



# Addressing Complex Communication Needs

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## BACKGROUND

Communication plays an essential role in order to express needs, wants, and develop relationships. Individuals with complex communication needs experience challenges expressing themselves, which can be addressed through augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. Evidence based implementation of AAC is characterized by:

- Students as active communicators,
- Peers as competent communication partners,
- Family as involved collaborators, and
- Educators as effective facilitators (Chung & Douglas, 2014).

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The knowledge and confidence of parents and professionals related to AAC was evaluated. An online questionnaire was administered to parents and professionals in Westchester County via email or Facebook. Descriptive statistics were calculated to analyze data.

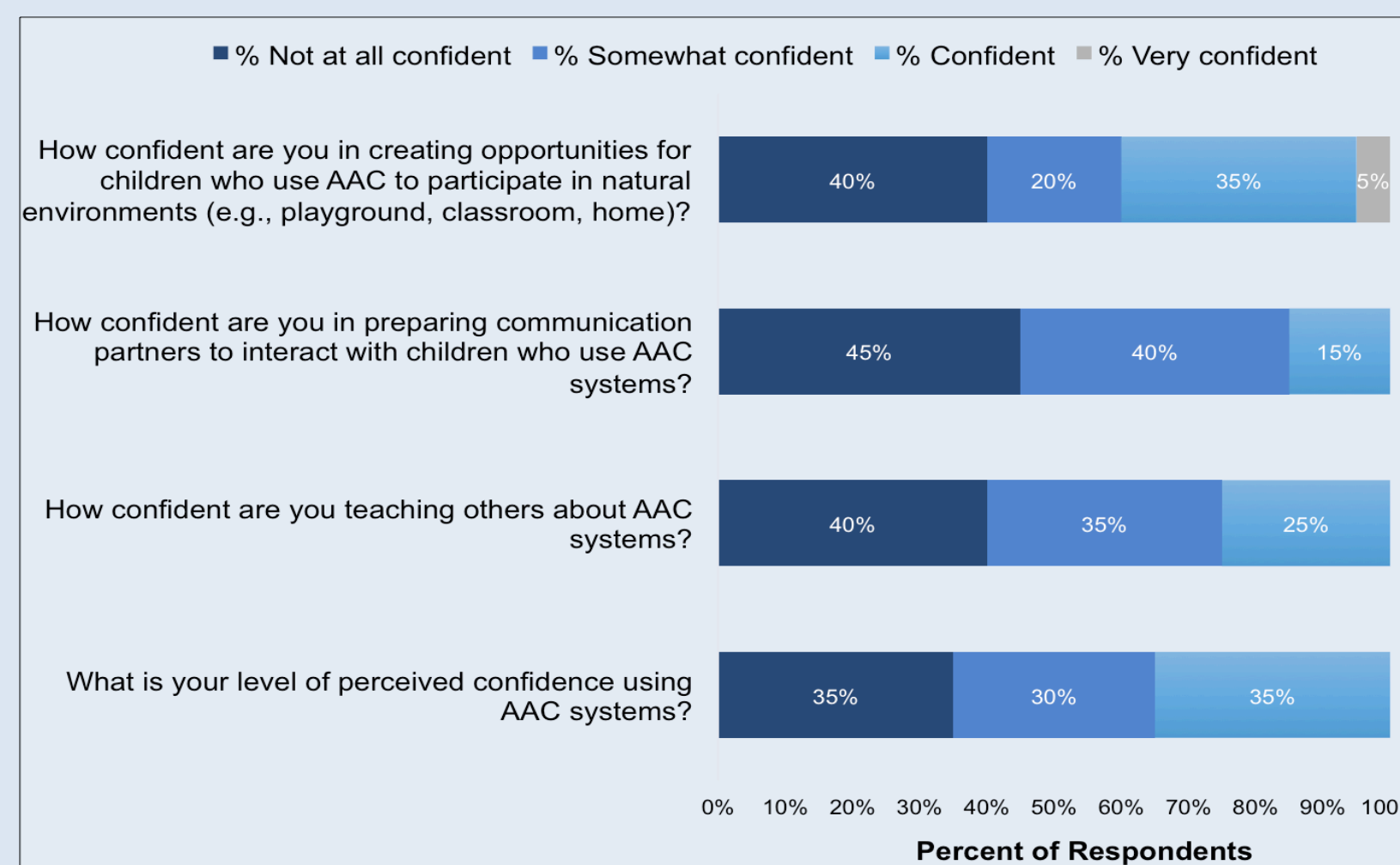
## COMMUNITY PARTNER

Kathleen Franklin, PhD., CCC-SLP – Chair and Associate Professor of Clinical Speech Language Pathology New York Medical College.

