

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MAY 2026

# Advancing Academic Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual Students: **From Research to Recommendations**

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**Emergent bilingual students are those in the process of learning English and live in a household where another language is spoken (Texas Education Agency Tex. Educ. Code § 29.051, 2021).**



## The Foundation for Research

A growing number of Texas jobs require some education or training beyond high school.

Researchers estimate that by 2031, 63% of all jobs in the state will require some postsecondary training (Carnevale et al., 2023). This economic demand comes as a significant share of the state’s student population faces systemic barriers that limit their access to advanced academic and career pathways.

Nearly one in four Texas students is emergent bilingual (Texas Education Agency, 2024a). While this student population has been increasing consistently for years, E3 Alliance data indicates school districts can benefit from additional guidance and support to provide emergent bilingual students with equitable educational opportunities.

This is especially important in Central Texas.

As of the 2023-24 school year, **24%** of Texas and **25%** of Central Texas students were emergent bilingual.

Between 2014 and 2024, the number of emergent bilingual students in Central Texas grew by 78%, exceeding the rate of growth in Texas by nearly 29% (Texas Education Agency, 2024b).

### A Growing Demand for a Bilingual Workforce

Emergent bilingual students are uniquely positioned to meet the state and nation’s workforce needs, particularly the rising demand for individuals who speak more than one language.

The number of jobs postings for bilingual employees in the U.S. more than doubled from 240,000 in 2010 to over 630,000 in 2015 (New American Economy, 2017).

There is especially high demand for bilingual employees in education and healthcare in Texas, where 35.1% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

Texas will need to add an estimated 21,900 bilingual teachers by 2028 to meet student demand (U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition, 2023).

Texas healthcare job postings requiring bilingual skills increased by 167% from 2017 to 2021 (American Immigration Council, 2022).

## Benefits of Bilingualism and Biliteracy

Research has found a variety of cognitive, social-emotional, and economic benefits linked to bilingualism and biliteracy (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).



People who speak more than one language excel in problem-solving and creativity.



Being bilingual is associated with improved memory and the delayed onset of dementia and Alzheimer's.



Speaking multiple languages is a gateway to a global society and economy.

Take Spanish, for example, which is the second most spoken language in Texas and the fourth most spoken language in the world. As of 2025, there were an estimated 520 million native Spanish speakers worldwide (Observatory of the Spanish Language and Hispanic Cultures in the United States, 2026).

## Preparing Emergent Bilingual Students for Life After High School

Despite the many benefits of speaking multiple languages, E3 Alliance data shows emergent bilingual students graduate high school at a lower rate than their non-emergent bilingual peers. This student population is also overrepresented in longitudinal dropout rates.

Only 22% of Central Texas emergent bilingual students immediately enrolled in a postsecondary program after graduating high school in 2022 — the same year that E3 Alliance launched the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee.



# About the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee

E3 Alliance launched the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee in 2022 to better understand the barriers emergent bilingual students face throughout their educational journeys.

## Early Education

E3 Alliance research has found that access to high-quality pre-kindergarten, for example, helps set all students up for success in elementary school and beyond. The committee sought to understand how pre-K impacts emergent bilingual students specifically.

## High School to Postsecondary

We also looked at several important factors, including if, and when, emergent bilingual students meet the requirements to be considered English proficient while in PK-12 schools. This is a particularly important milestone because it affects the classes and programs emergent bilingual students can access.

Our research has shown that completing Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual credit, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses significantly increase students' odds of pursuing higher education. We were particularly interested in examining emergent bilingual students' access to these advanced courses in high school.



The Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee included:

- Eight Central Texas School Districts
- Three Community Organizations
- Two Institutions of Higher Education
- One Education Service Center

Many thanks to the Greater Texas Foundation for supporting this work.

## Our Process

We conducted quantitative and qualitative research, including three focus groups with teachers, school staff, and parents of emergent bilingual students.

The committee met regularly to review data and develop research-backed strategies to improve academic opportunities for emergent bilingual students.

The National Alliance for Partners in Education (NAPE) partnered with E3 Alliance and steering committee members to develop and implement Action Research Projects to improve college and career readiness for emergent bilingual students.

