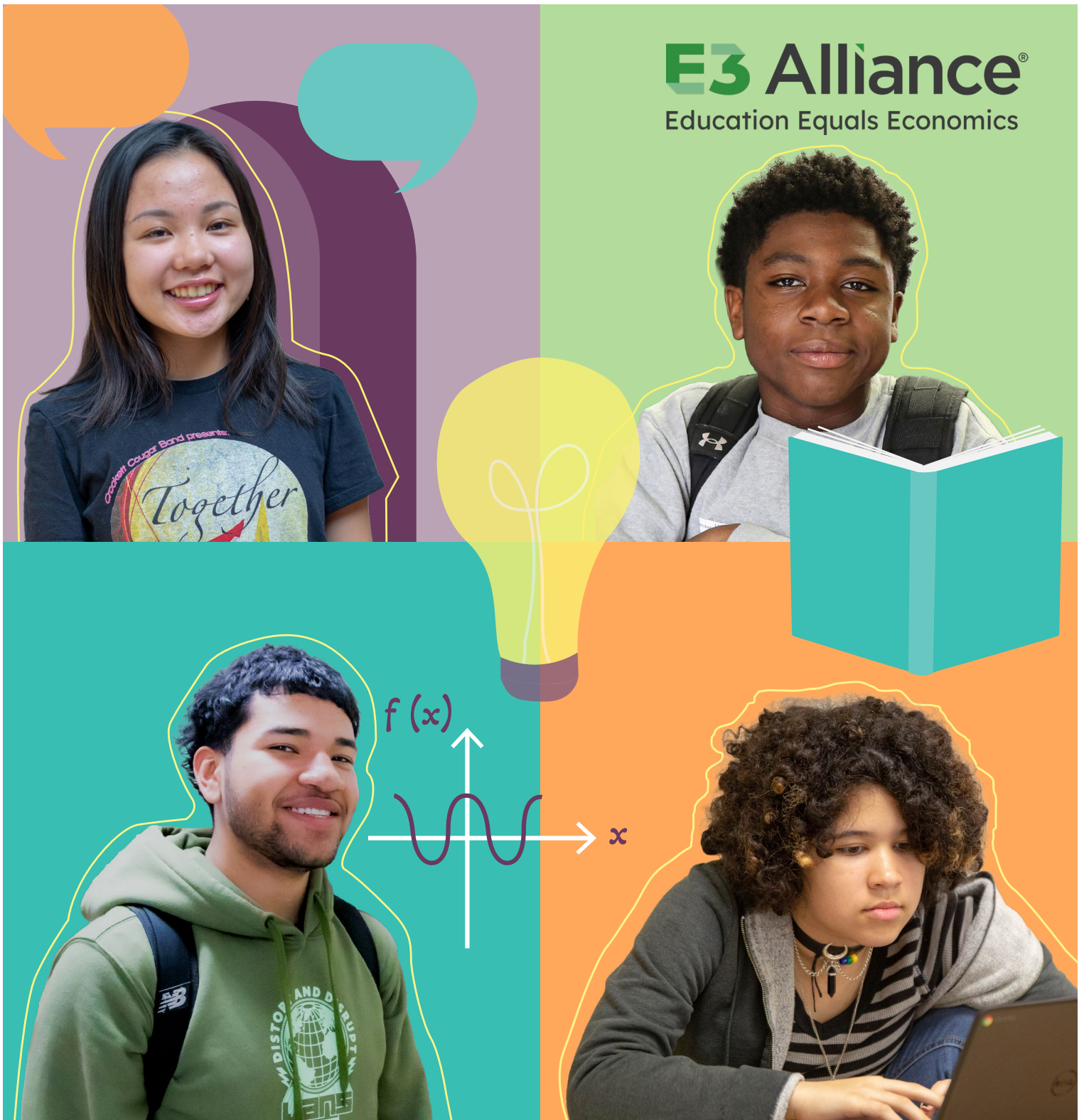




Advancing Academic Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual Students

From Research to Recommendations

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We also recognize the partners who contributed to this research. By investing their time, sharing strategies, and testing new approaches across districts and campuses, they helped turn research into practical action.

Your commitment to students and their families strengthens education across Central Texas.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Greater Texas Foundation or any director, officer, or employee thereof.



GREATER TEXAS FOUNDATION

Introduction

Texas schools educate one out of every five English learners in the United States, making the state central to the nation's educational future (Texas Education Agency, 2025a).

Within Texas, nearly one in four of the state's 5.5 million public school students is considered emergent bilingual (Texas Education Agency, 2024a).

While most emergent bilingual students in Texas (85%) speak Spanish, students across the state speak more than 120 languages. (Texas Education Agency, 2025b).

**24% of Texas and
25% of Central Texas
students were
emergent bilingual.**

2023-24 School Year
(Texas Education Agency, 2024a)

**Emergent bilingual students:
Students in the process of
learning English and live in
a household where another
language is spoken.**

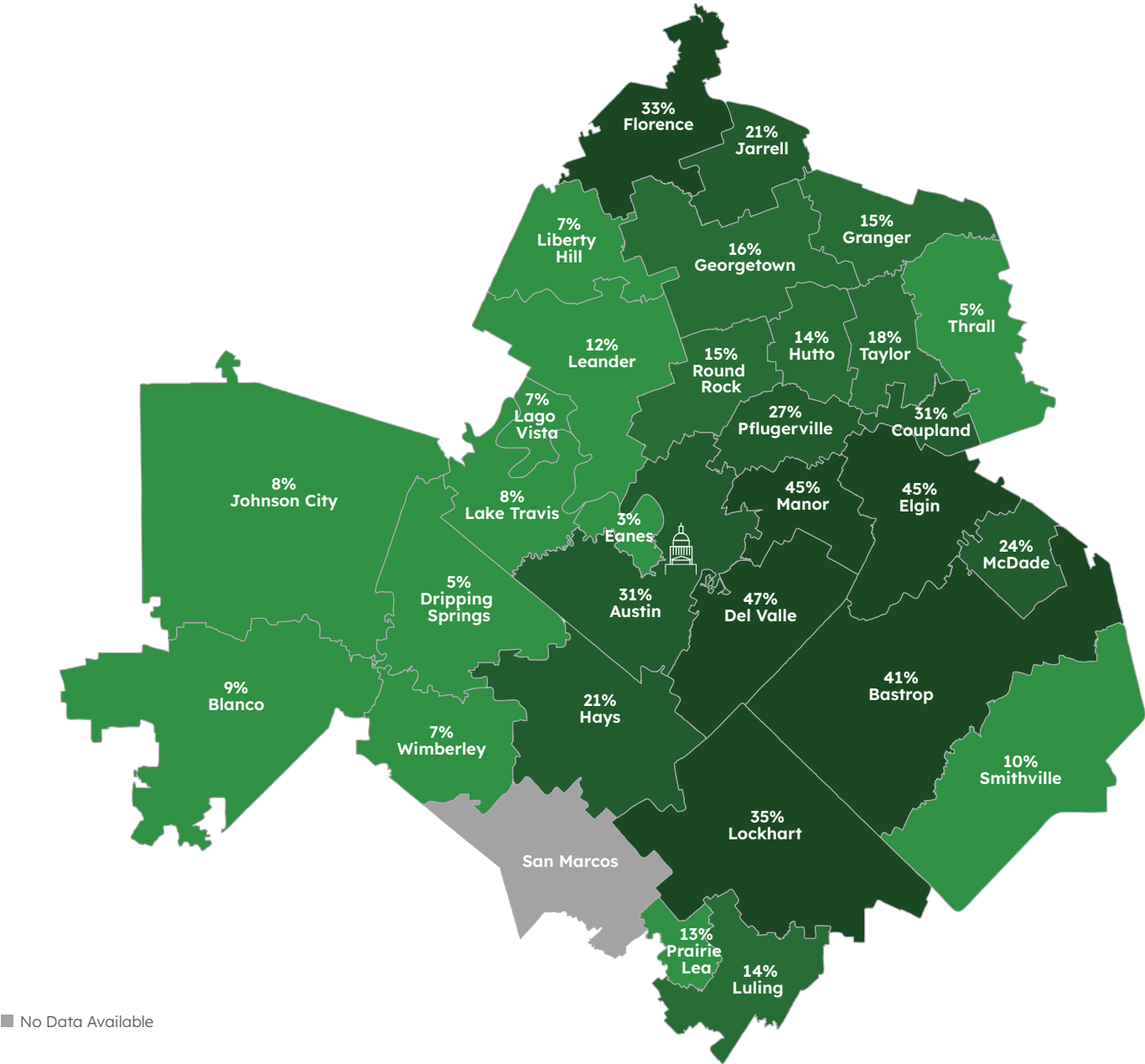


In Texas, from 2011 to 2021, the number of emergent bilingual students in U.S. public schools increased by about 15% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

During a similar period (2014 to 2024), the emergent bilingual population in Central Texas grew by 78%, exceeding the statewide growth rate by nearly 29 percentage points (Texas Education Agency, 2024).

Although this report focuses on Central Texas, many of the issues explored in this report are relevant to schools and communities across Texas. While the findings are grounded in Central Texas, they may provide useful insights for educators, policymakers, and community partners working to support emergent bilingual students statewide.

Percent of 2022-23 Enrolled Students who are Emergent Bilingual



Source: Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System/Texas Academic Performance Reports data.

The Rising Demand for a Bilingual Workforce

Research has found multiple cognitive, social-emotional, and economic benefits linked to bilingualism and **biliteracy**

Source: 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.

Emergent bilingual students are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of our workforce. U.S. job postings seeking bilingual employees more than doubled between 2010 and 2015 from 240,000 to over 630,000, according to a report from the New American Economy (2017).

In Texas, where 35.1% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2024), there is an especially high demand for bilingual employees in fields such as education and healthcare.

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition estimated Texas would need an additional 21,900 bilingual teachers by 2028 to meet student demand.

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

But for students to be successful and employable, they will likely need more than a high school diploma.

Researchers estimate that by 2031, 63% of all jobs in the state will require some type of postsecondary education or training (Carnevale et al., 2023).



Academic Outcomes for Central Texas Emergent Bilingual Students

E3 Alliance's analysis of academic outcomes for emergent bilingual students in Central Texas and across the state revealed persistent gaps, especially at the middle and high school levels. Systemic barriers limit access to advanced academic and career pathways.

There are many benefits associated with speaking multiple languages, yet emergent bilingual students graduate high school at a lower rate than their non-emergent bilingual peers.

Ninety-two percent of non-emergent bilingual students in Central Texas graduated from high school in 2023, compared with only 82% of emergent bilingual students, E3 Alliance data shows.

The gap in high school graduation rates between emergent bilingual and non-emergent bilingual students closed by nine percentage points in Central Texas and by nine percentage points in Texas between 2013 and 2023. However, disparities remain.

Emergent bilingual students are also overrepresented in longitudinal dropout rates. E3 Alliance found that 13% of the Central Texas class of 2022 was emergent bilingual, but 31% of

students who dropped out from the cohort were emergent bilingual.

One factor that may contribute is a higher rate of chronic absenteeism among emergent bilingual students compared to their peers (E3 Alliance, 2024b). Research has found that chronically absent students are more likely to fall behind in class and drop out of school altogether (Learning Policy Institute, 2024). Twenty-five percent of emergent bilingual students in Central Texas were chronically absent in 2024, meaning they were absent more than 10% of school days. In comparison, their non-emergent bilingual peers had a 19% chronic absence rate.

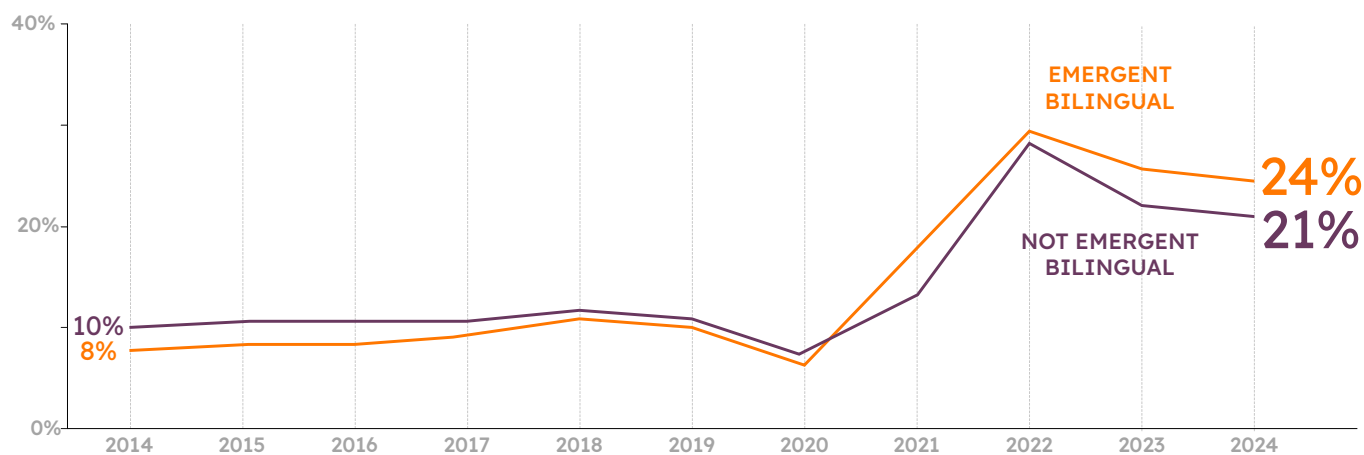
Further, E3 Alliance data shows that emergent bilingual students who graduate from high school pursue postsecondary education at lower rates than non-emergent bilingual graduates.

