# WIDA
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

# Tell Us About Your Child Survey
## User Guide

# Contents

# Overview

## About the Tell Us About Your Child Survey (TUAYCS)

Multilingual learners and families bring strengths and assets to the school community.  It is important for schools to establish relationships with newcomer families early in the enrollment process and to understand their experiences and unique perspectives regarding their children's education. The TUAYCS is a short questionnaire for parents or guardians and is specifically designed for students who are potential English learners (ELs), have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and have the most significant cognitive disabilities. Because the federal government does not define "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities," each state establishes its own eligibility criteria. WIDA defines English learners with significant cognitive disabilities as:

> 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 et al., 2018, p. 2)

The TUAYCS is an optional tool that states can recommend to districts and can help schools gather additional family information to support students with significant cognitive disabilities. This tool facilitates the collection of valuable family insights regarding a child's communication in both their home language and English. The TUAYCS inquires further into the intersection of language, communication, and disabilities. The data collected from this tool can help guide decisions about instructional supports and accommodations. Furthermore, engaging families about home communication methods builds strong partnerships, providing educators with crucial insights into student motivation, effective strategies, and meaningful learning extensions. By actively seeking and valuing parental perspectives, schools foster trust and collaboration, leading to increased family involvement and improved educational outcomes.

# Summary Description of the Tell Us About Your Child Survey

The TUAYCS is an eight-item survey designed to be completed by parents or guardians of students who have already met the following criteria:

- Have an IEP
- Are identified as having a significant cognitive disability
- Are determined to be potential ELs through a home language survey

The survey focuses on the student's use of their home language, use of English, and their communication abilities. This survey is designed to assist educators in differentiating between language and communication, recognizing that each student has unique communication needs. By understanding how a student communicates at home, teachers can effectively personalize instructional strategies, accommodations, and assistive technologies to support student success.

# Administration of the Survey

## Scheduling and Timing

The TUAYCS can be administered at any time; however, education teams may find it helpful for instructional planning if it is completed within the first month of enrollment. We strongly recommend that the survey be administered in a face-to-face setting, rather than an electronic or paper delivery, and that the school provides interpreters as necessary. Allow for 30–40 minutes for the completion of the survey and follow-up conversation with the parent or guardian.

## Setting and Participants

The TUAYCS can be administered in a variety of settings, including in the family's home, at a centralized intake center, at an open house, or during an individually scheduled meeting time. Be sure to find a quiet, accessible location where the family feels comfortable. Assure the family that this survey is used only to determine appropriate educational services and is not used for determining legal status or for immigration purposes. The English language development specialist and the special education teacher should both be present for the administration of the survey; however, if this is not possible, they should work together beforehand to review the survey and discuss classroom observations (if administered after the beginning of the school year).

## Administering the Survey

This section outlines the steps that should be taken when administering the TUAYCS and provides context for each survey question. The full TUAYCS can be found in Appendix A; be sure to have extra copies on hand if needed. Additionally, WIDA provides a sample parent letter in English in Appendix B.

Read the first page of the survey with parents to help them understand the purpose of the survey and understand how the information may or may not be used. Questions 1 through 4 help education teams consider the student's modes of communication and foundational communication skills.

**Question 1: There are many ways in which children communicate. Please check all the ways that apply to your child.**

The first question describes a variety of ways that students communicate and asks parents to check all the ways that apply to their child. It includes inclusive communication modes such as body movements, facial expressions, and pointing. It also includes a list of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices such as speech-generating devices or picture-based systems. The TUAYCS includes a one-page appendix with images of AAC devices that can help parents answer Question 1 in the survey. Knowing the communication methods used at home can help education teams build on what the student can do. Home communication practices are often deeply tied to cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Understanding these practices can help teachers design culturally responsive lessons that honor the student's identity, boosting confidence and engagement.

**Question 2: Please check each of the skills below that your child can do with prompting and/or support.**

The second question asks parents to report on learning-to-learn skills that their child can demonstrate with prompting and support, such as paying attention to instructions and understanding that symbols or pictures can represent words or concepts. Learning-to-learn skills like these are foundational for literacy and critical thinking. Parents' observations of how their child develops these understandings can guide educators in providing appropriate scaffolding and opportunities for reflection.

**Question 3: Does your child most often respond in English when someone communicates with them?**

The third question specifically asks if the student most often responds in English when someone communicates with them. The phrase "most often" is designed to qualitatively gauge whether the student predominately uses English, or if they are an emerging English language learner. Parents observe their children in a variety of settings outside of school, and may be able to provide a more holistic view on their child's abilities.

**Question 4: Does your child understand when someone communicates with them in English?**

The fourth question asks if the student understands when someone communicates with them in English. Even though a student may not be able to communicate in English (depending upon their communication needs), they may still understand and respond to English. Educators can create instructional strategies that support the development of achievable language goals for the student, along with structured social interactions that foster language acquisition, academic growth, and social engagement.

