must be valid, reliable, and culturally & linguistically appropriate
- **Language & Access**
 - Conduct evaluations in the child's native language or mode of communication, unless not feasible
 - Consider English language proficiency in evaluation, IEP development, and services
 - Do not identify disability due to limited English proficiency or lack of appropriate instruction (Exclusionary Clause)
- **Procedural Safeguards**
 - Child Find: identify, locate, and evaluate all students without delay
 - Administer assessments by trained, knowledgeable personnel in line with test protocols
- **Dual Identification**
 - MLs with disabilities must receive both LIEP (Language Instruction Educational Program) and IEP services
 - Provide language access for families with limited English proficiency (CRA, HB 23-1263)

2024-25 ML/Non-ML by Disability (All ages)



Data retrieved from CDE, Office of Special Education, 2024 December Count.

Challenges in Identifying Reading Disabilities in Multilingual Learners

- **Language Acquisition vs. Disability**
 - Normal Multilingual processes (limited vocabulary in each code, code-switching, slower processing) can resemble dyslexia.
- **Instructional Factors**
 - Gaps from mobility, tracking, or weak literacy and language instruction can mimic reading difficulties.
- **Language-Specific Knowledge**
 - MLs may have strong literacy skills in the home language not yet evident in English.
 - Monolingual assessments risk underestimating true abilities.

(Goodrich & Lonigan, 2018)

(Klingner & Eppolito, 2014)

(Umansky, 2016)

Critical Questions to Ask When an ML Experience Academic Challenges

- How long has a student received instruction in a given language?
- What Language Instruction Educational Program model have they received?
 - What is the efficacy of instruction and programming?
 - How do all teachers provide the child access to content and support English language development?
- How closely does the child's native language relate to English?
- What's the language of instruction?
- What is the child's English language proficiency?
- How does the child's performance compare to their Like-Peers?
- How does the school engage MLs in discourse making cross-linguistic connections?



Body of Evidence

Reading Assessment Challenges for Multilingual Learners

- **Systemic Issue:** Most reading screeners and diagnostics are normed on monolingual populations.
- **Monoglossic Standards:** Many assessments measure MLs against monolingual norms, ignoring multilingual development.
- **Underestimation of Abilities:** Assessments often misrepresent biliteracy skills, leading to inaccurate identification.
- **Misidentification Risk:** English-only assessments can over- or under-identify MLs as struggling readers.
- **Language Matters:** Students may appear “at risk” in English but show strong skills when assessed in their home language.

García, & Li, 2014

Valdés, 2001

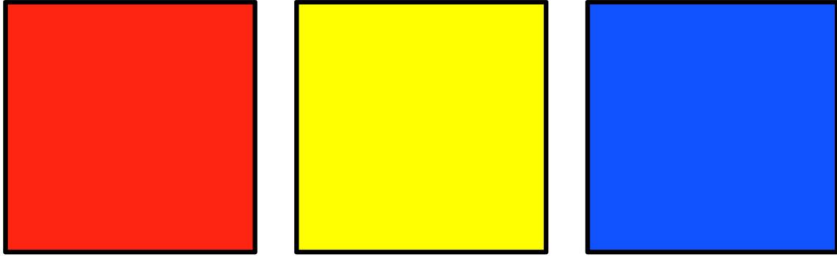
National Academies of Sciences,
Engineering, and Medicine, 2017

(Samson & Lesaux, 2009)

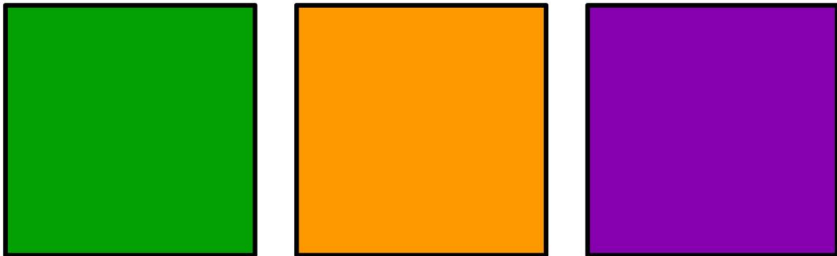
Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021