In 2022, only 22% of Central Texas emergent bilingual students immediately enrolled in a Texas postsecondary institution after graduating high school, compared to 48% of their non-emergent bilingual peers.



The sheer growth in Texas’ emergent bilingual student population over the last 15 years requires new systemic approaches and supports to ensure we are serving the students in our communities (Texas Education Agency, 2023b).

Chronic Absence Rate Over Time by Emergent Bilingual Status in Central Texas



Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.



A Brief History of Bilingual Education in Texas

To better understand the educational systems impacting emergent bilingual students in Texas, it's helpful to look at how state policies have evolved.



1918

Dating back to 1918, Texas law makes it a misdemeanor for educators to speak or assign materials in any language other than English. These policies remained entrenched for decades, institutionalizing the notorious “no Spanish rule” and allowing for punitive actions against students who used their home languages.



1972

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights publishes a report detailing exclusionary practices that target Mexican American students in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Colorado schools. The report identifies policies in Texas schools that forbids students from speaking Spanish in classrooms or on school grounds (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1972).



1973

Then-Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe signs the Bilingual Training and Education Act into law, which requires elementary schools with at least 20 emergent bilingual students to offer bilingual instruction. Despite this law, discrimination persists, as did legal battles seeking more support for students learning English (Texas State Historical Association, 1973).



1981

A federal judge finds that Texas violated federal law by failing to provide equal educational opportunities to emergent bilingual students. This court case spanned decades (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2010).

Texas is one of 49 states in the United States that provides additional funding to schools serving emergent bilingual students. It is one of 37 states that provide dual funding if a student is both emergent bilingual and from a low-income household (Learning Policy Institute, 2025b) (Learning Policy Institute, 2025).

While a 2021 Texas law seeks to improve and expand educational opportunities for emergent bilingual students, the state has a long history of educational policies that created barriers to success for bilingual students, dating back to the early 20th century.

This brief overview outlines some of the challenges and initiatives aimed at ensuring all students have equal access to education and ensures bilingualism is valued within Texas schools.



1982

The U.S. Supreme Court makes a landmark ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* stating undocumented students have a constitutional right to public education. The case challenged a 1975 Texas law that allowed K-12 public schools to prevent undocumented children from enrolling and allowed the schools to charge tuition (*Plyer v. Doe*, 1982).



2008

27 years later, the same 1981 judge finds that Texas was still failing to serve English Language Learners, particularly at the secondary level (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2010).



2021

The Texas Legislature passes Senate Bill 560 to develop a strategic plan ensuring school systems meet the needs of the state's growing emergent bilingual student population. This legislation directed the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission to work toward five overarching goals, including increasing the number of bilingual-certified educators and increasing the number of bilingual and multilingual graduates (Texas Education Code, 2021).



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 and identify research-backed strategies to address them.

Founding members:

- Austin ISD
- Del Valle ISD
- Hays CISD
- Lake Travis ISD
- Lockhart ISD
- Manor ISD
- Pflugerville ISD
- Con Mi MADRE
- Latinitas
- Region 13 Education Service Center
- Texas State University
- The University of Texas at Austin
- Todos Juntos Learning Center

The National Alliance for Partnerships in Education (NAPE) helped shape participating districts' work by leading a two-day workshop, "Leading for Emergent Bilingual Success." District teams developed Action Research Projects to "identify opportunities for improvement, measure baseline metrics, apply NAPE's proven strategies, and assess outcomes" for emergent bilingual students (E3 Alliance, 2025).

Focus and Scope of Work

As part of this work, the committee focused on developing research-backed strategies to improve emergent bilingual students' access to advanced courses in high school.



The committee adopted the following success statement to articulate its vision for emergent bilingual student success.

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.



“

This is the work that needs to be done to create big, impactful, long-term [change] for our emergent bilingual students.”

—Janeth Medrano
Austin ISD

The committee primarily focused on strengthening supports in high school. However, building on previous E3 Alliance findings that access to high-quality pre-K improves success for all students, the committee also examined how supports and opportunities across all grade levels influence academic outcomes.



Additionally, the committee analyzed English proficiency requirements for emergent bilingual students in PK-12. This educational milestone, known as reclassification, is important because it affects which classes and programs are available to emergent bilingual students.

In particular, the committee was interested in examining emergent bilingual students’ access to Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual credit, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses in high school because these courses significantly increase students’ odds of pursuing higher education (Inside Higher Ed, 2025).

Committee Goals



Goal 1: Increase policies that support emergent bilingual student access and success.



Goal 2: Increase access to primary programs (one-way dual language, two-way dual language, etc.) that support student success in secondary to postsecondary.



Goal 3: Increase the number of emergent bilingual students in AP, dual credit, and sequenced advanced math and CTE courses.



Goal 4: Increase the enrollment of emergent bilingual students in postsecondary education.



Goal 5: Increase hiring of emergent bilingual students into high-demand positions.

The Process

E3 Alliance convened the committee to identify which student data educators needed most and to establish a shared strategic agenda.

In Year 1, the committee defined the research, activities, and metrics; collected and reported on data; and identified barriers and root causes.

In Year 2, the committee identified strategies and practices that led to stronger outcomes; collected and reported on data; began creating new datasets based on research questions; and included qualitative research.

In Year 3, the committee focused on reviewing findings and progress, continuing to collaborate with partners, and completing the final data analyses.

This report shares the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee's findings from analyzing Central Texas student data. It also outlines strategies to strengthen students' academic performance.



“

To know that there were districts nearby that were facing and overcoming challenges just like we were, was really helpful for continuing the work... I find comfort in knowing that there are leaders that are working just as hard and with [the same] intentionality as we are here in Lockhart to support [emergent bilingual students].”

—Monica Saldivar
Lockhart ISD



Research Methods

E3 Alliance conducted mixed methods research to understand the trends and experiences of emergent bilingual students and educators in Central Texas.

In early 2024, members of the E3 Alliance research team began drafting research questions focused on emergent bilingual populations.

The team examined data from previous school years and identified a need for research in the areas of early education, policies and practices, advanced course-taking, and reclassification. The steering committee reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed research questions in May and June of 2024. The research team finalized four guiding questions for the research based on this feedback.

The primary guiding questions were:

- What are the district-level policies for early education emergent bilingual students?
- How are emergent bilingual students engaging with advanced course-taking?
- How does reclassification impact student outcomes? (See the Glossary for a definition.)
- How are emergent bilingual program types linked to outcomes?

Additionally, each primary guiding question contained six or seven more specific research questions.

Quantitative Methods

In November 2023, E3 Alliance presented baseline data to the steering committee that highlighted current trends in emergent bilingual outcomes across PK-12 and postsecondary education.

This initial presentation provided the committee with the regional context of these outcomes to complement their district's experience and catalyzed discussion around the guiding questions.

During the course of this work (and after developing the guiding questions), E3 Alliance ran four sets of analyses:

1. Emergent bilingual program types snapshot
2. Newcomers and their reclassification snapshot
3. Advanced course-taking for emergent bilingual students
4. Emergent bilingual reclassification and its effect on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

E3 Alliance performed these analyses using data from the Education Research Center (ERC) at The University of Texas at Austin, allowing us to examine outcomes across PK-12, postsecondary, and workforce. The ERC houses records for all Texas public school students and is stored in a secure, de-identified manner. These records are linked through unique identifiers that allow researchers to examine records across years and across levels (PK-12, postsecondary, workforce) for metrics reported to the state. All analyses are descriptive statistics (counts, percentages) unless noted otherwise.

The typical analysis followed a three-stage iterative process:

1. Initial analysis
2. Steering committee feedback
3. Feedback integration (either through supplemental analyses or by following up with answers to the committee's questions)

Emergent Bilingual Program Types Snapshot

The first analysis examined information on emergent bilingual program types, including Transitional Bilingual (early exit, late exit), Dual Language Immersion (one-way, two-way), and English as a Second Language (ESL) (content-based, pull-out) at the Central Texas level. The goal was to understand how program offerings changed for students across grade levels and to understand the frequency of Spanish as the home language within the region.

Newcomers and Reclassification Snapshot

The second analysis provided information on Central Texas newcomers (i.e., students in their first three years in the United States) who were also emergent bilingual. The analysis included the reclassification rate during and after their newcomer status changed.

This data informed the steering committee on differences between the general emergent bilingual population and those emergent bilingual students who were also newcomers.



Advanced Course-Taking

The third analysis focused on understanding emergent bilingual student access to advanced courses and the course subjects that emergent bilingual students most frequently completed. The research team also explored the relationship between college-credit-bearing courses (a subset of advanced courses) and postsecondary enrollment using regression techniques.

Reclassification and STAAR Performance

The final analysis sought to understand the relationship between reclassification and STAAR performance. The data followed fifth grade students in Central Texas based on emergent bilingual status and reclassification before middle school and compared their STAAR performance in middle school, descriptively and using regression techniques. The team also

inspected cumulative reclassification rates in secondary grades for these students.

Underlying these research question-specific analyses, periodic updates to the baseline data first presented to the steering committee were also presented to maintain up-to-date information on these metrics.

These updates came from existing yearly analyses that E3 Alliance performs as part of our Central Texas Education Profile found at data.e3alliance.org.

Qualitative Methods

The qualitative research team selected three data collection methods to answer the determined research questions: Document review, survey, and focus groups.

Data collection ran between September 2024 and September 2025. The team completed analyses for each method throughout the data collection process and concluded final thematization in December 2025.

	Document Review	Survey	Focus Group Round 1	Focus Group Round 2	Focus Group Round 3
Date(s)	9/11/2024-11/20/2024	4/14/2025-5/25/2025	6/4/2025	8/4/2025	9/17/2025
Who	Steering Committee Members	Education Staff (Teachers, Administrators)	Education Staff (Teachers, Administrators)	Parents of Emergent Bilingual Students	Parents of Emergent Bilingual Students
Total Number of Participants	7 Districts/ Organizations (59 documents)	23 (65% completion rate n=15)	12	13	11

Document Review

The qualitative research team collected document review data from participating steering committee districts and organizations between September and December 2024. The purpose of the document review was to examine communication to families, review existing policies and practices regarding emergent bilingual education, and identify exemplar documents and procedures that could be shared with other steering committee districts.

Participating districts submitted relevant documents and URLs to a secure survey system. This resulted in 20 documents and 39 link submissions. During the review process,

we coded documents based on intended audience, language accessibility, and year they were created, among additional variables. The research team also noted any significance about the relevant documents.

Survey

Following the document review, the qualitative research team launched a survey for teachers, administrators, school counselors, district staff, and community partners who directly or indirectly had a role in the education of emergent bilingual students. The survey opened in mid-April 2025 and closed at the end of May 2025.



Steering committee members shared the survey with relevant staff within their districts or organizations.

Survey measures included topics on communication, pre-K enrollment, advanced course-taking, academic outcomes, postsecondary enrollment, and emergent bilingual programming.

Unfortunately, recruitment efforts did not meet expectations and only 15 surveys were completed. Because of this, Likert scale items or other items that could not be statistically analyzed were not used in the final analysis. However, open-ended responses were included in data from the focus groups and analyzed for themes.

Focus Groups

Finally, with the help of partners and steering committee members, E3 Alliance conducted three iterations of focus groups between June and September 2025.

Teachers and Administrators

E3 Alliance conducted the first focus group in June 2025 with teachers and administrators who worked with emergent bilingual students. Participants were recruited through NAPE's summer training initiative, which focused on emergent bilingual student success. Two rounds of focus groups, totaling 12 participants, were held concomitant with this training.

