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## Texas Policy Priorities

As Texas Legislature prepares to convene this month, IDRA is releasing a series of stories on our policy priorities. The first editions focused on [Effective School Assessments and Accountability that Does Not Hurt Students](#) and [Texas Must Fulfill its Funding Promises to Public Schools](#). Stay tuned for future updates and see additional recommendations, research and resources at [IDRA's Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement website](#).

See [Spanish-language version](#) of this edition.

January 8, 2021

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- **Reimagining School Discipline in Texas and Beyond**
- **Join Our Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network**

## Texas Needs a Statewide Plan for Equitable Education for

# Emergent Bilingual Students

State leaders must act decisively to ensure that emergent bilingual students – who make up one in five Texas public school students – have equitable access to the resources they need to be successful and graduate ready for college.



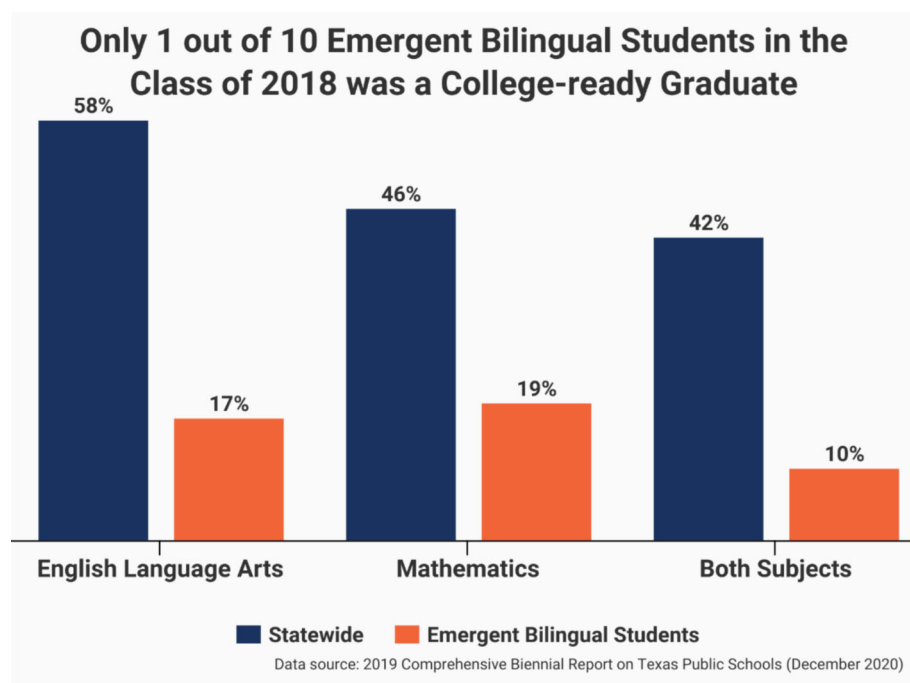
## Where We Stand for the Upcoming Texas Legislative Session

IDRA urges the state to develop a comprehensive, statewide plan for equitably educating emergent bilingual students. Emergent bilingual students, recognized as, “English learners” or “English language learners” by many schools and state agencies, are uniquely positioned to become bilingual if both their home language and English are taught and valued in schools.

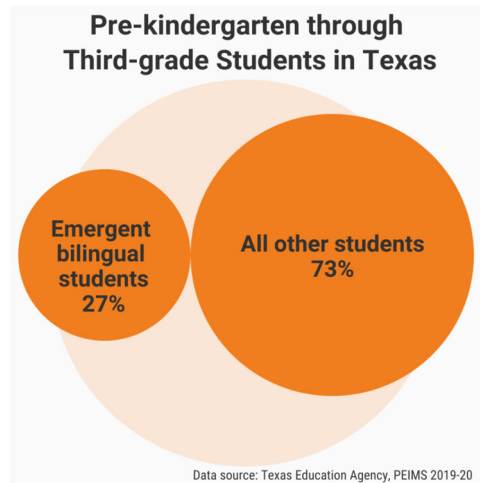
This requires a state plan with strategies to increase the number of certified bilingual teachers, support high-quality bilingual education programs and build more opportunities for bilingual education throughout Pre-K through 12th grade.

