



HB 1744 Helps Address the Three-Decades-Long Teacher Shortage in Bilingual Education

IDRA Testimony for House Bill 1744, Presented by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 20, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton 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 HB 1744.

Texas Has a Three-Decades Long Shortage of Bilingual Educators

Texas has maintained a shortage of certified bilingual education and ESL teachers for over 30 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Texas serves over 1.1 million emergent bilingual (English learner) students and the greatest share of emergent bilingual students of any state at over 20% of public school students. Yet, we continue to struggle to recruit, train, certify and retain bilingual educators in Texas classrooms (Latham Sikes & Villanueva, 2021).

This bill helps structure early career pathways for prospective bilingual educators, ESL teachers, and Spanish-language instructors to address our teacher shortage. This type of structure is akin to grow-your-own programs that connect students with teaching careers in their communities through preparatory high school coursework and professional career pipelines.

By expanding early career options for bilingual education, students can envision careers that build on their bilingualism and biliteracy and meet critical state workforce needs. This builds on the work of HB 3 by strengthening the bilingual teacher workforce to support high-quality programs and aids the state's work to meet postsecondary goals of the TX60x30 plan.

Overcoming Barriers to Entering Teacher Workforce

Importantly, HB 1744 provides critical financial assistance to prospective bilingual educators. We know postsecondary affordability is often a barrier to capable, bilingual people who are interested in pursuing a career as a certified educator.

Through its Transition to Teaching programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, IDRA partnered with universities and more than 20 K-12 public schools across Texas to recruit and prepare a new generation of more than 800 skilled, effective teachers to lead and innovate in schools that need them most. The program addressed key factors contributing to teacher shortages, including the need for more in-depth teacher training and to better matched placements for teachers in the right school communities for their training and expertise. This bill helps overcome those barriers. (IDRA, 2018)

Texas cannot properly serve the one in five students who are emergent bilingual students without quality, certified bilingual educators. HB 1744 provides the early career training and necessary financial incentives to address our longstanding bilingual teacher shortage.

Recommendations

- Adopt HB 1744 to address Texas' persistent teacher shortage for bilingual education/ESL and Spanish; and
- Support measurable goals to increase certified bilingual education teachers through a state strategic plan for bilingual education.

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

IDRA. (2020). Teaching Quality. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlJ20cc>

IDRA. (2018). IDRA Transition to Teaching Program 15-Year Synthesis. San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association. <https://idra.news/acpP>

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://bilingualex.org/>

Texas Education Agency. (2021). Grow Your Own, website. <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/educator-initiatives-and-performance/grow-your-own>

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). Teacher Shortage Areas Report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. <https://tsa.ed.gov/#/reports>

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.