Parents

Second, E3 Alliance conducted four focus groups with parents of emergent bilingual students in August 2025. Steering committee partners recruited local multilingual families to participate in these focus groups. Three of these focus groups were conducted in Spanish and one was conducted in English. There were 15 total participants across these four focus groups. Research team members developed guiding questions in English that were translated into Spanish by a bilingual E3 Alliance staff member prior to the focus groups.



Additionally, four bilingual E3 Alliance staff members were trained to conduct focus groups in Spanish. Two staff members interviewed families in Spanish, while the other two attended the focus groups and took notes in Spanish. Bilingual E3 Alliance staff members then translated these notes for the research team analysis. The qualitative research team held debrief sessions with the bilingual E3 Alliance staff who conducted the focus groups to ensure validity and ensure themes were translated accurately.

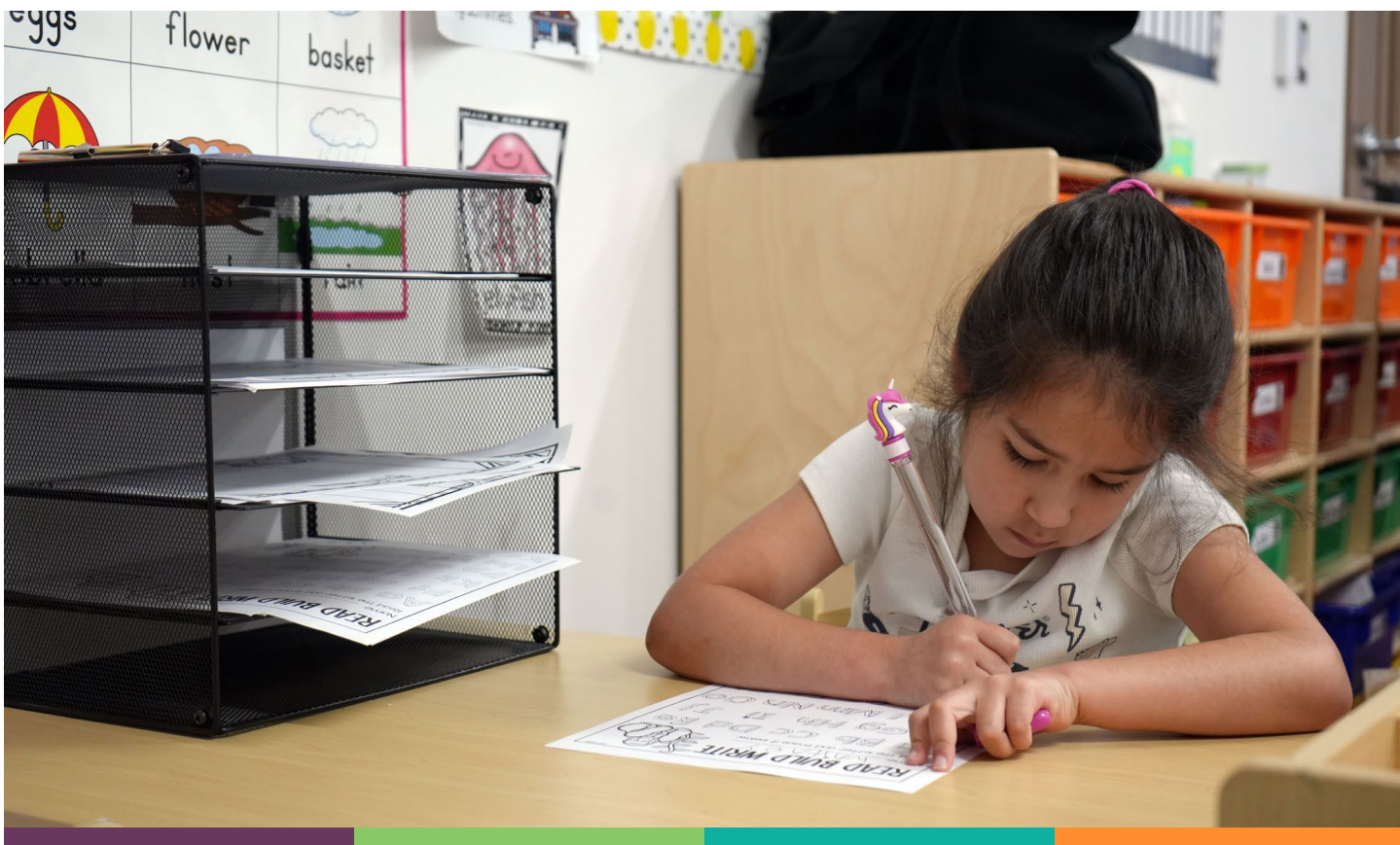
Third, E3 Alliance conducted focus groups with parents of emergent bilingual students similarly to the previous session. However, district emergent bilingual parent liaisons recruited participants. Eleven parents participated in these focus groups in September 2025.

Qualitative Analysis

Once the research team translated all notes and conducted debriefs to ensure validity from both parent focus group sessions, analysis of all three focus groups and open-ended responses from the survey began. The analysis process took approximately two months (November 2025 to January 2026).

Our team analyzed data using deductive coding methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). We developed codes through emergent analysis and post-focus group meetings with the facilitators and note-takers. To increase credibility, two research team members completed coding individually and then compared and adjusted for discrepancies. Themes that emerged focused on advanced course-taking, communication, and reclassification.

A discussion of the study's limitations appears later in this report.



Key Findings

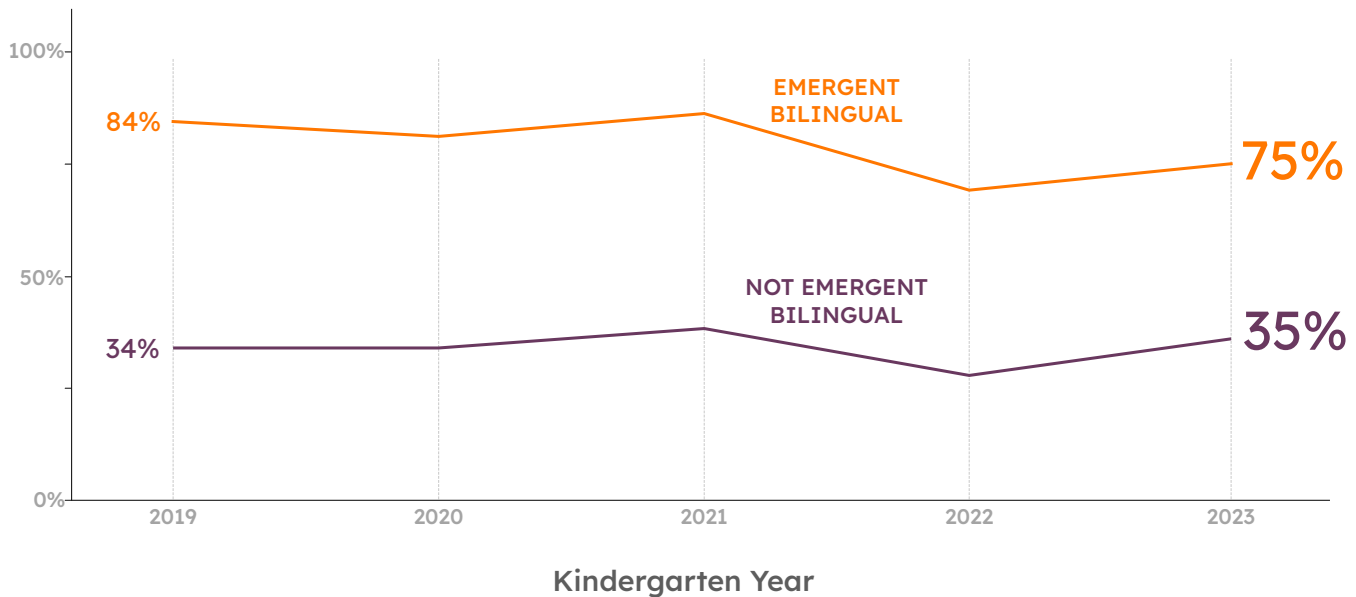
The mixed-methods research that E3 Alliance conducted in partnership with the steering committee yielded key findings related to academic outcomes for emergent bilingual students. We have organized the findings within the cradle-to-career continuum to underscore critical transition points during emergent bilingual students' educational journeys.

Participating in Prekindergarten Improves Academic Outcomes for Emergent Bilingual Students

E3 Alliance research shows that when students participate in pre-K programs, they are ready for kindergarten at a higher rate than students who did not attend pre-K, regardless of emergent bilingual status.

This data reveals a particularly encouraging finding: Emergent bilingual students in Central Texas attend four-year-old pre-K at higher rates (75%) than non-emergent bilingual students.

Percent of Central Texas Kindergarten Students that Attended Pre-K 4 by Emergent Bilingual Status



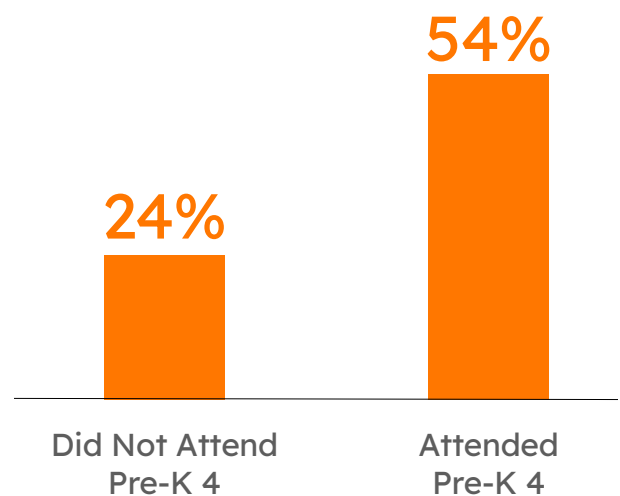
Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

This high rate of enrollment is not entirely surprising because emergent bilingual students in Texas are eligible for free public pre-K.

One finding in E3 Alliance's research that underscores this policy's impact is that emergent bilingual students who attend pre-K 4 met kindergarten readiness standard at much higher rates (54%) than their emergent bilingual peers who did not attend pre-K 4 (24%).

Emergent bilingual students who met kindergarten readiness standards continue to see positive academic outcomes throughout elementary school.

Percent of Central Texas Kindergarteners Meeting Kindergarten Readiness Standard



Note: Data shown is for the 2022-23 school year.
Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Early Childhood Data System data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

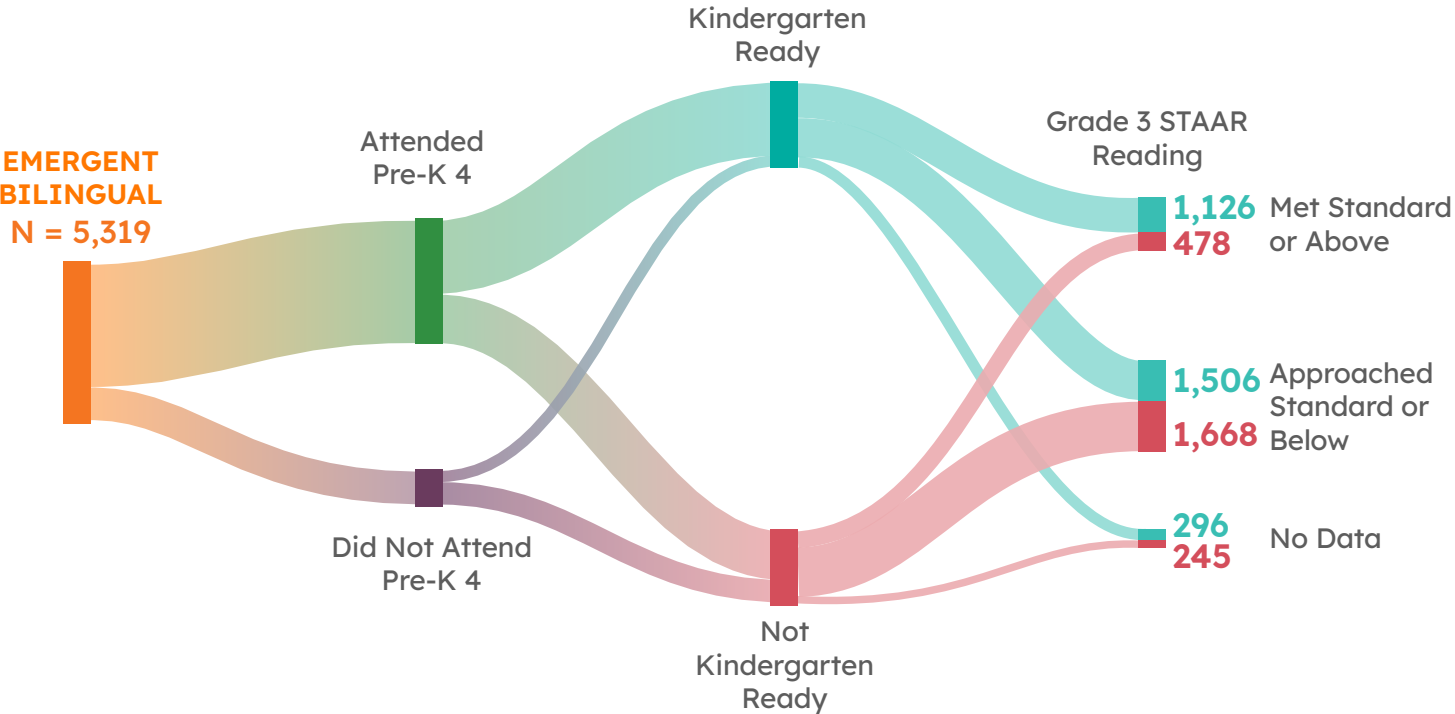
Students who are kindergarten ready have higher odds of meeting standards on the Grade 3 math and reading STAAR exams. Moreover, the benefits are not limited to elementary school: Students who participate in pre-K are more likely to graduate high school and pursue postsecondary education (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

When looking at student performance on STAAR, emergent bilingual students who are kindergarten ready outperform their emergent bilingual peers who were not kindergarten ready. Specifically, 43% of emergent bilingual students who were kindergarten ready met grade level on the Grade 3 STAAR reading exam, compared to only 22% of emergent bilingual students who were not kindergarten ready.

