



## Policy Brief

# Most English Learners Would Be Excluded from the Proposed Dual Language Weight

Public schools have a responsibility to educate all students who enter their doors. This naturally includes children who arrive at school speaking a language other than English. In Texas, 19 percent of 5.4 million students are English learners (ELs). Despite a rich history of research, educator expertise, and school leadership, EL students in Texas struggle to succeed. Significant underfunding of EL education hinders school districts statewide.

Proposed school finance legislation recommends increasing the funding for students in dual language programs in order to provide incentives for school districts to adopt dual language programs. This brief examines the impact of such a change.

### Current Policy

The Texas Education Code requires school districts to create bilingual education programs if there are at least 20 students who are ELs in the same grade. ELs in elementary school in a district must receive bilingual education. Other grade levels must receive instruction in either English as a second language (ESL) or other transitional language instruction.

The bilingual allotment was set in 1984 at 0.1, meaning that school districts receive 10% more funding for each EL student. Even at the time, the 0.1 weight was not consistent with cost estimates of what it would take to properly educate English learners in Texas. The research-based recommendation at the time was a 0.4 weight. We still have the 0.1 weight now. Studies since have shown that it is necessary to substantially increase the bilingual weight to adequately educate English learners.

### Proposed Funding for Dual Language

The school finance bills proposed by the Texas House and Senate do not allow for an increase of the bilingual education weight for all ELs. Rather, they recommend the creation of a new dual language allotment, with a weight of 0.05. The additional dual language weight is consistent with the recommendations made in the Texas School Finance Commission Report (2018). Under both bills, the school districts that are required by law to create bilingual education programs and have implemented dual language programs to fulfill that requirement will receive a total 0.15 weight per student. School districts that are required to create bilingual

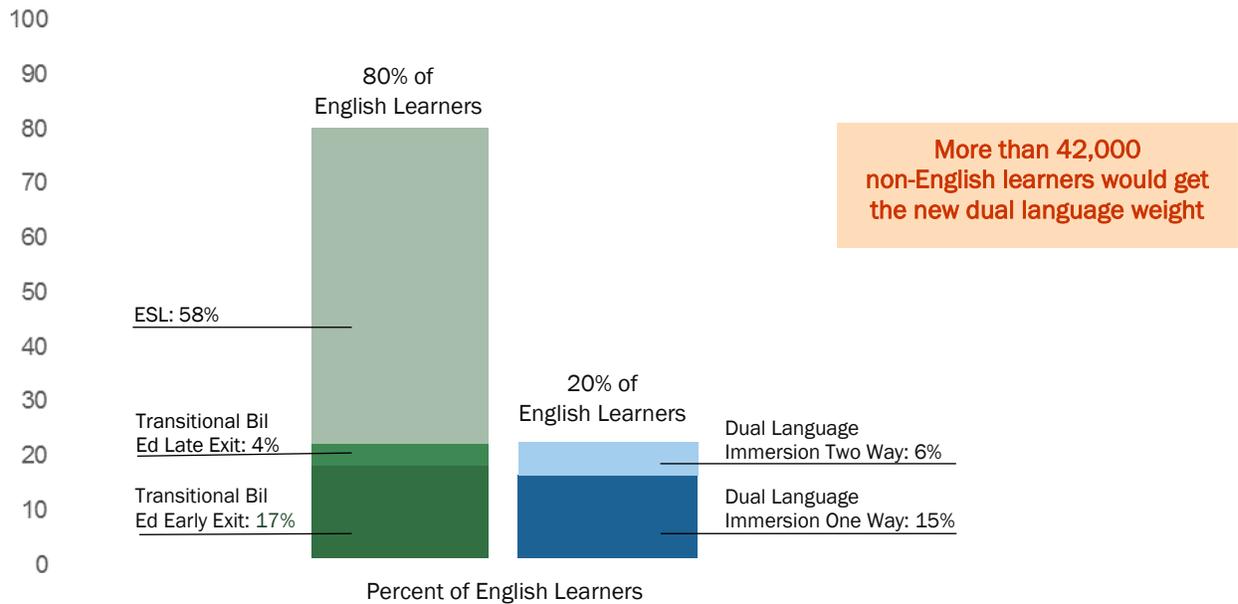
education programs but do not have a dual language program will continue to get the same insufficient 0.1 weight for each EL student that they have gotten for over 30 years.

Additionally, the House school finance bill increases funding for students who are not English learners but are in dual language programs.

IDRA analyzed data provided by the Texas Education Agency. Key findings are below.

- The new 0.15 weight for students in dual language programs will only cover 20% of ELs in Texas. The other 80% of ELs, who are in ESL or other types of bilingual education programs, will continue to receive a 0.1 weight. This means that Texas would still be dramatically underfunding programs for most English learners.
- While dual language programs are a very effective type of bilingual education program, the increased weight of 0.05 will likely not fully cover much of the costs of these programs.
- Most English learners in the state (80%) will be left with the same low funding weight (0.1) they have had since the 1980s, even as funds are provided to non-English learners for dual language programs.
- The 0.1 funding weight has never been consistent with what research shows it actually costs to provide quality educational opportunities to English learner students.
- Dual language programs are important and should be encouraged, but the great majority of English learners in the state do not benefit from the proposed legislation.

### Most English Learners Would Be Excluded from the Proposed Dual Language Weight



*Data source: Texas Education Agency, 2019. The figures from TEA include masked data for privacy. IDRA used a proxy to conduct this analysis. Thus, the counts are not exact. Figures do include traditional and charter schools.*

English Learner Students in Texas by Type of Program								
	EL Students Not Served in Dual Language				EL Students Served in Dual Language			Non-EL Students Served in Dual Language
	Transitional BE Early Exit	Transitional BE Late Exit	ESL	Total	Dual Language Immersion One Way	Dual Language Immersion Two Way	Total	Total
<b>Number</b>	160,517	42,895	555,364	<b>758,776</b>	138,322	56,608	<b>194,930</b>	<b>42,628</b>
<b>Percent</b>	17%	4%	58%	<b>80%</b>	15%	6%	<b>20%</b>	n/a

Data source: Texas Education Agency, 2019. The figures from TEA include masked data for privacy. IDRA used a proxy to conduct this analysis. Thus, the counts are not exact. Figures do include traditional and charter schools.

## Definitions

**Transitional Bilingual Education** – Uses the students’ home language, in addition to English, for instruction. Students are taught English while also learning core subjects like math, reading and social studies in their primary language.

**Early/Late Exit** – The amount of time students are in a bilingual education program typically ranges from a minimum of two years (early-exit) to six years (late-exit).

**English as a Second Language** – Students receive English instruction during a part of the day while most classes are taught in English (typically in middle and high schools.)

**Dual Language Immersion Two-way** – English learners are grouped with English speakers. Ideally, there is a nearly 50/50 balance. Instruction is provided in both languages, while students serve learn from each other.

**Dual Language Immersion One-Way** – Students are grouped with speakers of the same language. These programs support one language group of students to become bilingual, bi-cultural, and bi-literate.

## References

Texas Commission on Public School Finance. (December 31, 2018). *Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It the Most*. <https://tea.texas.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=51539627491>

The Intercultural Development Research Association 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. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.