English Language Learners with Disabilities in MA: Identification, Instruction, and Challenges

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EDC Learning transforms lives.

Presentation roadmap

Study Methods

Seven Points

- Summary
- Tables/Figures
- Recommendati ons

Conclusion

Research questions

What are the school or district systems in place to *identify disabilities* among ELLs?

What *instructional practices* are in place to ensure the academic success of ELLs with disabilities?

What *challenges* do schools and districts face in assessing and meeting the special needs of ELL students?

Data Collection

Online survey of ELL and Special Education Directors

- Responses from 64% of districts encompassing 94% of ELLs in the state

On-site interviews of principals and teachers at four schools

- Elementary, middle, and high schools
- Urban, from 10% to 75% ELLs and 5% to 25% students with disabilities

Phone interviews of District ELL and Special Education Directors at five districts

Point 1: ELL staff have different perspectives

ELL teachers and ELL administrators identify more challenges in meeting the needs of ELLs with disabilities

Collaboration: ELL teachers rarely included in formal or informal collaboration
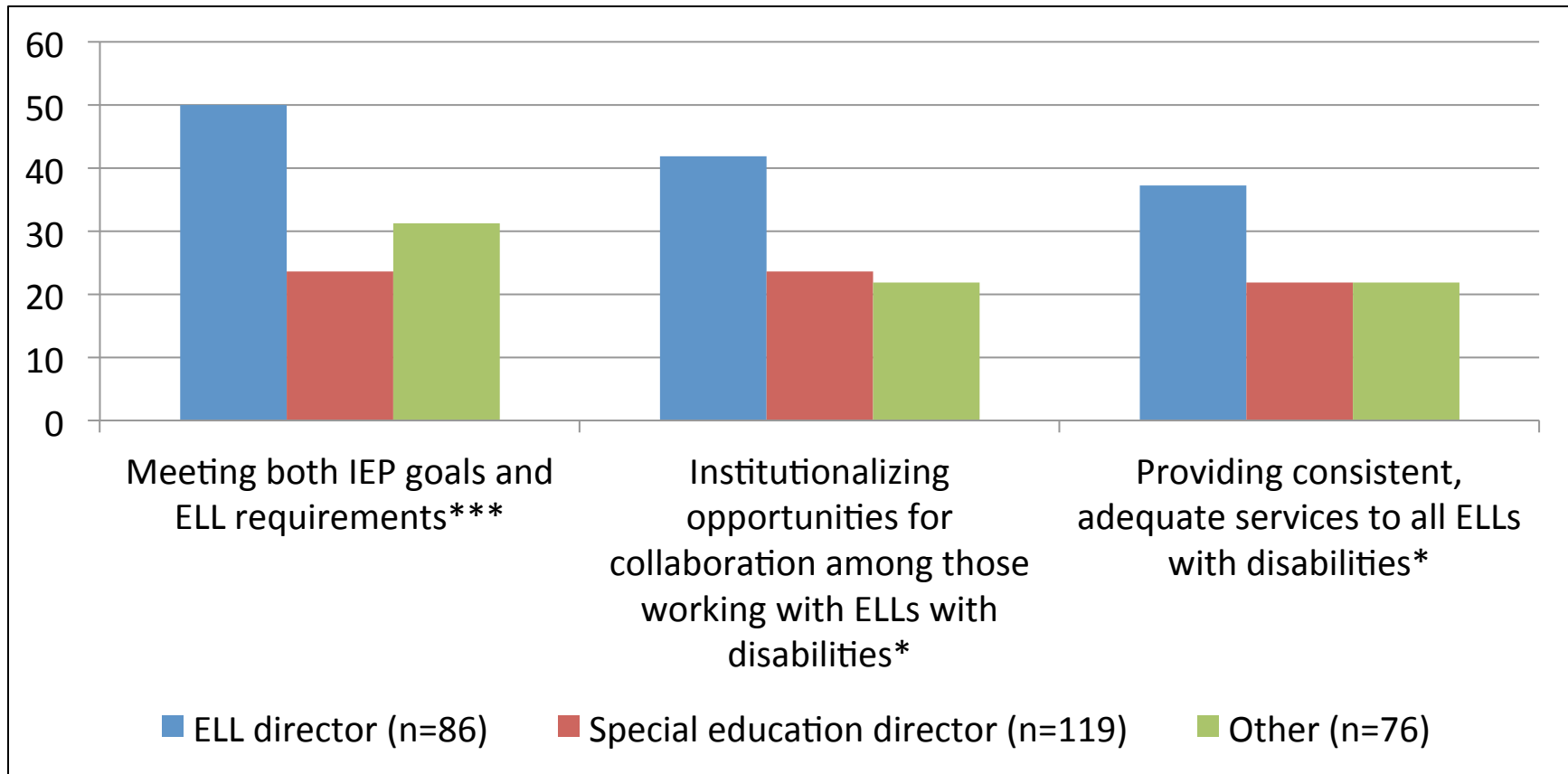
Recently, more inclusion of ELL teachers or specialists in child study teams

