



- Students Bridge the Digital Divide in Colonias..... 3
- IDRA Youth Leadership Now Engages High-Need Students....5
- Adopting a Texas Bilingual Special Ed Teacher Certificate.... 7

Focus: Big Ideas for Educational Equity

Stand Up for Students – Free Equity Policy Tools for Advocates

IDRA Launches SEEN Model Policy Shop

In the face of laws and school board actions that harm students, IDRA developed a free Model Policy Shop for students, families, educators and communities passionate about ensuring educational equity. The shop is featured on the IDRA Southern Education Equity Network (SEEN) website.



<https://idrased.org/model-policy-shop>

“We wanted to provide research-based and community-informed policies that promote an inclusive vision of public education and that counter efforts to undermine safe, welcoming, culturally-sustaining schools,” said Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA regional policy and community engagement director.

Through the IDRA SEEN Model Policy Shop, we are dedicated to advancing our shared goal of achieving equal educational opportunity for every young person. Here’s how we are working to support educational equity advocates.

• Student- and Family-Focused Model Policies, Principles, Roadmaps and Frameworks – Students and families have a key role in leading efforts to change education policy for the better in their communities, states and at the federal level. Our Model Policy Shop features complete packages with policy language, supporting research, and implementation materials designed to support impacted students and families in pushing equitable education policies.

• Peer Models and Resources – Recognizing that some incredible organizations also are doing significant education equity work across the U.S. South, the IDRA SEEN Model Policy Shop includes links to model policies crafted by other organizations, young people and advocates.

One school district has already adopted a policy from the Model Policy Shop. Round Rock ISD acted in May on its commitment to ensure a safe, welcoming school climate for all students by passing a comprehensive policy to prevent and respond to bullying and harassment in its schools. IDRA’s Identity-Based Bullying – IDRA Model Policy package includes a policy brief, model policy for state-level legislation, school board policy and an advocacy toolkit.

Whether you are a student seeking to make a difference, a family advocating changes to your child’s education, an educator striving for

(cont. on Page 2)

The Power of Voice and Action – Elevating the Promise

IDRA Releases 2021-2022 Impact Report

The years 2021 and 2022 marked dramatic shifts as the world headed out of COVID-19 shutdowns. Schools reemerged during the pandemic as the centers of community connection.

Despite wide support of families for their public schools, public education became a target. For financial and political gain, some actors proceeded to sow distrust and lodge racial and gender attacks on students, particularly across the U.S. South.

IDRA stood strong in this climate.

Stories of impact in this report include:

- Fostering Student, Family and Community Advocacy
- Building College Access & STEM Pipelines
- Leading Culturally-Sustaining Schooling
- Combatting Classroom Censorship
- Promoting Effective School Discipline & Safety
- Representing Voices of Communities of Color in Policymaking
- Serving Emergent Bilingual Students
- Keeping the Public in Public Education
- Bridging the Digital Divide

We value our collaboration with schools, families, students, advocacy partners and funders that make results like these possible.

We are grateful to work together as we press forward to elevate the promise of public education through the power of voice and action!

<https://idra.news/ImpactReport2021-2022>



“Through policy advocacy, teacher training, participatory action research, and coalition building, IDRA helped diverse communities tap into their collective power to influence educational policy and practices to ensure schools prepare all young people for college and life.”

– Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO

(Stand Up for Students – Free Equity Policy Tools for Advocates, continued from Page 1)

inclusive classrooms, or a policymaker at any level driving change, the IDRA SEEN Model Policy Shop is your hub for actionable policies and resources.

We invite you to visit this resource today to explore our growing bank of tools (<https://idras->

[een.org/model-policy-shop](https://idra.news/SubscribeNow)). Sign up to stay updated as we expand the shop (<https://idra.news/SubscribeNow>).

Please connect with us if you are working to introduce or implement these or any other model policies in education. Your input is crucial as

we expand our offerings and strive to create lasting impact in public schools.

For more information, contact Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director, at terrence.wilson@idra.org.

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

The IDRA Newsletter (ISSN 1069-5672, ©2024) serves as a vehicle for communication with educators, school board members, decision-makers, parents, and the general public concerning the educational needs of all children across the United States.

