

Proficiency is Not a Prerequisite: Removing Roadblocks and Ensuring Access for Nonspeaking Learners

LISA MIHALICH QUINN

Founder & Executive Director, Reach Every Voice

Co-Founder & Curriculum Creator, Communication for Education

Lisa@ReachEveryVoice.org

FB / Insta: @ReachEveryVoice @CommunicationForEducation



Lisa's Background

First class in public school
Springhill Lake ES -2006



Last class in public school
Forest Knolls ES – March 2020



Still teaching, all over the world
Gaelscoil Lios na nÓg - Dublin, Ireland – September 2023

Lisa's Background



REV Group Photo
December 2019

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Who's here today? What's your role?

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A note on language:

Language evolves

Identity first vs. Person first

- Defer to personal preferences

“The Words We Use”

- Communication First



Why this webinar?



2022 – 2023 Maryland Alternate Assessments Justification for Exceeding the 1% Participation Threshold

This data summary reflects whether each local education agency (LEA) **anticipates** exceeding the 1% threshold for the number of students participating in one or more of the alternate academic assessments and the justification for exceeding the threshold. Justifications are provided for LEAs anticipating exceeding the threshold.

Local School System	Exceeds 1% participation in English Language Arts	Justification for Exceeding 1% Participation Threshold	Exceeds 1% participation in Mathematics	Justification for Exceeding 1% Participation Threshold	Exceeds 1% participation in Science	Justification for Exceeding 1% Participation Threshold
Allegany County	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	ACPS has a small overall student tested population per grade, and it takes only a few students participating in alternate assessment per grade (7 students) to exceed 1%. Currently ACPS exceeds 1% in grades 4, 6 and 11. ACPS has 1.2% of students participating in the alternate assessment in this content area.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	ACPS has a small overall student tested population per grade, and it takes only a few students participating in alternate assessment per grade (7 students) to exceed 1%. Currently ACPS exceeds 1% in grades 4, 6 and 11. ACPS has 1.2% of students participating in the alternate assessment in this content area.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	ACPS has a small overall student tested population per grade, and it takes only a few students participating in alternate assessment per grade (7 students) to exceed 1%. Currently ACPS exceeds 1% in grades 4, 6 and 11. ACPS has 1.1% of students participating in the alternate assessment in this content area.
Anne Arundel County	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p>The LEA anticipates exceeding the 1.0 percent threshold for this assessed content. The anticipated participation rate for the spring 2023 administration is 1.02%.</p> <p>(A) Anne Arundel County has experiences increasing numbers of students with disabilities overall and increasing numbers of eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities (From 7,932 students in 2013 to 10,263 in October 2022 child count).</p> <p>(B) Students with significant cognitive disabilities participate in specially designed instruction within restrictive settings or disability—based programs which may emphasize participation in the alternate education framework and/or reduced opportunities to access the general education curriculum.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p>The LEA anticipates exceeding the 1.0 percent threshold for this assessed content. The anticipated participation rate for the spring 2023 administration is 1.02%.</p> <p>(A) Anne Arundel County has experiences increasing numbers of students with disabilities overall and increasing numbers of eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities (From 7,932 students in 2013 to 10,263 in October 2022 child count).</p> <p>(B) Students with significant cognitive disabilities participate in specially designed instruction within restrictive settings or disability—based programs which may emphasize participation in the alternate education framework and/or reduced opportunities to access the general education curriculum.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	

<https://www.Marylandpublicschools.Org/about//DAAIT/assessment/elaliteracymath/justificationsummarychart1percentparticipation20222023.Pdfdocuments>

What's happening IRL as schools address >1%?

- **Staff development teacher:** "Well, yeah, we got critical staffing for her. But that's just a warm body."
- **Teacher:** "We decided that everyone is just doing PODD because it simplifies things if we're all on the same page. We don't have time to learn multiple setups."
- **School Psychologist:** "See? Inclusion doesn't work."