Challenges to identifying disabilities among ELLs by role of respondent
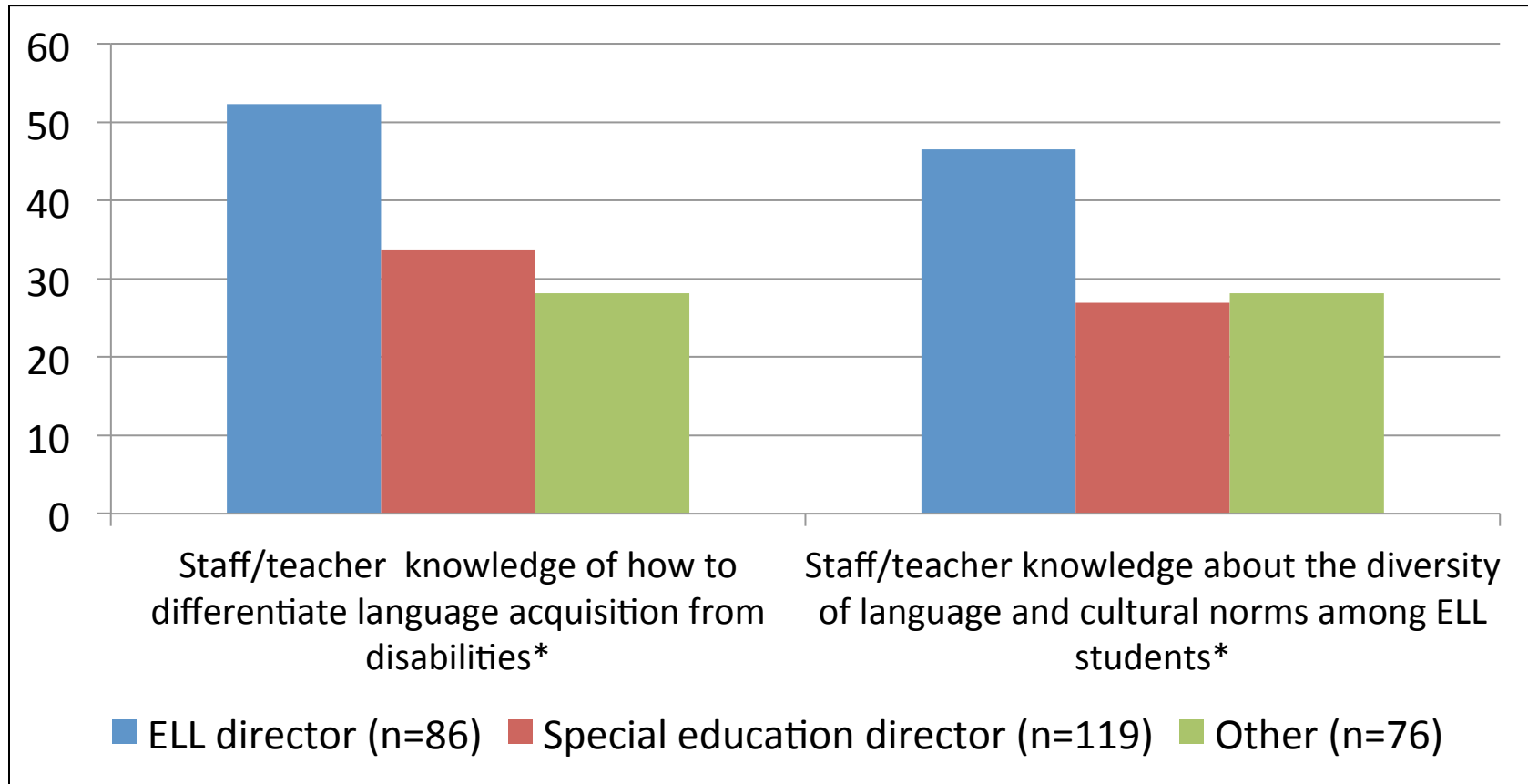
*p<.05.

