Recommendations to Improve Data Collection and Student Progress Monitoring for English Learners

An excerpt from:

Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Policy Roadmap

Recommendations to Improve Data Collection and Student Progress Monitoring for English Learners

For policymakers to understand our challenges and opportunities, Texas needs to ensure quality data are available. Whether it is student level data showing individual progress or statewide information about the effectiveness of bilingual education models, Texas lacks quality, standardized, disaggregated data for English Learner (EL) children in child care (birth to 5 years) and the early grades (pre-k through third grade). These data gaps raise questions around how policymakers can adequately assess the quality of early education programs for EL children and how schools and child care programs can properly identify and track the outcomes of children who have been designated as ELs.

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Starting in child care and continuing through high school, adopt a uniform process across early childhood systems to identify English Learner children and collect these data. Because Texas governance of early childhood programs in Texas is complex and fragmented across five state agencies, there is a lack of coordination and guiding principles across early learning settings. In Texas schools, home language surveys are administered when children first enroll in public school.

However, some schools go further than others to gather more information about the home language environment, and no standards or widespread practices exist to collect similar information in child care for younger children. In child care programs, there are no existing standards requiring children's language be screened or assessed.

To ensure educators are well-equipped to support children's language development as soon as possible, a uniform process should be developed across child care and early grades to ask families about children's language background, their dominant language, individual characteristics of the child, including strengths and challenges, and strategies used at home to promote children's learning and development. The agencies can facilitate an integrated bilingual education system by providing support to districts through the Education Service Centers (ESCs) and by cultivating a transparent and comprehensive data system for students' learning progress.

State Agency Recommendations

Texas Education Agency

Replace the term English Learner with Emergent Bilingual in the state's public education data system. Because the goal of bilingual education is to help children become bilingual and biliterate, not simply proficient in English, the label EL should be retired in favor of a more precise term: Emergent Bilingual. Bilingualism is dynamic and ongoing, continuing to develop throughout a child's education. The term emergent bilingual embraces students for their positive bilingual potential, rather than only from a deficit perspective. Changing the language used can have a significant impact to evolve the educational approaches of districts and communities.

Continue to identify English Learners in the state's education database (PEIMS) after they exit a bilingual education or ESL program. Currently, TEA is not publishing data that indicate whether students were previously classified as English Learners if they are no longer enrolled in a bilingual education or ESL program. To provide a way to monitor English Learners' progress, provide any necessary additional services, and track long-term outcomes such as graduation and entering college, data should be disaggregated to indicate whether a student has ever been categorized as an EL, from initial identification until they graduate.

Track longitudinal progress of EL children through high school by bilingual education program models. There's a growing recognition of the benefits of Dual Language Immersion, but Texas still lacks adequate data to assess the short- and long-term benefits of different bilingual education program models. Data should be collected to track how different models guide children to long-term educational success and bilingualism, including transitional bilingual early-exit, transitional bilingual late-exit, two-way Dual Language Immersion, one-way Dual Language Immersion, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Longitudinal data for English Learner children's educational progress is especially important given the educational disruptions of COVID-19.[20]

Assess EL children bilingually on kindergarten readiness assessments (KRAs). HB 3 required that each school district administer a kindergarten readiness assessment instrument adopted by TEA, limiting the high variance in assessments previously used across the state. This was an important step forward to collect better information. However, there is not a standard that exists to ensure programs are collecting kindergarten readiness information for English Learner children in both English and their home language. As a result, information collected for these children is likely to be incomplete or invalid. TEA should update the standards to ensure that the adopted tool collects information in both languages to more fully capture the school readiness of EL children.

Collect and report data on how many students are receiving a Seal of Biliteracy designation at graduation. The Seal of Biliteracy is an award for graduating high school seniors with significant academic accomplishments in at least two languages. It incentivizes schools and students to pursue biliteracy and bilingualism in their courses and activities. Unfortunately, TEA does not currently collect information showing how many students graduate each year with this distinction. For the state to track progress in helping students become bilingual, both at the state and district level, the Texas Education Agency should begin collecting and reporting the number of students who graduate with a Seal of Biliteracy.

Community Recommendations

Child Care Programs, School Districts, and Charter Schools

Institute student progress monitoring that goes beyond measuring English proficiency. For educators to have sufficient information to help guide young English learners to educational success, they need progress monitoring practices that provide useful information. Progress monitoring tools should include a component to measure bilingualism and biliteracy, as well as structured observations over time and information gathered from the family, for use in evaluating the child's development and informing instruction.

> "By tracking (EL) student achievement throughout their academic career, administrators may be able to identify and correct gaps that may be widening due to language issues."
>
> — A Dual Language teacher from the Houston area

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