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What is problematic about these statements? (critical staffing = warm body; everyone is doing PODD; see? inclusion doesn't work)

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“When a student does not have a reliable means of communication, it is difficult to accurately assess their cognitive abilities, and limited formal communication will also result in lower scores on adaptive assessments that may not truly reflect the student’s potential.

Students who do not have a reliable communication system (whether speech, sign, AAC, or a combination) and who have not had appropriate intervention and support to develop communication (including opportunities to learn to use AAC) are not eligible for the alternate assessment because their cognitive abilities cannot be reliably measured.”

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What qualifies as “reliable, symbolic means of communication”?

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“Have you ever had a word or song stuck in your head?

It isn't that you want to look at a new car but you can't stop singing the Cars 4 Kids jingle. You both don't want a new credit card and don't intend to change banks but you can't stop hearing, "What's in YOUR wallet?"

Chances are anyone who heard you humming or decrying the stuckness of the jingle just empathized with your frustration and continued to speak to you as usual.

This is not the case if you are autistic.

My brain and speech are stuck in a continuous loop of repeating scripts from cartoons I watched as a kid. I can't stop my mouth. I'm scripting dumb Thomas the Tank words as I type this.

I am getting rather tired of people hearing my repeated scripts and assuming I don't really understand.”

“The truth is I don't care about trains but I had the bad luck of hearing these catchy shows when my brain was young and malleable.

My speech goes beyond what I think of as unreliable. To me it is reliably annoying.

Until I learned to type my thoughts, the whole world believed my capacity to think and learn was far gone. Now that I can show otherwise my life is becoming more full.

My point is that my collection of sayings and songs has probably kept people from believing I am smart.

Until someone has a way to really communicate, take their scripts in stride and speak to them like they understand everything you say.

There's an excellent chance they do.”

“If a student has had **intensive and appropriate intervention** to support communication development but still has limited or inconsistent formal communication, the team should proceed with the eligibility determination process with caution and consider multiple points of information, including nonverbal cognitive assessments and other indicators of cognitive ability.”

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What qualifies as intensive and appropriate intervention?

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IV. Does the student have a reliable, symbolic means of communication (verbal, sign language, AAC, or some combination)?

Communication is critical for students to be able to demonstrate their learning and capabilities. A student who does not have a reliable means of communication may not be able to demonstrate their cognitive abilities.

The student has not had appropriate opportunities (including instruction and access to assistive technology) to develop a reliable means of communication AND has minimal or inconsistent means of communication.

The student is not eligible for the alternate assessment. It is not possible to reliably assess the cognitive and educational ability of a student who has not had an opportunity to develop communication. Increase communication support and revisit the alternate assessment conversation in the future.

The student has minimal or inconsistent symbolic communication but has had intensive and appropriate instruction designed to develop communication skills.

The student may be eligible for the alternate assessment based on a review of all evidence. Non-verbal cognitive assessments should be considered, and caution applied when interpreting all results.

The student has a reliable, symbolic means of communication that can be readily understood by others.

Communication does not appear to be the primary cause of the student's academic challenges.



Stop here. The student is not eligible for alternate assessments.



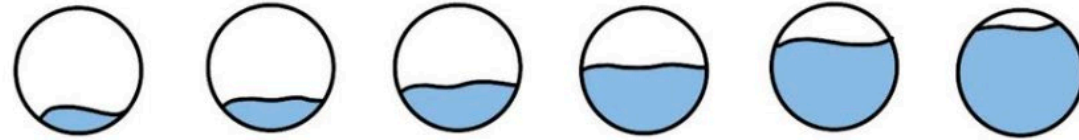
Proceed with extreme caution to the next statement.