Challenges to teaching ELLs with disabilities by role of respondent

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

ELL collaboration recommendations

State: Make explicit connections to relevant MA DESE initiatives, including:

- Common Core State Standards: http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore/
- MA Tiered System of Support (MTSS): http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/
- English Proficiency Assessment (WIDA/ACCESS for ELLs): http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/
- Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL): http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell/
- Federal Accountability Waiver: http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/general/
- Personnel evaluation: http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/

ELL collaboration recommendations (cont.)

State: Consider incorporating English language proficiency information into student IEPs

District and School: Promote greater integration of ELL teachers, specialists, and administrators in professional learning communities

District and School: Create opportunities for parents to collaborate and learn about multiple initiatives

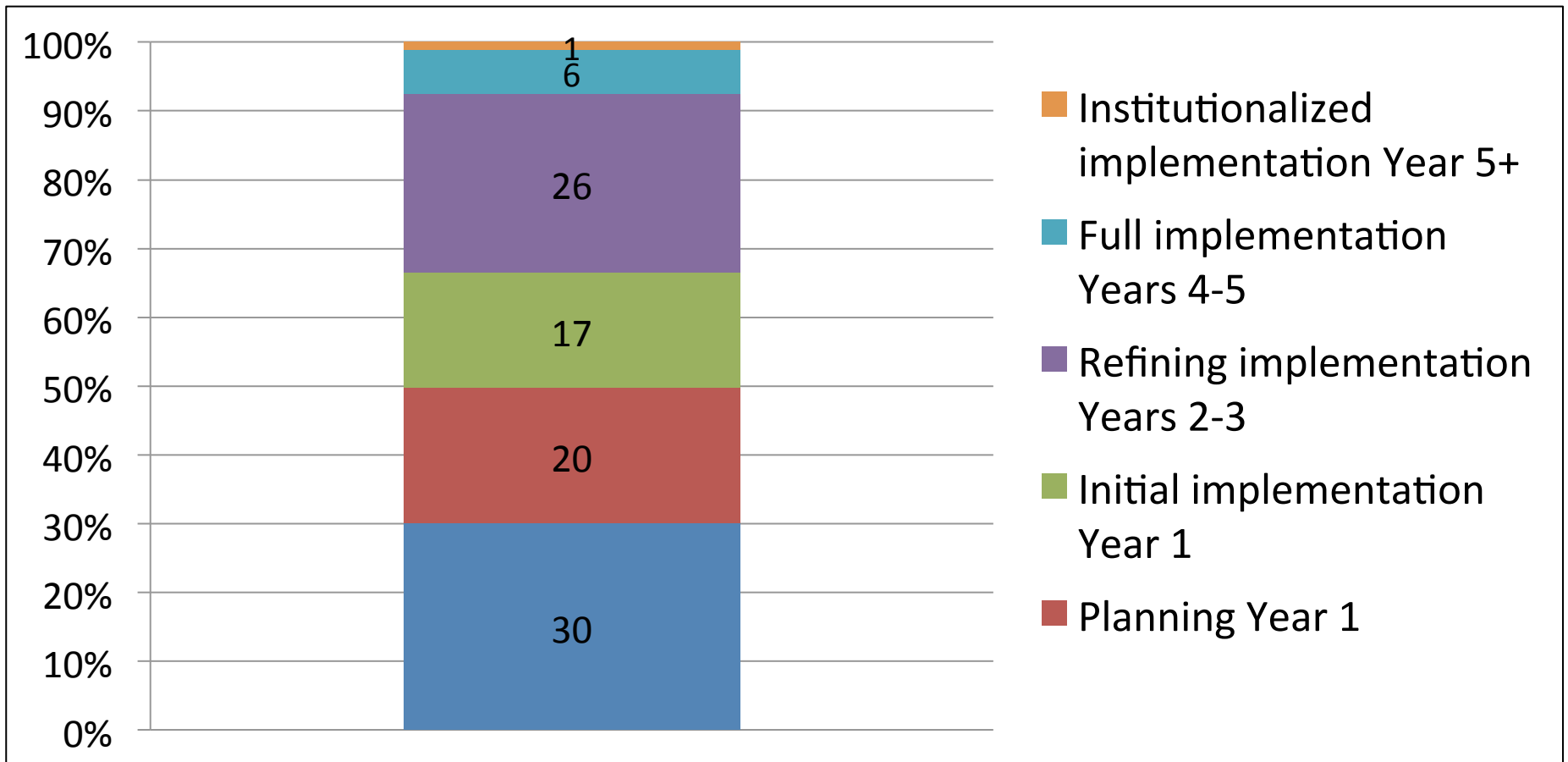# Point 2: MTSS is being interpreted and implemented in varied ways