Questions 5 through 8 help education teams consider the cognitive abilities versus language and communication abilities of the student. Without a deeper understanding of this distinction, the student's English language development needs may be easily overlooked. By checking comprehension in the student's home language, educators can distinguish between possible challenges related to language acquisition and those associated with cognitive difficulties.

**Question 5: Can your child follow one-step directions in English? (In other words, when asked to do a task that requires only one action, are they able to complete it?)**

The fifth question asks about the student's abilities to follow one-step directions in English. This question helps to gauge the student's ability to interpret small chunks of information in English.

**Question 6: Can your child follow one-step directions in a language other than English? (For example, "Give me the toy" or "Close the door.")**

The sixth question asks if the student can follow one-step directions in a language other than English. This question helps to gauge the student's ability to interpret small chunks of information in a language other than English. Responses from Questions 5 and 6 can be compared to see if the student's command of English may be a barrier to completing a task.

**Question 7: Can your child follow multi-step directions in English? (For example, "Open the fridge, grab the milk, and pour a glass.")**

The seventh question asks about the student's abilities to follow multi-step directions in English. This question helps to gauge the student's capacity to interpret more complex language in English.

**Questions 8: Can your child follow multi-step directions in a language other than English?**

The eighth question asks if the student can follow multi-step directions in a language other than English. This question helps to gauge the student's ability to interpret more complex language in other languages. Responses from Questions 7 and 8 can be compared to see if the student's command of English may be a barrier to completing a task.

# After Administering the Survey

The results from the TUAYCS can be used to individualize the student's learning plan and facilitate smoother transitions from home to school. By understanding a child's established communication strategies, educators can minimize student frustration by using strategies that are familiar to and effective for them. The survey provides valuable insights into a student's communication methods, language abilities, and individual preferences.

A collaborative approach to educational planning fosters trust with families and ensures that each student's unique linguistic, cultural, and disability-related needs are addressed. By considering the communication methods and preferences identified in the survey, educators can implement appropriate accommodations during instruction and social interactions. These may include using visual supports, providing extended response times, or incorporating AAC devices to support the student's English language development and overall communication skills.

Additional considerations should be carefully examined when gauging the English language proficiency of students with complex communication systems:

1. **Have the student's parents/guardians been included in the identification of both the disability and language-related needs?** Research has shown that parents and guardians have the most significant impact on a child's acquisition of language, even if the child spends less time with them than with other caregivers. Parents provide critical insights into the consistency of their child's behavior and communication at home that can be used to inform educational experiences.

2. **Does the student have an established effective mode of communication?** A critical aspect of inclusion in home, school, and community is the ability to effectively communicate with others. IDEA and Title II of the ADA address the obligation of all public schools to meet the communication needs of students.

3. **Does the IEP education team have access to prior information on the student's communication and language (e.g., classwork, homework, observations of expressive, receptive, written, and pragmatic language)?** This information may be helpful, in addition to the TUAYCS, when considering the language and communication needs of the student.

4. **Based upon observations and information gathered from the TUAYCS, is the expected student behavior similar when communication (written, spoken, read, or understood) is in English compared to a language other than English?** This information can help determine the potential impact that English language proficiency has on the desired outcomes. Keep in mind the multimodalities in which students with significant cognitive disabilities communicate; for example, the use of an AAC device may be considered the student's voice for both written and spoken communication.

## References

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). University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. https://altella.wceruw.org/pubs/ALTELLA_Brief-01_ Definition_070218.pdf

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Tell Us About Your Child Survey

## Tell Us About Your Child Survey

Today, we would like to learn more about your child and the way they communicate. We will use this information to help us understand how your child's language and communication usage impacts the screening process for English language services.

### What Is the Survey's Purpose?

- The purpose of this survey is to understand your child's language and communication needs in both their home language(s) and English. We anticipate it will take 12 to 15 minutes to complete.

- This survey is designed for students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), have a significant cognitive disability, and are potential English learners (ELs).

### What Does This Survey Include?

This survey includes questions about your child's ability to produce and process communication and language.

### Instructions

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. We will use the information you provide to help us make decisions about your child's English language proficiency screening.

## Survey

1) There are many ways in which children communicate. Please check all the ways that apply to your child.

