



## Issue Brief

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# High Quality Bilingual Education Programs Need More Support to Realize State Goals

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IDRA is 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. This brief focuses on the status of bilingual education attendance funding related to HB 3 and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on emergent bilingual students and the bilingual teacher workforce.

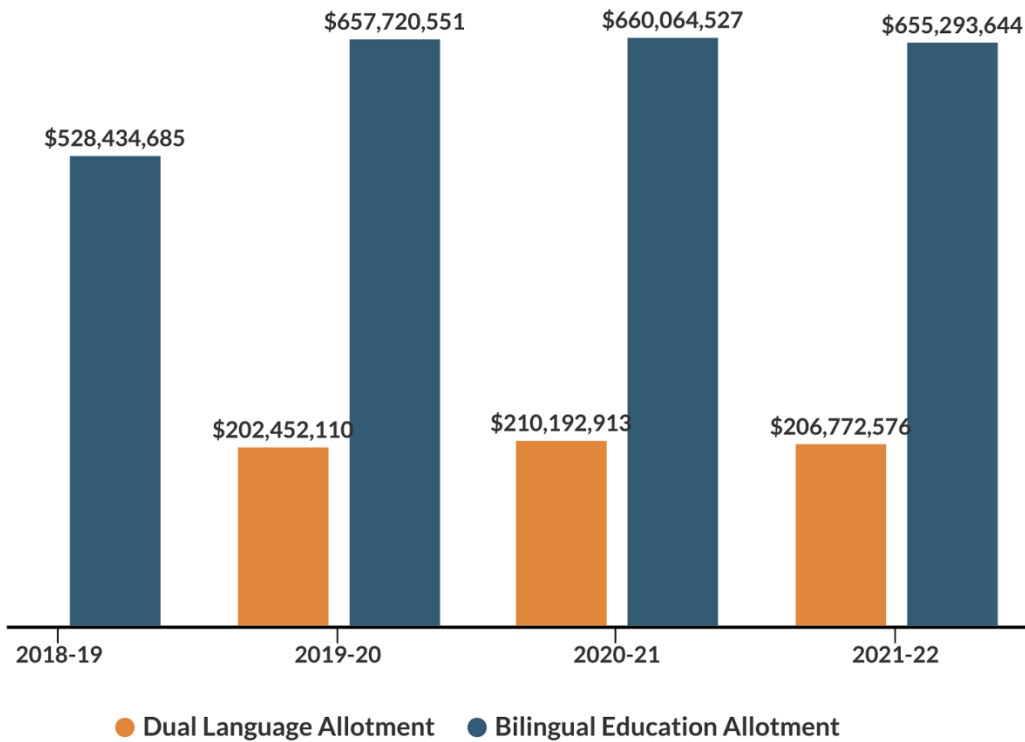
## Texas' Bilingual Education Programs Need Support to Realize HB 3 Goals

Texas' bilingual education weight remains at 10% (0.10), one of the lowest levels among states with weighted bilingual funding (ECS, 2021). HB 3 did not increase this weight but implemented a new dual language allotment, funded by an additional 5% (0.05) weight. For emergent bilingual students in dual language programs, these two combined weights equal 15% (0.15) weighted funding for the bilingual educational allotment total. The dual language weight applies also to non-emergent bilingual, or English dominant, students enrolled in two-way dual language programs. However, for the more than 75% of emergent bilingual students in Texas schools who are not in dual language programs, the weight went unchanged.

The dual language allotment was intended to incentivize the growth of dual language programs, as evidence shows these programs are more effective in producing greater language and literacy outcomes for students and greater academic achievement over time for emergent bilingual students who achieve bilingualism and biliteracy (Polanco & Luft de Baker, 2018; Thomas & Collier, 2019). In 2019 and to present, about only in five emergent bilingual students attend a dual language program for bilingual education (TEA, June 2021).

Yet since HB 3’s implementation, and through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, **Texas schools have experienced a drop in bilingual education funding due to lower attendance – a funding decline of over \$2.4 million since 2019.** This largely comes from a drop in emergent bilingual non-dual language average daily attendance (ADA) of 10,975 from the 2019-20 to 2021-22 school year.