Reading proficiency in elementary school is a powerful indicator of a student’s future academic achievement (E3 Alliance, 2023). According to the National Research Council, “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade.” Individuals who are not a “modestly skilled reader” by that grade level are less likely to graduate from high school.

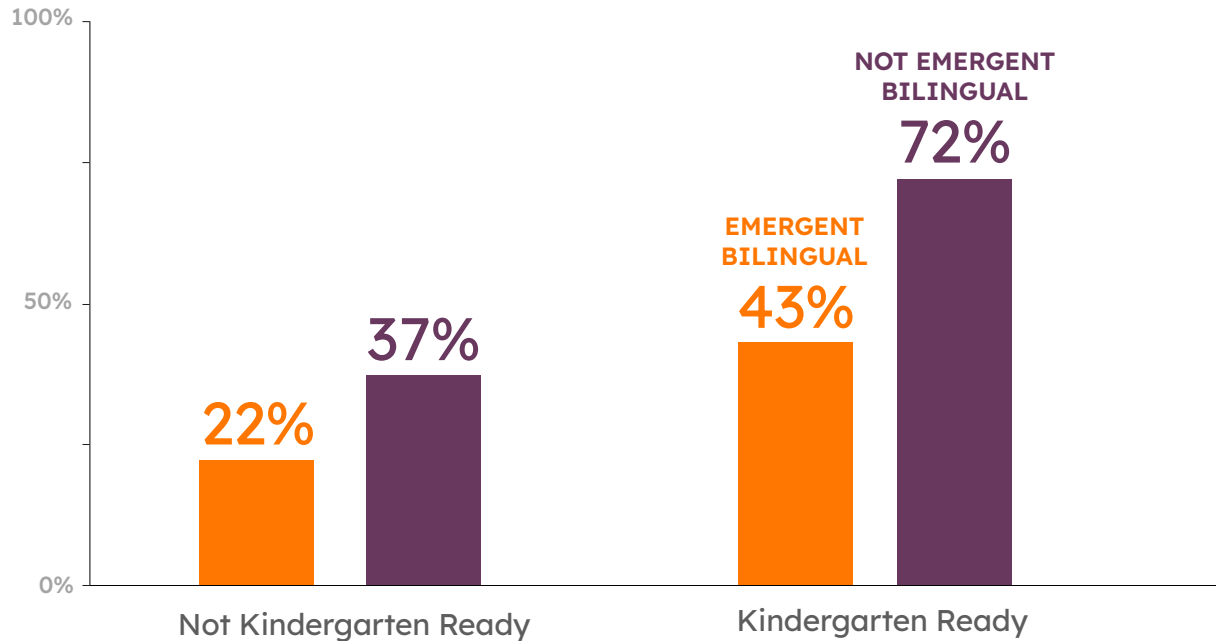
Free pre-K is a public policy bright spot that delivers meaningful results and sets emergent bilingual students up for academic success.

Emergent Bilingual Pathways From Pre-K Attendance Through Grade 3 STAAR Reading



Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Early Childhood Data System and Texas Education Agency data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

Percent of Central Texas Emergent Bilingual Students Meeting Standard on Grade 3 STAAR Reading



Note: Data shown is for the 2022-23 school year.

Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Early Childhood Data System and STAAR data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

Reclassifying as English Proficient by Middle School is a Gateway to Advanced Courses in High School

Reclassification is the formal process where a district's Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) determines if an emergent bilingual student is English proficient based on state-mandated metrics.

Texas students, except those in pre-K and kindergarten, can be reclassified at the end of a school year based on three factors:

- Performance on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), an assessment that aims to measure students' progress in learning English. Students are tested each year until they meet reclassification criteria.

- Satisfactory performance on the STAAR reading or an approved statewide content/reading assessment.
- A teacher's subjective assessment using an official standardized Texas Education Agency emergent bilingual reclassification rubric.

E3 Alliance data analysis found a striking reclassification trend: Emergent bilingual students in Central Texas are reclassified at lower rates than their peers statewide.

Specifically, E3 Alliance researchers examined the cohort of Central Texas emergent bilingual students who were in fifth grade in 2018. They found that, by 12th grade, only 28% of these students had reclassified as English proficient, compared to 34% of the corresponding cohort of emergent bilingual students in Texas as a whole.

E3 Alliance data also found that emergent bilingual students from low-income households are reclassified at lower rates than peers from non-low-income households.

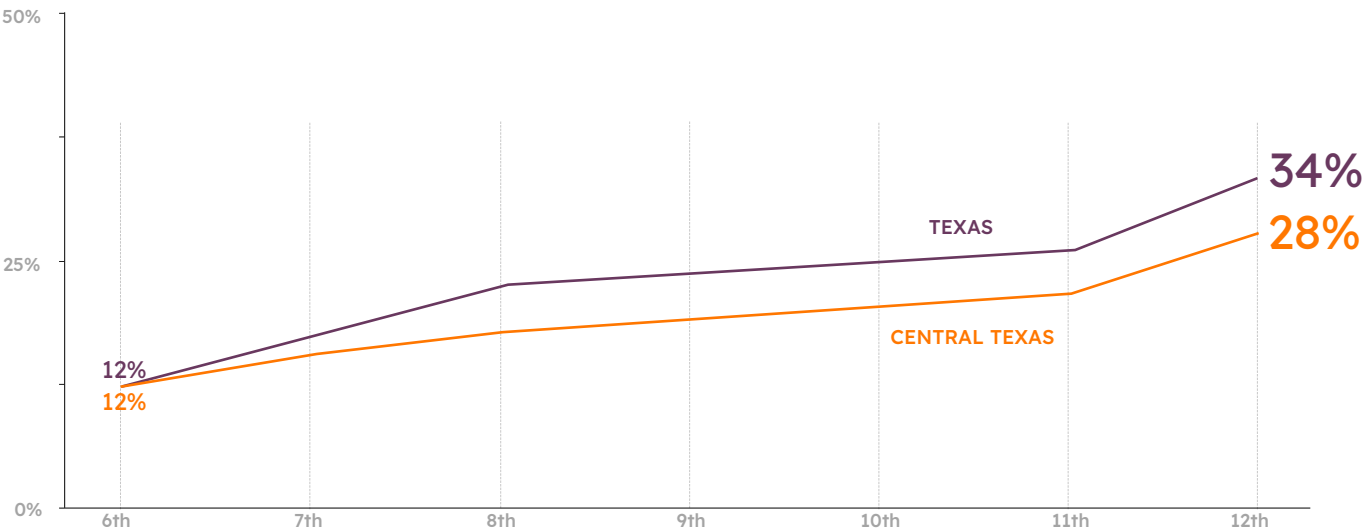
The current system in Central Texas led to reclassification by 12th grade of only a quarter of our emergent bilingual fifth graders from low-income households, compared to 44% of students from non-low-income households. It is important to note that during the 2022-23 school year, 76% of emergent bilingual students in Central Texas lived in low-income households.

Further exploring middle school trends, E3 Alliance analyzed a cohort of Central Texas fifth grade students in 2021. All students in the cohort approached standard or above on Grade 5 reading STAAR. We grouped those students based on their emergent bilingual and reclassification status.

Within the cohort, 95% of emergent bilingual students who reclassified before sixth grade approached standard or above on Grade 6 reading STAAR, outpacing their non-emergent bilingual peers at 91%.



Cumulative Reclassification Rates Between 6th and 12th Grade for 2018 Emergent Bilingual 5th Graders



Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

In comparison, only 73% of emergent bilingual students who were not reclassified going into sixth grade met these same criteria on Grade 6 reading STAAR.

Further highlighting the potential academic impact of reclassifying as English proficient before entering middle school, E3 Alliance data also found that emergent bilingual students who reclassified before middle school have 2.2 times higher odds of approaching standard or above on Grade 6 reading STAAR.

While quantitative data suggests reclassifying as English proficient before middle school positively affects academic outcomes for emergent bilingual students, qualitative data we collected identified barriers to reclassification.

Barriers to Reclassification

Student performance on TELPAS is the primary factor Texas uses to determine whether students can be reclassified as English proficient.

As described in the methodology section, E3 Alliance used qualitative research to better understand ongoing challenges and tensions related to reclassification in Central Texas schools.

Teachers reported a variety of constraints to TELPAS that could be impacting student performance on the test, including inconsistent rating, student perception of the test, and testing environment.

TELPAS Concerns From Teachers

Teachers reported they lacked proper training on the technical requirements of rating and proctoring the TELPAS, leaving some educators questioning if their students received the appropriate rating.

Fifth grade students who reclassified from emergent bilingual to English proficient passed the state reading exams in grades 6, 7, and 8 at higher rates than their non-emergent bilingual peers.

Source: E3 analysis of Texas Education Agency data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

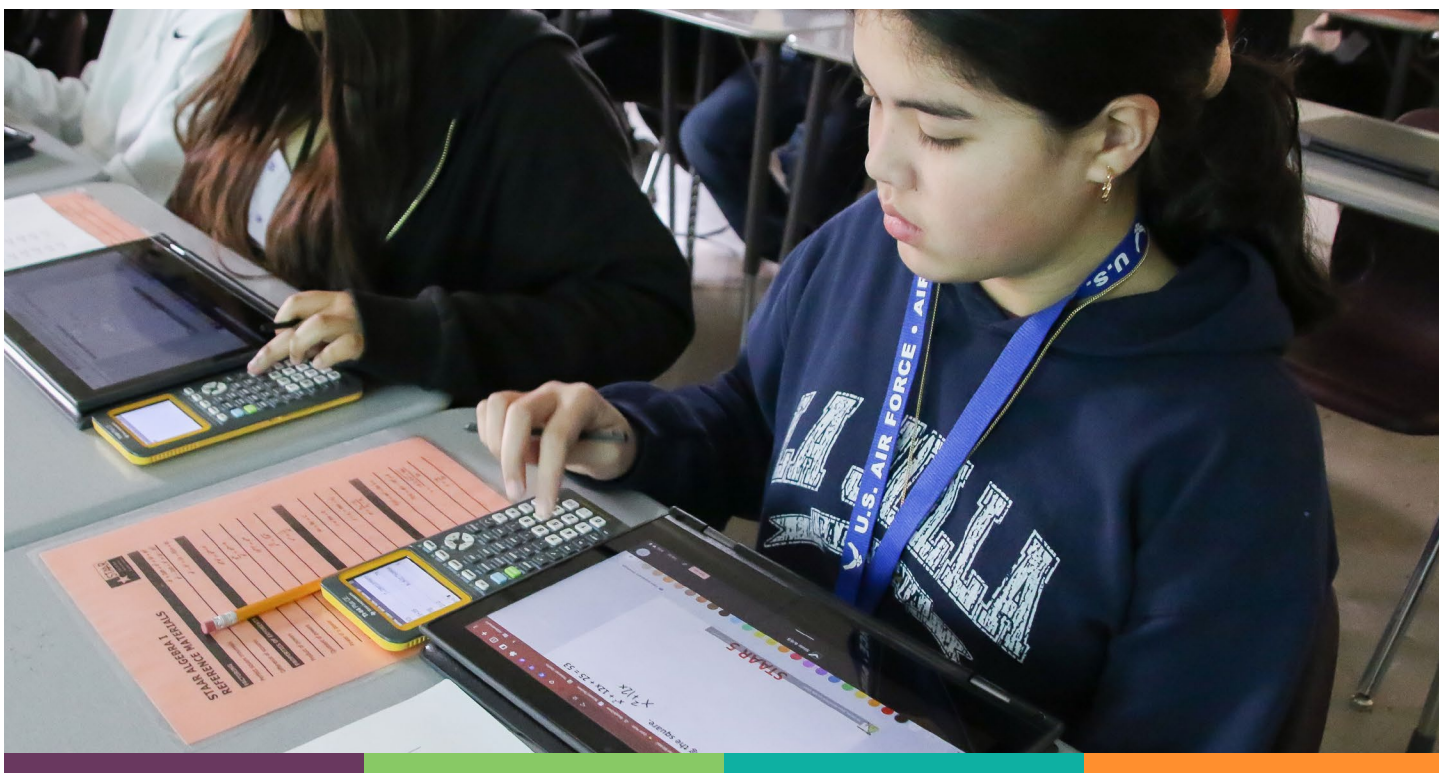
When teachers did not meet the rating deadline, other teachers completed ratings for their students.