Permission to reproduce material contained herein is granted provided the article or item is reprinted

in its entirety and proper credit is given to IDRA and the author. Please send a copy of the material in its reprinted form to the IDRA Newsletter production offices. Editorial submissions, news releases, subscription requests, and change-of-address data should be submitted in writing to the IDRA Newsletter production editor. The IDRA Newsletter staff welcomes your comments on editorial material.

Portions of the contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.

Publication offices:
5815 Callaghan Road, Suite 101
San Antonio, Texas 78228
210-444-1710; Fax 210-444-1714
www.idra.org | contact@idra.org

Celina Moreno, J.D.
IDRA President and CEO
Newsletter Executive Editor

Christie L. Goodman, APR, Fellow PRSA
IDRA Director of Communications
Newsletter Production Editor

Students Bridge the Digital Divide in Colonias

Highlights from IDRA's Pilot Student Digital Ambassadorships

by Michelle Vega & Aurelio Manuel Montemayor, M.Ed.

As Doña Lupe hesitatingly places her fingers on the Chromebook keyboard, she presses the F key with her left index finger and the J key with her right. She glows with pride and recognition as the letters appear on the screen. For the first time, she is learning the QWERTY keyboard and appropriate finger placement.

Doña is participating in a Saturday training session at the Hargill ARISE Adelante Center located in an isolated, rural part of Hidalgo County in South Texas. Her trainers and guides are Digital Ambassadors, high school students who have been volunteers with the organization and are now skilled transmitters of computational skills.

In December 2023, IDRA and ARISE Adelante launched a Digital Ambassadors pilot program to model ways that students can provide leadership in their communities to help narrow digital literacy gaps. For several years, both organizations have advocated more significant support for the communities in south Texas for computer and Internet access.

The pandemic put the digital divide crisis on the front burner. State surveys and IDRA-led focus groups revealed significant gaps in broadband infrastructure and Internet access.

With its mission of service with families in *colonias* (unincorporated communities) – of which there are hundreds in this part of the state – ARISE sees the impact of these critical gaps in digital literacy daily. From addressing health needs and emergencies via telehealth to managing daily online assignments from teachers, it is essential for families, not just students, to possess basic computer skills and interact in the digital world.

IDRA has partnered with ARISE for at least 25 years. This relationship crystallized IDRA's Education CAFE model for family leadership in education. The ARISE centers hold peri-



odic meetings of parents centered on critical dialogues about their children's education. As these meetings continued virtually during the pandemic, Education CAFE participants described the crucial digital needs in each home.

A significant parallel to the family leadership in education within IDRA's history has been the creation of "valued youth" programs. These programs emphasize the intelligence, assets and leadership potential of youth, particularly those who are of color, economically disadvantaged, emergent bilingual students and recent immigrants.

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership program, celebrating its 40th year, has illustrated the power and impact of a cross-age tutoring program that selects students deemed at risk and places them in leadership roles as tutors to younger students. The highly-successful program, thus, demonstrates the power of actively valuing students and the assets they bring. This philosophy permeates IDRA's newer VisionCoders, Youth Advisory Board, MAS for Our Schools and other youth participatory action research projects, and, now, our Digital Ambassadors program.

(cont. on Page 4)



(Students Bridge the Digital Divide in Colonias, continued from Page 3)

Digital Ambassador Activities

Our Digital Ambassadors program aims to bridge the digital divide by facilitating students' roles as technology trainers for their local bilingual communities. Students often serve as language bridges for their families, and here, they become digital literacy bridges. We structured the program in three pivotal phases: research, mastery and dissemination.

Research Phase – During the Digital Ambassadors pilot period, IDRA supported participating students to conduct comprehensive research to identify the most pressing technology needs within their community. They grounded their assessment in direct community engagement, ensuring that the training developed was both relevant and impactful.