Survey: those implementing MTSS for more years were more likely to say it meets needs of ELLs with disabilities

Some people describe old practices with new terms

MTSS has potential to reframe how to meet the needs of struggling ELLs

"Unwritten rule" to wait 6 months to a year before pursuing special education referral

MTSS implementation stage (n=269)

Chart legend:
- **Institutionalized implementation Year 5+** (orange)
- **Full implementation Years 4-5** (teal)
- **Refining implementation Years 2-3** (purple)
- **Initial implementation Year 1** (green)
- **Planning Year 1** (red)

Stacked bar values (bottom to top): 30, 20, 17, 26, 6, 1

Percentage affirming that their district's MTSS framework meets the needs of ELLs with disabilities (n=173)
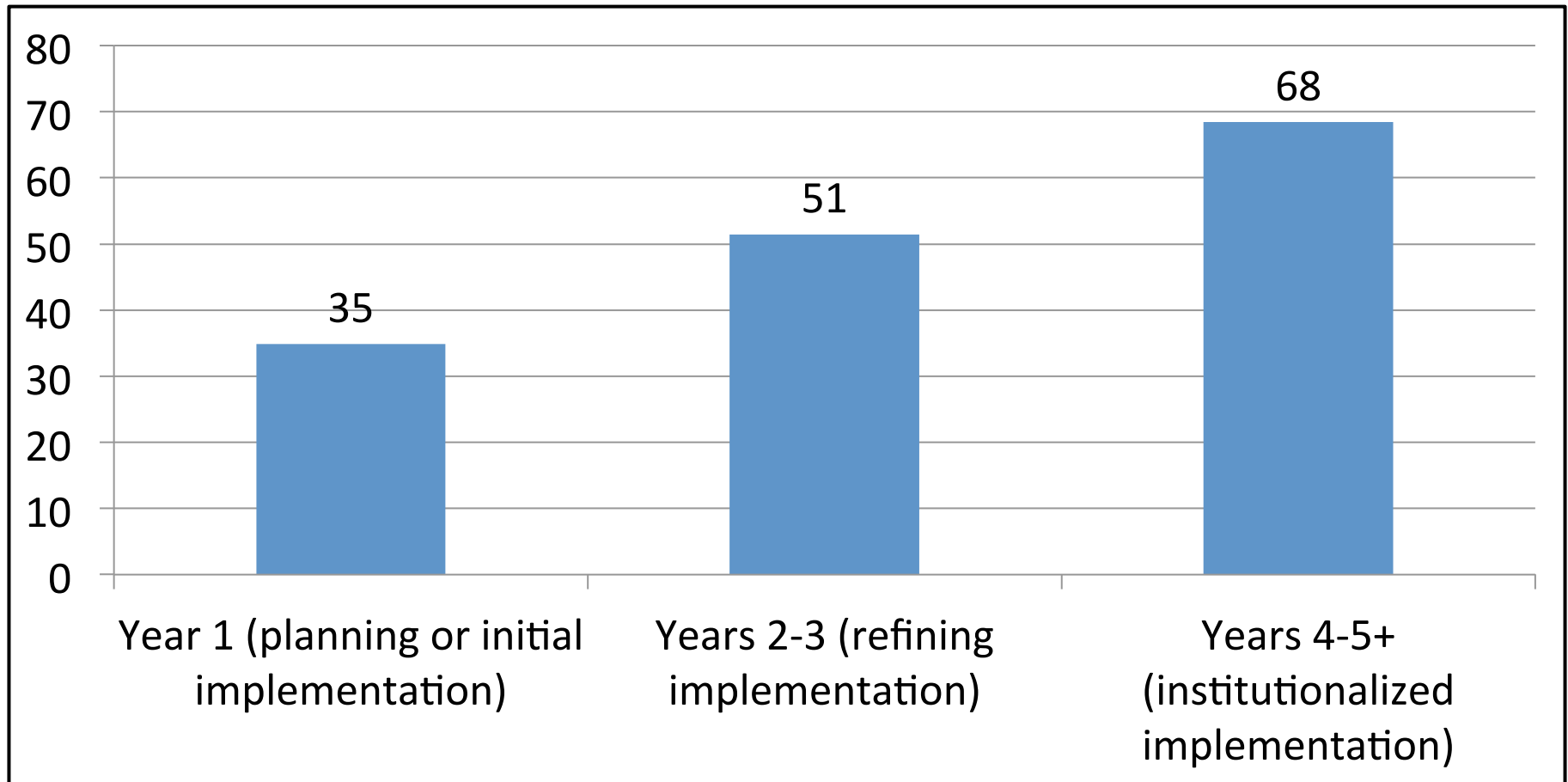
MTSS Recommendations