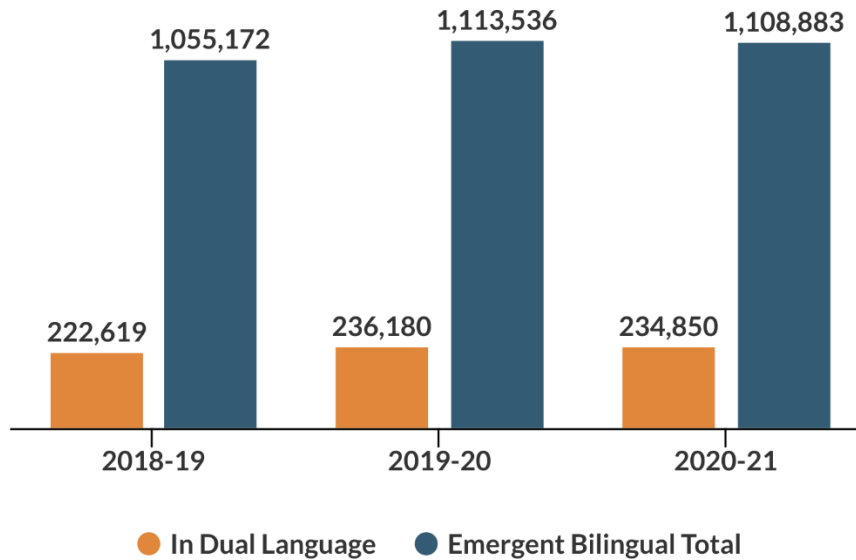
**Bilingual Education Allotment Dropped in 2021-22**



Source: TEA Statewide Summary of Finances, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22

Moreover, the dual language attendance dropped for emergent bilingual students (by 2,419) and non-emergent bilingual (English proficient) students (by 4,461) in dual language programs in the 2021-22 school year. Emergent bilingual student ADA in dual language programs increased by 8,582 between 2019-20 and 2020-21 before the recent decline. Eleven fewer school districts offered dual language programs in 2020-21 than in the prior school year, 2019-20 (TEA, 2022).

## Proportion of Emergent Bilingual Students in Dual Language Programs Remains Unchanged since Pre-HB3



Data source: TEA English Learners by Program, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21

**Despite the new dual language program weight, the proportion of emergent bilingual students served by dual language programs has stayed at 21% since pre-HB 3.**

To date, the state has not met its goal of expanding dual language programs. This suggests that the state can make greater investments to expand and support dual language programs, which help advance statewide goals for postsecondary attainment and workforce development. The 87<sup>th</sup> legislature renewed a commitment to dual language programs through SB 560, which authorized the Texas Education Agency to develop a statewide strategic plan to improve and expand bilingual education, including by increasing the certified bilingual teacher workforce and dual language programs. Strategies to advance these goals will need to consider the current decline in bilingual and dual language ADA in efforts to promote the value of bilingualism and biliteracy in Texas.

## Declines in Bilingual Education ADA Indicate Impact of COVID-19

In addition to declining average daily attendance, the number of emergent bilingual students in Texas public schools dropped in the 2020-21 school year for the first time in 10 years (TEA, June 2021). The decline in bilingual attendance and enrollment is indicative of COVID-19's negative impact on emergent bilingual students. Emergent bilingual students experienced disproportionate academic disruptions during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years with lasting impacts.

Over half the state's emergent bilingual student population attended school remotely in 2020-21, which presented challenges for accessing quality bilingual education services

(Lazarin, 2022). Emergent bilingual students and their families also were more likely to experience digital divide challenges, such as difficulty consistently accessing devices, Internet service and digital literacy strategies to navigate remote learning (Zehler, et al., 2019).

While many student groups had lower STAAR scores in 2020-21 compared to pre-pandemic achievement, emergent bilingual students' scores demonstrated the severity of the COVID-19 academic disruptions. The percentage of emergent bilingual students not meeting proficiency in math grew by over 20 percentage points (Lazarin, 2022). Similarly, the percentage of emergent bilingual students not meeting third grade reading levels increased 15 percentage points (TEA, 2022).

The bilingual education teacher workforce also suffered under COVID-19. Texas has experienced a shortage in certified bilingual/ESL teachers for over 30 years, and the pressures of the pandemic placed particularly greater burdens on bilingual/ESL teachers' class sizes and teaching workloads (Horn, et al., 2022).

Emergent bilingual students account for one in five Texas public school students. Investing in their education, especially bilingual education services, benefits all students' literacy and life achievements. Additionally, their educational success is essential to achieving the state's K-12, postsecondary and workforce goals. While schools certainly faced challenges to develop new dual language programs amid the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing high-quality bilingual education going forward is essential to students' educational recovery and success.

## Recommendations

The legislature can make progress to realize the dual language goals of HB 3 and ensure all emergent bilingual students have the resources they need in their language programs by:

- Increasing the basic allotment based on cost evidence and adjusted for inflation;
- Increasing the bilingual education allotment weight to 40% (0.40) to bolster financial support for all bilingual programs and expand dual language programs;

In addition, the state legislature and agencies must provide targeted support for emergent bilingual students as part of comprehensive state goals for improving public education. This includes:

- Building upon commitments from the 87<sup>th</sup> legislative session to improve and expand bilingual education, per the forthcoming strategic plan authorized by SB 560 (87R), including:
  - Increasing the number of certified bilingual educators;
  - Instituting strong data monitoring for bilingual high school graduates through the state seal of biliteracy; and
  - Expanding dual language programs across Texas public schools.
- Investing in specific programs and supports to address recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers in the workforce.

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).

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