Topics included:

- Building effective student relationships with a culture of high expectations
- Increasing emergent bilingual participation in advanced courses
- Analyzing emergent bilingual student enrollment into postsecondary

Using the findings from this work, E3 Alliance worked with the steering committee to develop recommendations that strengthen systems to support emergent bilingual students.



## Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee Vision Statement

**We will know our Emergent Bilingual students are successful when students and families feel valued and empowered to self-advocate, participate and perform in advanced classes, and graduate college and career-ready at equivalent rates as their monolingual peers.**

## The Findings

### Attending pre-K improves academic outcomes for emergent bilingual students.

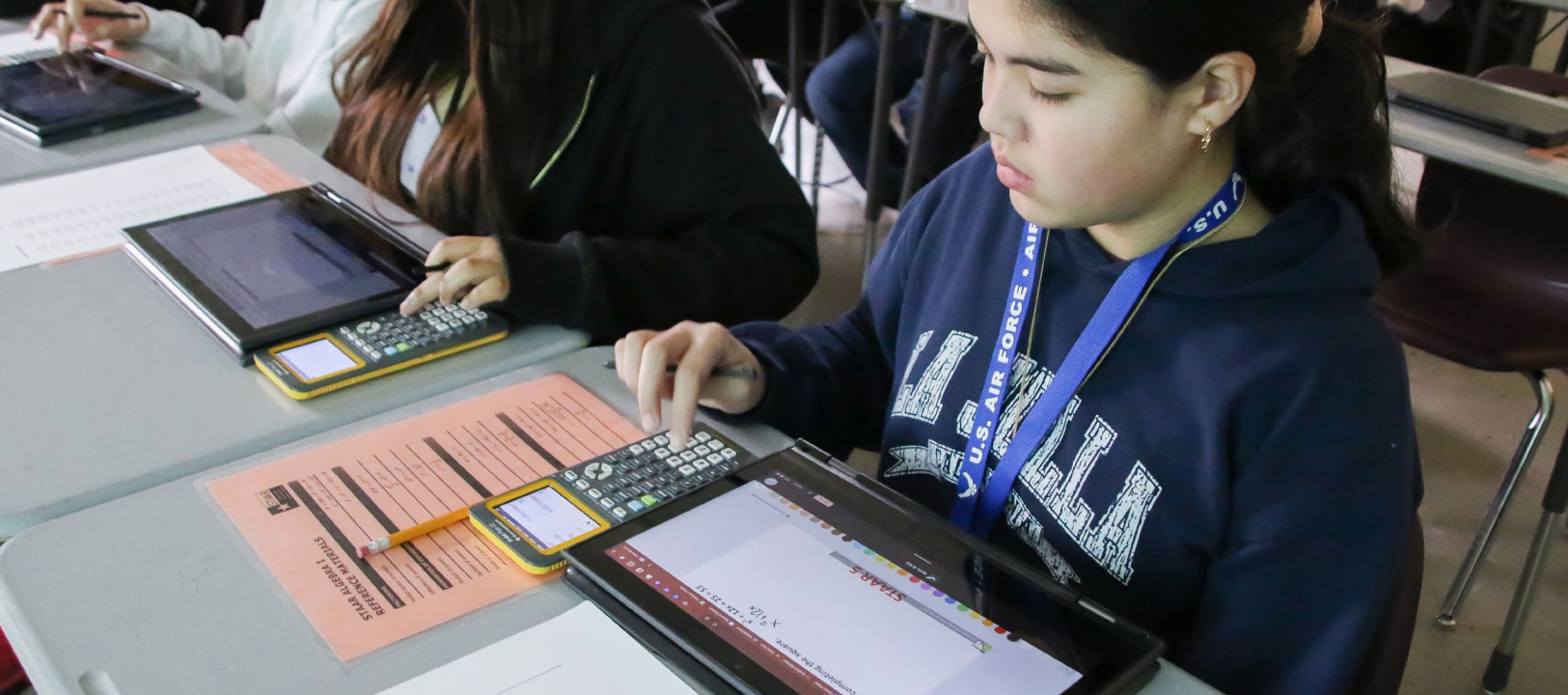
Preparing emergent bilingual students to take advanced courses in high school begins as early as pre-kindergarten.