State and District: Promote state MTSS Self-Assessment tool to monitor fidelity of implementation with focus on English language instruction for struggling ELLs

http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/sa/

State: Identify research-based sources for guidance on interventions (e.g., The National Center for Response to Intervention or the National Center on Intensive Interventions)

www.rti4success.org

http://www.intensiveintervention.org/

# Point 3: Individualized assessments do not provide all necessary data

Survey: more challenges noted in identifying individualized assessments, not in how to use them

Common concern with validity of individualized assessments for ELLs

Ecological approach: some describe its use

Intuition: experienced teachers do not systematically describe how they distinguish language acquisition process from learning disabilities

Assessment challenges for identifying disabilities among ELLs (cont.)
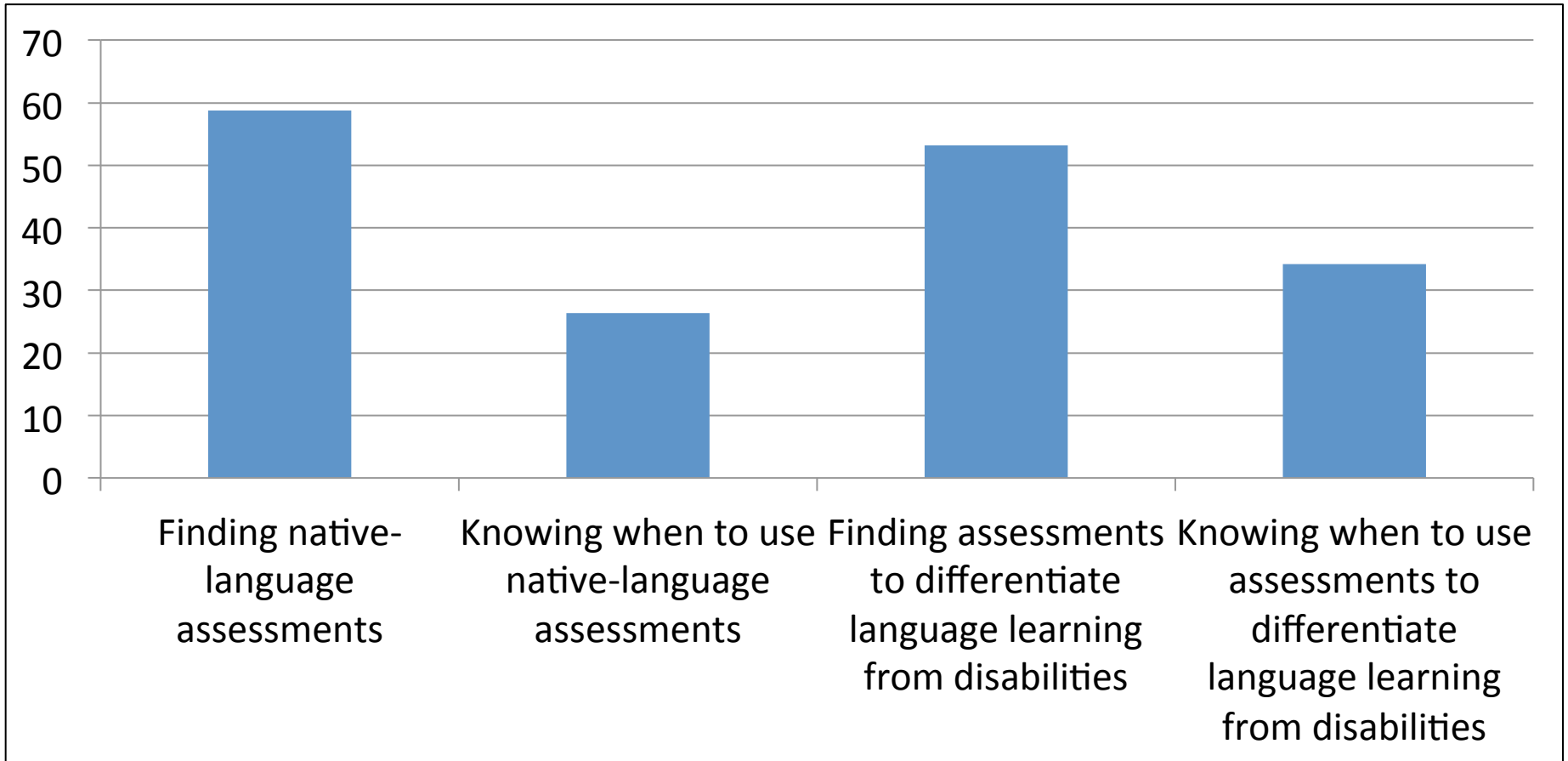
Assessment recommendations

