



Recommendations to the Texas Legislature, state agencies, school districts, charter schools, and child care centers to improve educational outcomes for early childhood English Learners.

Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Policy Roadmap

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Acknowledgements

This report is a product of the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative. Texans Care for Children, in collaboration with a number of partners and stakeholders, launched the Initiative in early 2020.

The research included in this report was produced with the support of Philanthropy Advocates, a collaboration with Educate Texas. Philanthropy Advocates is comprised of over 55 foundations and philanthropists from across Texas interested in ensuring that policymakers, parents, educators, media, and the general public have objective data about Texas public and higher education. Since their founding a decade ago, Philanthropy Advocates (formerly Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium) has harnessed the power of philanthropy and data-driven research to achieve their vision: to see all Texas students achieve their educational goals from cradle to career. For more information on

Philanthropy Advocates, please visit philanthropyadvocates.org.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed their valuable time and expertise to bring this report to fruition.

Thank you to Philanthropy Advocates, the Rainwater Charitable Foundation, and the Alliance for Early Success for the generous support that made possible the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative and this report.

Texans Care for Children team members David Feigen, Stephanie Rubin, Rebecca Hornbach, Peter Clark, John Jacob Moreno, and L'Aunjane Carriere collaborated to research, write, and design this report. The Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Steering Committee, consisting of Jennifer Esterline and Becky Calahan (Philanthropy Advocates), Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes and Ana Ramon (Intercultural Development Research Association), Kim Kofron (Texas Association for the

Education of Young Children), and Dr. Dina Castro (University of North Texas at Denton) all contributed to the recommendations and the coordination of the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative.

The Initiative's statewide advisory group, which consists of educators, district administrators, advocates, and other stakeholders, provided critical insights and feedback to the Initiative's steering committee through survey responses, workgroup discussions, and interviews.

Thank you to the the Bipartisan Policy Center, Early Edge California, EdTrust, the Migration Policy Institute, the National Council on Teacher Quality, New America, Start Early, and many other organizations and researchers across the country for providing critical research and recommendations. The Initiative's steering committee and statewide advisory group drew on this input and expertise to develop the recommendations in this report.

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Introduction

To ensure more Texas children are successful both inside and outside the classroom and to maximize the impact of the historic education investments in House Bill 3 from the 2019 Texas legislative session, Texans Care for Children, along with a variety of partners and stakeholders, launched the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative in early 2020.

Our goals are to ensure more English Learner (EL) students become strong readers by third grade, become fluent and literate in both English and their home language, and are learning in settings where educators, principals, child care directors, and parents have the tools they need to support them during this precious period of childhood. Early childhood experiences — in the home, child care, pre-k, and other early grades — provide the foundation for success in later grades and later in life. The early years of life are the optimal time to develop skills in a child’s home language and a second language. Research shows this is the age range when the brain is most ready and able to acquire two or more languages. Furthermore, the languages and cultures ELs bring to their education are not just assets for their own learning, but also are important contributions to learning for their entire class. That’s why

school districts and communities nationwide are updating their approaches to early education to make the most of the developing brain’s capacity to gain fluency in multiple languages.

Regardless of the language spoken at home, helping students become bilingual has well-documented cognitive benefits for children and strengthens the ability of the state to compete in a global, multilingual economy. When young children develop their literacy skills in their home language, it speeds up their ability to learn English and other subjects. Importantly, early childhood teachers can cultivate English skills while ensuring that the children’s first language continues to flourish.

Quality bilingual education is also a civil rights issue. Before federal legislation passed in 1968, many English Learners had little or no access to high-quality, equitable

education in the United States and experienced segregation and even physical punishment based on language differences.¹

Several key court decisions upheld the rights of English Learner students to receive specialized instruction based on their linguistic needs (e.g., *Lau vs. Nichols*, 1974; *Castañeda vs. Pickard*, 1983). Texas passed its own Bilingual Education Act in 1973, which mandated that schools provide bilingual education if they enrolled twenty or more students of the same home language, and effectively abolished previous English-only instruction requirements.²

While working on HB 3 during the 2019 Texas legislative session, lawmakers debated many strategies to improve the quality of early education programs, with the stated goal that all children are reading at grade level by third grade. These efforts

“Multiple languages are not to be feared, they’re an asset in your classroom. And if you’re lucky enough to have multilingual children in your classroom, embrace it and make it to the benefit of everybody.”

