

Texas Students Would Benefit by Building on Bilingual Education Progress

IDRA Testimony to the Texas House Public Education Committee on the Interim Charge Relating to the State of Education, Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., May 11, 2026

Dear Chair Buckley and 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.

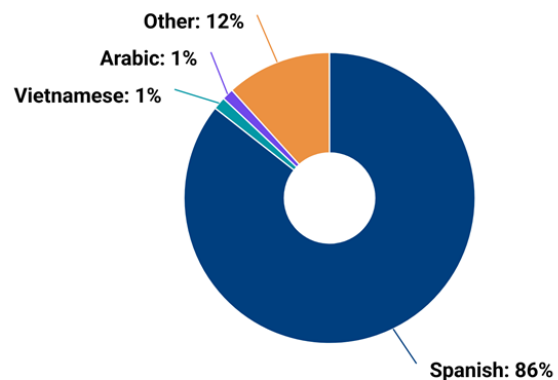
This committee passed historic reforms to bilingual education during the last session. For the first time in over 40 years, this committee invested in the over 1 million emergent bilingual students in Texas public schools by raising the bilingual education allotment from 10% to 12% additional per-pupil funding. This was monumental, since Texas serves one in five emergent bilingual students in the country, and we know that high-quality bilingual education programs are critical to early literacy gains, college and career readiness and workforce development.

While that increase was not part of the final House Bill 2 funding package, it helped establish a foundation for promising work to ensure all Texas public school students can get a quality public education in the language they understand – be that English, Spanish or one of the over 100 languages spoken across the state.

Spanish, Vietnamese and Arabic comprise the top three most frequently spoken languages, but thousands of students in Texas schools also speak Pashto, Urdu, Mandarin Chinese, Gujarati, Swahili and many other languages.

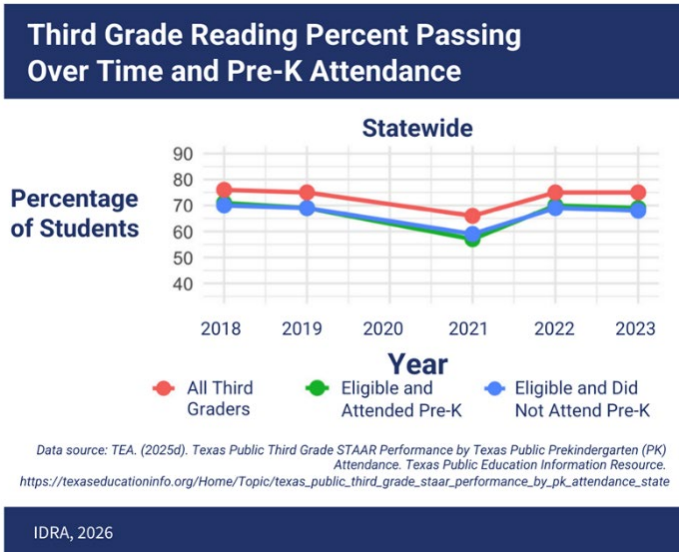
Data tell us that early investments in bilingual education pay off in third grade reading scores. For example, 40% of Texas pre-kindergarten students are designated as emergent bilingual students. Third graders who attended pre-kindergarten pass the STAAR reading exam at slightly higher rates than their peers who did not attend.

Top Three Languages Other than English Spoken in Texas Schools

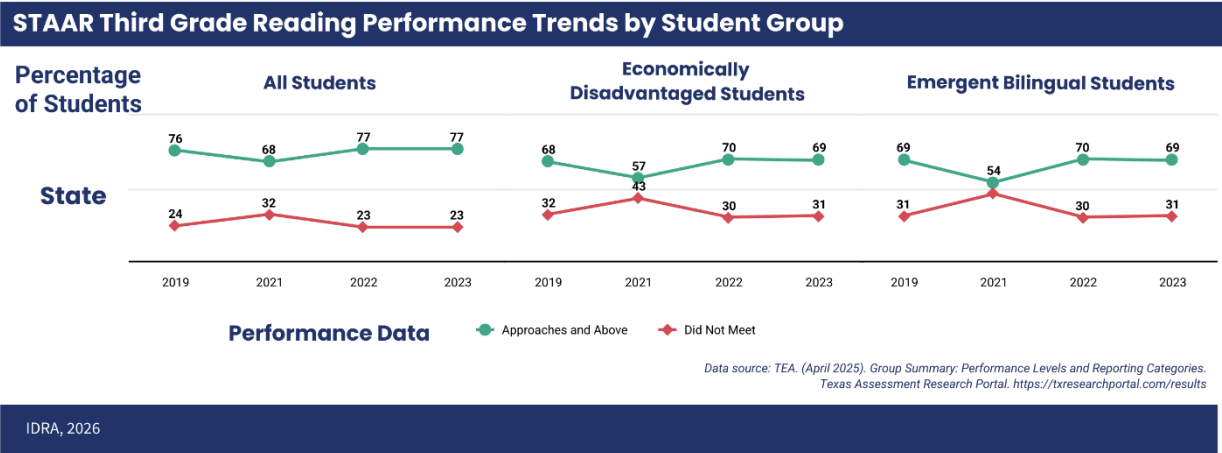


Data source: TEA Emergent Bilingual Fact Sheet #1 – Statistics, 2024-25, <https://www.txel.org/media/hxcfzvqe/factsheet1-statistics.pdf>

IDRA, 2026



Third grade emergent bilingual students rebounded from post-pandemic levels in 2021 on the STAAR reading exam comparable to their peers statewide (see Perez & Latham Sikes, 2026).



Furthermore, sustained bilingual education programs and expanded pathways to cultivate biliteracy opportunities through high school, such as through the Seal of Biliteracy, position students to graduate with competitive bilingual skills that are needed across business, health care, education and other industries (Latham Sikes & Piñón, 2025).

This committee advanced legislation in the 89th session to support early and consistent investment in bilingual education, support the growth of quality bilingual and dual language programs across the state, and adopt a more inclusive and stronger Seal of Biliteracy recognition for graduating students.