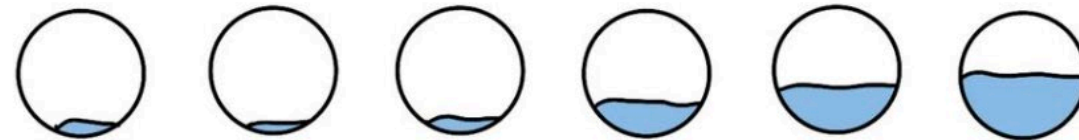
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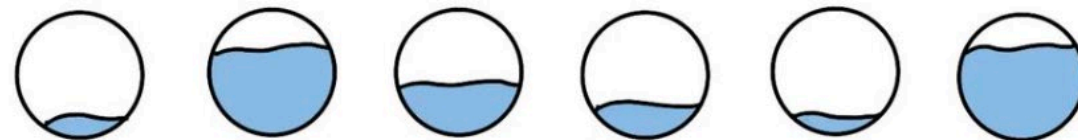
This is progress



This is also progress



And so is this



switch mounted at
knee to control
scanning on device

multiple switches to
control device /
wheelchair functions

partner to position
keyboard / device

partner assisted
scanning (PAS)

direct select on touchscreen

eye-gaze device on
wheelchair mount



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How did you **feel** when someone made an assumption about you that was incorrect?

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Plants



drink



water

through their



roots

like



we



drink

from

from _____.



a bucket



a straw



all



plants

need



water?

Do



yes



no

presuming competence

≠

presuming knowledge

let's get real

Picture this learner in your mind...

- 9 years old
- diagnosis of nemaline myopathy
- unable to produce speech
- relies on a ventilator / GI tube
- uses a wheelchair
- mobility is limited to small movements of wrists, eyes, and head
- requires constant presence of a trained nurse

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Picture this child's educational setting. What does it look like?

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Included with his peers

Included with his peers

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What supports and adaptations do you picture this child needing?

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Supports & Adaptations

- AAC device / AT support
- adult support, trained in tech needs
- materials management
- programming content into device
- content adapted to allow less written output
- reduced workload due to rate of production with AAC / missed time for medical supports
- on the spot adaptation

But what about the state tests?

Picture this learner in your mind...

- 13 years old
- autistic
- minimal speech, mostly repetitive sounds that are not understood by other students and teachers
- requires assistance in the bathroom, managing materials, completing multi-step tasks
- when dysregulated makes loud "eeeeee, eeeee" noises, sometimes bites his own arm, scratches others, may run from the room

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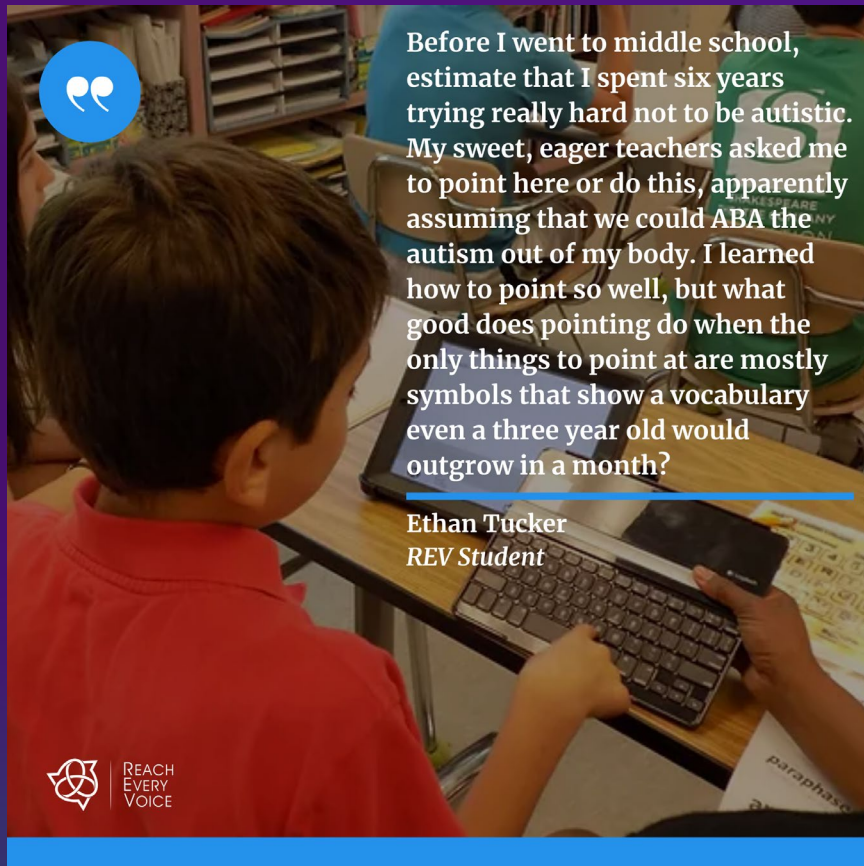


Picture this child's educational setting. What does it look like?