— Sarah Baray, PreK4SA

led lawmakers to pass several reforms to improve the quality of early educational program standards, including requirements regarding family engagement, student progress monitoring, and teacher preparation. However, there was not a focus on how these reforms serve the needs of EL children, and many gaps remain. The main step lawmakers took to directly address the needs of ELs was increasing funding for Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs.

English Learners have always made up a significant portion of the Texas public school population. **Texas schools educate the greatest proportion of English Learners in the U.S., including 28 percent of the state's pre-k through 3rd grade enrollment.**³

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines an EL as “a student whose primary language is not English and whose English language skills are such that the student has difficulty performing ordinary classwork in English.” Several other terms are often used to describe this population, most commonly Dual Language Learner and Emergent Bilingual. Although these other terms better describe these children’s bilingual potential, we are using the term English Learner in this report to align with current practice in Texas.

Infants' and toddlers' experiences in early education settings are also critical. Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the experiences of young ELs in Texas child care programs. Many programs do not track data on

children's home language, English proficiency, race, or ethnicity, and the state does not offer consistent and comprehensive guidelines for educating ELs in early childhood.

The following report is especially important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. English Learners have been missing out on in-person learning and even distance learning if they lack quality internet access and devices; families of ELs are experiencing unemployment and an uncertain financial future; and many EL children have experienced traumatic stress and social isolation that will add to their academic challenges as they return to school. Experts are predicting a significant “academic slide,” in particular for young English Learner and low-income students.

To address these opportunities and challenges, the Texas Early Childhood English Learner

Initiative crafted policy recommendations and steps that early education community providers, state agencies, and the Texas Legislature should take to improve learning environments and educational outcomes for EL children. From January through October 2020, we developed the recommendations through a statewide survey of 185 experts in bilingual and early childhood education, three virtual workgroup convenings with community leaders from around the state, and numerous conversations with education program leaders and stakeholders. Those recommendations, outlined below, focus on four key areas: improving the quality of early learning programs, strengthening the workforce, collecting better data, and retooling school finance. These recommendations represent key, research-based steps Texas leaders should take to ensure more EL children are successful in school and beyond.



Summary of Recommendations

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Create a state strategic plan to cultivate bilingualism across all early learning systems and set clear benchmarks to increase the number of bilingually certified teachers, the number of students who are bilingual or multilingual, and the availability of high-quality dual language immersion classes in pre-k through 12th grade.

Update high-quality prekindergarten standards to include a maximum class size of 22 students and a student - teacher ratio of no more than 11:1.

Create a state broadband and technology plan that serves the needs of young English Learners (ELs).

As Texas policymakers update Texas pre-k standards, consider the examples provided in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Create a certification in Bilingual Special Education.

Reduce programmatic barriers for educators and pre-service teachers to access bilingual education certification programs.

Provide greater support for bilingual certified educators, including additional loan repayment assistance.

Improve Early Childhood-Grade 3 and Early Childhood-Grade 6 teacher certification programs to include more culturally responsive content on educating EL children.

Starting in child care and continuing through high school, adopt a uniform process across early childhood systems to identify English Learner children and collect these data.

Ensure the Early Education Allotment from HB 3 (2019) supports children in pre-k, including young ELs.

Protect and increase state financial support for bilingual education and ESL programs in schools through per-pupil funding.

Include a factor to adjust for inflation in the basic allotment so that increased weighted allotments reflect current educational costs.

State Agency Recommendations

Provide stronger curricular guidance to schools and child care programs regarding ELs' education needs.

Monitor implementation of Dual Language Immersion (DLI) and Transitional Bilingual programming at the campus and district level, including disparities in English Learner vs. non-English Learner enrollment.

Prioritize family engagement.

Launch a statewide campaign to educate school district leaders, local workforce development boards, and families about the importance of bilingualism.

Incorporate criteria relevant to English Learner children in the Texas child care quality rating and improvement system, Texas Rising Star (TRS).

Add information about services for English Learner children in child care searchable databases.

Provide culturally and linguistically responsive training for educators, administrators, and coaches.

Replace the term English Learner with Emergent Bilingual in the state's public education data system.

