

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

[View as Webpage](#)



## Amplifying Texas' People Power in a Legislative Session Marked by Harmful Policies

June 2, 2021

During the 87th Texas legislative session that ended this week, IDRA fought for policies that ensure excellent and equitable schools for all students. The legislature convened in the wake of multiple crises – a global pandemic, an economic shutdown, systemic and violent racism, and a devastating winter storm. Tragically, the state's leadership largely sought to curtail civil rights and ignore those most impacted by Texas education policy.



At IDRA, we entered this session with a mission to build people power, beginning with the creation of our [Education Policy Fellows](#)\* program. We were so honored to work alongside families and students to convene a student policy summit, weekly training sessions on the legislative process, virtual press conferences, and community roundtables to address critical education priorities. We even organized a shadow hearing after the

legislature sought to silence voices opposing HB 3979, a dangerous bill that will limit teaching and learning about civics and racism.

Despite a tough session, we had several bright spots. I am so proud to highlight the work of IDRA's heroic policy team led by Morgan Craven: Ana Ramón, Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes and our fearless fellows Dr. Altheria Caldera, Araceli García, Thomas Marshall and Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz. They worked tirelessly to:

- Help pass four bills supporting emergent bilingual students;
- Push for urban representation in the session's major broadband bill;
- Support the new law expanding the authority of individual graduation committees to ensure more students graduate high school;
- Ensure funds are spent on evidence-based approaches that promote safe schools for all students; and
- Defeat an attempt to gut the Texas Top 10% Plan.

Read more about these bills below and stay tuned for IDRA's Summer Policy Series, where we will discuss the impact of the legislative session and share exciting opportunities for you to join our fight for education equity. Thank you for your support and partnership!

*Celina Moreno*

## Strong Policies that Passed

Though many harmful bills were pushed through the legislative process this year, there are still bright spots to highlight from the 2021 legislative session.

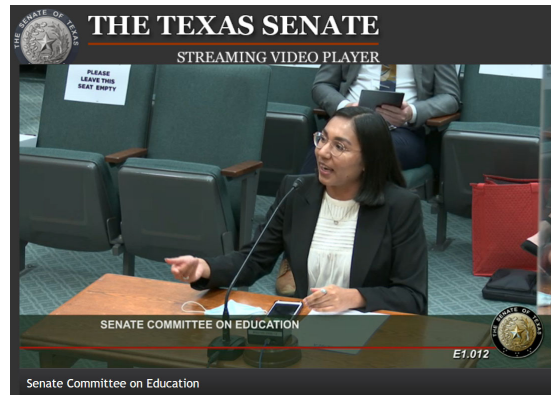
## Ensuring Excellent Educational Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual Students



We are thrilled that four bills related to the [Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative](#), made it to the governor's desk for his signature. Our keystone piece of legislation, [SB 560](#) by Sen. Lucio, creates a state strategic plan for bilingual education by setting clear benchmarks to increase the number of bilingually certified teachers, the number of students who graduate bilingual or multilingual, and the availability of high-quality dual language immersion classes in pre-K through 12th grade.

To better serve students in need of both bilingual and special education, [HB 2256](#) by Rep. Guerra creates a new teacher certification in bilingual special education. Teachers who want to be able to screen, assess, instruct and support linguistically diverse students who also should receive special education services will now be specially trained and certified to meet students' needs.

[SB 2066](#) by Sen. Menéndez supports an asset-based perspective in emergent bilingual student education by changing out-of-date terms like “limited English proficient” student and “English learner” to “emergent bilingual” students.



[SB 2081](#) by Sen. Menéndez and Rep. Talarico requires smaller pre-K class sizes for most Texas pre-K providers. By sticking to a research-backed ratio of students to teachers, we can ensure that Texas students build strong educational foundations in pre-K.

Together, these four bills represent a step in the right direction for access to an equitable and excellent education for Texas emergent bilingual students.

## Promoting Equitable Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Digital Inclusion



We know the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated public education's systemic inequities. From student mental health to broadband Internet access, there are longstanding problems that must be addressed. Following this session, we are excited about the ways the legislature took action for students in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital divide, including the following.

[HB 5](#) by Rep. Ashby creates a statewide broadband office, statewide broadband plan, and broadband grant program for entities like schools and hospitals to apply for funding. Importantly, we pushed for this



bill to add an urban school district representative on the governor's broadband council to ensure urban communities have access to broadband infrastructures.

[SB 179](#) by Senator Lucio expands school counselors' capacity to deliver critical counseling services to students by requiring school districts to adopt a policy that requires school counselors to spend at least 80% of their work time providing such services directly to students.

## Preparing All Students to Succeed in College with Better Data, Better Counseling and Equitable Representation



Though there were many missed opportunities to expand preparation and access to college for Texas students, [HB 999](#) by Rep. Bernal will ensure many more students across the state are able to graduate from high school. Effective immediately, HB 999 guarantees that individual graduation committees will be allowed to determine whether a student will graduate without having to consider whether the student passed end-of-course assessments. This is important protection given the challenges of teaching, learning and test administration due to COVID-19.

Additionally, in a legislative session full of harmful bills, there was a strong defensive campaign against [SB 1091](#), a bill that proposed a cap on the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan and would have limited college access for students of color across the state.



\* The IDRA Education Policy Fellows Program is generously supported by Trellis Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation and in partnership with the John Gardner Public Service Fellowship, facilitated by Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service. We are grateful for their support!

## There's Still Work to Do!

Like so many others, we are frustrated by the harmful bills that passed this legislative session, particularly [HB 3979](#), which limits important coursework

and training opportunities and conversations about racial justice in Texas classrooms. You can read more about [what HB 3979 does here](#).

Give to equity! We are committed to pressing on to secure equity and excellence in education for all students. You can help us extend our impact by making a donation today.

**Donate today!**

To learn more about our policy agenda, contact Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at [chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org) or Ana Ramón, Deputy Director of Advocacy, at [ana.ramon@idra.org](mailto:ana.ramon@idra.org).

**Services**

**Research**

**Pressroom**

**About Us**

**Website**



5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101  
San Antonio, Texas 78228  
Phone: 210-444-1710

Reach Out To Us



### **Support IDRA through Amazon Smile**

With Amazon Smile, you can shop while raising money for a cause you care about!

Visit [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and select IDRA as your charity. Thank you for helping IDRA support teachers & families to ensure that Learning Goes On during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond!



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.