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Establishing Equity: Aligning Dual Language Bilingual Education to HB3 Sec. 11.1185 Texas Early Childhood Literacy & Mathematics Proficiency Plans

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Executive Summary

To the chair of the Education Committee, this policy brief provides recommendations that address dual language bilingual education and the House Bill 3 (HB3) Texas Early Childhood Literacy & Mathematics Proficiency Plans requirement. How can the HB3 Texas Early Childhood Literacy & Mathematics Proficiency Plan requirement set appropriate reading goals for dual language students designated as English Learners? These recommendations are attentive to the unique trajectory of developing literacy in two languages (biliteracy) and accurately report students' biliteracy growth. Adopting the stated recommendations will ensure valid measures of students' literacies, establish a fairer and more effective accountability system, and drive an accurate appropriation of funds to support robust dual language bilingual education implementation. It is noteworthy to state that the recommendations are consistent with the Education Finance Committee's core principle that students meet the state's educational expectation of 60 percent of students meeting the third grade reading standard by 2030 (TEA, 2018).

Inequitable Literacy Metrics & Bilingual Learners

Currently, Texas serves over one million students designated as English Language learners, emergent bilinguals. The population of emergent bilingual students has increased significantly from 800,554 in the 2008-09 school year (Latham Sikes, C., & Villanueva, C., 2021). Nationally, Texas has also held onto its years-long lead as the state that has experienced the largest annual numeric increase of Hispanic residents since 2010 (Ura, A., Ahmed, N., 2018). "As of the 2019-2020 school year, EL students in pre-K through third grade comprised 44% of all EL students in the public education system. English learners in the elementary grades (preK-5th) make up 62% of all identified ELs in Texas schools" (Ura, A., Ahmed, N., 2018). Following a failure to reform the state's school finance formula in a special session during 2017, the Commission on Public School Finance was instated by and submitted a report with recommendations to the legislature before the start of the 86th (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). Among these recommendations were proposed new allotments and programs to improve early literacy including one for Dual Language education programming (TEA, 2017).

Historically, reporting literacy development for students in bilingual education programs, including One and Two-Way dual language programs¹, has been problematic (Arteagoitia, I., & Yen, S. J.

¹ Dual Language education refers to the bilingual program that provides grade level content and literacy in two languages, English and another program language. One-Way Dual Language programs are configured by participating students that are designated as English Learners. Two-Way Dual Language programs serve two student groups, students designated as English learners and students who are monolingual or dominant in English at the time of enrollment (Howard, 2018).

2020; Valdés, G., & Figueroa, R.A. 1994). Arteagoitia and Yen (2020) brought attention to the issue when they explained that “a mere monolingual lens...completely disregards the competencies children who speak a language other than English may have in that language or languages.” Districts require and track literacy growth in only one of the two program languages, traditionally English. The screeners, diagnostic evaluations, and assessments administered in these programs use metrics that are monolingually-normed for English. The use of monolingual metrics produces systematic measurement error and seriously affects emergent bilinguals’ outcomes by limiting bilingual students’ ability to demonstrate their full literacies (Abedi & Linqunti 2012, Solano-Flores, 2016). The misalignment occurs when monolingual metrics are used to measure the literacies of emergent bilingual students. To ensure equity in dual language bilingual education, both program languages must be recognized in assessment practices to capture the wide range of knowledge and skills held across both program languages, support dual language bilingual education goals, and adequately address students’ academic needs (Arteagoitia, I., & Yen, S. J., 2020).

The conventional narrative during the COVID-19 pandemic is that students, especially students of color, will experience a considerable amount of learning loss (Taboada, M. B. 2020; Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. 2020). Monolingual assessment practices and the use of monolingual screeners, diagnostic evaluations and assessments will only exacerbate the erroneous perception of emergent bilinguals as underperforming. This underlines the need to change the current system of assessment practices, tools, and reporting that fail to both accurately capture the existing literacy-related aptitudes that emergent bilinguals already possess and allow emergent bilinguals to fully demonstrate their biliteracy growth.

Inequitable monolingual assessment practices reinforce and are reinforced by deficit frameworks. These frameworks, with a long history and still prominent today, have been institutionalized in our systems of education and often drive educational thought and practice (Valencia, R., 1997). Schooling within these systems has pathologized the language and cultural practices of minoritized groups. Influential and problematic studies like Hart and Risley (1995), whose “word gap” research concluded that the linguistic “deficiencies” were the cause of academic failures have provided the modern foundations of these longstanding deficit frameworks (Dudley-Marling, C. & Lucas, K., 2009). These studies have resulted in and continue to shape the educational structures and systems that reflect monolingualism and its norms as the only standard for all students.