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Included with their peers

Prior to the Pilot Program



- segregated autism classrooms / time in nonpublic settings
- limited access to symbol-based systems – mostly PECS
- no access to general education curriculum
- limited time with same-aged peers
- most instruction is discrete trial training

10 years later...



“

I used to spend every day in a self contained autism classroom and it slowly became torture. The adults who worked with me were so kind but I was treated like a toddler no matter how many years passed. Finally getting access to age appropriate education saved my life.

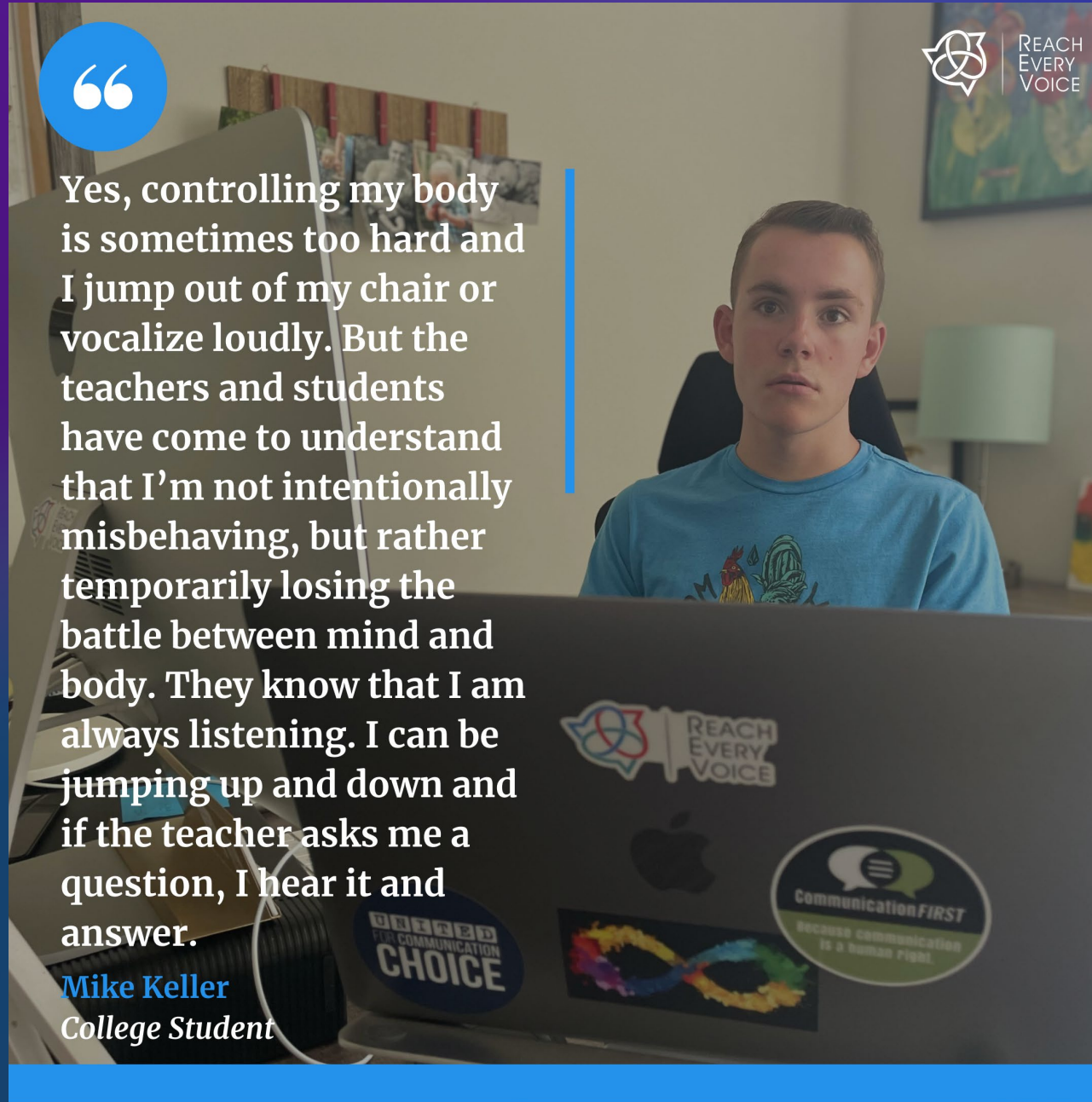
William Assimakopoulos
High School Student