While many teachers felt the new testing and rating model reduced the burden of grading, they also wanted more opportunities to provide input on their students' TELPAS ratings.

Testing Experience Poses Challenge for Students

Some teachers noted that an added barrier for students was changing the test itself, especially around the computer-based listening and speaking portions.

Other teachers reported challenges with computer literacy, as well as students' limited exposure to and understanding of equipment required for the test (such as microphones). The online testing platform was also a barrier for some students.



Further, teachers found the TELPAS testing environment insufficient. Teachers reported that students were not comfortable with the testing environment because many students were tested in spaces, such as libraries, where other students could see what they were doing.

“

[Students] don't know how to do [the test online], and we can't help them with it.”

—Central Texas Teacher

Student Perception of TELPAS

Many emergent bilingual students in high school believe that TELPAS does not affect their ability to graduate; therefore, some teachers believe students may not give their full effort on the test.

Teachers feel that students do not see a reason to take the test and do not fully understand that their TELPAS classification impacts their accommodations and available classes.

Though teachers felt their students should be more motivated to take the test seriously, they also noted that the test is not designed in a way to help and encourage emergent bilingual students. One teacher described TELPAS as discouraging, adding that the test is not fair and puts harmful labels on students.

“

There is a gap in understanding what the [TELPAS] test is.”

—Central Texas Teacher



Teacher Perspectives on Reclassification and Access

Teachers and staff identified many impacts, both positive and negative, to an emergent bilingual student reclassifying.

One teacher noted that “students who are reclassified from [emergent bilingual] status are successfully able to perform the tasks of any other high school student.” The same teacher added, “Students perform better in their classes and can adapt successfully even in moments of new learning and stress.”

However, another teacher reported, “Students that do not meet reclassification tend to be the ones that struggle.”

Labels Impact Access to Advanced Courses

Teachers reported misperceptions around bilingual labels. These labels are a barrier to advanced course access in high school. Teachers suggested their input should carry more weight

than TELPAS ratings when determining class placement and student accommodations. For example, a student can be ranked “advanced high” in all categories, except for speaking, and still be considered an intermediate language learner. This label limits which courses emergent bilingual students can take.

Teachers noted that a student’s ratings, along with other student data, were not always considered holistically. Academic placement for emergent bilingual students was often based in opinion, and schools were “moving away from data-driven decisions.”

While educators identified barriers to reclassification, they also shared success stories. An administrator shared how one student was so successful that “nobody remembers she was a newcomer.”

Elementary to Secondary Transitions

As researchers and educators consider ways to help emergent bilingual students be successful earlier in their academic careers, it is important to highlight the difference in resources available to emergent bilingual students in secondary grades.

Elementary teachers and staff reported experiences with a range of emergent bilingual program models, including ESL Content Based, Transitional Late Exit, and Dual Language. Regardless of program model type, teachers shared key elements to successful program implementation:

- Daily exposure to students' home language and second language
- Opportunities to build academic and social vocabulary
- Student-centered instruction

Secondary teachers shared a starkly different experience with available resources.

Secondary teachers had less to report regarding specific program types and instead primarily shared about sheltered or non-sheltered learning environments for emergent bilingual students.

A sheltered learning environment is one in which teachers use second language strategies while teaching another subject to make the content accessible to emergent bilingual students.

In middle and high schools, most instruction is taught entirely in English and not designed to promote bilingual skills.

Secondary teachers shared a desire for clearer guidance on implementing instructional models and a more systematic approach with better record keeping for their emergent bilingual students.

For emergent bilingual students, the transition to middle school can bring challenges that are not

easily addressed by instructional models. ESL and sheltered instructional models are offered inconsistently and without strong support for implementation.

The Role of Student Engagement

What helps students successfully reclassify? Teachers in this study believe students involved in school activities typically reclassify earlier.

To illustrate the impact of connections, one teacher recounted how a student who participated in school activities “had to branch out [and] meet people who were not [emergent bilingual].” After learning about the concept of college from a peer, the student discovered more available opportunities for college independently.

The Future of TELPAS

The Texas State Board of Education adopted new English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) in 2024 (Texas Education Agency, 2025c). These new standards will become effective in classrooms in the 2026-27 school year. As a result of the changes to the ELPS, TELPAS will transition to a new assessment.



Increasing Emergent Bilingual Students’ Access to Advanced Courses Correlates to Higher Odds of Postsecondary Enrollment

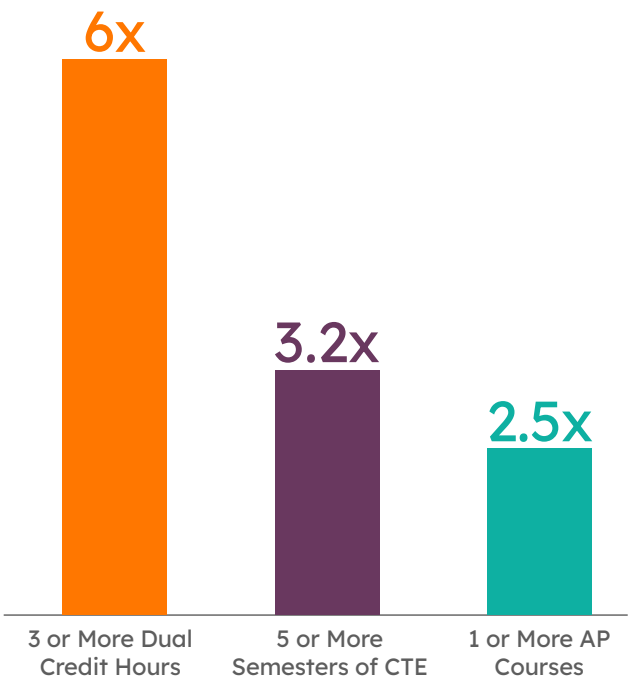
Prior E3 Alliance research found that completing a college-credit-bearing course in high school is a strong predictor of postsecondary enrollment.

This is especially true for emergent bilingual students. Emergent bilingual students have six times higher odds of enrolling in a postsecondary institution if they complete three or more dual credit courses, 3.2 times higher odds if they complete five or more semesters of CTE courses, and 2.5 times higher odds if they complete at least one AP course.

Yet, despite the positive impact of completing college-credit-bearing courses, emergent bilingual students in Central Texas participated in advanced courses at a lower rate than their non-emergent bilingual peers.

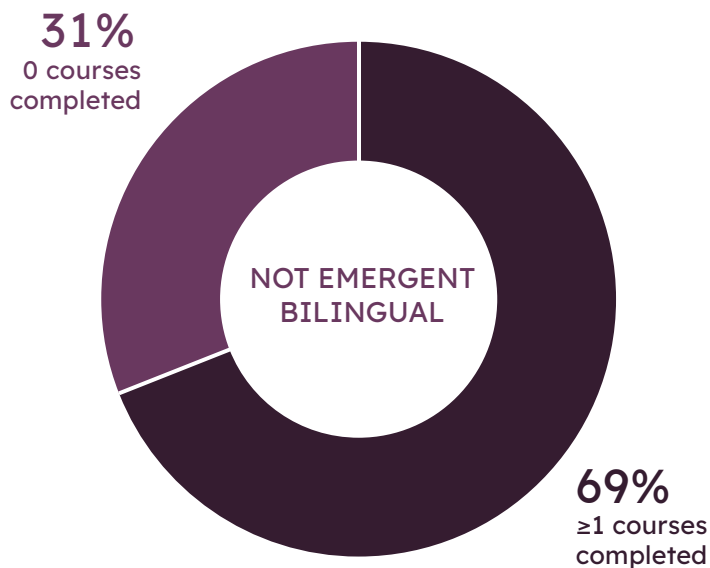
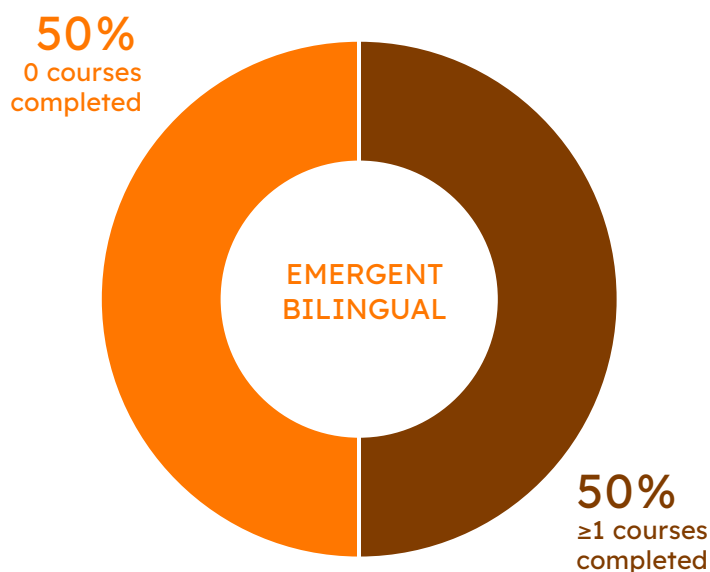
From 2019 to 2024, a roughly 20-percentage-point gap persisted in advanced course participation between emergent bilingual students and their non-emergent bilingual peers in Central Texas high schools.

Postsecondary Enrollment Odds Among 2022 Central Texas Emergent Bilingual Graduates



Comparison group: Emergent bilingual graduates who did not meet the indicated outcome.
Model: Logistic regression controlling for race/ethnicity, gender, household income, special education status, emergent bilingual status, and urbanicity.
Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

College-Credit-Bearing Course Engagement Among 2023 Central Texas High School Graduates



Cohort: First-time 9th grade students who were on track with peers for four years and graduated in four years.

Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

E3 Alliance researchers found that only 50% of emergent bilingual graduates from the Central Texas class of 2022 completed at least one college-credit-bearing course while in high school, compared to 69% of their non-emergent bilingual peers.

Dual Credit Participation Lags for Emergent Bilingual Students

Emergent bilingual students who take three or more dual credit courses in high school have six times higher odds of pursuing postsecondary education.

E3 Alliance data shows that emergent bilingual students have disproportionately low representation in all dual credit courses except for Spanish or other foreign languages.

From 2013 to 2022, emergent bilingual students completing dual credit courses rose from 5% to 11%.

Yet, the gap between emergent bilingual and non-emergent bilingual students is widening. From 2013 to 2022, the gap between emergent bilingual and non-emergent bilingual students completing at least one dual credit hour increased from 10 percentage points to 15 percentage points.

Emergent Bilingual Students Complete CTE at Similar Rates to Non-Emergent Bilingual Peers

While E3 Alliance data shows that emergent bilingual graduates complete college-credit-bearing courses at a lower rate than their non-emergent bilingual peers, the data reveals that

emergent bilingual students are on par with their peers in CTE course participation.

During the 2023-24 school year, for example, 14% of Central Texas emergent bilingual high school students took an advanced CTE course compared to 15% of non-emergent bilingual students.

For the Central Texas high school class of 2022, emergent bilingual graduates had rates of engagement in CTE courses similar to those of their peers across all levels of engagement, as measured by number of courses completed in high school. This is an important trend to maintain since, as our data shows, completing at least five semesters of CTE courses in high school increases the odds that emergent bilingual graduates will enroll in postsecondary.