Conceptual Scoring Example with Juan

PRIMARY COLORS



SECONDARY COLORS



Conceptual Scoring Definition

- “crediting a student for each concept they know regardless of which language they use for the label. For example, whether a child knows “bird” (English) or “pájaro” (Spanish), they earn credit for understanding that concept”

Goodrich &
Lonigan, 2018

Example of the Pitfalls of Monoglossic testing



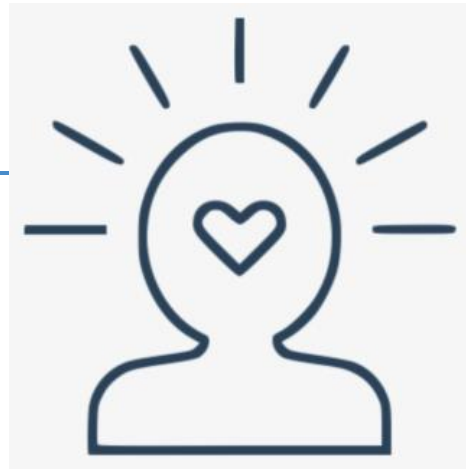
1	3	8	7	2	8	7	2	1	3
2	1	7	8	3	1	2	8	3	7
3	2	8	1	7	3	8	7	1	2
8	1	7	2	3	7	2	1	8	3
3	8	2	1	7	2	3	8	7	1
7	3	8	2	1	3	8	7	1	2
2	1	7	8	3	7	1	8	2	3
7	3	8	2	1	3	2	7	1	8

Kishchak, Ewert, Halczak, Kleka, & Szczerbiński,
2024

Rhinehart & Gotlieb, 2023

Pause and Reflect

- What information does conceptual scoring provide that a monolingual norm-referenced assessment wouldn't?
- How might conceptual scoring impact test validity and reliability?



Dynamic Assessment Process



Test

Administer formal assessment

Identify key concerns

Consider cultural and linguistic factors

Analyze the task

Develop a hypothesis



Teach (MLE)

Devise brief lesson(s) to address concerns

Utilize best practices for ELs

Fade out prompting and support



Retest

Administer formal assessment



Report

Compare pre and posttest results

Describe:

Teacher effort

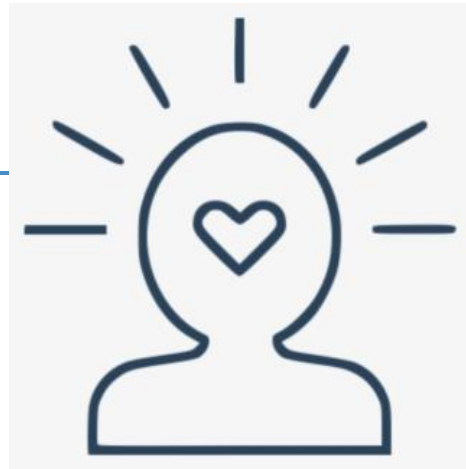
Time

Amount of prompting and support

Student Modifiability

Pause and Reflect

- How is Language Proficiency accounted for when determining reading risk or characteristics of dyslexia for MLs in your context?



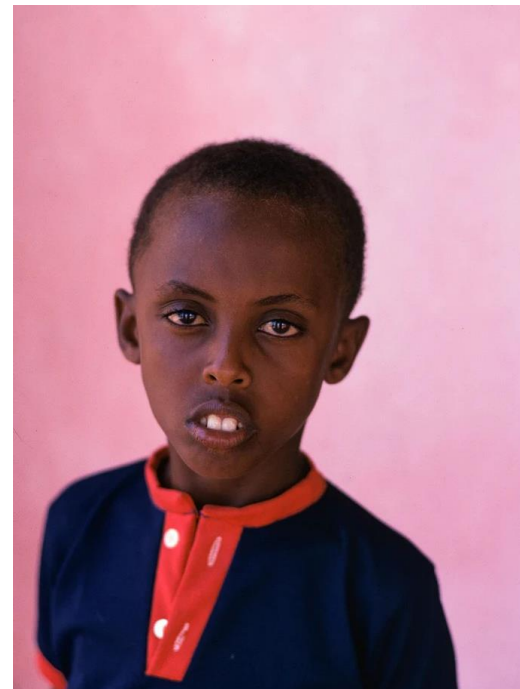
Like-Peer Comparative Data

- Without comparing MLs to peers of similar language exposure and background, schools risk misinterpreting achievement gaps as disability.

