



Shifting Services Is Not the Same as Providing Access

Written Testimony Against INA Closure, Submitted by Dr. Lizdelia Piñón to the Fort Worth ISD Board of Managers, April 28, 2026

Good evening, Board of Managers and Superintendent,

Fort Worth ISD is currently considering program changes that include the closure of the International Newcomer Academy (INA) as part of a “reduction in force due to program change,” as outlined in the district’s April 28, 2026, board agenda. This proposal includes the elimination of all positions at the INA campus and the redistribution of students across the district.

This is not a minor adjustment. It is a significant shift in how some of the district’s most vulnerable students will be served.

This decision raises serious concerns about educational equity, program effectiveness, and compliance with federal and state obligations to serve emergent bilingual students.

Fort Worth ISD serves approximately 27,927 emergent bilingual students, including more than 2,100 newcomers. Many of these students are navigating not only the challenge of learning English but also interrupted or limited formal education. Some arrive without literacy in their home language, requiring foundational instruction in both language and content simultaneously. These are students who are learning English, learning academic content, and learning how to navigate school – often all at the same time.

Research is clear that newcomer students – particularly students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) – require specialized, intensive and coordinated supports to succeed academically. Effective newcomer programs provide structured language development, foundational literacy, and scaffolded access to grade-level content, enabling students to transition successfully into comprehensive school settings (Short & Boyson, 2012; Sugarman, 2017). Programs like the International Newcomer Academy are designed to meet these needs.

The proposed closure of INA and redistribution of students appears to be framed as a shift in services rather than an elimination. But shifting services is not the same as providing access.

IDRA’s research has consistently shown that, when support for emergent bilingual students is fragmented or diluted, student outcomes suffer. Strong programs require intentional, coordinated systems, not scattered or inconsistent services (Robledo Montecel & Montemayor, 2018). Simply redistributing students into neighboring schools, even with the intention of providing similar services, will not produce the same outcomes.

Most campuses are not designed or staffed to provide the level of intensive language development, foundational literacy and coordinated support that newcomer students need. What happens instead is inconsistency: services vary across campuses, implementation becomes uneven and access depends on where a student is placed.

Families are left navigating more complex systems without clear guidance or support. And ultimately, the burden falls on the students themselves.

This is not alignment.

This is inequity.

This raises both practical and legal concerns. Under *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), all children, regardless of immigration status, have the right to a free public education. Under *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), school districts must take affirmative steps to ensure that students who are not proficient in English can meaningfully access that education. Furthermore, *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) requires that programs for emergent bilingual students be based on sound educational theory, implemented effectively and evaluated for results.

Eliminating a proven newcomer model without clearly outlining how these requirements will continue to be met raises serious concerns about compliance with these standards.

The IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework highlights that effective schools for emergent bilingual students must include strong teaching and curricula, leadership that understands language development, meaningful family engagement, and systems that build on students' linguistic and cultural assets (Robledo Montecel & Goodman, 2010). Removing specialized programs like INA undermines each of these core components.

School district data further underscores the urgency of this issue. While overall enrollment has declined, emergent bilingual student enrollment has increased, indicating a growing need for targeted supports at the very moment they are being reduced.

Importantly, there are viable alternatives that align both with research and community input. A community-informed solution proposes consolidating the International Newcomer Academy with Como Success Academy into a unified 6-12 newcomer campus. This approach would preserve specialized language and literacy support, provide a coherent continuum of services across grade levels, maintain existing community partnerships and allow for more efficient use of resources.

Research and IDRA's experience consistently show that when districts implement changes of this magnitude, those changes must be accompanied by intentional support, including professional development for educators, strong family engagement strategies, and asset-based approaches that leverage students' strengths (Robledo Montecel & Montemayor, 2018).

The question facing Fort Worth ISD is not whether change is necessary. The question is whether that change will expand opportunity or restrict it. Emergent bilingual students do not need less support. They need the right support. The future of thousands of students depends on getting this right.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Lizdelia Piñón, Ed.D., education associate, at lizdelia.pinon@idra.org.

Resources

Robledo Montecel, M., & Montemayor, A.M. (June-July 2018). InterAction with the Ecosystem – The IDRA Quality Schools Action Framework. IDRA Newsletter. <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/interaction-with-the-ecosystem-the-idra-quality-schools-action-framework/>

Robledo Montecel, M., & Goodman, C. (eds). (2010). Courage to Connect – A Quality Schools Action Framework. IDRA. <https://www.idra.org/change-model/courage-to-connect/>

Short, D.J., & Boyson, B.A. (2012). Helping Newcomer Students Succeed in Secondary Schools. Center for Applied Linguistics. <https://www.cal.org/publications/helping-newcomer-students/>

Sugarman, J. (November 2017). Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/beyond-teaching-english-supporting-high-school-completion-immigrant-and-refugee-students>

Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

Lau v. Nichols, 414 U.S. 563 (1974).

Castañeda v. Pickard, 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir. 1981).

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