Our data shows emergent bilingual children in Central Texas attend pre-K 4 at a higher rate than non-emergent bilingual students. Emergent bilingual students in Texas automatically qualify for free pre-k.

Emergent bilingual students who participated in pre-K also met the kindergarten readiness standard at higher rates than non-emergent bilingual students who also attended pre-K.

**61%** of emergent bilingual students who attended pre-K 4 met the kindergarten readiness standard.

**54%** of non-emergent bilingual students who attended pre-K 4 met the kindergarten readiness standard.



Additionally, a higher percentage of emergent bilingual students met grade level on Grade 3 STAAR Reading if they previously met the kindergarten readiness standard compared with students who did not meet that same standard.

### **Central Texas emergent bilingual students are reclassified as “English Proficient” at lower rates than the statewide average.**

E3 Alliance data analysis shows that between sixth and 12th grade, emergent bilingual students in Central Texas are reclassified at a lower cumulative rate than emergent bilingual students statewide.

Students may be reclassified when they demonstrate proficiency on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), meet required English Language Proficiency Standards on state academic assessments (or approved alternatives at the secondary level), and show satisfactory classroom performance as documented by the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), with parent or guardian approval.

Findings from this initiative indicate that reclassification is impacted not only by assessment outcomes, but also by access to linguistically responsive instruction, alignment of biliteracy practices across grade levels, and consistent monitoring of students as they transition from emergent bilingual status to emergent bilingual monitor.

E3 Alliance data shows that students who reclassify before middle school and who approached standard or above on STAAR in fifth grade have stronger performance on math and reading STAAR in sixth grade.

### **When emergent bilingual students are encouraged to take advanced courses, they are often foreign language and CTE courses.**

One educator who participated in our focus groups shared that emergent bilingual students who speak Spanish are often encouraged to take advanced level Spanish classes.

Quantitative data backs this up as well.

E3 Alliance data shows that during the 2023-24 school year, 28% of emergent bilingual students completed an advanced foreign language course compared to 8% of their non-emergent bilingual peers.

However, emergent bilingual students participate in English, Fine Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies courses at lower rates than non-emergent bilingual students.

Both student populations are on par when it comes to enrollment in CTE courses.

### **A smaller percentage of emergent bilingual students complete advanced courses in high school compared to non-emergent bilingual students.**

E3 Alliance data found that between 2019 and 2024, emergent bilingual students completed advanced courses at a lower rate than non-emergent bilingual students.

In 2024, for example, only a quarter of emergent bilingual students completed advanced courses.

In comparison, that same year, 44% of non-emergent bilingual students completed an advanced course.

### **Completing advanced courses increases the odds that emergent bilingual students will pursue postsecondary education.**

Emergent bilingual students who complete three or more hours of dual credit courses have six times higher odds of enrolling in a two- or four-year college.



The odds of pursuing postsecondary education are also higher when emergent bilingual students complete at least one AP course or five or more semesters of CTE courses.

### **Parents want to participate, engage, and be partners in their child’s education with teachers and school staff.**

As their students moved into secondary grades, parents reported feeling there were fewer opportunities to be involved.

Parents said as students get older and explore their independence, they felt the transition was not supported in school in a way that steadily built student independence.

Parents also reported that they wanted more communication regarding their students’ successes, not just challenges. Some parents expressed facing barriers to engaging in school opportunities.

## Bright Spots

The gap is closing between top-performing emergent bilingual and non-emergent bilingual students completing Algebra I by eighth grade.