10 years later...

“

Yes, controlling my body is sometimes too hard and I jump out of my chair or vocalize loudly. But the teachers and students have come to understand that I'm not intentionally misbehaving, but rather temporarily losing the battle between mind and body. They know that I am always listening. I can be jumping up and down and if the teacher asks me a question, I hear it and answer.

Mike Keller
College Student



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What supports and adaptations did these students need to be successful?

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Supports & Adaptations – autistic students

- AAC device / AT support
- adult support, trained in tech needs
- materials management
- adult support trained in motor coaching and co-regulation
- content adapted to allow less written output
- reduced workload due to rate of production with AAC / missed time for regulation
- on the spot adaptation

Supports & Adaptations – physically disabled student

- AAC device / AT support
- adult support, trained in tech needs
- materials management
- programming content into device
- content adapted to allow less written output
- reduced workload due to rate of production with AAC / missed time for medical supports
- on the spot adaptation

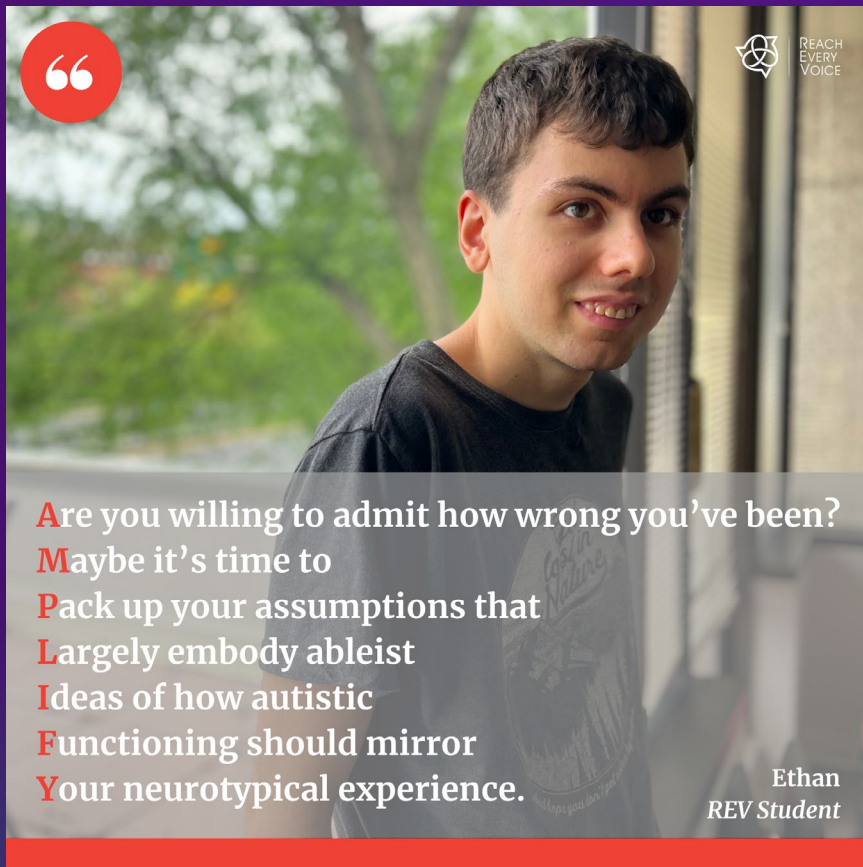
Only 44% of autistic students in Maryland are in general education environments 80% or more of the day

