



Bilingual Special Education Teacher Certification Will be Life-changing for Texas Students

Testimony before the Texas State Board for Educator Certification, presented by Dr. Lizdelia Piñón, IDRA Education Associate, December 6, 2024

Dear Chair Streepey and Honorable Members of the Board:

My name is Dr. Lizdelia Piñón, and I represent IDRA, an organization that has championed educational equity and excellence since 1973. Our mission is simple yet profound: to ensure every child – regardless of their background – has equal access to strong public schools that prepare them to succeed in college and beyond.

I am not only an advocate; I am also a mother. My children, Felicita, Frida and Santiago, are emergent bilingual students with disabilities. Their educational journeys would have been profoundly different if educators had been trained under the Bilingual Special Education Teacher Certification we are discussing today. This certification is more than a credential – it is a lifeline for students like mine, whose unique identities often place them at the intersection of invisibility and inequity in our educational system.

As a member of the Bilingual Special Education Educator Standards Advisory Committee, I collaborated with dedicated scholars, educators, advocates, and stakeholders to craft and refine these standards. This work centers on preparing teachers who will serve, truly understand, and uplift emergent bilingual students with disabilities. The standards emphasize culturally and linguistically sustaining practices and advocacy tools that empower educators to meet their students where they are and guide them toward their fullest potential.

This certification was born out of the visionary work of House Bill 2256, which emerged from the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative in 2021. Despite serving tens of thousands of emergent bilingual students with disabilities, Texas has lacked a certification program to equip educators with the specialized skills needed to address their challenges – until now. This certification represents a long-overdue opportunity to foster a culture of advocacy and inclusion in our schools, ensuring every child is seen, supported, and celebrated for who they are.

As both a scholar and a mother, I see this certification as transformational. It ensures bilingual special education teachers are not just educators but advocates—leaders who know best practices, elevate their school communities, and give a voice to dually identified students who are too often overlooked.

But this work doesn't stop at Texas' borders. IDRA is using this certification as a model policy to share with the rest of the nation. By approving this certification, you are positioning Texas as a national leader in addressing the critical intersection of language and disability through innovative, equitable teacher preparation. You set a precedent that will ripple across the country, ensuring countless emergent bilingual students with disabilities benefit from this trailblazing work.

Approving this certification will change lives. It will give educators confidence and tools to support their students and provide many families hope for a more inclusive and equitable future. For my children and the tens of thousands of students like them, this is more than compliance with HB 2256. This is Texas fulfilling its promise of opportunity for every child.

I urge you to approve this Bilingual Special Education Educator certificate. Together, let's open the door to a future where all students – no matter their language, ability or background – thrive under the care of compassionate and prepared educators.

Thank you for your time and for considering this vital step forward. IDRA stands ready to support this initiative with any necessary resources or expertise. Please contact me at lizdelia.pinon@idra.org.