Continue to identify English Learners in the state's education database (PEIMS) after they exit a bilingual education or ESL program.

Track longitudinal progress of EL children through high school by bilingual education program models.

Assess EL children bilingually on kindergarten readiness assessments (KRAs).

Collect and report data on how many students are receiving a

Seal of Biliteracy designation at graduation.

Contract for an independent study to determine costs for administering quality bilingual education and ESL programs.

Provide more oversight and assistance to districts to utilize the Dual Language Allotment and properly implement Dual Language Immersion programs.

School District, Charter School, and Child Care Recommendations

Recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development.

Engage families of ELs as collaborative partners in their children's education.

Utilize culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate

procedures to screen ELs' language proficiency in both English and their home language.

Honor and celebrate children's home cultures and languages throughout instruction.

Invest in and expand DLI programs and ensure the model is equitably placed in campuses across districts.

Work to recruit, hire, retain, and promote bilingual and multilingual staff who speak and understand the culture of the population served.

Seek grants from the Texas Education Agency Grow-Your-Own teacher program to develop local teacher preparation pathways.

Institute student progress monitoring that goes beyond measuring English proficiency.

Prioritize young ELs in district allotment spending.

Recommendations for Improving the Quality of Early Learning Programs for English Learners

Fortunately, Texas has one of the more comprehensive state bilingual education laws in the country.⁴ Texas requires that public schools provide bilingual

education programs if 20 or more students with the same home language, other than English, are enrolled in the same grade. Texas is also one of just five states that

requires state-funded public pre-kindergarten bilingual education for young English Learner (EL) students.

Texas School District Programs for Educating English Learners

ESL Program

- **English as a Second Language (ESL)** programs provide all instruction in English. They offer supplementary language instruction to teach English to ELs under the direction of an ESL-certified teacher. ESL programs typically serve EL children exclusively, and are administered through two main models: the pull-out approach, where instructors “pull out” EL students from mainstream classroom instruction for ESL services, and the content-based approach, where ESL language instruction is integrated into academic content in class.

Bilingual Education Programs

- **Transitional Bilingual** programs educate EL children in both English and another language before transferring them to English-only programs. These programs focus on transitioning ELs into English-only classes rather than cultivating students to become bilingual. Transitional Bilingual programs typically serve EL children exclusively.
 - Early Exit Model: Ranges from three to five years, with instruction in the students’ home language utilized during the first two years.
 - Late Exit Model: Ranges from five to seven years, with instruction in the students’ home language utilized during the first four years.
- **Dual Language Immersion** programs (DLI) cultivate bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural competence by educating children in both English and another language. Different from transitional programs, DLI programs consider bilingualism a goal and an asset, rather than simply a strategy to ease the transition to English-only classes. Implementation of DLI programs varies. The ratio of the home language to English in each grade in DLI can vary from campus to campus and district to district. For example, some DLI programs use 80 percent home language and 20 percent English while others use a 50-50 approach.
 - Two-Way DLI Model: Combines ELs and native English speakers in the same classroom.
 - One-Way DLI Model: Exclusively serves ELs.

The vast majority of ELs — particularly Spanish speakers — would be best served by DLI. Based on a review of longitudinal academic research, TEA concluded, "English learners served through well-implemented DLI showed, on average, higher academic outcomes than their English learner peers served through any other language program and were the only group in the study to achieve full gap closure with their English proficient peers, which occurred by the middle school years."⁵

Unfortunately, DLI is not widely offered across the state. Among EL children in pre-k through third grade, 37 percent receive ESL instruction, 17 percent transitional bilingual, and 18 percent DLI.⁶ The remaining 28 percent receive alternative services or have opted out of bilingual education and ESL altogether. ESL may be the only viable option for the small portion of ELs who speak languages that are particularly rare in individual communities.

Meanwhile, state and federal agencies do not systematically collect data on the models used in licensed child care programs for EL children. There are also no Texas or federal policies that require, incentivize, or track the use of effective models for supporting EL children's language development.

Like all children, there are also EL children with autism, speech delays, learning disabilities and other developmental delays and disabilities. Our survey and workgroup convenings elicited

many concerns among community leaders and early childhood experts that some EL children are referred to early intervention and special education services for what are actually linguistic differences. They also expressed concern about the reverse - that some EL children with disabilities and developmental delays are not given the proper support they need. Clear standards and best practices could help ensure that EL children receive the linguistically and culturally responsive support they need.