Mastery Phase – Following the research phase, students embarked on a rigorous learning journey to master the selected technology skills. This phase leveraged a blend of online learning platforms, hands-on workshops, and mentorship by IDRA's technology professionals, ensuring that students gained both the depth of knowledge and the pedagogical skills necessary to teach others effectively. The students presented at a regional roundtable, called a *Mesa Comunitaria*, about their projects.

Training Others Phase – The program's culmination occurred during community training events co-hosted by IDRA. The students organized and led the events at each of the four ARISE centers in May 2024. The ambassadors provided vital technology training to community members. The events fostered a sense of agency among the students as they witnessed the tangible impact of their efforts. By teaching others, students reinforced their learning and developed valuable leadership, communication and organizational skills.

Participating in the Digital Ambassadors program transformed the students by enhancing their technology skills, problem-solving abilities and communication proficiency. They also gained gratitude and recognition from the families, mothers, fathers and grandparents whom they trained.

Stories of Impact

The Digital Ambassadors program undoubtedly broadened students' perspectives on tech-



Solutions for bridging the digital divide are more nuanced than simply providing students with devices and troubleshooting connectivity issues. Students, their families and their teachers must also feel confident with navigating the digital landscape safely.

This free online toolkit guides schools in making informed decisions about increasing students' access to broadband Internet, computer technologies, and digital skills training for supporting their success.

Chapter 1 Introduction to Digital Equity Get an intro to digital equity and how schools can support students and their families in accessing the Internet and digital technologies necessary for engaging in the digital world.	Chapter 2 Using a Digital Equity Audit Explore what a digital equity audit is and how this tool can support school leaders in making effective and equitable decisions that increase digital equity within their district or campus.	Chapter 3 Digital Literacy & Misinformation Get resources and tools to help students and educators understand the importance of navigating the digital world.	Chapter 4 Advancing Digital Equity with Data Learn about digital redlining, disproportionate access of broadband Internet, and community-led solutions for bridging the digital divide.
---	--	---	---

<https://idra.news/DigitalEquityToolkit>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.



nology and potential career paths. The practical application of skills learned in the program, such as navigating technology and collaborating with others, enriched their academic experiences. It equipped them with valuable competencies for future endeavors in technology or related fields. Below are a few stories that speak to the power of the Digital Ambassadors program.

Carlos: Moved by the realization that many people face significant challenges with technology, Digital Ambassador Carlos actively participated in the program to provide support and guidance to those in need. His experience at the Mesa Comunitaria event enabled him to share valuable information. It encouraged him to make a difference by raising awareness and addressing the technology-related needs of others. Through his dedication and confidence,

Carlos exemplified how high school students can play a vital role in advocating digital literacy and inclusivity.

Aaron: A high school sophomore and Digital Ambassador at the Hargill ARISE center, Aaron was significantly impacted by his involvement in the program. His training enhanced his technology skills, such as creating PowerPoint presentations and navigating technology tools. He also gained tangible benefits in his academic life, enabling him to complete school assignments more efficiently and with greater proficiency. Aaron's participation in community events, like the Mesa Comunitaria presentation, boosted his confidence and provided him with a platform to give back to the community by sharing his knowledge and skills. His experience as a Digital Ambassador highlighted (cont. on Page 6)

Re-engaging Students as Leaders

IDRA Youth Leadership Now's Pilot Year Shows Powerful Strategies

by Hector Bojorquez

While student disengagement and absenteeism were problems before the pandemic, they have grown in the post-pandemic era. IDRA turned to our award-winning Valued Youth Partnership program and expanded elements to form our new Youth Leadership Now program with dramatic results.

"It blows your mind. It really does. The immediate change in students was palpable," remarked Anna Luna, who is the teacher coordinator for the project at Fabens Middle School.

IDRA's Youth Leadership Now is a field-initiated research-based project funded by the U.S. Department of Education. We are collaborating with the Education Service Center Region 19 to operate the program in several high-need school districts in West Texas.

We embarked on this inaugural year with a clear mission: to enhance the socio-emotional and academic skills of eighth-grade students who are at risk of dropping out of school. In 2023-24, over 50 students in Clint, Dell City and Fabens school districts participated in the Youth Leadership Now elective course. The experience improved their belief about their self-efficacy and sense of belonging as a basis for overall academic perseverance.