(Umansky & Reardon, 2014)

Abdi Out-Performed His Like-Peers

The Special Education Team including the English Language Development Coordinator was concerned that Abdi may not be exhibiting characteristics of Dyslexia. They had been monitoring the district's Universal Screening data and noticed a peculiar trend: 55% of MLs screened were found to have possible characteristics of dyslexia. They concluded that the educational challenges that Abdi was facing were in fact due to a Language Instruction Educational Program that was ineffective for the majority of its MLs. They decided to hire more ELD teachers, and to train classroom teachers on how to develop oral language and oracy skills. Abdi continued to receive intervention and increased targeted English Language Development instruction.



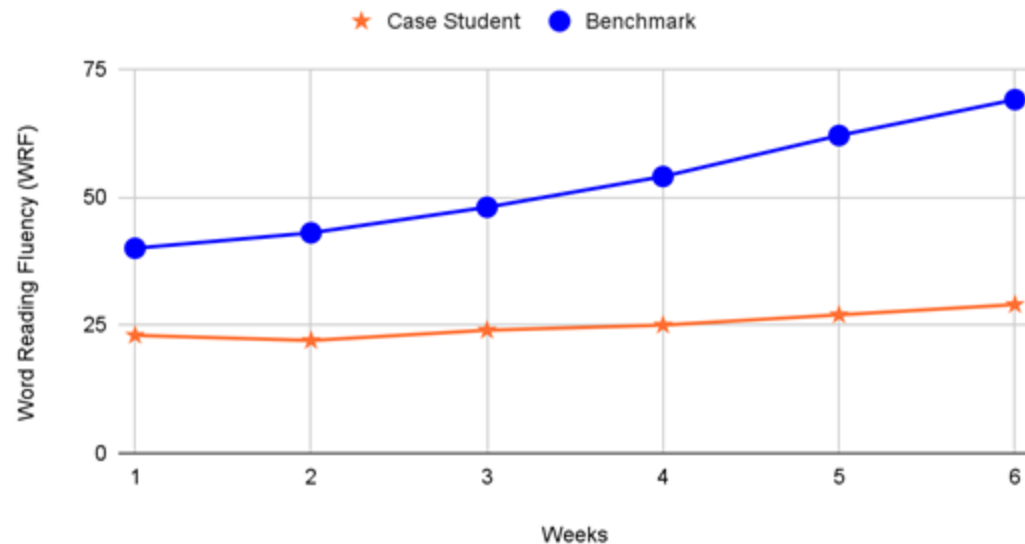


Using Like-Peer Comparison

Benchmark Comparison

- What does this graph tell us?
- What doesn't it tell us?