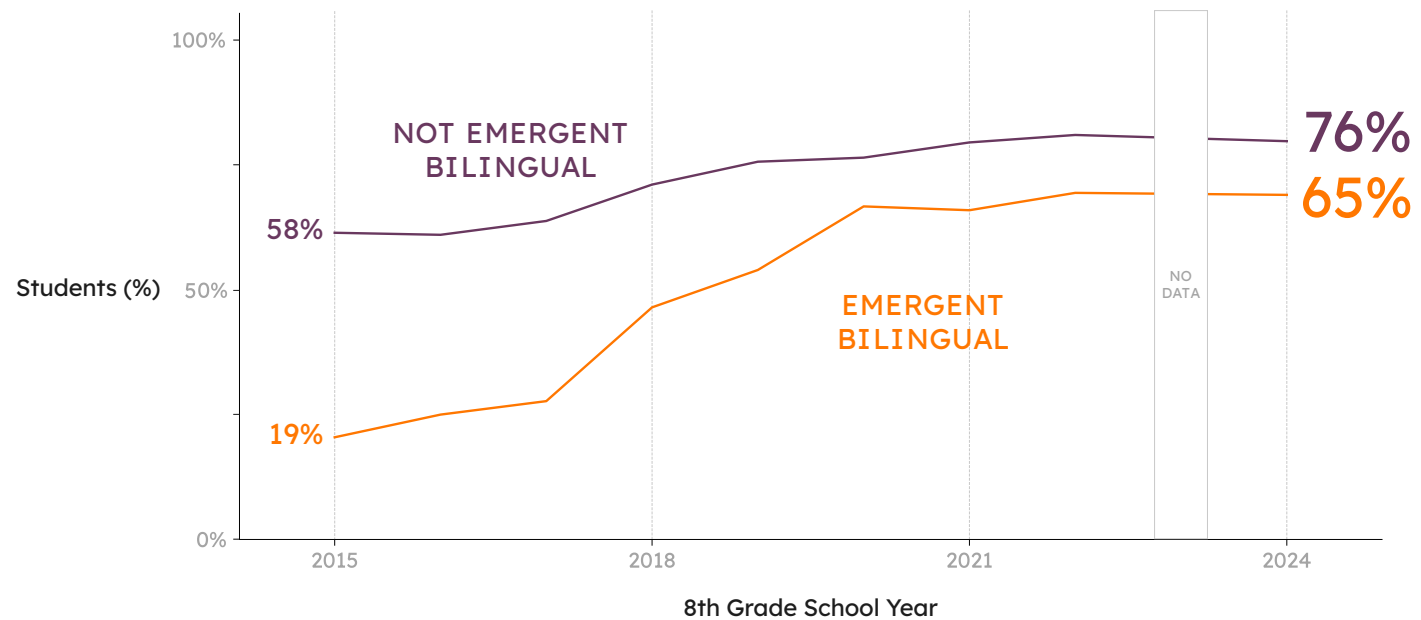
E3 Alliance research has shown that students who score in the top 40% on fifth grade STAAR math will be successful in advanced math in middle school, including completing Algebra I by eighth grade, if given the opportunity.

In 2024, 65% of emergent bilingual eighth grade students who met this criteria completed

Algebra I by eighth grade, compared to 76% of their non-emergent bilingual peers with similar scores. This gap has closed by 72% since 2015.

Completing Algebra I in middle school is a gateway to taking more rigorous math courses in high school — which prepares students for college and career.

Rate of Algebra I Completion in Middle School Increasing Among High-Performing Emergent Bilingual Students