2023-2023 Least Restrictive Environment by Disability

Disability	LRE A		LRE B		LRE C		LRE D + E		LRE F		LRE G		LRE H + I + U + V		Total N
	In General Education 80% or More		In General Education between 40-79%		In General Education less than 40%		Home or Hospital		Public Day		Private Day		Public/Private Residential or Correctional Facilities or Parentally Placed		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Autism	6470	43.58%	1949	13.13%	4526	30.49%	38	0.26%	546	3.68%	1246	8.39%	71	0.48%	14846

SOURCE: MSDE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WORKGROUP DATA, SEPTEMBER 2023

How do we shift our mindset around including students who have significant needs related to AAC use?



- **Culture shift:** it's okay to be a teacher who doesn't know everything
- **Culture shift:** build acceptance for school-based staff to acknowledge they have been wrong
- Cultivating a mindset that ALL students belong. AAC users belong in classrooms with their speaking peers.
- Proficiency with a device is not a prerequisite to inclusion.

What is AAC?

"AAC means all of the ways
that someone communicates
besides talking."

SOURCE: AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION (ASHA) WEBSITE

What is Text-based AAC?

- Writing
- Spelling words by pointing to letters
- Pointing to or selecting written words

1. Text-based choices



2. Limited range of letters



3. Full alphabet display - ABC order



4. Full alphabet display - QWERTY



Why advocate for text-based **multimodal** AAC?

How many ways have you
communicated since you left your
house this morning?

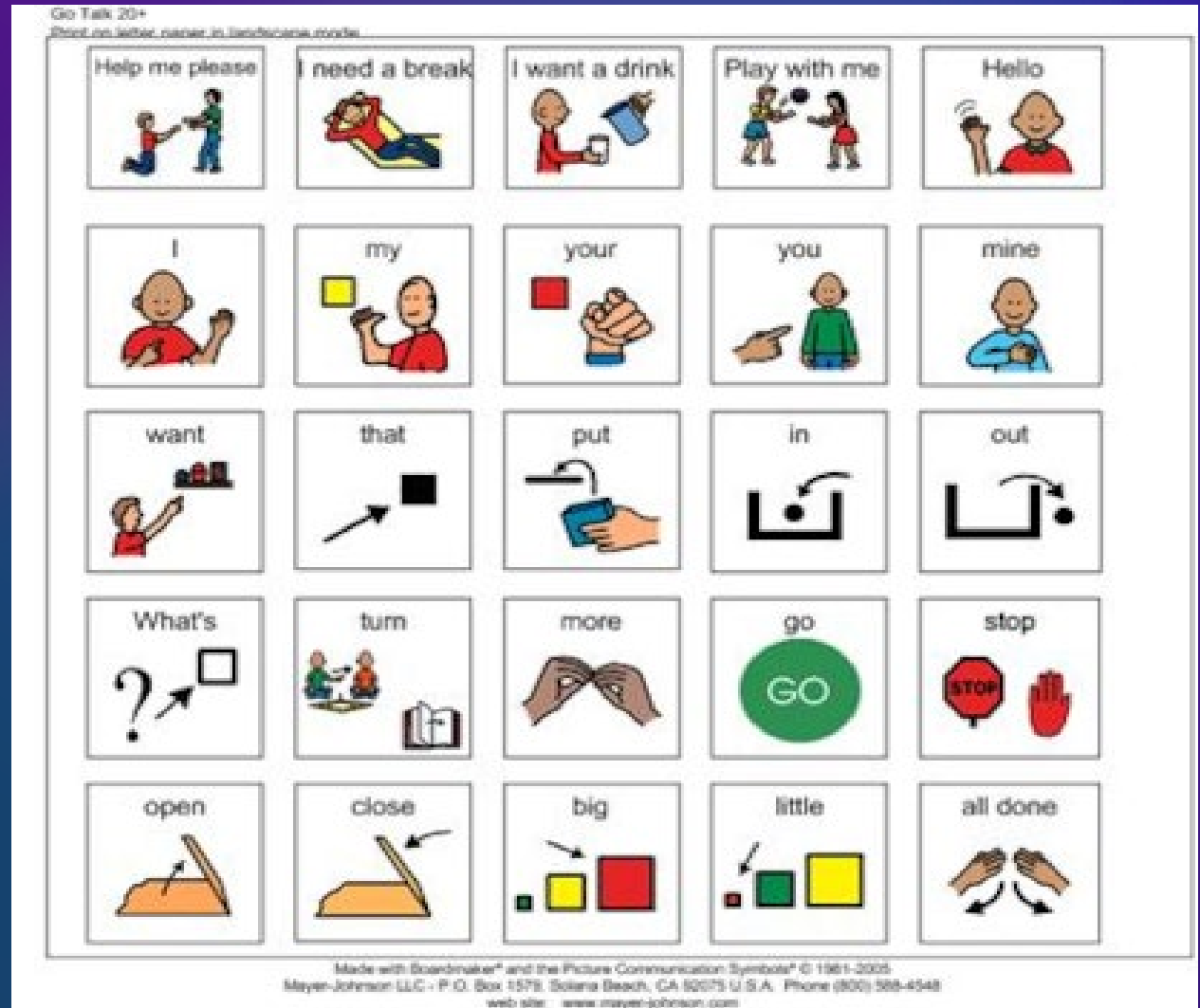
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How have you communicated since you left your house this morning?