## Why We Need a Statewide Plan for Emergent Bilingual Student Education

Texas [only provides an additional 10%](#) for English learners – [one of the lowest rates in the country](#). Just one in 12 emergent bilingual students graduates as “college-ready.”



The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in schools, with disproportionate effects on emergent bilingual student education. This has been especially hard on very young emergent bilingual students, who make up 27% of pre-kindergarten through third-grade children in Texas.



Coupled with regular summer learning loss, the [effects of the pandemic](#) on academic gains for emergent bilingual students can be long-lasting and devastating if our state leaders do not take immediate action to support their learning.

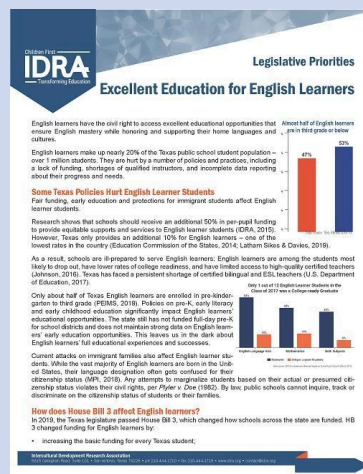
To develop a statewide plan that addresses the needs of emergent bilingual students across the PK-12 pipeline, we recommend that state leaders do the following.

- **Support expansion of dual language programs, which currently serve only 1 in 5 emergent bilingual students.**
- **Increase the number of certified bilingual education teachers.** Texas has a severe shortage of certified bilingual and ESL teachers. The state needs to address the shortage with certified bilingual education teachers in order to expand bilingual education programs across districts and grade levels.
- **Collect and report data on the number of students who graduate bilingual or multilingual through the [Seal of Biliteracy](#).** In districts where it is offered, the Seal of Biliteracy designates students who have become bilingual and biliterate across academic subjects.
- **Engage families and community stakeholders throughout the plan.** Create a state broadband and technology plan that serves the needs of emergent bilingual students.
- **Change statutory language for “English learners” to “emergent bilingual” students to prioritize the importance of bilingualism over an English-only focus.**
- **Pause accountability requirements for assessments for spring 2021, such as Texas English Language Proficiency System (TELPAS) tests.** We encourage districts to continue to monitor emergent bilingual (English learner) student learning through local, formative assessments that are not tied to state-requirements or accountability system consequences and are administered over an extended assessment window.
- **Set clear guidelines for TEA to monitor and report on pandemic-related data.**

By taking steps now to develop and implement a comprehensive state plan for equitable education for emergent bilinguals, Texas lawmakers will be investing in the future of all students.



[Learn more at IDRA's Education Policy website on Ensuring Excellent Educational Opportunities for English Learners](#)



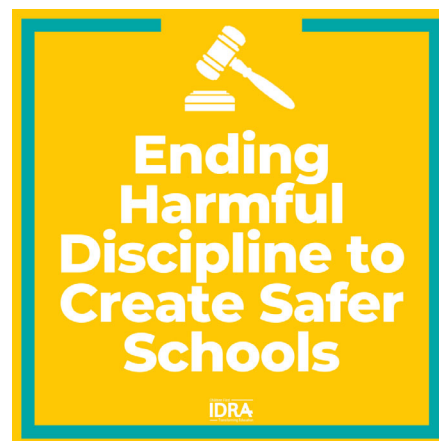
[See IDRA's Legislative Priorities Factsheet: Excellent Education for English Learners \(in English & Spanish\)](#)

## Reimagining School Discipline in Texas and Beyond

### Positive School Environment

All students have a right to a positive and supportive environment that enhances their academic, emotional and spiritual growth. However, unjust discipline practices, such as corporal punishment, school policing, and assigning students to disciplinary alternative education programs, hamper the development of environments that position all students to be successful.

To foster such environments, educators need assistance in the form of policies informed by those who are impacted the most – students, families, community members, educators and school administrators – to address the current and future disparities that further marginalize students of color, students with disabilities and LGBTQ students.



## Where We Stand for the Upcoming Texas Legislative Session

IDRA believes all students deserve excellent and equitable educational opportunities. But unjust discipline practices deny many students, particularly historically marginalized students, those opportunities. Current practices such as those previously mentioned harm the [growth and development](#) of all students, especially marginalized students.