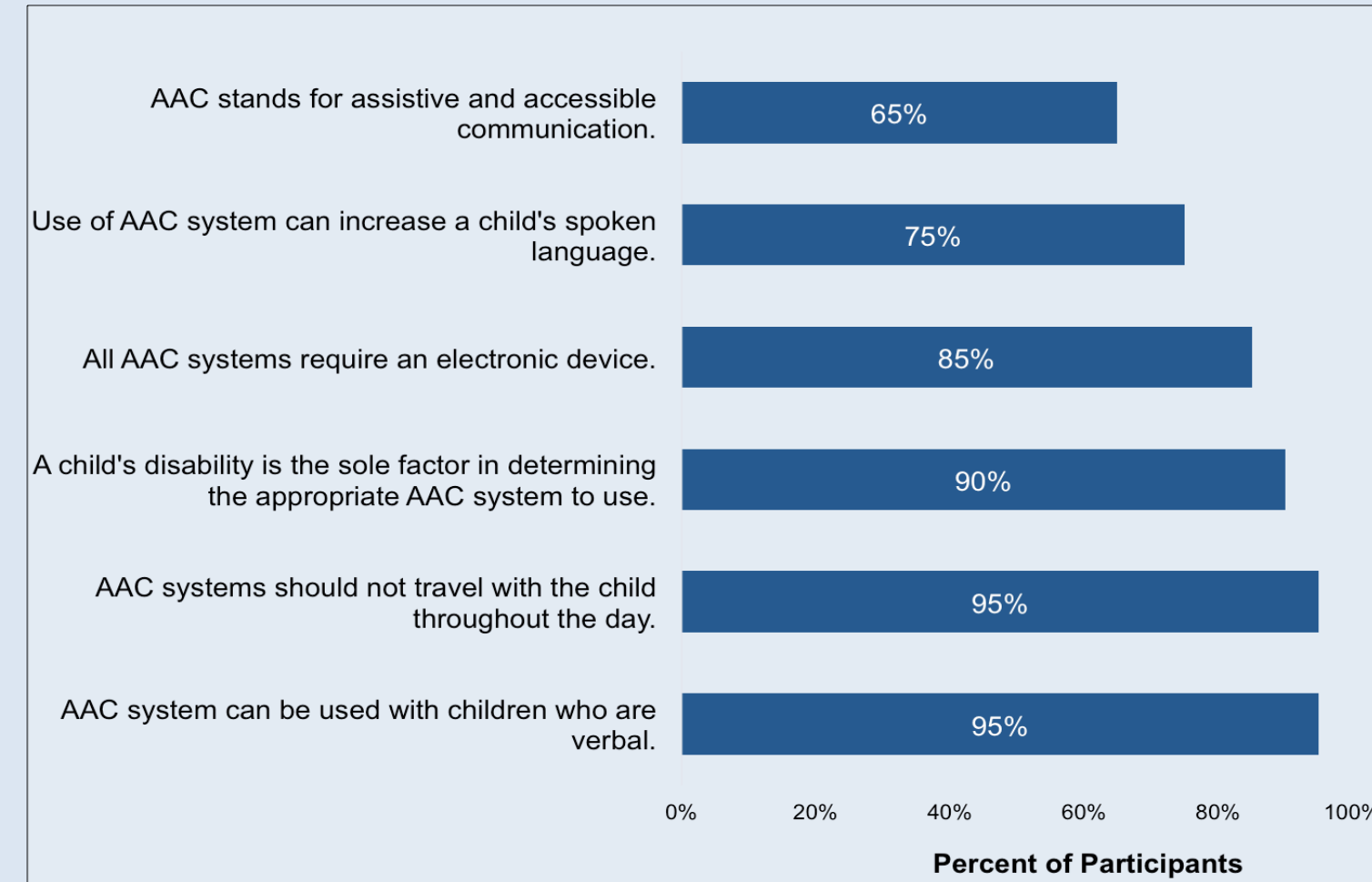
**TABLE 1. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS.**

	Total Sample	Related Service	Teachers	Teaching Assistants	Others
<b>Years of Experience</b>					
< 1 year	9 (47%)	8 (73%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)
1-3 years	4 (21%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (67%)
4-6 years	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
7-9 years	1 (5%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
>10 years	5 (26%)	2 (18%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>AAC Experience</b>					
<1 year	11 (55%)	6 (55%)	2 (67%)	0 (0%)	3 (75%)
1-2 years	2 (10%)	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)
3-4 years	2 (10%)	1 (9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)
> 4 years	5 (25%)	3 (27%)	1 (33%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)
<b>Grade</b>					
EI/EC	4 (19%)	0 (0%)	2 (67%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)
Elementary	12 (57%)	9 (75%)	1 (33%)	1 (50%)	1 (25%)
Middle School	4 (19%)	3 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)
High School	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)