State: Continue to promote MTSS progress monitoring as data source for student progress and instruction

State and districts: Provide a glossary defining multiple types of assessment tools and uses

- standards-based assessments
- benchmark assessments
- individual tests of achievement
- curriculum-based measurements
- criterion-based assessment
- progress monitoring tools
- reading diagnostic assessments for core instruction

Point 4: Individualized instruction found across schools

Identifying each student's need and tailoring instruction (and teacher allocation) accordingly

Dynamic instructional groupings that shift throughout school year as student needs shift

All recognize the diversity of ELLs with disabilities:

- diverse language backgrounds
- diverse levels of English acquisition
- diverse disabilities
- diversity of strategies

Individualized programs and services

Some refer to IEP "trumping" ELL needs

Some bilingual SPED classrooms have isolated ELLs with disabilities; in others they are launching pads to general education classroom

Inclusion classrooms: some adjust to individual needs, others are in name only

Hard to meet different needs based on language levels and disability severity

Instructional recommendation

State: Encourage individualizing instruction by providing districts and schools with the tools to quickly disaggregate data, to be able to see disability categories as well as trajectories of growth, language levels, and assessment scores of ELLs with disabilities

State: Link the use of the state's Conditions for Effective Schooling to the MTSS model explicitly

http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/blueprint/ch2.pdf

Point 5: Effective parent participation requires more than translation services

More ELL directors noted importance of knowing about ELL students' diversity of language and cultural norms ($p<.05$)

Addressed well: providing sufficient translation and interpretation

Not addressed well: actively engaging parents of ELLs with disabilities

Still a challenge:

- Helping parents understand IEP process
- Parents who don't participate

Parent participation recommendations

State: Investigate promising practices for ELL parent participation

State: Highlight Collaborative School/Family Problem-Solving process in Chapter 3D: Core Components blueprint
http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtss/blueprint/ch3d.pdf

Point 6: Staff development an ongoing need

Survey: greatest need for training is in ELL PD

Less need for professional development on special education strategies

Principals who were interviewed want more teachers with dual training

Challenge: using paraprofessionals for language support and then depending on them for most instruction