To improve the quality of early learning programs for ELs, Texas leaders should take the steps outlined below, including shifting to DLI from other programs for ELs, improving family engagement, and boosting standards.

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Create a state strategic plan to cultivate bilingualism across all early learning systems and set clear benchmarks to increase the number of bilingually certified teachers, the number of students who are bilingual or multilingual, and the availability of high-quality dual language immersion classes in pre-k through 12th grade. In 2018, the State of California launched *Global California 2030*, formally setting the goal to double the amount of bilingual teachers by 2030 and guide three out of four students to be proficient in two or more languages by 2040.⁷ Texas should embrace this challenge and establish its own plan to meet

and exceed these goals with a coordinated statewide strategy that brings together the state Legislature, state agencies, higher education institutions, and school districts to set and meet the established goals. Addressing the bilingual teacher shortage with well-prepared, certified teachers trained in culturally-responsive pedagogies and instruction would be a critical component of this goal.

Update high-quality prekindergarten standards to include a maximum class size of 22 students and a student - teacher ratio of no more than 11:1. While state law sets a limit of 22 students per class for kindergarten through fourth grade, there is no statewide standard for pre-k classes. A 2016 report commissioned by the Texas Education Agency recommended a maximum of 22 students and no more than 11 students for each teacher or aide in a classroom with more than 15 students.⁸ Although this change would help all children, it would be particularly impactful to young English Learners who can become bilingual with the proper individualized support.

Create a state broadband and technology plan that serves the needs of young English Learners. In the Spring of 2020, a Texas Education Agency report found that pre-k and kindergarten students — as well as children of color and lower-income kids — were less engaged in distance learning.⁹ This is due, in large part, to difficulty accessing reliable internet and devices.¹⁰ State

policymakers should leverage state and federal funding to offer technology support to families of ELs, including access to reliable internet services, online platforms, digital literacy outreach, training, and devices. Though effective bilingual education instruction is based on in-person strategies, improvements in broadband will help educate EL children when they need to be taught virtually.

Furthermore, state leaders should leverage funds to help districts identify hard-to-reach families and engage with parents to ensure academic gaps don't widen as children are unable to attend in-person instruction. Texas is one of only six states without a state broadband plan, which many experts fear makes the state less competitive for future federal funding.¹¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed gaps in technology and internet access that must be addressed, given the role it will play in public education for years and decades to come.

As Texas policymakers update Texas pre-k standards, consider the examples provided in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Recent research has shown that Head Start's standards produce strong student outcomes for young learners.¹² These standards have proven successful in a wide variety of communities and contexts. Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide services to over a million children every year, in every U.S. state and territory, in farmworker camps, and in over 155 tribal communities. Head

Start programming is intentionally responsive to the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage of each child and family. State lawmakers should consider aligning Texas pre-k standards to mirror the requirements found in Head Start's Early Learning Outcomes Framework concerning English Learner children, including its research-based curricula, screening and assessment procedures that promote effective teaching practices, and plans to engage with the entire family when meeting a child's educational goals.

State Agency Recommendations

Texas Education Agency

Provide stronger curricular guidance to schools and child care programs regarding ELs' education needs. Curricular guidance should include addressing developmental milestones, and providing culturally and linguistically responsive instruction. Guidance should include a focus on how to prepare EL children

"Smaller class sizes in the early grades where students are still building a foundation in their native language would be extremely helpful. Where teachers in general have to navigate educating students at various academic levels, bilingual teachers also have to navigate students at various language proficiency levels."

— Cristina Vázquez, Lockhart ISD



during key educational transitions. Key transitions include child care settings to pre-k and kindergarten as well as the transition from late elementary grades (5th and 6th grades) into upper grades. In addition, TEA should ensure districts have access to instructional materials in students' home language (either appropriately translated or originally written in the home language) to support the curriculum guidance.

