



INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
MARIA "CUCA" ROBLEDO MONTECEL, PH.D., PRESIDENT & CEO
5815 CALLAGHAN ROAD, SUITE 101
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78228
210.444.1710 • FAX 210.444.1714
CONTACT@IDRA.ORG • WWW.IDRA.ORG

Texas Must Seize the Opportunity to Improve the Education for English Language Learners

**Testimony of IDRA on English Language Learners – Presented by Roy Johnson, M.S.
IDRA Director of Support Services and Evaluation, before the Texas Senate Education
Committee, February 10, 2016**

Chairman Taylor and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

Thank you for allowing the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) the opportunity to provide testimony of its research and analysis on English language learner (ELL) students in Texas. IDRA is here to testify about the challenges facing ELL students and the schools that serve them, as well as the promise and success that they can achieve if we, in this state, provide the opportunities they need.

Founded in 1973, IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization that is dedicated to assuring educational opportunity for every child. Throughout its history, IDRA has been a vocal advocate for the right of every student to equality of educational opportunity and has conducted extensive research and analysis on ELL programs, funding, and monitoring. Staff members from IDRA have provided expert testimony since the 1970s on Texas' school finance cases and on other important issues affecting students in Texas.

ELLs are one of the fastest, if not the fastest, growing segments of the Texas student population

ELLs in the state of Texas are nearly 1 million students. According to data from the Texas Education Agency, the ELL population was between 948,000 and 949,000 students in the 2014-15 school year and comprised about 18.2 percent of the total student population. From 2013-14 to 2014-15, the ELL population grew by 5.4 percent compared to 1.5 percent for the state's student population as a whole.

ELLs bring a special talent of being fluent in another language that Texas must capitalize on. By creating policies that value ELLs' multiculturalism and provide them the tools necessary to succeed, the Texas Senate can help prepare these students for success in the global economy, as laid out in the Texas Education Agency's mission. Texas must embrace this diversity and find remedies for meeting the educational needs of struggling ELL students as this student population continues its growth in our public schools. Today, approximately 93 percent of Texas public school districts serve at least one ELL student. Roughly 115 school districts serve more than 1,000 students, and another 54 serve between 500 and 999 students.

Parents of ELLs strongly value the public education of their children. About 96 percent of parents of ELLs have given permission for their enrollment into bilingual/English as a second language (ESL) programs.

Total Enrollment and ELL Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2010-11 to 2014-15					
Item	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total Enrollment (EE-12)	4,933,617	4,998,579	5,075,840	5,151,925	5,232,065
ELL Enrollment (EE-12)	831,812	838,418	864,682	900,476	949,074
Percent ELL Enrollment	16.9	16.8	17.0	17.5	18.1
Percent Parent Permission for ELL Enrollment in Bilingual/ESL Programs	95.4	95.6	95.7	95.9	96.1

Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS Standard Reports, 2010-11 to 2014-15

Texas' failure to invest appropriately in its ELL programs on the front-end has likely cost the state far more dollars in the long run. In 2014, a Texas district court judge concluded in the Texas school finance trial:

“If these rapidly growing populations are to meet the state’s heightened academic expectations, Texas must adequately address the obstacles these student populations face – including lower parent resources and involvement, challenging home environments, high mobility rates, fewer ‘out of school’ educational opportunities, and additional language barrier-related challenges for ELL students. The unrefuted record demonstrates that these students can overcome these obstacles to learning and achieving in the classroom *if* presented with the kinds of quality programs and interventions discussed below.”

The research shows that increasing the funding weight for bilingual/ESL programs would help improve educational opportunities

Texas provides only a 0.10 (10 percent) add-on for funding its bilingual/ESL programs. Increasing the weight to a minimum of 0.50 would help schools provide a number of essential bilingual/ESL program supports for ELL students, helping to improve their language skills and achievement in the classroom. Examples of some supports cited by the research include the following:

- Stipends to recruit and retain certified bilingual/ESL teachers
- Program evaluation and accountability
- Materials and technology
- Extended day/accelerated programs
- Summer school
- Smaller class sizes
- Bilingual paraprofessionals
- Parent engagement programs
- High quality professional development
- Mentoring bilingual/ESL teachers.

Each of these supplemental supports is part of a larger, more comprehensive quality language program. When the state provides school districts insufficient resources, the districts must choose which supports it can afford to offer, rather than provide the resources needed by the students.