IDRA designed the program, though, to also impact students schoolwide through their teachers. Beatriz Nuñez, also from Fabens, added, "Move that label aside. They are labeled as troublemakers. They are. But in YLN, you really get to see them in a different light. And they're amazing kids."

This innovative initiative leverages IDRA's flagship cross-age tutoring program, the Valued Youth Partnership, combined with teacher-led mentorship and community engagement through a variation of IDRA's Education CAFÉ model.

Cross-Age Tutoring

In Youth Leadership Now, schools select eighth graders based on their need for academic support and leadership development opportunities, prioritizing students in at-risk situations. We then place them as tutors of three young elementary students.

Four times a week during school hours, the student tutors travel to the elementary school to work with their young charges (called "tutees"). With IDRA's tutor guide, the tutoring sessions are interactive, incorporating games, reading activities, and problem-solving tasks aligned with the curriculum goals of the younger students.

On the fifth day of each week, tutors receive training on tutoring techniques, communication skills, college planning, and specific academic content areas, such as literacy and numeracy.

Mentorship Program

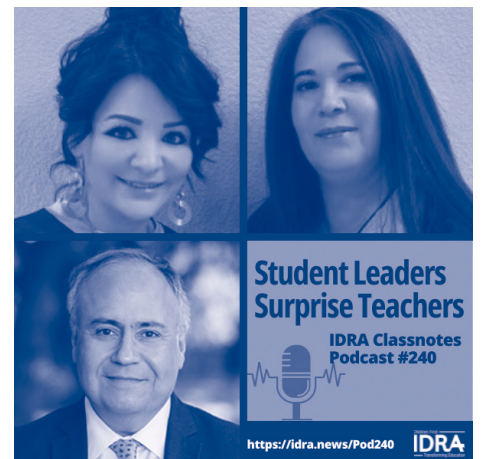
IDRA's mentorship component provides robust support and guidance to the tutors as they transition from middle school to high school. This element successfully enhances the tutors' leadership skills and academic persistence by connecting them with experienced mentors who facilitate their personal and academic development.

School leaders select mentors from a pool of experienced teachers known for their expertise in adolescent education and their ability to build strong, supportive relationships with students. IDRA and the service center provide monthly training sessions for mentors designed to equip them with the skills to support at-risk students effectively, including communication techniques, sensitivity to the socio-emotional needs of adolescents, and strategies for encouraging academic resilience and leadership.

(cont. on Page 6)



This innovative program leverages IDRA's flagship Valued Youth Partnership cross-age tutoring program combined with teacher-led mentorship and community engagement through a variation of IDRA's Education CAFÉ model.



<https://idra.news/Pod240>

(Re-engaging Students as Leaders, continued from Page 5)

Mentoring sessions throughout the school year provide a platform for mentors to offer guidance, discuss academic progress, address personal or educational challenges the tutors face, and help them set goals and paths for their transition to high school.

The mentorship component includes continuous monitoring and support mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of the mentor-tutee interactions. Mentoring sessions take place in designated quiet areas within the school, such as counseling offices or private corners of the library, to ensure privacy and foster open communication.

During this pilot year, mentors provided ongoing support and guidance tailored to each tutor's individual needs, serving as role models, advocates and advisors. Tutors engaged actively with their mentors, participating in discussions about their experiences, academic challenges and plans for the future.

The expected outcomes for mentors include enhanced mentorship skills, a better understanding of the challenges faced by students who are deemed at-risk, and the satisfaction of contributing significantly to the development of future leaders. For tutors, the program aims to strengthen their leadership skills, improve academic performance, enhance self-esteem, and better prepare them for the transition into high school with a strong support system.

Youth Education CAFE™ Action Projects

Drawing from IDRA's successful Education CAFE (Community Action Forums for Excellence) model, the Youth Education CAFE component of Youth Leadership Now also fosters intergenerational leadership and active

Teacher Tools for Culturally-Sustaining Education

The award-winning IDRA SEEN School Resource Hub provides teachers with lesson plans, instructional best practices and historical resources to support you in delivering culturally-sustaining classroom lessons.



