



## **HB 2256 Improves Bilingual and Special Education Service Identification for Students**

**IDRA Testimony for House Bill 2256, Presented by Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes to the House Public Education Committee, April 6, 2021**

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, and I am 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 are in favor of HB 2256.

HB 2256 came out of a year-long initiative, the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative, to identify better policies for young English learners (emergent bilingual students). During that process, we heard from administrators, teachers and experts that a certification in bilingual special education would help to better serve English learners who also have special education needs, as well as other students in both of those groups.

Currently, English learner students experience both an over-identification and an under-identification for special education (Zacarian, 2011; Zirkel, 2021). This is because not enough educators and diagnosticians have the training to differentiate between linguistic needs and developmental needs. Students who only have linguistic needs can be inappropriately identified for special education, or vice versa, as students who have both linguistic and special education needs are sometimes only identified for language programs.

The misidentification of English learner students and their special education needs is inefficient and ineffective for addressing the students' actual learning needs. It also compromises students' federal protections to receive the educational services they need to succeed (Zirkel, 2021).

Strong bilingual education programs include appropriate identification and services for English learner students who also require special education supports (IDRA, 2016; Kennedy, 2019). When students receive coordinated services to address all their learning and developmental needs, they have better learning outcomes.

We recommend passing HB 2256 to support better bilingual and special education services for 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](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

## Resources

- Kennedy, B. (2019). Effective Practices in Bilingual Education Program Model Implementation: A Literature Review. Austin: Texas Education Agency.  
<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Bilingual%20Education%20Programs%20Literature%20Review%20Jan%202019.pdf>
- Robledo Montecel, M., Cortez, J.D., Cortez, A., & Villareal, A. (2016). Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English: A Guide. San Antonio: IDRA. [https://www.idra.org/research\\_articles/ell-education/good-schools-classrooms-children-learning-english/](https://www.idra.org/research_articles/ell-education/good-schools-classrooms-children-learning-english/)
- Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative. <https://bilingualtexas.org/>
- Zacarian, D. (2011). The Over- and Under-Identification of ELLs in Special Education. In Transforming Schools for English Learners: A Comprehensive Framework for School Leaders, by Zacarian, D. <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/over-and-under-identification-ells-special-education>
- Zirkel, P. (2021). English Learners In K-12 Schools at the Perilous Intersection with Disability Laws: The Need for Guardias Bilingües. The Public Interest Law Journal, 30(1).  
<https://www.bu.edu/pilj/files/2021/04/Zirkel.pdf>

*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.*