Texas schools are struggling mightily to serve ELL students

Texas is largely doing a poor job of educating its ELL students and the problem lies largely with insufficient resources. In 2015 on the STAAR reading test, passing rates for ELL students were considerably lower than for the general population of students across each grade level. The percentages of ELL students meeting the passing standard ranged from 40 percent in Grade 7 to 74 percent in Grade 5.

STAAR Reading Percent at Phase-in Satisfactory Standard and Above							
Student Group	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	All Grades
All Students	77%	74%	87%	77%	76%	88%	77%
ELL Students	69%	60%	74%	49%	40%	58%	56%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, 2014-15

For every end-of-course (EOC) test administered in 2015, the passing rate for ELL students was lower than for all students tested. The percentage of ELL students meeting the passing standard ranged from 40 percent in U.S. History to 74 percent in Algebra I.

STAAR End-of-Course (EOC) Percent at Phase-in Satisfactory Standard and Above					
Student Group	English I	English II	Algebra I	Biology	U.S. History
All Students	77%	74%	87%	77%	76%
ELL Students	69%	60%	74%	49%	40%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, 2014-15

At first administration on the 2015 STAAR reading test, two out of every five ELL students (43 percent) performed *unsatisfactorily* at Grade 5, and three out of every five ELL students (62 percent) performed *unsatisfactorily* at Grade 8.

Student Success Initiative: STAAR Reading First Administration Results, 2015				
Grade	Students Meeting Phase-in 1 Level II Standard on First Administration		Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction	
	All Students	ELL Students	All Students	ELL Students
Grade 5	75%	57%	25%	43%
Grade 8	76%	38%	24%	62%

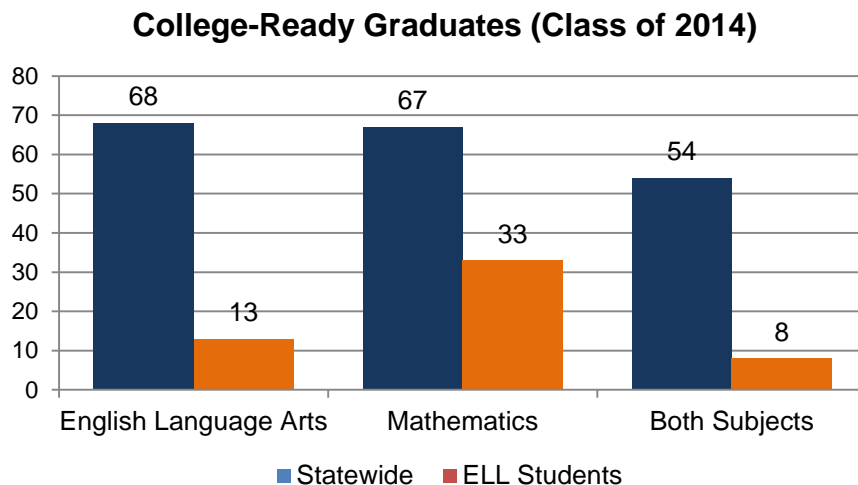
Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, 2014-15

About two out of 12 ELL students met the post-secondary readiness standard on the 2015 STAAR subject area tests.

STAAR Percent at Post-secondary Readiness Standard		
Subject	All Students	ELL Students
Two or More Subjects	41%	12%
Reading	46%	15%
Mathematics	48%	16%
Writing	34%	15%
Science	44%	13%
Social Studies	44%	9%

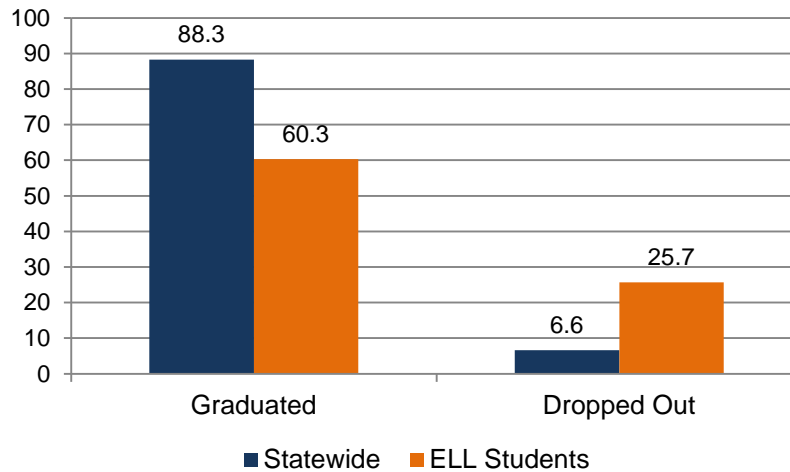
Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas Academic Performance Report, 2014-15

Only one out of 12 ELL students in the Class of 2014 was a college-ready graduate according to TEA data.



