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# Student Personas

June 2020

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

These student personas were developed by the Partner Experience team here at NWEA. Personas are amalgamated representations of real users, created by synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data on their interests, struggles, and lifestyle with a narrative or bio statement, a name, and a face. Personas allow teams to develop an empathy for their users that contributes to a better product—and user experience—overall. You can often hear teams that use personas saying things like, “I don’t think Mia will be able to find this.”

The Partner Experience team created these personas to achieve three very important goals:

- align the organization on who we are talking about when we say “all kids”
- assist teams across the organization that write for, speak to, and interact with students by giving them more insight into how to tailor their work to their audience’s needs
- contribute to our mission to help all kids learn by broadening our understanding of the challenges, limitations, and interests of this audience so that our work can meet them where they are at

This document should be considered a “living document” and should be revised annually in order to remain relevant for the work we do here at NWEA. It is not intended for distribution outside of the organization.

### **Sources**

The data in this document was obtained from many different sources including websites, state and national education agencies, textbooks, and reports from various national and international research firms. To make analyses as timely as possible, the latest year of available data was gathered. Most information in this document summarizes data from surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Census Bureau with support from NCES, and Common Sense Media, Inc. This document also includes the full bibliography of sources for readers who may want to review and compare data sources for themselves.

### **Comparing Data Sources and Margin of Error**

As with all statistically representative sampling, error must be considered when comparing data from different sources. When using data from a sample, some margin of error will always be present in estimations of characteristics of the total population or subpopulation because the data are available from only a portion of the total population. Consequently, data from samples can provide only an approximation of the true or actual value. More information on the standard error of various sources consulted for this document can be found at the original sources.

### **Physical and Cognitive Development**

Cognitive development sections on each persona leverage Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, a primary theory of Developmental Psychology on the nature and development of human intelligence. The phases map the transition from a purely sensorimotor understanding of the world to the ability to think hypothetically and abstractly about the known and unknown world. However, the age at which an individual reaches a phase of cognitive development is not a hard-and-fast rule and an individual’s cognitive growth is not a linear, chronological progression. It is determined by many factors in addition to age. Among others, an individual’s exposure to varied life experiences, their culture, their learned response to novelty, and their family’s parenting style can all play a role in the age at which they are able to demonstrate concrete or abstract thinking. Additionally, individuals can “regress” in response to stress, demonstrating emotional responses to experiences that are more typical of younger people. However, this document is an accurate representation of what level of cognition it is reasonable to expect from most students at each grade. Additionally, not every body matures at the same rate, but the data in individual personas can be used as a guide for what to expect the average individual to be experiencing as their body and motor skills develop.

### **Demographic Data and Personas**

In order to “breathe life” into the demographic data, the totals or percentages obtained from NCES were divided by the total number of personas and assignment to each persona was randomized. For each indicator such as household type, NCES has a further breakdown by other indices such as income or race. Where combinations of demographic data (such as single-parent households and income) misaligned with additional breakdowns, the randomized assignment was modified to create realistic narratives. Each modification triggered additional research in order to bring an authentic voice to that narrative and confirm the persona was still representational for that demographic.

### **Additional Information**

To recommend data for inclusion in the next iteration of this document, or for any questions or clarifications, please contact Aimée Knier on the Partner Experience team.

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