| Communication approach: How does your child show preference for or reaction to objects, people, activities, etc.? | Use this space to add any additional information about your child's communication you want to share. |
|---|---|
| ❑ Uses body movements or facial expressions | |
| ❑ Uses vocalizations or sounds | |
| ❑ Looks at object, person, or activity | |
| ❑ Uses gestures | |
| ❑ Points or notices an object, person, or activity | |
| ❑ Touches object, person, or activity | |
| ❑ Brings object of interest to someone | |
| ❑ Brings symbol or picture of object, person, or activity to someone | |
| ❑ Uses verbal speech (unclear words— for example, "ba" for "ball") | |
| ❑ Uses verbal speech (clear words, easy to understand what your child is describing) | |
| ❑ Uses sign (for example, American Sign Language, Mexican Sign Language, Chinese Sign Language, Protactile, Signed Exact English, simple sign language, other sign language, etc.) | |

| Communication approach:<br>How does your child show preference for or reaction to objects, people, activities, etc.? | Use this space to add any additional information about your child's communication you want to share. |
|---|---|
| Uses an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system<br><br>❏ Speech-generating device<br>❏ Communication app on a phone or tablet<br>❏ Picture-based system<br>❏ Eye gaze/gaze tracking (any system or technology that allows your child to interact using their eye movements)<br>❏ Other (please explain): _____ | |
| ❏ Writes using a writing tool (pen, keyboard, tablet, brailler, or another tool). Writing could include drawings, letters, words, etc. | |
| ❏ Other (please explain): _____ | |

2) Please check each of the skills below that your child can do with prompting and/or support.

| My child can | Use this space to add any additional information about your child you want to share. |
|---|---|
| ❏ Understand that symbols or pictures represent words or concepts. | |
| ❏ Hear and understand information presented through spoken language or an AAC device. | |
| ❏ Remember information presented by a communication partner or AAC device in the order in which it was presented. | |
| ❏ Pay attention to instructions. | |
| ❏ Understand social cues such as turn-taking and responding when being addressed. | |

3) Does your child most often respond in English when someone communicates with them?

❏ Yes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ No (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Sometimes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Not sure

❏ Not applicable

4) Does your child understand when someone communicates with them in English?

❏ Yes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ No (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Sometimes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Not sure

❏ Not applicable

5) Can your child follow one-step directions in English? (In other words, when asked to do a task that requires only one action, are they able to complete it?)

❏ Yes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ No (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Sometimes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Not sure

❏ Not applicable

6) Can your child follow one-step directions in a language other than English? (For example, "Give me the toy" or "Close the door.")

❏ Yes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ No (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Sometimes (please tell us more about this): _____

❏ Not sure

❏ Not applicable

7) Can your child follow multi-step directions in English? (For example, "Open the fridge, grab the milk, and pour a glass.")

❑ Yes (please tell us more about this): _____

❑ No (please tell us more about this): _____

❑ Sometimes (please tell us more about this): _____

❑ Not sure

❑ Not applicable

8) Can your child follow multi-step directions in a language other than English?

❑ Yes (please tell us more about this): _____

❑ No (please tell us more about this): _____

❑ Sometimes (please tell us more about this): _____

❑ Not sure

❑ Not applicable

## Additional Resource—AAC Device Images
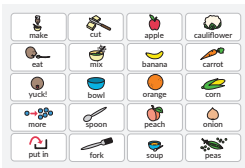
1. Speech-generating device



   Speech-generating devices with keyboards, words, and pictures

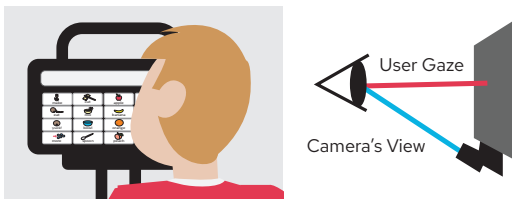2. Communication app on a phone or tablet



   App on tablet that has pictures and symbols for communication

3. Picture-based system



   Communication board with pictures of nouns and verbs

4. Eye gaze/gaze tracking (any technique or technology that allows your child to interact with a person or AAC device using only their eye movements)



   A user looks at a communication tablet with communication picture symbols to select the chosen picture. The camera in the image to the right shows how the device registers eye contact to the symbol selected.

# Appendix B: Parent Letter

Note: This parent letter is available in 16 different languages on the WIDA website.

## Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are writing to invite you to participate in an important survey called the Tell Us About Your Child Survey (TUAYCS). This survey is designed to help us better understand your child's language and communication needs, particularly if your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), has the most significant cognitive disabilities, and is learning English as an additional language.

**Purpose of the Survey**

The TUAYCS aims to gather information about your child's ability to communicate in both their home language(s) and English.

**What to Expect**

- The survey consists of eight questions about your child's language and communication abilities.
- It should take approximately 12-15 minutes to complete the survey.
- We will have a follow-up conversation with you after the survey.

**Next Steps**

1. A member of our education team will contact you to schedule a time to complete the survey.
2. The survey will be conducted in person, and we can provide an interpreter if needed.
3. After the survey, we'll have a discussion with you regarding the results and explain any next steps in the process.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary but highly valuable. Your insights as a parent/guardian are crucial in helping us provide the best possible educational experience for your child.

If you have any questions or concerns about the TUAYCS, please don't hesitate to contact [INSERT CONTACT NAME] at [INSET CONTACT INFORMATION].

Thank you for your partnership in supporting your child's education.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR TITLE]
[SCHOOL/DISTRICT NAME]

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