

Recommendations to Improve School Finance to Provide Better Support to English Learners During Early Childhood

An excerpt from:

Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Policy Roadmap



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In their final report, the Texas School Finance Commission wrote in 2018, “any recommendations for reallocation of existing funding or new investments should be prioritized toward low-income and English language learner students.”²¹ One of the ways that lawmakers pursued that strategy during the 2019 legislative session was by creating a new Dual Language Allotment through HB 3, the omnibus school finance bill. To better incentivize the ramp up of one-way and two-way Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs, the new Allotment established an additional 0.05 funding weight to both English Learners and non-ELs. DLI programs are effective for all students, but particularly important for English Learner (EL) children.

The Legislature also created the Early Education Allotment, providing funding for districts to offer full-day pre-k and invest in other early learning strategies. Funding is determined by a 0.1 weight for economically disadvantaged and/or EL students in kindergarten through third grade.

Over the past several legislative sessions, lawmakers have worked to increase accountability, oversight, and funding for Texas school districts. Still, questions remain regarding how these changes

served the needs of EL children. It is not known yet if the new Dual Language Allotment will lead to a substantive increase in DLI programs. HB 3 also did not provide a funding boost for educating English Learners in other bilingual and ESL programs, which serve about 80 percent of K-12 English Learners.²² The weighted funding for the approximately 80 percent of ELs in other bilingual and ESL programs has not increased since the 1980s.

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Ensure the Early Education Allotment from HB 3 (2019) supports children in pre-k, including young ELs. One of the most critical actions taken by the Legislature in 2019 was requiring districts to offer full-day pre-k, rather than just half-day pre-k, to all eligible four-year olds. With the Early Education Allotment, districts now have access to funding that will allow them to ramp up their half-day programs to full-day and begin raising the quality of instruction. The Legislature should ensure the Early Education Allotment continues to support the expansion to full-day pre-k, which will help students, especially ELs, start kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed, boost early literacy and academic

achievement, and reduce both grade retention and the need for special education services.²³

Protect and increase state financial support for bilingual education and ESL programs in schools through per-pupil funding. Although many of HB 3’s innovative strategies will support English Learner children and bilingual education, weighted funding for these children has not increased since the 1980s and remains at a national low of 10 percent.²⁴ These weights should be based on updated cost studies that account for the needs of a diverse set of students and that account for COVID-19 and other new related costs. In addition, the spending requirements for the student weighted allotments should be protected to ensure that program funding is utilized in the appropriate programs.

Include a factor to adjust for inflation in the basic allotment so that increased weighted allotments reflect current educational costs. The current school finance formula does not account for annual inflation, so school funding falls short of the cost to educate students each year. This compromises the funding effectiveness of both the basic per-pupil allotment and any additional funding strategies, such

as the Dual Language Allotment. Adjusting for inflation in the state school finance formula would allow taxpayer monies to go further toward meeting the cost of today's education.

State Agency Recommendations

Texas Education Agency

Contract for an independent study to determine costs for administering quality bilingual education and ESL programs. To better understand the financial needs of Texas districts to incorporate high-quality bilingual education models across the state, the Texas Education Agency should contract for an independent study to inform the Legislature on what resources are needed. Costs should recognize the need for increased educator salaries and geographic differences. The study's recommendations should be reported to the Agency and Legislature to be considered for policy implementation.

Provide more oversight and assistance to districts to utilize the Dual Language Allotment and properly implement Dual Language Immersion programs. TEA provides DLI implementation resources to districts, but reports from districts across the state indicate varying program implementation guidelines and integrity. Some reports indicate inequities in the design, promotion, and implementation of one-way DLI programs that serve only English Learners compared to two-way DLI programs that include non-English Learner students. For appropriate DLI implementation, TEA should leverage its Education Service Centers (ESCs) to administer support, resources, and supervision of DLI programs.

Community Recommendations

School Districts and Charter Schools

Prioritize young ELs in district allotment spending. As school districts manage local budgets to meet their students' needs under increased financial pressure, any allotted resources for special populations should be directed toward EL students students' and their instructional programs and supporting full-day pre-k. These include allotments such as the Early Education Allotment, Dual Language Allotment, and Bilingual Education Allotment.

“Despite a steady increase in EL populations over four decades, federal, state, and local funding has remained stagnant, meaning that, taking inflation and the rising costs of educator salaries, instructional materials, etc. into consideration, the amount of funding per pupil has dramatically decreased over time.”

— Laura Chris Green, Texas A&M University- Commerce





Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative

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