

Investing in Compensatory and Bilingual Education is Key to Advancing State Goals for Student Success

IDRA Invited Testimony on HB 2, Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Public Education Committee, March 4, 2025

Dear Chair Buckley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., and I am deputy director of policy at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan 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. IDRA appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on this important legislation that would impact millions of students.

House Bill 2 offers an important foundation for considering key investments in our public schools and students, 62% of whom are considered economically disadvantaged and drive the compensatory education allotment, and 23% of whom are identified as emergent bilingual students. Texas serves the greatest proportion of emergent bilingual students in the country, also called nationally *English language learners* (NCES, 2024).

These children are not just “special populations,” they represent *all* children in public schools across the state in rural, suburban and urban schools alike and in the public schools of every member of this committee. Investing in them is investing in all Texas students.

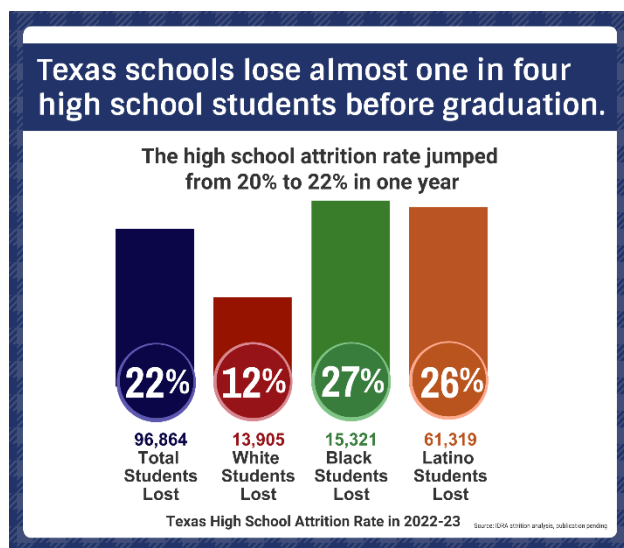
My testimony focuses on elements related to Article 1 of HB 2 concerning public education and school finance, specifically the changes to the compensatory education allotment and the need to include changes to the bilingual education allotment. In particular, I will share more on who these allotments go to support and why that matters for students’ success and the overall success of schools that educate the vast majority of Texas students.

Compensatory Education Allotment – Why Investments Matter for Student Success

The state compensatory education allotment is generated by the number of students who are considered economically disadvantaged and is meant to add funding to address disparities in student performance and completion rates. For over 36 years, IDRA has conducted an annual attrition study to examine how students across all groups are supported toward high school graduation. The most recent study for the 2022-23 school year captured the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students’ high school completion since this group began the ninth grade in 2019-20. **Astonishingly, nearly one in four students who were freshman in 2019-20 did not complete high school four years later.**

A analysis of student data by racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and other special population subgroups reveals deeper gaps. Texas high schools lose Black and Latino students at least at **twice the rate** of white students. Economically disadvantaged students are more than **three times** more likely to drop out of high school before graduation than non-economically disadvantaged peers (Quintanilla-Muñoz & Sánchez, 2024).

Since the federal ESSER funding that has dried up was distributed to schools based on their Title I status – or the number of economically disadvantaged students they served – we can reason that these gaps will grow without new targeted investments from the state (Craven, 2024).



Fortunately, we have years of evidence showing which policies and strategies keep students engaged in school or even bring them back to school after having dropped out. Investing in students who are economically disadvantaged is key among them. This funding supports programs that prepare students considered at-risk of dropping out for graduation and college and career opportunities.

For example, for decades, IDRA has led programs that identify these students as leaders for peer mentoring and tutoring programs and offered them student leadership experiences that enable them to develop skills that get them engaged and inspired in their own education. The foundational program has a 40-year track record of a 98% success rate in keeping students once considered at-risk in school (IDRA, 2016-2023).

Raising the compensatory allotment to direct more funds toward evidence-based programs for student success can help bring students back to school, keep them there, and graduate them with their sights set on college and career opportunities.

Bilingual Education Allotment and the Dual Language Allotment – Why Quality Bilingual Education is a Strategy for Literacy and College and Career Readiness

The Texas bilingual education allotment is set at 10% of additional funding, one of the lowest weights in the country compared to similar state systems. Many states average closer to 20% above base funding for bilingual programs (ECS, 2024).