Success in Advanced Math Access Meets Ongoing Postsecondary Enrollment Gaps

When considering which courses prepare students to pursue a postsecondary education, college-credit-bearing math courses belong in the conversation.

E3 Alliance has done extensive research on the impact of completing advanced math courses in middle and high school. We have found that students who completed college-credit-bearing math courses in high school enrolled in, persisted in, and completed a postsecondary program at higher rates than their peers.

The gateway to more rigorous math courses in high school is completing Algebra I by the end of middle school. This same research also showed that students who scored in the top 40% (“high-performing students”) on the Grade 5 math STAAR would be successful in advanced math in middle school, including completing Algebra I by eighth grade, if given the opportunity.



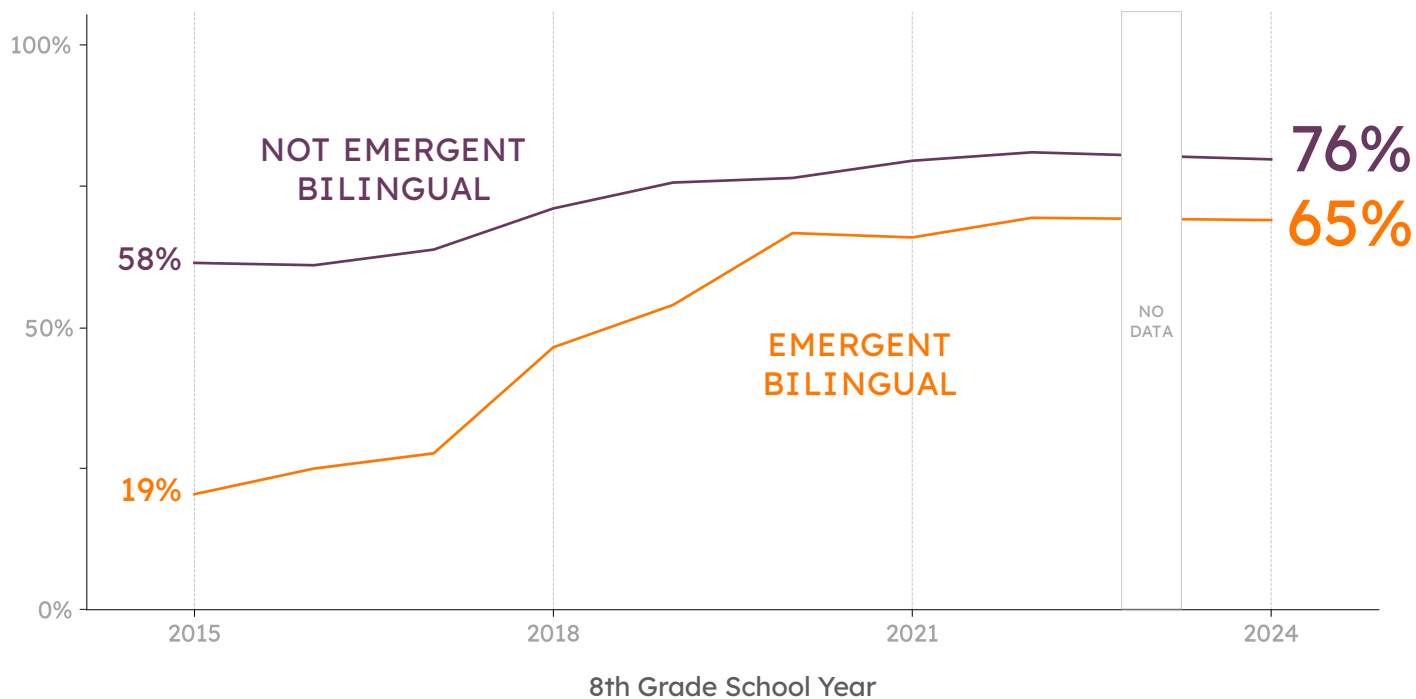
Considering these findings and due to focused efforts by E3 Alliance and regional partners, the data reveals a bright spot: Between 2015 and 2024, the gap between high-performing emergent bilingual and non-emergent bilingual students completing Algebra I by eighth grade has closed by 72%.

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

The Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee found that the gap in postsecondary enrollment was particularly compelling at 23 percentage points. This finding prompted deeper examination of the factors contributing to this disparity.



Percent of Central Texas High-Performing 8th Grade Students who Completed Algebra I in Middle School

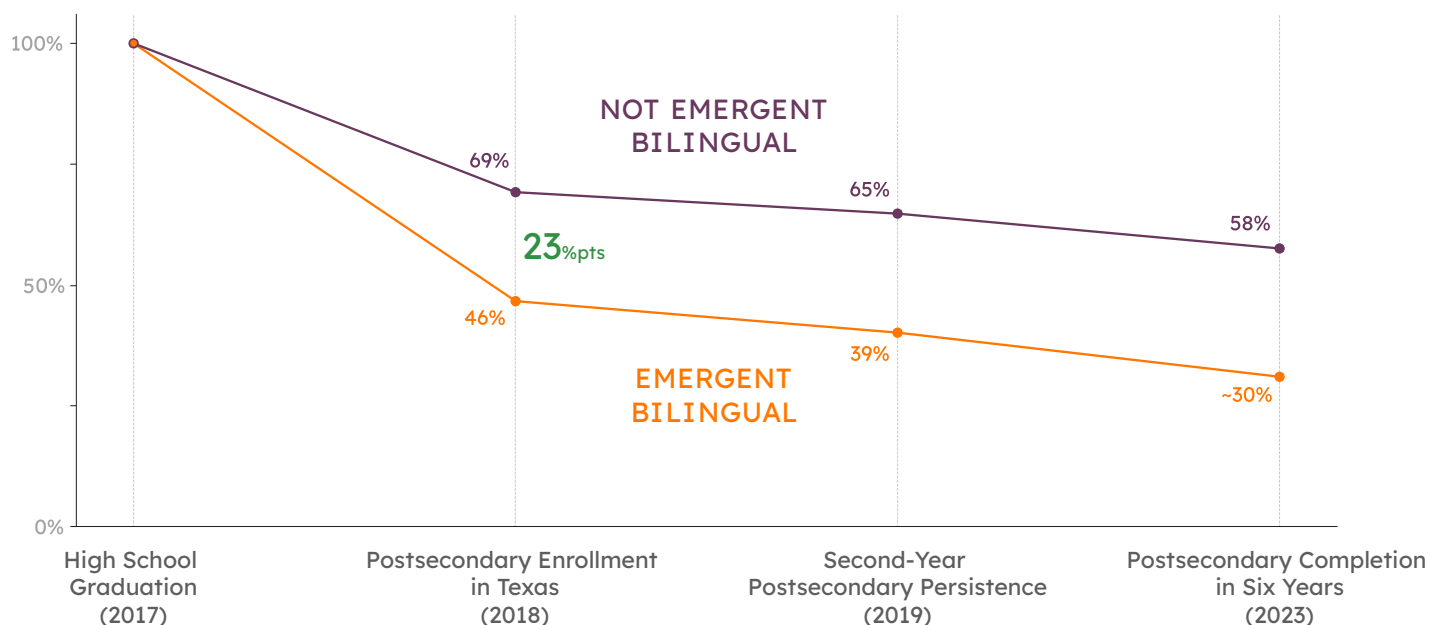


Cohort: 8th grade students in the given school year who took the 5th grade math STAAR three years prior.

Note: "High-performing" refers to students who scored in the top 40% of all 5th grade math STAAR test-takers.

Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

Postsecondary Outcomes Among Students in the Central Texas Class of 2017 who Completed a College-Credit-Bearing Math Course



~ Rounded to prevent imputation (actual value is within +/- 5 percentage points of the value shown).

Note: "College-credit-bearing math course" refers to any AP, IB, or dual credit math course.

Cohort: First-time 9th grade students who were in a Texas public high school for four years and followed standard grade progression.

Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board data at The University of Texas Austin Education Research Center.

Barriers to Advanced Courses

Parents and teachers generally reported that advanced courses were appropriately challenging and that emergent bilingual students who took advanced courses were successful. Still, emergent bilingual students face many barriers to accessing advanced courses.

Staff reported that negative perceptions of the emergent bilingual label—rather than actual academic ability—often bar students from advanced courses. These perceptions create systemic hurdles that limit access to advanced learning opportunities.

Course placement for emergent bilingual students often relies heavily on TELPAS speaking and listening scores, even though these scores do not fully reflect what the student truly knows.

“

Most of our advanced course-taking falls into the realm of foreign languages, where many of our emergent bilingual Spanish-speaking students are encouraged to take advanced-level Spanish classes.”

—Central Texas Teacher



Staff also shared that when emergent bilingual students were encouraged to take advanced courses, it was often limited to foreign language classes.

While parents valued advanced courses for their children's future, they shared teacher concerns that institutional bias frequently blocks emergent bilingual students from advanced pathways. These assumptions about student ability often result in students being funneled into less rigorous "leftover" classes.

Newcomer parents faced distinct enrollment challenges, including restrictive policies, narrow enrollment windows, and unclear instructions.

Moreover, differences from their home country also made navigating the system of advanced course-taking challenging. These challenges included different grading policies and unclear course abbreviations and naming conventions (e.g., dual credit, AP, etc.).

Even when students enrolled in advanced courses, parents encountered significant hurdles in supporting them at home. The specialized

nature of the coursework proved difficult for students to translate into their home language, leaving many parents feeling unable to provide academic assistance.

More work is needed to develop systemic supports for emergent bilingual students and their families as they transition from high school to postsecondary.

Any Postsecondary Education Linked to Higher Employment Rates

E3 Alliance data found that from 2012 to 2022 Central Texas emergent bilingual high school graduates consistently enrolled in postsecondary programs at lower rates than non-emergent bilingual students. Of students who graduated high school in 2022, 48% of non-emergent bilingual students and only 22% of emergent bilingual students enrolled in a Texas postsecondary institution within one year of graduating high school.

Central Texas emergent bilingual students also pursue postsecondary education at a consistently lower rate compared to their emergent bilingual peers statewide. In 2022, only 22% of emergent bilingual graduates in Central Texas immediately enrolled in a Texas postsecondary institution, trailing behind the 31% enrollment rate for their peers across the state.

Central Texas emergent bilingual students enroll in postsecondary full time at a lower rate—41% compared with 68% of their peers. While more than half of all Texas college students are enrolled part time, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board notes that students enrolled full time are more likely to complete their programs.

Positive Outcomes with Any Postsecondary Education

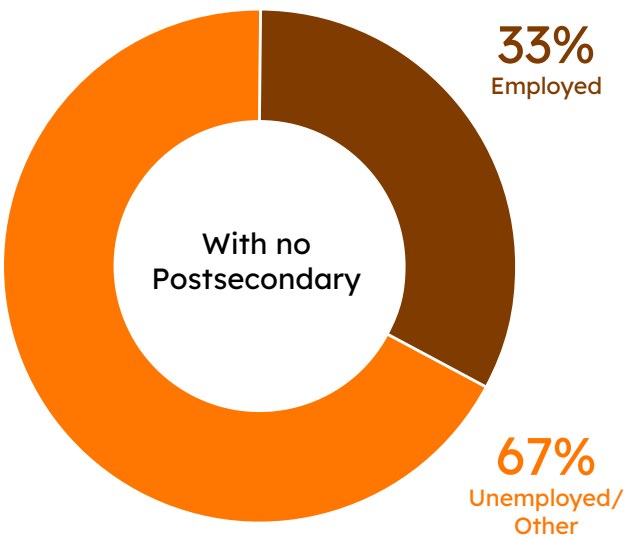
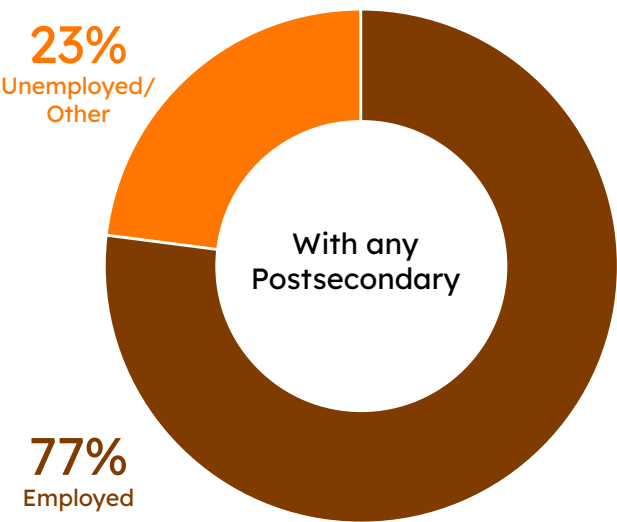
Pursuing any education after high school, regardless of completion, produces extraordinary results. E3 Alliance data from the Central Texas graduating class of 2016 shows that 77% of emergent bilingual students who pursued any higher education were employed six years later, while the employment rate for emergent bilingual students with no postsecondary experience was only 33%. These findings include students who earned a bachelor’s degree or community college credential as well as students who attended a postsecondary program but did not earn a degree or certificate.