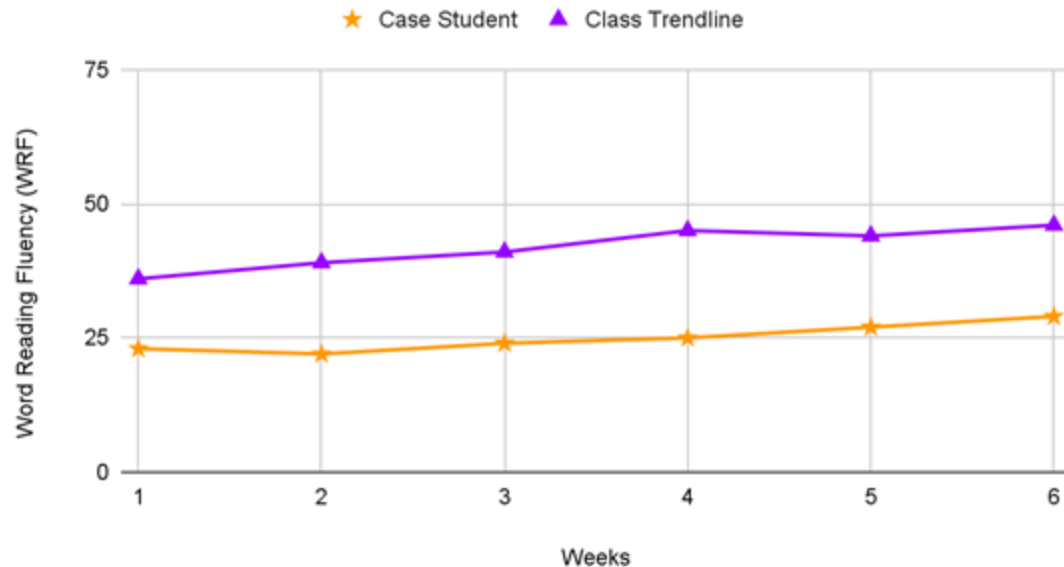
Case Student and Benchmark



Class Trendline Comparison

- What does this graph tell us?
- What doesn't it tell us?

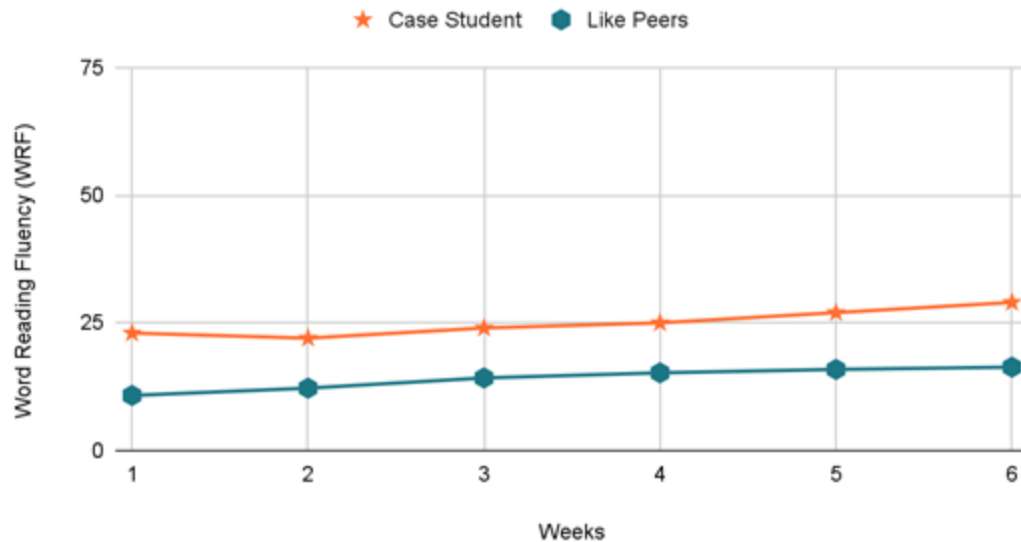
Case Student and Class Trendline



Like-Peer Comparison

- What does this graph tell us?
- What doesn't it tell us?

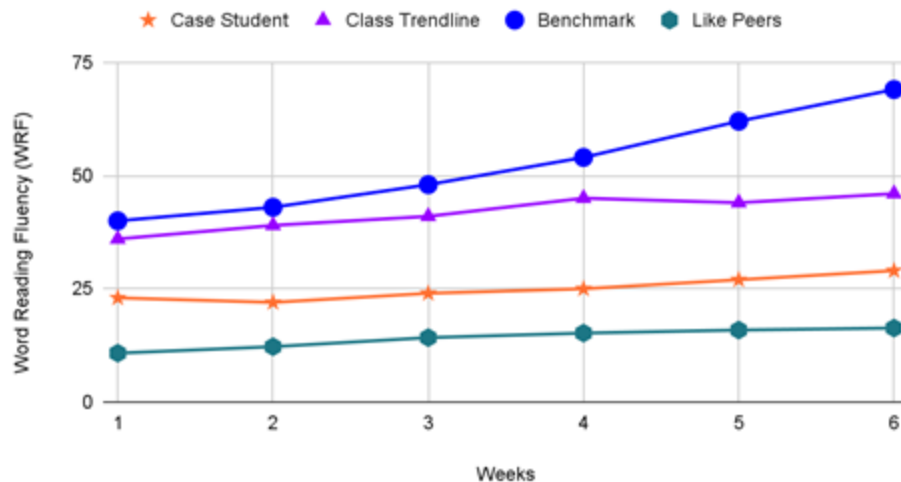
Case Student and Like Peers



Comparative Data

- Using the like-peer comparison, what did we learn?