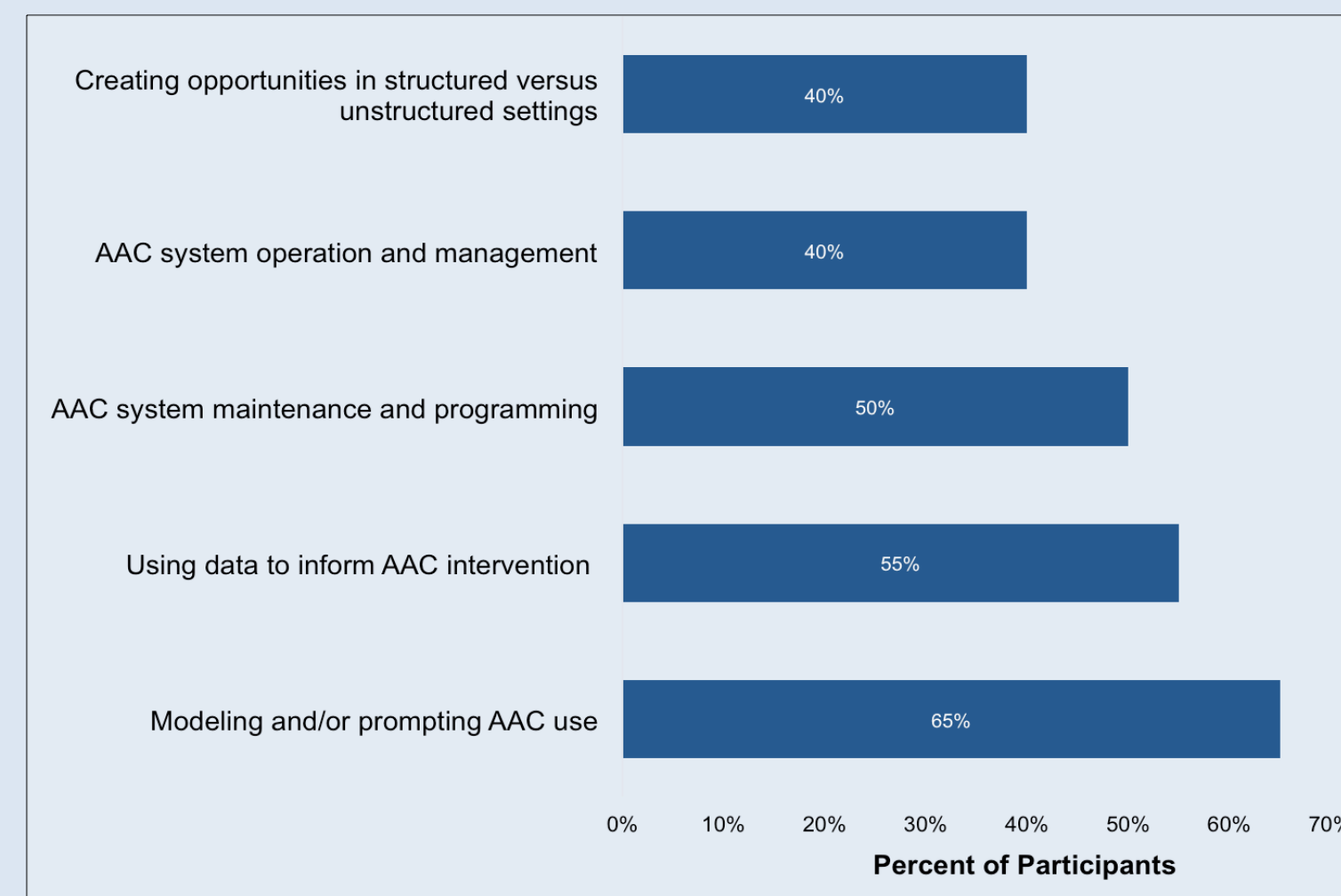
**FIGURE 2. PERCEIVED CONFIDENCE.**



**FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF CORRECT RESPONSES.**



**FIGURE 3. DESIRED TRAINING TOPICS.**



## RESULTS AND PROGRESS TO DATE

To date, 20 professionals have responded to the needs assessment. A majority of responses were received from related service providers who have been working for less than one year and work with elementary age students. There is a relationship between years of experience with AAC and perceived level of confidence. Overall, individuals working for less than one year feel less confident teaching AAC and developing opportunities for students to utilize AAC in their natural environments. Ninety percent of respondents feel that additional training in AAC would be beneficial. The top three desired training topics include:

- Modeling and/or Prompting AAC Use
- Using Data to Inform AAC Intervention
- AAC System Maintenance and Programming

## DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

Findings indicate that additional training would be helpful for professionals when working with students who have complex communication needs. To inform the development of training modules the next steps for the project include:

- Continue with data collection
- Analyze data on training preferences
- Clean and run data for parents
- Run additional analysis for professionals
- Develop content and activities for training sessions