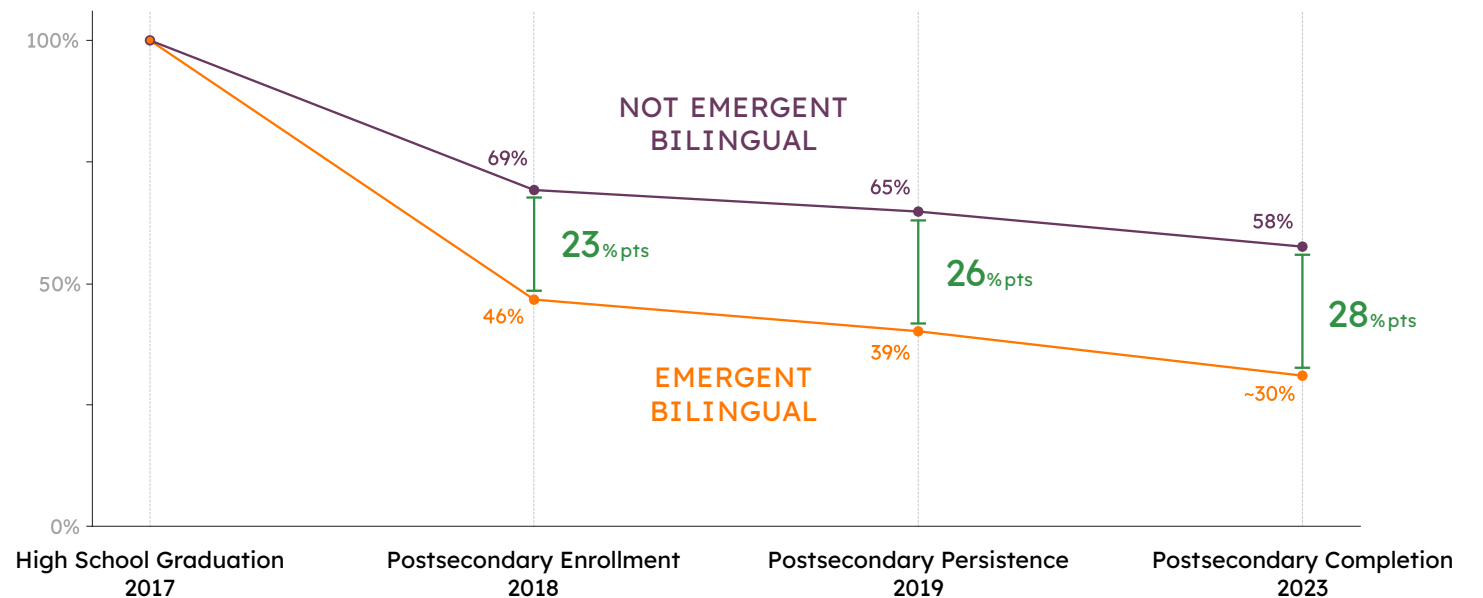
Source: E3 Alliance analysis of TEA data at the UT Austin Education Research Center.  
 Note: High-performing = student scored in top 40% of all 5th grade Math STAAR test-takers  
 Cohort: 8th grade students in the given school year who took the 5th grade Math STAAR three years prior



While completing Algebra I is a strong predictor of postsecondary enrollment, data shows that even when emergent bilingual students complete advanced math courses in high school, they enroll, persist, and complete postsecondary programs at lower rates than non-emergent bilingual students.

This trend highlights that more research is needed to understand how to support emergent bilingual students once they are enrolled in a postsecondary program.

Even with Advanced Math, Emergent Bilingual Students Enrolled in Postsecondary at Lower Rates



Source: E3 Alliance analysis of TEA and THECB data at the UT Austin Education Research Center.  
 Note: Advanced math = any AP, IB, or Dual Credit math course  
 Cohort: 2017 12th grade students who were in Texas public schools for all of HS, followed standard grade progression, and completed an advanced math course while in HS. Updated January 2025.



**The biggest misconception that I would love to clarify across the board is that not knowing English does not mean that our students come in as empty vessels. They come in with so many experiences, so many different skills, so many different perspectives that they can share and contribute to our society.”**

**—Janeth Medrano, Austin ISD,  
Steering Committee Member**

## Conclusion

Supporting emergent bilingual students is essential to ensuring success for all Texas students beyond high school.

Increasingly, success in our rapidly evolving economy requires a postsecondary credential, whether it is an industry-aligned certificate or college degree. That is why the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee developed recommendations focused on increasing emergent bilingual students’ enrollment in college-aligned courses and postsecondary programs.

The goals of the steering committee will continue to guide E3 Alliance and Central Texas school districts’ efforts to support and develop systems that improve outcomes for emergent

bilingual students.

The next step in this process is supporting districts and campuses as they implement the research-backed recommendations we developed together.

Then, we must evaluate how the recommendations help emergent bilingual students access more advanced courses and pursue postsecondary education.

As we track implementation of the recommendations and test them regionally, we can assess their effectiveness and determine their potential for adoption by other districts and the state.

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