Early Childhood Literacy & Mathematics Proficiency Plan: “Trajectories Toward Biliteracy”

The misalignment of assessment metrics for emergent bilinguals has long had serious detrimental consequences (Valdés, G., & Figueroa, R.A. 1994). One of these, known as *consequential validity*, refers to specific contexts where results are used to falsely identify emergent bilinguals as “struggling.” The “struggling” label has exacerbated inequitable education design for emergent bilinguals which denies access to high-quality learning experiences. This perpetuates the “increase in rote learning,” which has led to a “decline of teaching methods that encourage higher-order thinking skills, the writing of essays, and conducting research” (García, 2009, p.369; see also Glaser, 1990).

Given such inequitable effects on the learning experiences of emergent bilingual students, the current assessment practices for measuring emergent bilinguals’ literacy growth must change. Students in dual language bilingual education are developing literacy in two languages simultaneously (biliteracy) and will have skills that display themselves in the use of both of their languages. Therefore,

equitable assessment practices for emergent bilinguals would capture literacy growth in both program languages. A biliteracy approach for measuring literacy growth will allow students to demonstrate what they know across their two languages, therefore providing teachers, policy makers and students themselves a more holistic and accurate picture of their literacy capabilities.

Acquisition of literacy in multiple languages requires reading goals that differ from monolingual (only-target language or only-English) literacy development, not because they are unattainable but because the progression of literacy development is *different*. One promising approach, “Trajectories Toward Biliteracy,” includes reading goals in both program languages established as “targeted zones.” Hopewell and Escamilla’s (2010) findings reposition emergent bilinguals (designated as ELs), as meeting literacy goals where before monolingually-normed assessments deemed them to be “struggling.” The table below shows the results of a literacy study conducted with a population of third-grade emergent bilinguals. When data in only one program language was analyzed, 84% of 3rd grade emergent bilinguals were flagged as underperforming and requiring individual support. However, when *both* the English and Spanish literacy scores were collected to measure literacy development, only 40% of the students met criteria for needing individual support. This meant that an overwhelming 60% percent of students actually met the third grade literacy standard. The sharp contrast in this analysis reveals the importance of considering students’ full linguistic resources to determine literacy proficiency.

Table 1

Students Requiring Individual Literacy Plan (Hopewell and Escamilla, 2013)

	English Language scores only— DRA2	Spanish language reading scores only —EDL2	Trajectory toward biliteracy- EDL2 + DRA2
% requiring ILP	83.6% (n= 224)	55.3% (n=148)	39.6% (n=106)
% not requiring ILP	16.4% (n=44)	44.7% (n=120)	60.4% (n=162)

Note. ILP = Individual Literacy Plan; EDL = *Evaluación del Desarrollo de Lecto-escritura*; DRA = Developmental Reading Assessment.

The dual-language education goal of attaining high proficiency levels of bilingualism and biliteracy calls for an appropriate way to measure progress (Howard, 2018). Starting from the idea that emergent bilingual students draw on all their linguistic resources to develop literacy, Escamilla and Hopewell (2010; 2014) provide an important model for assessment that normalizes metrics of literacy development in and between students’ two languages. In dual-language programs, languages and literacies develop cohesively and in reciprocal ways— put another way, they develop bidirectionally, expanding on each other.

Existing Policy

According to HB3 (2019), Texas Early Childhood Literacy & Mathematics Proficiency Plan, (Sec. 11.185) districts are required to design a plan to report data collection on students’ literacy growth by identifying specific annual reading goals in kindergarten through third grade. Current policy allows a district’s literacy proficiency plan to set separate goals for students in a bilingual education or special language program. While the policy clearly acknowledges the need to set and align goals specific to a students’ program enrollment, the policy would be strengthened by *requiring* separate goals for one- and two-way dual language bilingual education programs that include both English and the target language.

