



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. Despite a rich history of research, educator expertise and school leadership, EL students in Texas struggle to succeed. Significant underfunding of English learner 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 English learners in the same grade. English learners 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, which, even at the time, 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

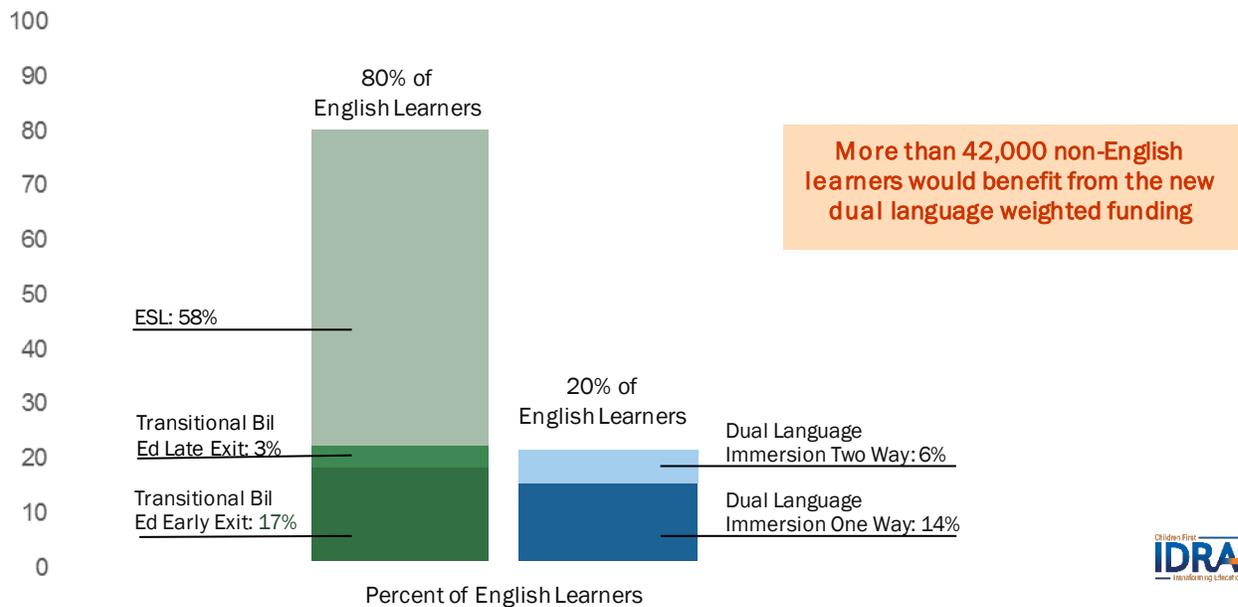
The school finance commission report (2018) does not recommend an increase of the bilingual weight. Rather, it recommends the creation of a new dual language allotment, with a weight of 0.05. The school districts that are required by law to create bilingual education programs and have also implemented dual language programs 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 – which covers about 51.3 percent of English learner students according to the commission report – will continue to get the same insufficient 0.1 weight that they have for 30 plus years.

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

IDRA's findings show:

- Even with a 0.15 weight for half of students for dual language and a 0.1 weight for the other half without dual language, Texas would still be dramatically underfunding programs for 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 the costs of these programs and will only impact the 20% of English learners in the state who are in dual language 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.
- This low funding weight has never been consistent with what research shows it actually costs to provide quality educational opportunities to English learner students.
- Dual language is great, but the great majority of English learners in the state do not benefit from the proposed legislation.

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English Learner Students in Texas by Type of Program

| | Total EL Population | 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 |
| Number | 953,705 | 160,517 | 42,895 | 555,364 | 758,776 | 138,322 | 56,608 | 194,930 | 42,628 |
| Percent | | 17% | 3% | 58% | 80% | 14% | 6% | 20% | 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 include traditional public and charter schools.

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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>