Ultimately, this data demonstrates that the path to economic mobility does not require an all-or-nothing approach. These findings underscore the critical need for policies and systemic supports that

In short, emergent bilingual students with **ANY** postsecondary experience, regardless of completion, were employed at higher rates compared to their peers with no postsecondary experience.

encourage emergent bilingual students to pursue any postsecondary pathway—whether that involves a four-year degree, a community college credential, or even part-time enrollment. Even a single step into higher education serves as a positive career catalyst.

Employment Outcomes for Central Texas Class of 2016 Emergent Bilingual Students Six Years After Expected Graduation Date



Note: Wages not reported to Texas Workforce Commission’s Unemployment Insurance Wage Reports are not included. For example, gig work is not included.
Source: E3 Alliance analysis of Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Workforce Commission data at The University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.



Recommendations to Action

A cornerstone of the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee's work involved identifying systemic strategies to better support emergent bilingual students throughout Central Texas. Translating these findings into action, **Del Valle ISD**, **Lockhart ISD**, and **Austin ISD** workshopped and implemented targeted initiatives designed to deepen family engagement and expand student access to advanced coursework.



Del Valle ISD

Bringing Parents and Caregivers into the Conversation

To better serve their student body (of which more than half are emergent bilingual), Del Valle ISD’s district administrators crafted an Action Research Project with support from E3 Alliance and NAPE.

At the core of this project was the research question: “How can we empower, guide, and support families of emergent bilingual middle school students in Del Valle ISD to navigate the educational system and actively engage in their children’s academic success?”

Del Valle ISD’s Multilingual Coordinator Rogelio Guzman understands that navigating the educational system is a universal challenge—one that is significantly magnified for emergent bilingual families. “They don’t know what they don’t know,” Guzman says, noting that if English-speaking parents struggle to navigate the education system, the barriers for parents who do not speak English are even greater.

Prioritizing Family Needs from the Start

Del Valle ISD partnered with steering committee member Con Mi MADRE, an Austin-based nonprofit that works with young Latinas and their mothers to prepare for postsecondary education.

Con Mi MADRE surveyed participating Del Valle ISD parents to assess their baseline knowledge of educational requirements and available support resources.

Learn more
about Con Mi MADRE at
conmimadre.org

The pre-survey revealed that while families are highly motivated to support their children, they face scheduling constraints and lack clear information on academic pathways, graduation requirements, and college preparation.

To address these needs, Del Valle ISD developed a presentation to empower parents with information about high school graduation requirements, dual credit programs, CTE, and how different courses impact their student's grade point average (GPA). By scheduling sessions during convenient times—including weekends—the district successfully reached nearly 50 families.

“

[The Del Valle presentation] helped a lot in understanding how the educational system works now.”

—Del Valle Parent

Con Mi MADRE then conducted a post-presentation survey. From Del Valle ISD's efforts, families gained a better understanding of academic terms and opportunities such as GPA, AP and Pre-AP courses, dual credit classes, and Early College High School programs.

District leaders also learned that providing information in Spanish and creating a welcoming environment for questions and discussion helped families feel more comfortable and engaged in the learning process.

“

“[The Del Valle presentation] will definitely help me stay informed about my daughter's education.”

—Del Valle Parent

Audrey Selden, with NAPE, praised the impact of Del Valle ISD and Con Mi MADRE's partnership. “A really big part of this is stopping and taking time to understand how the system is operating on students,” she said. “This project demonstrates that when you do take that time and make the space for families to really participate, we're going to make great gains.”





Lockhart ISD

Implementing Districtwide Strategies for Academics and Outreach

For Lockhart ISD, supporting emergent bilingual learners is essential to the success of the entire district, as these students represent a significant 40% of the total student population. As part of its work with the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee, the district implemented a districtwide compliance and support system and a PK–12 data dashboard to evaluate their programs.

Administrators also formalized district and campus collaboration to ensure consistent policies across all schools. For example, Lockhart ISD required all campuses to develop TELPAS Plans of Support. The district provided campuses with templates to ensure these plans were developed cohesively rather than in isolation.

Lockhart ISD also now requires teachers to hold an ESL certification to qualify for the Teacher Incentive Allotment, a state-funded program that provides financial rewards to high-performing teachers.

The Value of Family Engagement

Administrators also made a concerted effort to increase engagement with the families of emergent bilingual students, including:

- Expanded translation-required communication
- District and campus events
- Registration support and on-site language assessments
- Designed intentional transition supports
- Increased real-time language access



“

Being a part of the [Emergent Bilingual Steering] committee has really propelled the changes that we've been able to make because it's been rooted in data that is life changing.”

—Monica Saldivar
Lockhart ISD

As part of their commitment to intentional supports, Lockhart ISD is expanding their family outreach programs. Building on a successful initiative that prepared students and families for the move to middle school, the district is now developing a similar program to guide students and families through the critical transition from eighth to ninth grade.

Lockhart ISD's Director of Bilingual Education Monica Saldivar said participating in the steering committee helped her and colleagues “work smarter” and “work with intentionality to make sure that we're strengthening community and academic experience [for families and students].”

It also prompted the district, Saldivar said, to raise more awareness about the opportunities for advanced courses in high school.

“I think that there was just an opportunity for us... to share with [students and families] the way that their lives could be... changed for the better if they took part in advanced coursework,” she said.

Sustaining a Culture that Celebrates Multilingualism

Saldivar is most energized by the tangible results of this collaborative initiative. Changes have led to more consistent instruction for emergent bilingual students, stronger program leadership and ownership, and greater student pride in their language, culture, and achievements. As a result, students are graduating more prepared for life after high school.

“We are recognizing [students] for the assets that they bring linguistically [and] academically to our community,” she said. “And we are celebrating with their families all of the hard work and challenges that they've overcome to be successful.”

Saldivar added that once we can empower families, we're empowering our entire community. “I think that's what drives us,” she said.



Austin ISD

Empowering Students With Increased Access to Information

In Austin ISD, emergent bilingual students make up nearly one-third of total enrollment and approximately 24% of the middle and high school population. This diverse community is characterized by immense linguistic depth, with students and families speaking more than 100 languages. The district's top eight home languages are English, Spanish, Pashto, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Arabic, Dari, and Portuguese.

Janeth Medrano, Austin ISD's director of secondary multilingual education, describes bilingualism as a "superpower," yet she argues that educational systems are often poorly equipped to recognize the inherent assets these students possess.

"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," she said. "They come in with so many experiences, so many different skills, so many different perspectives that they can share and contribute to our society."

Overhauling the Course Catalog to Serve Emergent Bilingual Students and Families

Austin ISD joined the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee because district staff wanted to evaluate their approach and meaningfully improve academic outcomes for emergent bilingual students.

After each meeting, she returned with new data that helped the district make “some really impactful decisions” to improve academic outcomes for emergent bilingual students and expand access to advanced courses.

Austin ISD revamped its course catalog to improve accessibility for its emergent bilingual community. The updated catalog is now available in multiple languages, including Spanish.

The district also launched AVID Excel, an initiative that strengthens students’ academic language and literacy skills, ensuring they can successfully participate in rigorous high school courses that prepares students for college.

Participating in the Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee prompted cross-departmental collaboration between advanced academics, Early College High School, CTE, and counseling staff.

Developing clear pathways for programs helped campuses, counselors, and families understand the process to get to an advanced course. This increased awareness of and participation in advanced courses.

“We have developed different pathways for different programs to ensure that not only campuses and counselors, but also families understand how we get to that advanced course,” Medrano said.

According to Medrano, these systemic changes are yielding results. The completion rate for emergent bilingual students in advanced courses rose from 76% in 2021 to 81% in 2024.



Strategies for Addressing Barriers

School systems have a significant opportunity to refine how administrators, counselors, and teachers assess student potential. Effective assessment requires acknowledging that language acquisition and academic capability are not the same.

“[Emergent bilingual students] might be developing their language, but they can still perform at high academic levels when it comes to math, for example,” Medrano said.

To bridge this gap, she recommends leveraging technology to support students in the process of acquiring English. Additionally, Medrano suggested tapping into students’ existing language skills and ensuring they are on the path to advanced foreign language courses, so they can see themselves as future college students.

**Learn more about AVID
Excel at austinisd.org/avid**

Research Limitations

Though we received robust information regarding the educational experiences of emergent bilingual students from their parents, teachers, and staff, there are some limitations to this research.

Surveys

In future research, the research team will weigh the necessity of a survey. If it is deemed a necessary measurement tool, the team will consider other methods of distributing the survey to increase participation, including providing paper copies to participants in person and asking them to return the survey before they leave.

Document Review

The research team found that the 59 documents submitted by steering committee participants during the document review phase were highly tailored to their specific districts, organizations, and communities.

This posed a challenge when analyzing these custom-made documents for themes and commonalities, especially as they related to the guiding and research questions. Even so, our document review found that district and organizational staff were striving to provide translated documents and meet the unique needs of their families and communities.

Student Voice

While we were able to collect data from the families of emergent bilingual students, their teachers, and other school staff, the perspectives of the students themselves were missing from



this research. Future research should include emergent bilingual students, particularly to better understand their experiences with reclassification, advanced course-taking, and educational programs.

Limitations in State-Reported Datasets

Given that quantitative research relied on the ERC, analyses were limited to variables and data elements in state-reported datasets. Some follow-up questions from the steering committee were not answered due to the need for variables not reported to the state.

Additionally, state reported datasets in the ERC could be delayed by as much as one year after the end of the corresponding school year, resulting in reduced relevance for some data points that rely on being as close to real-time as possible.

Areas for Future Research and Evaluation

To better support emergent bilingual students and inform systemic policies, future research is critical in the following areas:

Student Perspectives

Gather direct feedback from emergent bilingual students about their educational experiences, the availability of advanced course offerings, and the level of challenge they experience once they are enrolled.

Learn from students' experiences in dual language, ESL, or other bilingual programs while in elementary and middle school to inform future policy and practice.

Transition from Elementary to Middle School

Examine the institutional and systemic changes that occur during the transition from elementary to middle school. This appears to be a critical inflection point for students, families, and educators.

Evaluation of Pilot Policies

Assess the efficacy of pilot policies currently being implemented by steering committee members in increasing emergent bilingual students' access to advanced courses and postsecondary enrollment.



Postsecondary Enrollment

Identify the factors contributing to lower postsecondary enrollment rates among emergent bilingual students in Central Texas and Texas, even when students complete the highest levels of math in high school.

Long-Term Emergent Bilingual Outcomes

Examine the experiences of students who remain classified as emergent bilingual for extended periods to better understand the efficacy of student supports.

Conclusion



The findings of this study make one thing clear: improving outcomes for emergent bilingual students requires intentional efforts and systems change.

Across Central Texas, gaps in access to advanced coursework, advising, and postsecondary pathways, especially at the secondary level, continue to limit opportunities for students who are already navigating systemic barriers.

These are not isolated issues; they reflect how our systems are currently designed.

At the same time, this research surfaced something deeper: The need to shift underlying mindsets about language, readiness, and potential that shape who gets access to opportunity.

Lasting change will require us to confront both the systems we have built and the beliefs that sustain them.

From Data to Action

This effort is unfolding amid broader uncertainty in education, shifting funding landscapes, evolving immigration contexts, and increasing pressure on public schools. In this moment, the response cannot be to scale back but rather to increase programs and policies that support emergent bilingual students.

The E3 Alliance Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee goals remain a clear north star, grounded in a shared commitment to create opportunity and equitable access for all students.

Although these findings are grounded in Central Texas, many of the challenges and opportunities identified throughout this report reflect issues facing schools and communities across Texas.

The recommendations informed from this research provide a practical path forward. They reflect what districts can do now to increase access, strengthen alignment, and better support emergent bilingual students across the secondary experience.

E3 Alliance and our district partners will continue to use these recommendations as a foundation for action, aligning efforts across systems, tracking implementation over time, and measuring progress toward improved student outcomes.



The opportunity now is not just to respond to these findings but to act on them with urgency.

It is our collective responsibility to redesign our education system so that access and success for emergent bilingual students are no longer the exception but the expectation.