Monitor implementation of Dual Language Immersion (DLI) and Transitional Bilingual programming at the campus and district level, including disparities in English Learner vs. non-English Learner enrollment. To better understand how successful district DLI programs are at serving the educational needs of English Learner children, the Texas Education Agency should assess whether programs are prioritizing the enrollment of ELs in these programs. Although DLI programming is a research-based strategy to educate native English speakers as well, the needs of ELs should be put first in DLI programs. TEA should also share best practices and provide technical support to those districts who may be struggling to achieve strong outcomes.

Prioritize family engagement. Family engagement between schools, parents, and students is critical to crafting an effective bilingual learning environment. As TEA works to bolster programs, services, and policies to serve ELs, academic plans must prioritize authentic, two-way communication so that families

have meaningful opportunities for input. Schools can draw on family members' in-depth knowledge of their child's language skills and usage at home to provide more comprehensive screening, learning opportunities, and assessments in the classroom.¹³ However, the parents and families of ELs themselves often speak a language other than English, and they are often less likely than other parents to be meaningfully engaged by their child's school.¹⁴ State officials should actively invite and engage families in major agency decisions. Effectively engaging families will enhance student opportunities and outcomes.

Launch a statewide campaign to educate school district leaders, local workforce development boards, and families about the importance of bilingualism. To ensure ELs receive a high-quality, bilingual education, families need to be assured that bilingualism will be embraced by their school. There is a long history in Texas of schools focusing ELs' education solely on English acquisition. Fortunately, many schools and education leaders have already shifted away from that approach in recent years. That shift has drawn on research regarding effective education for ELs and a growing recognition of the economic and cultural benefits of bilingualism. However, many families — as well as some teachers, administrators, and others working in education — are unaware of this new emphasis on the importance of bilingualism. TEA should leverage the regional Education Service

Centers (ESCs), media networks (e.g. Public Broadcasting System), and other educational networks in the creation and dissemination of state branded materials to local education decision makers and to families, outlining the benefits of cultivating bilingualism as early as possible.

Texas Workforce Commission

Incorporate criteria relevant to English Learner children in the Texas child care quality rating and improvement system, Texas Rising Star (TRS). Overseen by the Texas Workforce Commission, the TRS program is a critical tool to improve the quality of teacher-child interactions for infants, toddlers, and young children in child care programs. Research shows that positive and effective teacher-child interactions are critical to children's first three years.¹⁵

The TRS certification system currently offers three levels of certification (Two-Star, Three-Star, and Four-Star) to encourage providers to attain progressively higher certification requirements leading to a Four-Star level. To incentivize the state's quality programs to better serve the needs of EL children, programs should receive points towards their Star Rating for establishing a process to identify EL children when they enroll, reflecting and valuing English Learners' home culture and languages throughout their programming, and supporting professional development to support culturally and linguistically responsive practices.



The Texas Health and Human Services Commission

Add information about services for English Learner children in child care searchable databases.

When families are searching for available child care regulated by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, they can look for a program in their area by going to [TXChildCareSearch.org](https://www.txchildcaresearch.org). Through this tool, families and caregivers can filter their search results to see if programs provide night care, offer financial assistance, serve children with special needs, or are accredited to follow higher standards. Search tools administered by the state should also tell families whether programs offer dual language immersion, home language instruction with English support, English instruction with home language support, or provide English-only instruction. That information is crucial for families who wish to access a high-quality, bilingual education as early as possible.

Community Recommendations

Schools Districts, Charter Schools, and Child Care Programs

Recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development. To maximize the potential of ELs, schools and child care programs must embrace bilingualism and biliteracy from early childhood through 12th grade, especially in districts that enroll a high number of EL children. Schools should incorporate DLI instruction throughout their educational continuum and evaluate the impacts on their students to enhance the Texas research base.

Engage families of ELs as collaborative partners in their children's education. Diligent outreach and aggressive recruitment of EL families is an essential first step to ensuring ELs' developmental and educational needs are

met in the classroom. Programs should ensure they are equipped to effectively communicate with families about their children's needs and opportunities. Programs should also provide families with high-quality bilingual materials and information about educating children at home and accessing critical services. Communication should include examples of home-based activities and instructional materials that support parent-child relationships at home, information in their home language about accessing Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), resources for children to receive diagnostic screening, and clear guidance on the benefits of bilingualism and the importance of home language development.