For the class of 2014, the four-year longitudinal graduation rate for ELL students was 60.3 percent compared to the state average of 88.3 percent. The longitudinal dropout rate for ELLs was 25.7 percent compared to the state average of 6.6 percent. The true achievement gaps are even larger than those presented in these charts when comparing ELL and non-ELL students (as opposed to the “all-student” category which includes ELL students).

Four-Year Longitudinal Rate, Grades 9-12 (Class of 2014)



Recent research demonstrates that increasing the weight to 0.50 would likely lead to improved student performance

On February 2, 2015, IDRA hosted a symposium where its inaugural IDRA José A. Cárdenas School Finance Fellows Program Fellow, Dr. Oscar Jimenez-Castellanos, presented his research findings on securing educational equity and excellence for ELL students in Texas secondary schools. The research was conducted, in part, to identify certain best practices in secondary schools. But the scarcity of success led to Dr. Jimenez-Castellanos' following observation: **“Before conducting the study, I had a perception that Texas was at the leading edge of educating English language learners. I was expecting to find real solutions to national issues related to secondary English language learners. But I learned that Texas is not the utopia I had envisioned.”**

Important points from the research, the event and IDRA's work in this area included as follows:

- The bilingual weight should be increased to 0.5 at a minimum.
- This study found no secondary schools in Texas that are consistently exceeding academic benchmarks with ELLs. The schools with highest ELL achievement expend significantly more general funds than other schools.
- Texas is significantly underfunding ELL education (with supplemental funding of only 10 percent despite research indicating much higher weights are needed).
- Though increasing ELL weighted funding is important, the funding weight alone is not sufficient without also increasing funding for the base program for all students.
- Reporting on the status of ELL education in Texas schools has not been providing a clear picture since much of the data lumps elementary and secondary grade level data.
- While Texas only mandates schools to provide ELL programs if they have at least 20 ELL students in a grade level, federal policy requires schools to serve every ELL student – as was reiterated recently by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice.

Recommendations to improve the opportunities and achievement of ELLs

As the Senate Education Committee is aware, the Texas Legislature has a constitutional duty to provide an adequate and suitable school finance system that enables schools to provide all of their students with a meaningful opportunity to acquire the essential knowledge and skills and other objectives demanded by the state. Texas has strong programmatic laws in Chapter 29, Subchapter B of the Education Code, and its recent outcomes on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show the state's ELLs outperforming ELLs in other states in the southwest with anti-bilingual education laws (i.e. Arizona and California). However, the success is limited and Texas has not seized the opportunity to further improve its laws and has failed to match high student expectations with sufficient, necessary resources.

As the district court explained in its executive summary of the case: "Rather than attempt to solve the problem, the State has buried its head in the sand, making no effort to determine the cost of providing all students with a meaningful opportunity to acquire the essential knowledge and skills reflected in the state curriculum and to graduate at a college- and career-ready level." This statement rings especially true for ELL students.

To conclude, the following recommendations are offered to improve the opportunities and achievement of ELLs in this state:

- Increase ELL funding weight.
- Revamp and strengthen monitoring of ELL programs under the Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS).
- Devise a plan to address the bilingual teacher shortage and improve ESL teacher certification and alternative certification programs in order to develop a stable, competent and effective teaching force.
- Reject efforts to soften content assessment requirements for ELL students (apart from other students) to ensure support and proper accountability for struggling programs;
- Create a fund for a research and support center with an experienced staff that can assist school districts with meeting the needs of ELL students, including providing high quality professional development for teachers of ELL students, assessing and evaluating local programs to ensure more effective programs, etc.
- Revise the Texas Education Code to use the term "English Learner (EL)" or "English Language Learner (ELL)" to replace "limited English proficient/proficiency (LEP)."

IDRA thanks this committee for the opportunity to testify and IDRA stands ready as a resource.

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. At IDRA, we develop innovative research- and experience-based solutions and policies to assure that (1) all students have access to and succeed in high quality schools, (2) families and communities have a voice in transforming the educational institutions that serve their children, and (3) educators have access to integrated professional development that helps to solve problems, create solutions, and use best practices to educate all students to high standards.