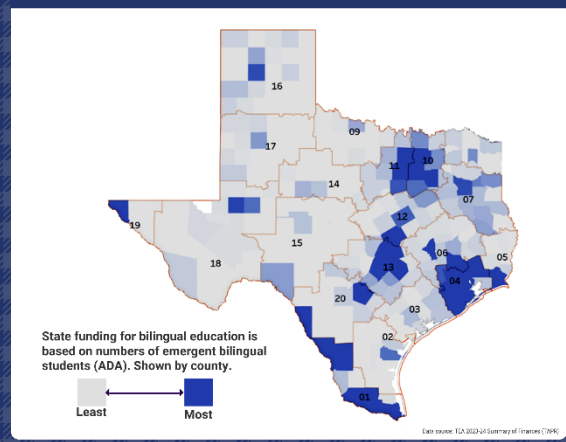
The Texas Legislature established the dual language allotment through HB 3 (86R, 2019), which acts as a sub-allotment to the total bilingual education allotment. It confers an additional 5% funding to both emergent bilingual and English proficient students in dual language programs (see Latham Sikes & Villanueva, 2021, for more on bilingual program types). High-quality bilingual programs that focus on bilingualism and biliteracy, such as dual language immersion programs, instead of English-only instruction lead to higher English literacy and test scores for both emergent

bilingual students and English proficient students in those programs (*i.e.*, two-way dual language programs) (RAND, 2017).

Funding from the bilingual education allotment goes to supporting bilingual programs in schools for classroom materials, books, supplements for staff salaries, and district efforts to integrate teaching and learning in multiple languages across educational programs. This includes professional development, training and family engagement programs.

Quality bilingual programs that are sustained across elementary and into upper grades also support students graduating bilingual and biliterate, which are critical college and workforce skills (ACTFL, 2019; Latham Sikes & Piñón, 2024). **Still, only about 22% of emergent bilingual students are in dual language immersion programs (IDRA, 2025).**

Emergent bilingual students make up nearly one in four public school students and attend schools in every corner of the state.



An increase to the bilingual education allotment by at least doubling what emergent bilingual students generate, from 10% to 20%, could greatly bolster support and expansion of high-quality programs that facilitate students' early literacy, high school completion and college and career skills.

Recommendations

IDRA respectfully asks that this committee consider the following recommendations:

- Make additional increases to the compensatory education allotment. These increases will help schools support economically disadvantaged students and can offset the ESSER funding cliff and other financial challenges that districts are facing. Many Texas school districts spent ESSER funds on necessary staff, tutoring, academic instruction resources and summer programs that are still needed. Without these programs, we risk greater gaps in achievement for economically disadvantaged students and for school success generally.
- Include the bilingual education allotment in HB 2, Article 1, and increase to a 0.2 weight (20% additional funding) for serving emergent bilingual students.
- Raise the basic allotment to account for inflation since 2019 and include a mechanism to adjust for inflation annually. This benefits all students and educators, and elevates the investments made through increased weights for targeted allotments.

Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify. IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA deputy director of policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

- ACTFL. (2019). Making Languages Our Business: Addressing Foreign Language Demand among U.S. Employers. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. https://www.languageconnectsfoundation.org/uploads/files/general/MakingLanguagesOurBusiness_ExecSummary.pdf
- Craven, M. (2024). What You Need to Know About the ESSER Funding Cliff – How Schools Will Be Impacted by the End of Federal COVID-19 Relief Funding. IDRA. <https://idra.news/ESSERcliffPDF>
- ECS. (March 2024). 50 State Comparison: K-12 Funding 2024, English Learner Funding. Education Commission of the States. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/k-12-funding-2024-05>
- IDRA. (2025). Texas Bilingual Education Funding (2023-24) – IDRA Map. <https://idra.news/TxMapSchoolFundingBE>
- IDRA. (2016-2023). Program evaluations and data analysis, unpublished. IDRA.
- Latham Sikes, C. & Piñón, L. (2024). The Path to a Stronger State Seal of Biliteracy – Advancing Texas Student Success through Bilingualism and Biliteracy. IDRA, <https://idra.news/BiliteracySealBrief>
- Latham Sikes, C. & Villanueva, C. (2021). Creating a More Bilingual Texas. IDRA and Every Texan, <https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Creating-a-More-Bilingual-Texas-2021.pdf>.
- NCES. (2024). English Learners in Public Schools. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics. from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf>.
- Quintanilla-Muñoz, C., & Sánchez, J. (November 2024). Pandemic-Legacy High School Attrition Rate Increases Two Points; Black-White Gap Widens to 15 Points. Texas Public School Attrition Study, 2022-23. IDRA. <https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Texas-Public-School-Attrition-Study-2022-23.pdf>
- RAND Corporation. (2017). Dual-language immersion programs raise student achievement in English. Research Brief. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9903.html.

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