Utilize culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate procedures to screen ELs' language proficiency in both English and their home language. School districts are required to conduct a home language survey of each student who is new to the district or who has not been previously



surveyed. To identify ELs, districts are required to conduct a home language survey and administer an oral proficiency test to assess English proficiency. In child care programs, there are no existing standards requiring children's language be screened or assessed.

These screenings are critical to ensure ELs are learning in educational environments that best support their linguistic potential. For children to be screened in a culturally and linguistically responsive way, families need to be collaborative partners. The state should ensure school districts provide information to families in their home language, with trained translators utilized where feasible. As families are engaged, the screening must also be developmentally appropriate, which may involve meeting with a child multiple times. This is even more critical for children with potential disabilities and developmental delays, who may benefit from

Early Childhood Intervention or special education. Programs must work individually with families and children, assessing both their English and home language proficiency as equally important benchmarks to ensure they are in the right educational environment to meet their needs.

Honor and celebrate children's home cultures and languages throughout instruction. Stocking bookshelves with bilingual books; asking families to provide images from home that honor family celebrations and foods; and playing music from different countries and in different languages are all simple but critical practices to help children feel their culture and language is being valued at their child care program. To succeed in providing a quality education to EL children, it is critical programs work closely with families and meet children's individual language development needs in the classroom.

School Districts and Charter Schools

Invest in and expand Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs and ensure the model is equitably placed in campuses across districts. DLI is proven to be the most effective model for educating English Learners and cultivating bilingualism. Districts should leverage the new dual language allotment to pare down the use of ESL programs and expand DLI for EL students. Districts should also leverage state and local resources to offer DLI programs throughout pre-k to 12th grade and seek to increase the number of students who graduate high school with a Seal of Biliteracy. To support DLI, schools should: help in-district teachers obtain supplemental bilingual education certifications; utilize the ESC resources for DLI implementation and bilingual education instructional resources; develop and offer upper-level bilingual academic courses; and develop strong family engagement programs to promote interest in DLI programs.

Recommendations to Strengthen the Early Learning Workforce Supporting English Learners

High-quality, well-equipped, and supported educators are the backbone of the Texas education system. As the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, Texas child care and school district educators are essential workers for the Texas economy and to Texas families. Children's experiences during the rapid brain development of the first eight years of life serve as the foundation for their future success inside and outside the classroom, but for that potential to be realized, educators in these years must be well-prepared and supported.

Texas faces several challenges and opportunities regarding the workforce that educates English Learners (EL) in child care and early grades. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there is a longstanding shortage of certified bilingual teachers in Texas pre-k through 12th grade.¹⁶ During our research, school districts, educators, and other stakeholders reported that this shortage hinders appropriate bilingual education program implementation now as well as the expansion of quality programs. Additionally, responses to our survey indicate that current certification requirements do not properly prepare educators to meet the needs of young children who are EL and/or have disabilities or developmental

delays. Furthermore, child care programs struggle to recruit and retain a quality workforce at all, due to minimum wage salaries, lack of benefits, insufficient training and support, and unmanageable classroom environments and class sizes.

For Texas educators to help guide young EL children to meet their promise, they need the tools and resources to meet the task. By pursuing the recommendations outlined in each section of this report to better support ELs in early childhood through the early grades, Texas can help to grow future generations of bilingual educators. But Texas must also take steps to strengthen the current bilingual educator workforce and put the proper supports in place for future generations of educators.

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Create a certification in Bilingual Special Education. Very few individuals in educational settings are fully equipped to understand how to properly address student disabilities and delays in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. Currently, neither Bilingual Education certificates nor Special Education certificates provide the needed preparation to serve

EL children with disabilities. As a result, many EL children do not receive the proper interventions to meet their developmental needs, leading to an over or under representation of ELs in special education programs. The creation of a certificate in Bilingual Special Education would build a pipeline of school leaders who are equipped to serve the specific linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of English Learner children with disabilities and developmental delays in pre-k through 12th grade.

Reduce programmatic barriers for educators and pre-service teachers to access bilingual education certification programs.

The Legislature should take steps to prepare, certify, recruit, and retain effective bilingual education teachers. Steps include expanding teacher preparatory programs' partnerships with local districts and developing certification pathways to attract, train, and retain bilingual members of school communities as certified teachers.

