Stronger Bilingual Education Programs Are Key Strategy for Student Success

IDRA Testimony for HB 1581, Submitted to the Texas House Subcommittee on Advanced and Career-Oriented Education by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., April 3, 2025

Dear Chair Ashby and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, 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.

We are in favor of House Bill 1581. This bill addresses community and educators' feedback from the Texas Education Agency's SB 560 Plan for Emergent Bilingual Students released last January. The plan called for more agency support to grow and sustain high-quality bilingual education programs, assist districts in delivering bilingual and ESL programs as required by law, and increase support for educators serving emergent bilingual students.

Texas serves over 1.3 million students who speak a language other than English at home. Over a third of them are in the early grades of prekindergarten to third grade, where strong language and literacy development is necessary for academic success (TEA, 2024). Research shows that high-quality bilingual education programs lead students to outperform their English-only peers and develop the necessary workforce skills of being able to speak, read and write in more than one language (Williams et al., 2023). Developing robust bilingual education programs requires materials, district and campus-level coordination, parent engagement in multiple languages, and well-trained teachers and staff. HB 1581 provides the support needed for school districts to develop stronger programs that help students learn from early grades through graduation.

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.

Resources

TEA. (January 2023). SB 560 Emergent Bilingual Strategic Plan. Texas Education Agency. https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/sb-560-emergent%20bilingual-strategic-plan.pdf

TEA. (2024). Emergent Bilingual Students by Category and Grade, School Year 23-24. Texas Education Agency.

Williams, C.P., Meek, S., Marcus, M., & Zabala, J. (May 15, 2023). Ensuring Equitable Access to Dual-Language Immersion Programs: Supporting English Learners' Emerging Bilingualism. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/ensuring-equitable-access-to-dual-language-immersion-programs-supporting-english-learners-emerging-bilingualism/

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. 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.