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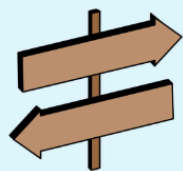
Why advocate for text-based AAC?



Why advocate for text-based **multimodal** AAC?

SOURCE:
COMMUNICATION FOR
EDUCATION YOUTUBE:
EMBRACING
MULTIMODAL
COMMUNICATION:
EMPOWERING
NONSPEAKING AUTISTIC
INDIVIDUALS

It is not either - or



 AssistiveWare

READ MORE 

AAC users can use **both** text-based and symbol-based AAC systems at the same time.

 AssistiveWare

READ MORE 


According to AAC users, there are times when they struggle more with motor control and word finding.

 AssistiveWare

READ MORE 

At those times, they find selecting a familiar symbol **easier** than typing a word.

 AssistiveWare

READ MORE 



I prefer **Proloquo2Go** during moments of particular overwhelm. It's not the pictures that are important to me, it mostly just helps to be able to locate the word rather than think it up on my own.

—
endever*corbin
AAC user



 AssistiveWare

READ MORE 



AssistiveWare

Based in the Netherlands · August 19 · 

Although **#AAC** systems are usually symbol-based or text-based, AAC users often need a combination of both for effective communication.

#AssistiveWare

What supports are needed for students using text-based multimodal communication in inclusive environments?

- understanding regulation / dysregulation
- building a toolkit of regulation strategies
- prompting – consistency and plans for fading
- structured communication practice
- building a relationship between support partner and learner
- understanding sensory-motor differences
- recognizing and respecting agency & autonomy
- **PRESUMING COMPETENCE**

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What will you take away from today's presentation? What sticks in your mind?

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Questions?



Resource Padlet

LISA MIHALICH QUINN

Founder & Executive Director, Reach Every Voice

Co-Founder & Curriculum Creator, Communication for Education

lisa@reacheveryvoice.org

www.ReachEveryVoice.org

www.CommunicationForEducation.com

@ReachEveryVoice @CommunicationForEducation



So many times we act on beliefs regarding assumptions and only cause harm. If we still put all minority students in separate classrooms, people would riot. Why then is it acceptable for the segregation ceded to individuals with disabilities? Why are we second class citizens?

Ethan Tucker
REV Student