Disability categories for which respondent would like to receive training for ELLs
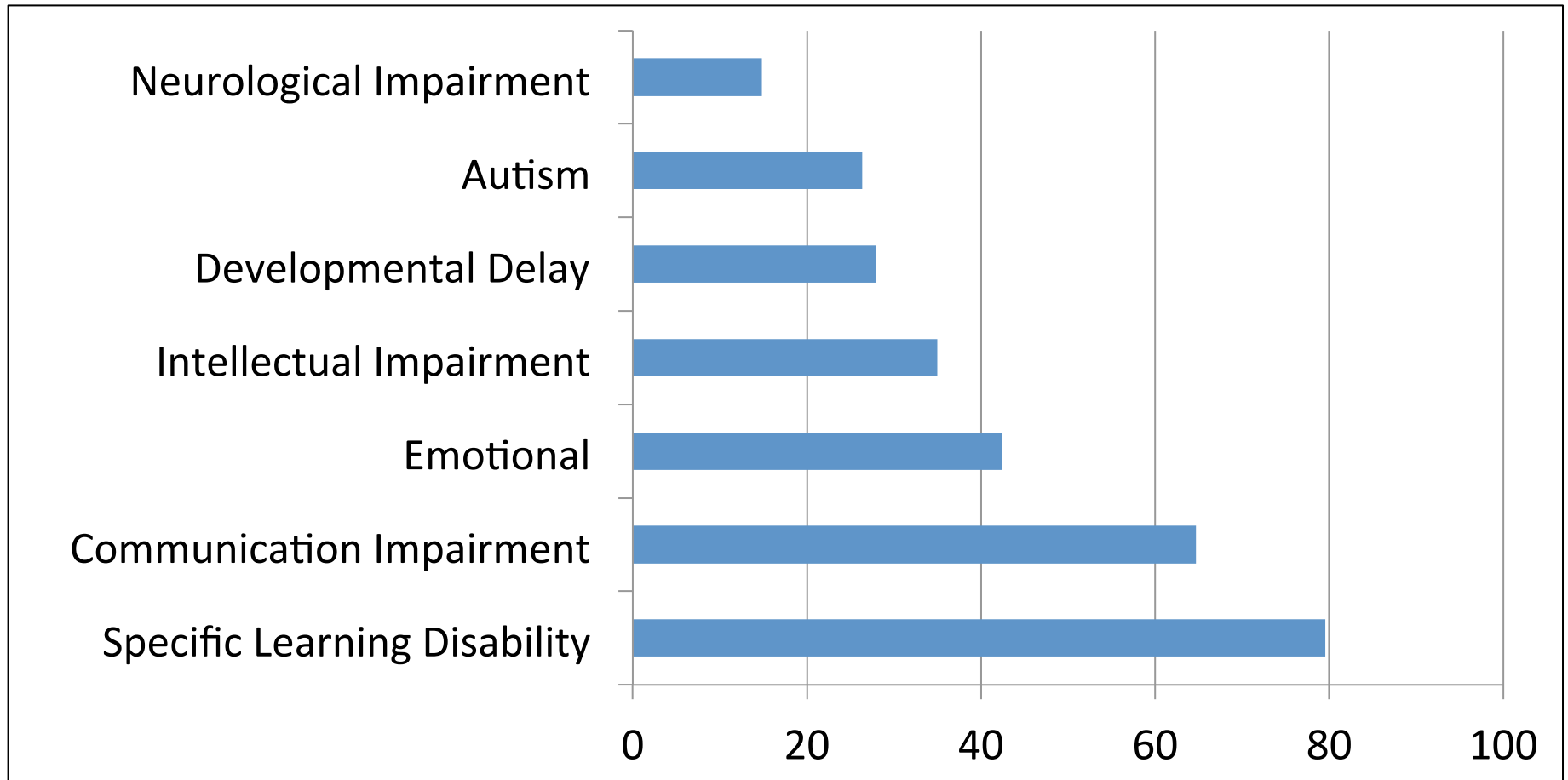
Professional development needs
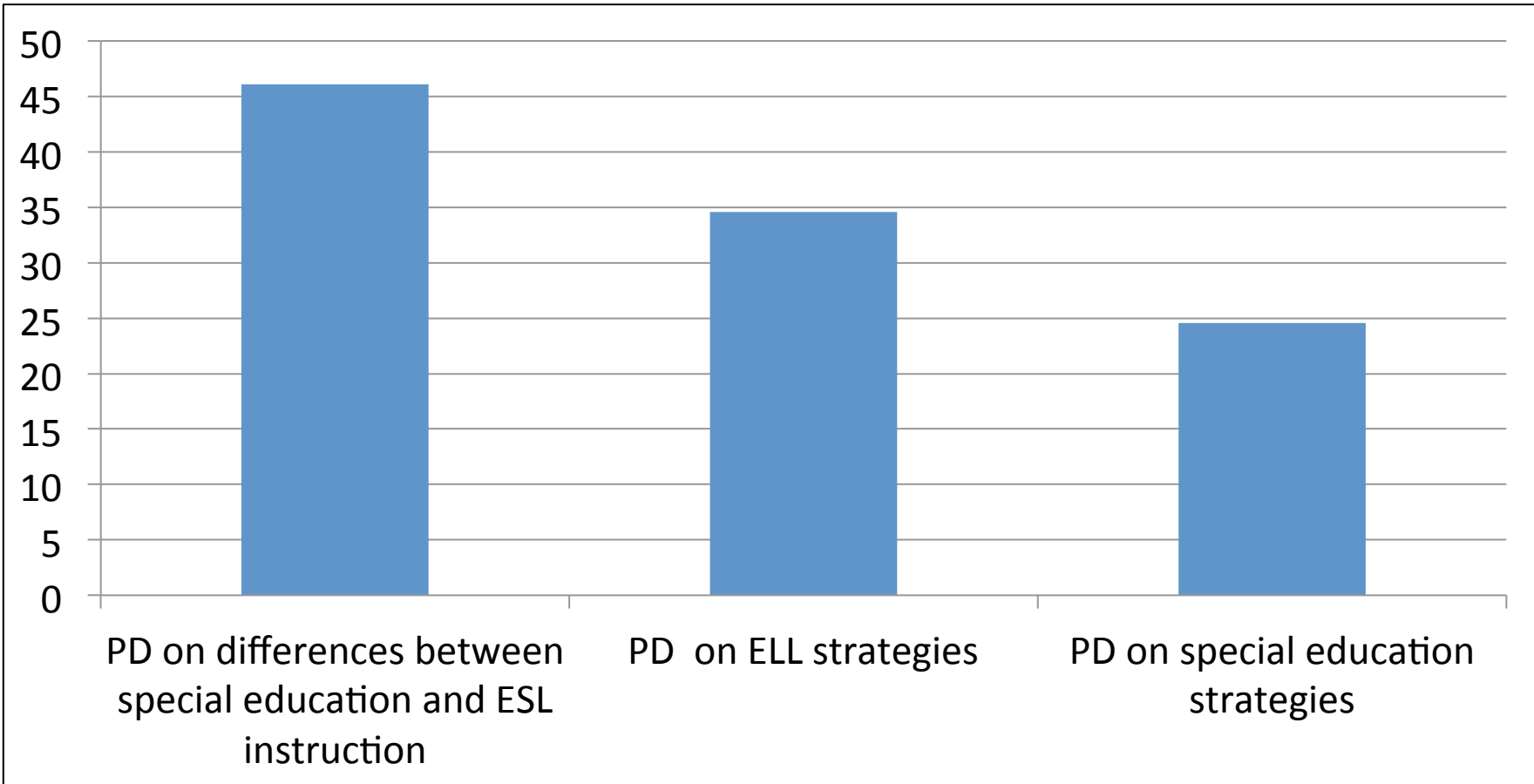
Professional development recommendations

State, District, and School: Embed PD on ELLs with disabilities into overall PD vision

State: Provide pool of resources to meet unmet needs (e.g., access to personnel with expertise in low-incidence languages)

State: Build relationships with pre-service institutions to align pre-service ELL training with identified needs

Point 7: Research recommendations

Explore use of state-developed MTSS implementation self-assessment tool

Conduct case studies of schools & districts implementing MTSS > 4 years, focusing on struggling ELLs

Interview experienced teachers to systematize "intuition"

Analyze data on Former ELLs (FLEPs), including special education referral patterns

Investigate how schools use data to guide instructional planning and to address the needs of ELLs within MTSS framework

Conclusions

Disability identification processes
- Potential of MTSS to change conversation
- Improving use of individualized assessments

Instructional practices
- Trend toward individualized instruction

Challenges
- Parent participation
- PD focused on ELL strategies
- ELL staff participation in formal collaboration
- Research