In order to train more bilingual certified educators, it is also important to revise the bilingual education teacher certification exam. Multiple experts and practitioners report the test contains bias against native Spanish

speakers and requires high fees that prohibit bilingual speakers from pursuing teaching. We can maintain rigor and quality while expanding access to the bilingual education teaching field by revisiting the certification exam and associated fees.

Provide greater support for bilingual certified educators, including additional loan repayment assistance. In order to address challenges in recruiting and retaining quality bilingual educators, Texas should facilitate greater support to the bilingual workforce, including additional loan repayment assistance, stipends, higher salaries, increased access to teacher aides, and more.

Improve Early Childhood-Grade 3 and Early Childhood-Grade 6 teacher certification programs to include more culturally responsive content on educating EL children. Regulated by the State Board for Educator Certification, the EC-3 and EC-6 certifications allow educators to teach students up to grade 3 and grade 6 respectively. The Legislature created the EC-3 certification in 2017 to address the specific needs of the early childhood population that were not well represented in the EC-6 certification. While an important step forward, we should ensure the EC-3 and the EC-6 certification programs sufficiently prepare educators to meet the needs of EL children. The Legislature should update the requirements for these certification programs to include greater content associated with providing a culturally responsive, bilingual

early education to ensure Texas educators are well-prepared to serve a diverse set of children in schools and child care programs.

Create a state strategic plan to cultivate bilingualism across all early learning systems and set clear benchmarks to increase the number of bilingually certified teachers, the number of students who are bilingual or multilingual, and the availability of high-quality dual language immersion classes in pre-k through 12th grade. As noted above, in 2018 the State of California launched *Global California 2030*, formally setting the goal to double the amount of bilingual teachers by 2030 and guide three out of four students to be proficient in two or more languages by 2040.¹⁷ Texas should embrace this challenge and establish its own plan to meet and exceed these goals with a coordinated statewide strategy that brings together the state legislature, state agencies, higher education institutions, and school districts to set and meet the established goals. Addressing the bilingual teacher shortage with well-prepared, certified teachers trained in culturally-responsive pedagogies and instruction

would be a critical component of this goal.

State Agency Recommendations

Texas Education Agency, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Provide culturally and linguistically responsive training for educators, administrators, and coaches. For policies and practices impacting EL children to succeed, all faculty and staff need better training to execute these practices in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner. This training will better equip staff to confront racial and cultural discrimination, improve interactions between teachers and students, and provide a greater respect for different cultures and ethnic backgrounds present in early childhood classrooms. With better training and preparation, staff will be able to become authentic and accessible partners with families in serving childrens' educational needs.

“All teachers need a strong understanding of linguistics. Bilingual teachers need a strong foundation in biliteracy development. Currently, teacher candidates receive much more semester credit hours in literacy but receive very little on biliteracy. Literacy development is not synonymous with biliteracy development.”

— Dr. Iliana Alanis, UTSA

Community Recommendations

Child Care Programs, School Districts, and Charter Schools

Work to recruit, hire, retain, and promote bilingual and multilingual staff who speak and understand the culture of the population served. All children benefit from a diverse educational workforce, but particularly children of color and EL children. Schools and child care programs must demonstrate an active effort to recruit and retain a well prepared, diverse workforce and provide a pathway for those educators to rise up into leadership positions if they desire. This change is sorely needed in Texas, whose overall student population is 53 percent Hispanic¹⁸, compared to only 28 percent of educators.¹⁹ All children will benefit from the diverse perspectives and lived experiences these staff can offer.

School Districts and Charter Schools

Seek grants from the Texas Education Agency Grow-Your-Own teacher program to develop local teacher preparation pathways. The TEA Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 includes grants to local education agencies seeking to develop grow-your-own (GYO) teacher programs. These programs, which can begin at the high school level, aim to recruit and retain educators from the local community. As GYO teacher programs develop local leaders, they focus especially on diversifying the teacher workforce.



Recommendations to Improve Data Collection and Student Progress Monitoring for English Learners

For policymakers to understand our challenges and opportunities, Texas needs to ensure quality data are available. Whether it is student level data showing individual progress or statewide information about the effectiveness of bilingual education models, Texas lacks quality, standardized, disaggregated data for English Learner (EL) children in child care (birth to 5 years) and the early grades (pre-k through third grade). These data gaps raise questions around how policymakers can adequately assess the quality of early education programs for EL children and how schools and child care programs can properly identify and track the outcomes of children who have been designated as ELs.