Case Student, Class Trendline, Benchmark, and Like Peers

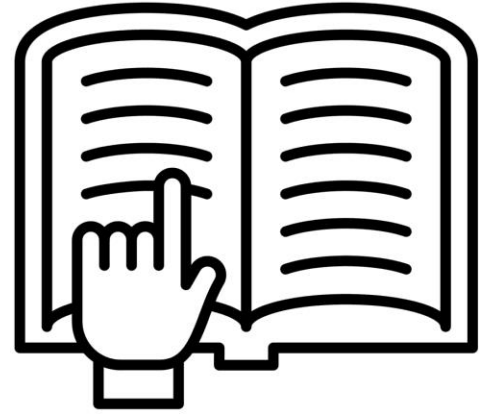


Like-Peer Comparative Data Impact

- English Language proficiency levels impact academic achievement
- Norming groups may not represent the same demographics
- Similar circumstances among students yield more relevant normative data

Take 2 Minutes to Read On Your Own

- International Dyslexia Association's Brief
 - Which of the 6 points in the article resonates most with you today?





Wrap Up

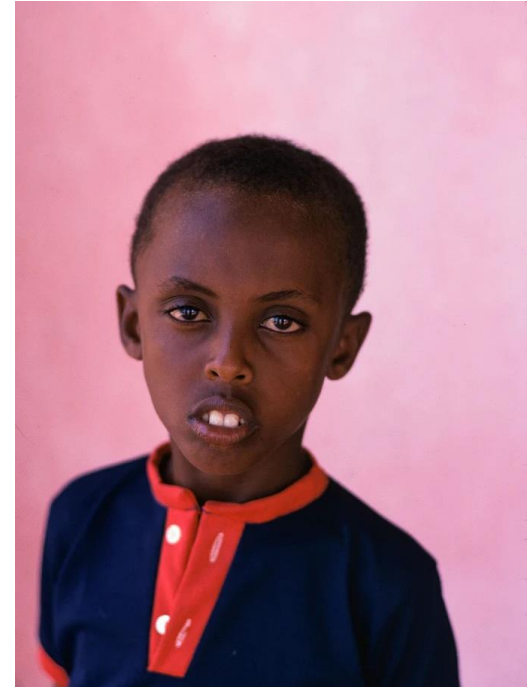
Remember Abdi

Assessment data tells us various stories.

Sometimes it highlights systemic inefficacies.

Examining larger trends in local normative data can be a powerful way to identify language learners who are at risk for reading deficiencies and disabilities.

A single monolingual assessment often can't identify the root cause of the challenges a child experiences especially if they are Multilingual.



Take Away 1



- Appropriate and Accurate Interpretation of Assessment Data is Key
 - Who is included in the normative samples?
 - Who is not?
 - What are the language backgrounds of norm group participants?
 - What degree of proficiency in English or another language do they have?
 - What geographic region where norm group participants from?

Take Away 2



- Components of the Body of Evidence are necessary to Make Informed Instructional Decisions for MLs who Struggle with Reading
 - Like Peer Comparative Data
 - Conceptual Scoring
 - Dynamic Assessment
 - Multilingual Assessment
 - Family Interviews



- Monolingual Assessment Instruments, On Their Own, Can't Definitively Identify The Characteristics of Dyslexia in Multilingual Learners.
 - Variability of Language proficiency
 - Duration of formal instruction in a given language
 - Efficacy of program models
 - Unfair comparison



Reference Section

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Resource Section

Resources

- [CDE's Multilingual Learners Identified with or Suspected of Having Educational Disabilities Webpage](#)
- [CDE's Multilingual Learner Guidance and Resources](#)
- [CDE's ELD Guidebook](#)
- [IDA's English Learners and Dyslexia](#)
- [IDA's Diverse Vulnerable Learners with Reading Disabilities: A Call to Action](#)