<https://idrased.org/hub>

community involvement in education issues. Youth Leadership Now engages students, families and educators in collaborative projects that address local educational challenges and promote equity.

We convened students, their families, and educators, with special attention to include a diverse cross-section of the community to ensure multiple perspectives were represented in tackling educational issues.

IDRA provided training on the principles of community action research, including methods for identifying issues, collecting data and developing actionable strategies. We designed training sessions to be participatory and to provide tools for effective advocacy and project implementation.

Schools held regular Youth Education CAFE meetings as platforms for discussing, planning and implementing community-based projects. These meetings facilitated open dialogue among students, parents, educators and community leaders, fostering a collaborative environment. A key topic was the minimal communication with families by the school

and complicated tools for families to connect with their schools. Other topics included college affordability and school safety.

The expected outcomes for the community include more robust relationships between schools and their communities, and actionable plans developed to address local educational challenges.

Looking Ahead

During this pilot year, Youth Leadership Now has shown promising immediate outcomes and laid a solid foundation for the program's expansion across multiple districts.

The program is poised to broaden its reach and deepen its impact, building on the successes and lessons learned during this foundational year. We remain committed to transforming the educational trajectories of students deemed at risk through innovative, research-based interventions that lead students to become engaged, informed and thoughtful leaders.

Hector Bojorquez is IDRA's director of operations and educational practice. Comments and questions may be directed to him at hector.bojorquez@idra.org.

(Student Digital Ambassadors, continued from Page 4)

the transformative power of education and community engagement in supporting young people to make a positive impact in their communities.

Gabriela: A young adult staff member at ARISE, Gabriela described the significant impact of the pilot program on the Digital Ambassador students. Through their active participation in community-focused activities and technology training, the students showed in-

creased motivation, confidence, and a sense of responsibility toward school and helping their communities.

The program enhanced their technology skills and also provided them with valuable experiences in public speaking and engaging with diverse perspectives. These experiences contributed to their personal growth and development, preparing them to navigate the digital landscape with confidence and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Following the success of the pilot program, Methodist Healthcare Ministries is providing funding for a new phase of the Digital Ambassador program that launched in June and will continue through December of this year.

Michelle Martínez Vega is IDRA's chief technology strategist. Comments and questions may be directed to her at michelle.vega@idra.org. Aurelio Montemayor, M.Ed., is IDRA's family engagement coordinator and directs IDRA Education CAFE work. Comments and questions may be directed to him at feedback@idra.org.

Texas Gets Closer to Adopting a Bilingual Special Education Teacher Certificate

by Lizdela Piñón, Ed.D.

In Texas, the education landscape is quickly evolving, particularly for students who are dually identified as emergent bilingual with special needs. These students often face unique challenges that require specialized instruction and support. Though Texas has tens of thousands of emergent bilingual students with disabilities, the state has not had a teacher certification program that equips professionals to serve them.