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Starting in child care and continuing through high school, adopt a uniform process across early childhood systems to identify English Learner children and collect these data. Because Texas governance of early childhood programs in Texas is complex and fragmented across five state agencies, there is a lack of coordination and guiding principles across early learning settings. In Texas schools, home language surveys are administered when children first enroll in public school.

However, some schools go further than others to gather more information about the home language environment, and no standards or widespread practices exist to collect similar information in child care for younger children. In child care programs, there are no existing standards requiring children's language be screened or assessed.

To ensure educators are well-equipped to support children's language development as soon as possible, a uniform process should be developed across child care and early grades to ask families about children's language background, their dominant language, individual characteristics of the child, including strengths and challenges, and strategies used at home to promote children's learning and development. The agencies can facilitate an integrated bilingual education system by providing support to districts through the Education Service Centers (ESCs) and by cultivating a transparent and comprehensive data system for students' learning progress.

State Agency Recommendations

Texas Education Agency

Replace the term English Learner with Emergent Bilingual in the

state's public education data system. Because the goal of bilingual education is to help children become bilingual and biliterate, not simply proficient in English, the label EL should be retired in favor of a more precise term: Emergent Bilingual. Bilingualism is dynamic and ongoing, continuing to develop throughout a child's education. The term emergent bilingual embraces students for their positive bilingual potential, rather than only from a deficit perspective. Changing the language used can have a significant impact to evolve the educational approaches of districts and communities.

Continue to identify English Learners in the state's education database (PEIMS) after they exit a bilingual education or ESL program. Currently, TEA is not publishing data that indicate whether students were previously classified as English Learners if they are no longer enrolled in a bilingual education or ESL program. To provide a way to monitor English Learners' progress, provide any necessary additional services, and track long-term outcomes such as graduation and entering college, data should be disaggregated to indicate whether a student has ever been categorized as an EL, from initial identification until they graduate.

Track longitudinal progress of EL children through high school by bilingual education program models.

There's a growing recognition of the benefits of Dual Language Immersion, but Texas still lacks adequate data to assess the short- and long-term benefits of different bilingual education program models. Data should be collected to track how different models guide children to long-term educational success and bilingualism, including transitional bilingual early-exit, transitional bilingual late-exit, two-way Dual Language Immersion, one-way Dual Language Immersion, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Longitudinal data for English Learner children's educational progress is especially important given the educational disruptions of COVID-19.²⁰

Assess EL children bilingually on kindergarten readiness assessments (KRAs).

HB 3 required that each school district administer a kindergarten readiness assessment instrument adopted by TEA, limiting the high variance in assessments previously used across the state. This was an important step forward to collect better information. However, there is not a standard that exists to ensure programs are collecting kindergarten readiness information for English Learner children in both English and their home language. As a result, information collected for these children is likely to be incomplete or invalid. TEA should update the standards to ensure that the adopted tool collects information in both languages to more fully

capture the school readiness of EL children.

Collect and report data on how many students are receiving a Seal of Biliteracy designation at graduation. The Seal of Biliteracy is an award for graduating high school seniors with significant academic accomplishments in at least two languages. It incentivizes schools and students to pursue biliteracy and bilingualism in their courses and activities. Unfortunately, TEA does not currently collect information showing how many students graduate each year with this distinction. For the state to track progress in helping students become bilingual, both at the state and district level, the Texas Education Agency should begin collecting and reporting the number of students who graduate with a Seal of Biliteracy.

Community Recommendations

Child Care Programs, School Districts, and Charter Schools

Institute student progress monitoring that goes beyond measuring English proficiency.

For educators to have sufficient information to help guide young English learners to educational success, they need progress monitoring practices that provide useful information. Progress monitoring tools should include a component to measure bilingualism and biliteracy, as well as structured observations over time and information gathered from the family, for use in evaluating the child's development and informing instruction.

"By tracking (EL) student achievement throughout their academic career, administrators may be able to identify and correct gaps that may be widening due to language issues."

— A Dual Language teacher from the Houston area



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

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



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A project of Texans Care for Children, Philanthropy Advocates, and IDRA



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