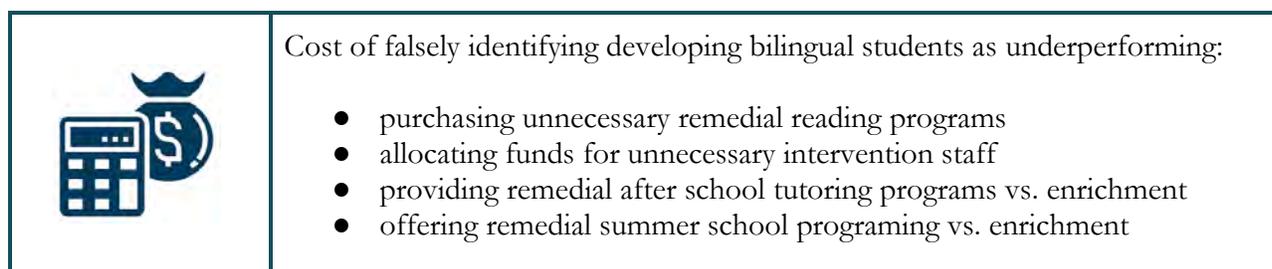
Setting reading goals in *both* program languages must be prioritized to improve the schooling opportunities and experiences of emergent bilinguals. The need to differ from a monolingual literacy trajectory is evident, not because the monolingual goals are unattainable, but because the trajectory of biliteracy is *different*. For educators and policymakers, recognizing and leveraging key differences between monolingualism and bilingualism shifts the pervasive deficit view of emergent bilinguals’ academic potentials to a more asset-based frame. This shift impacts curriculum and pedagogy in ways that have profound effects on teaching and learning.

Accurate Assessment Leads to Effective Spending

In the last session, the 86th Texas legislature placed heavy emphasis on resourcing the education of students identified as economically disadvantaged and English learners (TEA 2019). House Bill 3 was passed and sets various allotments, including a dual language education funding allotment. Robust dual language programs are costly (Lara-Alecio et al., 2005) and the dual language allotment requires attaching compliance and monitoring measures to support dual language implementation (TECELI, 2021). These measures also serve as criteria to allocate funds appropriately for emergent bilinguals. Well-implemented monitoring and compliance measures give emergent bilinguals access to high-quality learning environments that appreciate and foster high proficiency levels of bilingualism and biliteracy.

Hopewell and Escamilla (2014) explain that in an era of monetary shortfalls in public education, resources could be better used to develop appropriate assessments as opposed to using flawed ones that systematically misdiagnose youth and the unnecessary interventions that are developed as a response. Furthermore, monolingual literacy assessments that are currently used to measure the literacy development of bilingual students are costly and further burden districts with unnecessary expenses (Hopewell & Escamilla 2014).

Figure 1



Policy Recommendations

In order for Texas to adequately serve emergent bilinguals, it must write policies that systematically safeguard equity. The following recommendations ensure equity and strengthen current policy by guiding districts to use metrics that allow developing bilinguals to fully access and demonstrate their literacy skills across multiple languages. These recommendations are based on a robust body of research and the known benefits of bilingualism.

Mandate Annual Biliteracy Goals

Mandate district's literacy proficiency plan to develop separate goals for dual language programs and establish a bilingual trajectory. Districts must identify specific annual reading goals in both program languages (Kindergarten-third grade) based on instruments being used (Hopewell & Escamilla 2010, 2014).

Require Accountability Measures in Both Program Languages

Require one- and two-way dual language programs to report annual student reading growth in both of the program languages. This mandate ensures accountability of dual language implementation (Hopewell & Escamilla 2010, 2014; TECELI, 2021).

These recommendations serve as safeguards to the overidentification of emergent bilinguals as underperforming and ensure that districts capitalize on the students' full linguistic abilities with allocated funds used as intended to provide an equitable education for all students.

Conclusion

In summary, the current 87th Texas legislative session can amend existing policy through revisions that increase the accuracy of literacy growth measurement, reduce costs, and strengthen the fidelity of dual language bilingual education program implementation.

The recommendations place an additive lens on policy. Such a policy would ensure students are able to showcase the academic advantages that their bilingualism and biliteracy afford them (Bialystok, E., Craik, F. I., & Luk, G., 2012). Ultimately, these policy recommendations reframe the current deficit narrative students designated as English Learners have historically endured due to the misalignment of assessment practices. The Texas Commission on Public School Finance set forth a goal of 60 percent of the student population meeting reading proficiency by 2030. The recommended policy amendments promise to support such an initiative while highlighting the benefits of robust and faithfully implemented dual language bilingual education which benefits all Texans.

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