Recommendations for District and School Staff, Community Partners, and Families

The Emergent Bilingual Steering Committee developed these research-backed recommendations to expand emergent bilingual student access to college-aligned courses and postsecondary programs.

Even as Texas leads the nation in emergent bilingual support, we acknowledge that district leaders, educators, and families may face challenges implementing these recommendations in the current climate.

Increased immigration enforcement can result in lower student enrollment and higher rates of chronic absenteeism, even for U.S.-born students (Pillai et al., 2025).

Texas is experiencing an ongoing shortage of bilingual educators.

Districts face difficult decisions to maintain services and programs while facing budget deficits.



The future of federal funding for programs that support emergent bilingual students is also unclear.

In a state where one in four Texas students is emergent bilingual, transforming these systems is more than a strategic goal; it is an economic and moral imperative to ensure that success is no longer a hard-fought exception but a guaranteed expectation.

Over the last three years, we have witnessed passionate educators and engaged parents ready and willing to dismantle the systemic barriers.

Building radical trust—rooted in unwavering transparency and deep communication—is the essential catalyst for systemic change. It is the only way to bridge the divide between families, educators, and students, and fundamentally rethink how our systems are limiting the opportunities available for all Texans.



District Staff Recommendations

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Policy, Systems, and Accountability

- Review TELPAS trends, reclassification progress, and advanced coursework participation through regular district-campus conversations among administrators and instructional staff. Use these discussions to share practices and provide targeted support that strengthens enrollment and persistence in advanced pathways.
- Publish and disseminate a district definition of “advanced coursework” (including honors, AP, IB, dual credit, and advanced CTE). Review enrollment policies and prerequisites to identify and revise rules that may unintentionally limit emergent bilingual student access.
- Create or expand policies that use multiple identification measures to enroll emergent bilingual students in advanced coursework. Incorporate measures, including performance indicators, language growth, grades, and student interest. Reduce reliance on single measures and promote earlier access to advanced coursework.
- Review participation patterns with campuses annually to understand how emergent bilingual students are accessing advanced courses. Partner with schools on strategies that strengthen access, enrollment, and persistence in advanced and postsecondary-aligned pathways.

Communication and Community Engagement

- Create and maintain a multilingual glossary of educational terms, acronyms, TELPAS-related language, and course titles. Translate into all major home languages represented in the district. Embed these translations in registration materials and campus websites.

- Identify “translation-required” touchpoints (e.g., course selection guides, LPAC letters, family meetings, information nights) and establish a district protocol to ensure interpretation and translation services are automatically provided.
- Share key data with families in accessible formats, including visuals and brief summaries in home languages, to explain participation gaps, course pathways, and available supports.
- Host recurring community events (e.g., annually or each semester) that celebrate multilingualism and explicitly connect bilingualism to college, career, and workforce opportunities. Include partnerships with local employers and higher education institutions.

Staffing and Professional Learning

- Prioritize staffing at middle and high schools. Hire or reassign bilingual counselors, ESL- or bilingual-certified teachers, family engagement liaisons, and course advisors with specific responsibility for emergent bilingual academic planning.
- Provide targeted professional learning for counselors and advisors that address implicit bias, asset-based mindsets, and how language status can, even unintentionally, shape course recommendations and long-term academic trajectories.
- Define and publish district standards of practice for bilingual and ESL program implementation, including expectations for instructional design, language supports, and course access. Establish a support process for campuses where models need strengthening or redesign.



School Staff Recommendations

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Instruction, Postsecondary Readiness, and Student Support

- Monitor TELPAS administration practices at the campus level to ensure equitable access, consistent expectations, and appropriate testing conditions. Address discrepancies through coaching and corrective action when needed.
- Create a proactive support and case management process for students who are not reclassified, including scheduled data reviews, targeted language supports, and differentiated strategies to prevent TELPAS from becoming a long-term barrier.
- Provide ongoing, year-round communication (not just during testing windows) to students and families explaining TELPAS, reclassification criteria, and how language proficiency decisions affect course access and postsecondary options.
- Expand advanced coursework with built-in language supports, such as sheltered instruction, co-teaching, extended time, and academic language scaffolds, to ensure emergent bilingual students can succeed once enrolled.
- Identify and remove advising practices that limit emergent bilingual student access to advanced courses, such as subjective “readiness” criteria or informal recommendations.

Communication and Family Engagement

- Provide families with clear, translated explanations of course options, academic pathways, and available supports during course selection periods, including decision timelines and points of contact.
- Create intentional opportunities early in the school year for families and educators to build relationships, such as bilingual family meetings, virtual information sessions, or counselor-led small-group discussions.



Community Partners Recommendations

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Collaboration and Capacity Building

- Partner with districts and schools to co-host workshops and information sessions that help families:
 - Understand TELPAS, reclassification, and language proficiency expectations.
 - Understand academic pathways, advanced coursework options, graduation requirements, and postsecondary opportunities.
- Serve as liaison and amplify school-related information.
- Bridge communication between families and educators, particularly within historically underserved or linguistically diverse communities.

Access, Outreach, and Student Support

- Provide or support high-quality translation and interpretation services and culturally responsive outreach strategies to ensure families can meaningfully participate in academic planning and decision-making.
- Share workforce, college, and career pathway data that demonstrates the long-term benefits of multilingualism and advanced coursework, helping families connect current academic decisions to future opportunities.
- Collaborate with districts to support student persistence in advanced courses by offering mentoring, enrichment programs, tutoring, internships, or other community-based supports aligned to students' linguistic and academic strengths.



Family Recommendations

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

- Celebrate the power of two languages. Being bilingual is a superpower! Continuing to use and develop your home language helps your children academically and prepares them for college and careers. Talking, reading, and sharing stories about your experiences and challenges in your language at home is an important strength and supports your children in their future success.
- Lean on your community. Supporting your children is not something you have to do alone. Your friends, family, and neighbors are amazing resources. Share what you learn about the school with them, and don't be afraid to ask for tips in return. We are stronger when we work together.
- Make space to have regular conversations with your child about school. Take a moment of quality time to talk with your child every day. Ask about what's happening at school, including the fun social parts, what they are learning, and if they are facing any challenges. It's also a great time to look over forms or talk about upcoming classes, assignments, and deadlines together, so you both know what is coming up.
- Maintain family routines and take advantage of the simple moments that can be used regularly for homework and studying. This is a great way for you and your children to look at homework or assignment due dates together, so you are both prepared and ahead of the game.
- Stay connected with school. Think of teachers, counselors, and school staff as your partners. You have the right to ask how your children are doing on tests, how they can participate in advanced classes, and what they need to graduate and enroll in postsecondary program.
- Your voice is very important. Ask specific questions like:
 - “How can my child get into advanced classes?”
 - “What help is available for this subject?”
 - “When will my child be considered a fluent English speaker?”
- Participate in school and district opportunities when possible. Registration days, academic planning meetings, information sessions, and family workshops can provide helpful information and build connections. Families participate in different ways, and every level of involvement supports the success of children.



Recomendaciones para familias en español

- Celebra el poder de dos idiomas ¡Ser bilingüe es un superpoder!: Seguir usando y desarrollando su lengua materna ayuda a sus hijos académicamente y los prepara para la universidad y la carrera profesional. Hablar, leer y compartir historias de su niñez o de sus experiencias y retos en su idioma en casa, es una fortaleza importante y apoya a los sus hijos/as en su éxito futuro.
- Apóyese en su comunidad: Apoyar a sus hijos no es algo que tiene que hacer solo/a. Sus amigos, familia y vecinos son recursos increíbles. Comparta con ellos lo que aprenda sobre la escuela y que no le de pena de pedirles consejos a cambio. Todos somos más fuertes cuando trabajamos juntos.
- Haga un espacio de tiempo para tener conversaciones sobre la escuela con tu hijo/a regularmente: Tómese un tiempo de calidad para hablar con su hijo/a cada día. Pregunte qué está pasando en la escuela, incluyendo las partes sociales divertidas, lo que está aprendiendo, y si están pasando por algún desafío. También es un buen momento para revisar los formularios o hablar juntos sobre sus próximas clases, tareas y fechas importantes para entregar trabajos o de la escuela para que ambos estén preparados para lo que se acerca.
- Crea una rutina de equipo: Mantenga y aproveche los tiempos y lugares sencillos para las rutinas de tareas y los estudios. Esta es una excelente manera para que usted y su estudiante revisen juntos las fechas de entrega de trabajos para que ambos estén preparados y adelantados.
- Manténgase conectado con la escuela: Mire a los maestros/as, consejeros, y personal escolar como su equipo cuando se trata de apoyar a su hijo/a. Usted tiene derecho a preguntar y se recomienda que pregunte cómo le va a su hijo en los exámenes, cómo puede participar en clases avanzadas y qué necesita para graduarse y matricularse en la educación superior.
- ¡Su voz es muy importante!: Usted puede hacer preguntas concretas como: “¿Cómo puede mi hijo acceder a clases avanzadas?” o “¿Qué ayuda hay disponible para esta materia?” ¿Cuándo se considerará a mi hijo un estudiante proficiente en inglés?
- Participe en oportunidades escolares y del distrito cuando sea posible: Los días de inscripción, las reuniones de planificación académica, las sesiones informativas y los talleres familiares pueden proporcionar información útil y conexiones. Las familias participan de diferentes maneras y todos los niveles de participación apoyan el éxito del alumno.

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Glossary

Advanced Classes/Courses

This is an umbrella term that refers to courses that are considered “advanced” by the Texas Education Agency. It includes, but is not limited to, advanced Career and Technical Education courses, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual credit courses.

Advanced Placement (AP)

AP courses, available to students nationwide and globally, allow students to take college-level courses while still in high school. AP exams give students the chance to earn college credit, depending on their score.

College-Credit-Bearing Courses

This refers to Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual credit courses that allow students to earn college credit while in high school. It is a subset of “Advanced Courses.”

Chronically Absent Student

A student who is absent for more than 10% of enrolled days in a school year. A student must be enrolled for more than 30 days before they can be considered chronically absent.

Dual Credit

These courses allow eligible high school students to enroll in college courses. They can earn high school and college credit simultaneously. Dual credit courses can be taught at a college or on a high school campus.

Dual Language

This program allows students to work on skills in their first language while also acquiring a second language. There are two-way programs



in which, for example, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students participate. There are also one-way programs which support “one language” groups of students to become bilingual and biliterate.

Emergent Bilingual

The Texas Education Agency defines emergent bilingual students as students who are in the process of acquiring English and live in a household where another language is spoken.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

This is an instructional program focused on helping students develop the skills to listen, read, write, and speak English. All instruction is provided in English. Schools administer an English-language proficiency test to determine whether students are eligible for ESL.

ESL Certified

This describes teachers who have completed specific training and passed state exams to teach emergent bilingual students.

High-Performing Student

In the context of middle school math course-taking, this term refers to a student who scores in the top 40% on the Grade 5 math STAAR assessment statewide.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

IB is an internationally recognized academic program that includes rigorous high school courses. Students may earn college credit based on their scores on IB exams, depending on the college or university.

Kindergarten Ready

This describes students who are ready for kindergarten as determined by passing one of two Texas Education Agency-approved assessments.

Newcomer

This describes students who are recent arrivals to the United States. According to the Texas Education Agency, this includes immigrant children and youth who have been in U.S. schools for less than three years, refugees, asylees, unaccompanied youth who enter the country without an adult guardian, and children of migratory workers.

Pre-K Eligible

This describes students who qualify for free public pre-K in Texas based on several factors, including emergent bilingual status and household income.

Reclassification

This describes the process through which emergent bilingual students meet state criteria to be considered English proficient and no longer require additional language supports. Once students meet the criteria, the Language

Proficiency Assessment Committee recommends that they exit bilingual or ESL services in accordance with state requirements and parent notification guidelines.

Seal of Biliteracy

This designation recognizes students for demonstrating proficiency in two or more languages. Schools, districts, and the state may award the Seal of Biliteracy as a certificate recognizing students' bilingualism and biliteracy.

Sheltered Instruction

Sheltered instruction or a sheltered learning environment within English as a Second Language programs describes a method for making content accessible to students while developing English language skills.

Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)

This is an English-proficiency exam administered to emergent bilingual students in grades K-12 to determine their progress in learning English. The assessment measures listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students take the assessment each year until they meet the criteria for reclassification as English proficient.

Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA)

TIA is an optional state program that provides funding to help school districts reward and retain highly effective teachers and encourage them to work in high-needs schools and hard-to-staff positions.

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5930 Middle Fiskville Road
Suite 414
Austin, Texas 78752
512-223-7241
info@e3alliance.org

e3alliance.org

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