IDRA advocates [equitable discipline plans](#) that not only prioritize safety but are also fair, consistent, developmentally appropriate, as well as sensitive to the needs of students and adults.

State leaders and educators must proactively create positive school climates by [implementing plans](#) that incorporate social, emotional and behavioral support systems that respond to the needs of all students and adults.

## Policy Recommendations

Education scholar Dr. Bettina Love (2020) reminds us, “We must struggle together not only to reimagine schools but to build new schools that we are taught to believe are impossible.”

With this in mind, IDRA recommends the following policies for the upcoming Texas legislative session.

- **Adopt the Texas CROWN Act, and prohibit punishments that exclude students from the classroom** (like suspensions) for [dress code violations](#), which disproportionately target Black students, specifically girls, pushing them out of their classrooms.

Most student expulsions are for discretionary (not required) reasons, including dress code violations in Texas



Percent of expulsions in 2019-20

Data source: State Level Annual Discipline Summary, PEIMS Discipline Data for 2019-20

- Require that schools **meet the recommended student-to-mental health professional ratios** (including counselors and social workers). Diverse, well-trained mental and behavioral health professionals [can help to create safe, supportive schools](#) where the underlying needs of students and adults are addressed, rather than punished. This is especially critical as students and adults are returning to classrooms during the pandemic. **Districts should use SB 11 (86-R) school safety allotment funds to hire diverse counselors and social workers** and provide teacher training in research-based ways to promote safe and supportive schools and combat the school-to-prison pipeline.

- Obligate each local education agency (public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools) to **report to the Texas Education Agency Commissioner disaggregated data** by student race, ethnicity, sex and

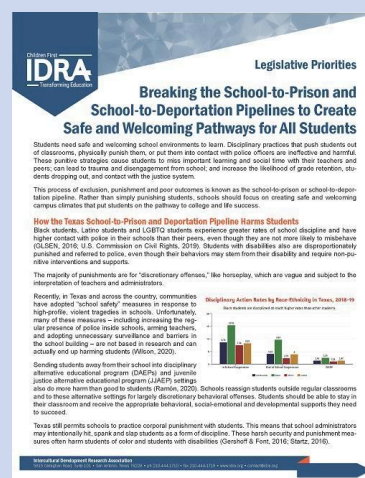


gender, economically disadvantaged status, special education designation, English learner designation, student status as homeless, and grade level. In addition, **TEA should provide a data report to the Legislature on a quarterly schedule.**

- **Raise the ages of juvenile court jurisdiction.** Both the upper and lower ages should be increased so that 10- to 12-year-old children are not criminalized, and 18-year-old youth are not pushed into the adult criminal justice system.
- **End corporal punishment in schools**, which is [used disproportionately against Black students](#) in Texas and across the U.S. South. In addition to having discriminatory outcomes in application, the practice has not been found to effectively change student behaviors in schools, serves no educational purpose, and can push students into the school-to-prison pipeline.
- **Increase recess and outdoor time requirements for all grade levels and prohibit schools from taking recess away from students.** Research shows that unstructured outdoor time improves concentration, academic performance, [social emotional wellbeing and health outcomes](#) (particularly during COVID-19).



[Learn more at IDRA's Education Policy website on Ending Harmful Discipline to Create Safer Schools](#)



[See IDRA's Legislative Priorities Factsheet: Breaking the School-to-Prison and School-to-Deportation Pipelines \(in English & Spanish\)](#)

## Resources

Love, B. (2020). *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. Beacon Press.

Shujaa, M.J. (ed). (1994). *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*. Africa World Press.

## Join Our Texas Education CAFE Advocacy Network

IDRA's family leadership in education process, [Education CAFE™](#), supports parents and caregivers to understand and influence public school policy and practice. This January, families in Texas will have various opportunities to inform legislators and staff about their priorities, needs and hopes for the education of their children, from birth through college graduation.

Due to COVID-19, there likely will be a drastic change in how the general public will be able to interact with policymakers during the Texas legislative session. Now more than ever, policymakers need to hear from the very people their decisions will impact. IDRA is launching a family and community advocacy network focusing on education issues in the Texas legislative session. We invite families and community advocates to join in.

Start by signing up to receive our new email alerts, which will be available in English and Spanish.



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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. 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.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote

the success of students of all backgrounds.

