



Texas Must Create a Statewide Plan for Improving Bilingual Education

IDRA Testimony for SB 560, Presented by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Senate Education Committee, April 12, 2021

Dear Chairman Taylor and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, and I am the Deputy Director of Policy at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We support SB 560.

SB 560 came out of a year-long initiative, the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative, to identify better policies for young English learners (or emergent bilingual students). During that process, we heard from administrators, teachers and experts that Texas must develop a statewide strategic plan to address the needs of emergent bilingual students with tangible goals and timelines for achieving them.

Texas serves the largest share of emergent bilingual students in the nation – about twice the national average of 10% (Latham Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). Yet until now, Texas had not taken steps to establish a statewide plan to develop goals for high-quality bilingual education.

The plan through SB 560 would set goals to increase the number of certified bilingual educators, expand dual language immersion programs, and implement clear data collection and monitoring for emergent bilingual students' success. This bill also ensures that the Texas Education Agency will work with key stakeholders – including public schools, early childhood education programs, and, most importantly, parents of emergent bilingual students – in developing this statewide strategic plan for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. These features ensure that more emergent bilingual students benefit from the important steps forward taken by legislators through HB 3 (2019).

Currently, only about one in five emergent bilingual students is in a dual language program, which is one of several types of bilingual education programs (Craven, 2019). Emergent bilingual students meet grade-level standards for STAAR and college readiness at lower rates than their peers (Latham Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). These students also have experienced some of the greatest disruptions to their learning through the pandemic. This bill would help structure the state's efforts to get students back on track in ways that also improve bilingual education.

We enthusiastically recommend passing SB 560 to support better bilingual education goals, programs, and outcomes for our students.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

Craven, M. (April 2019). Current Proposals for Texas' Investment in English Learners Still Not Enough. IDRA Newsletter. <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/current-proposals-for-texas-investment-in-english-learners-still-not-enough/>

Latham Sikes, C., & Villanueva, C. (2021). Creating a More Bilingual Texas: A Closer Look at Bilingual Education in the Lone Star State. San Antonio: IDRA & Austin: Every Texan. <http://idra.news/BilingualTX>

Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative. <https://bilingualtexas.org/>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. 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.