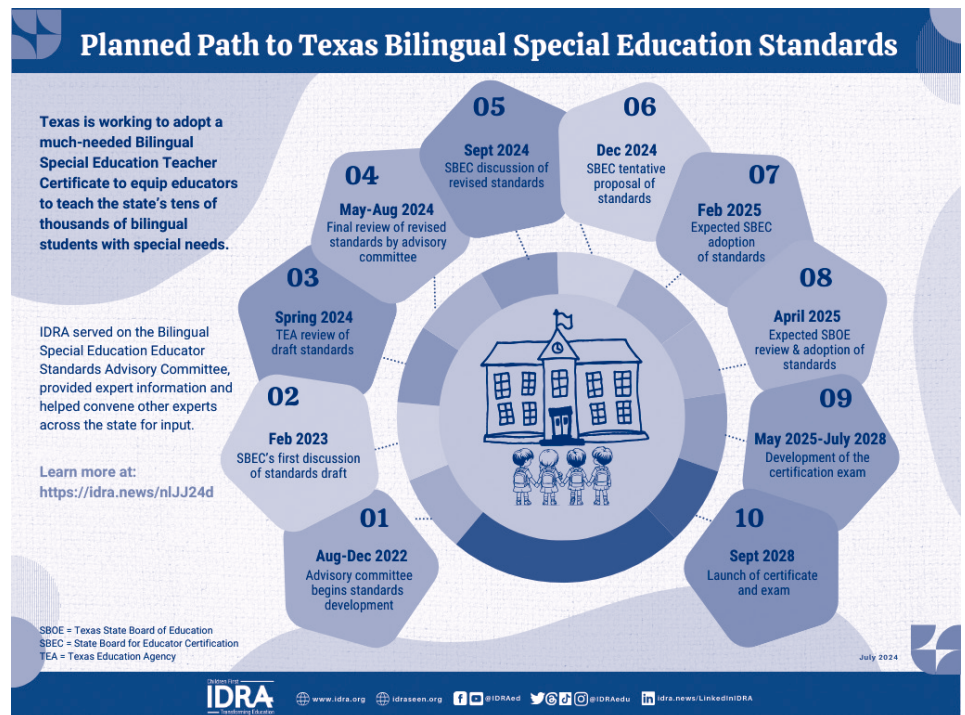
Recognizing this need, Texas took significant steps toward creating a Bilingual Special Education Teacher Certificate through House Bill 2256 in 2021. The measure was born from the Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative, with IDRA serving as a steering committee co-leader with Texans Care for Children, Philanthropy Advocates, Dr. Dina Castro, UNT Denton, and the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children (TxAEYC).

The next step was for the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) to develop the rules and standards for the educator certification and exam to be adopted by the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). Unfortunately, neither body has completed these tasks. An updated version of the proposed rules and standards will be presented again to SBEC in September 2024, and the tentative date of exam launch is September 2028 (see graphic).

Certification Standards Outlined by Statewide Advisory Committee

After HB 2256 passed, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) formed the Bilingual Special Education Educator Standards Advisory Committee, comprised of 10 appointed experienced scholars, educators, administrators, advocates, and bilingual and special education experts, including myself.

We embarked on a rigorous process to develop the standards and domains for the new certification. This involved numerous meetings with



TEA, where members worked in large groups and smaller sub-groups to draft and refine the standards. Diligent cross-checking, extensive discussions, and a collaborative spirit marked the committee's work.

IDRA convened bilingual special education professionals for roundtable discussions about recommendations to ensure the standards adequately prepare educators to support the diverse needs of dually identified students.

In 2023, I co-presented the advisory committee's findings and recommendations to SBEC, underscoring the importance of this work. I emphasized that the new certification should equip educators with skills to integrate bilingual and special education pedagogies, recognize and leverage students' backgrounds as assets, and the need for appropriate instructional and behavioral methodologies.

Key Components of the Certification Standards

The standards developed by the advisory committee for the teacher certification encompass a comprehensive set of skills and knowledge areas, including the following.

- **Integration of Pedagogies:** Educators must be able to effectively combine bilingual education and special education techniques to support student learning.
- **Evidence-Based Practices:** Teachers need to be proficient in using evidence-based practices from both fields to create effective learning environments.
- **Asset-Based Approach:** Educators must recognize students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as assets – not challenges – and communicate this perspective to all stakeholders.

(cont. on Page 8)

Focus: Big Ideas for Educational Equity

(Texas Gets Closer to Adopting a Bilingual Special Education Teacher Certificate, continued from Page 7)

- **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Educators must ensure informed, collaborative decisions are made throughout the referral, identification and placement processes for students.
- **Advocacy and Capacity Building:** Teachers must advocate the needs of dually identified students and receive targeted training to build capacity within the school community.

Next Steps for Adoption

From May through July 2024, the advisory committee refined the proposed certificate standards, ensuring they are comprehensive and effectively address the needs both of students and educators. The upcoming SBEC meeting in September is crucial, as the board will review the revised standards and determine whether to adopt them formally.

A formal adoption of robust standards will be a significant milestone for Texas education, demonstrating a commitment to providing high-quality, inclusive education for all students, particularly those who have been historically underserved. The new certification will ensure that educators are prepared to support dually-identified students, fostering an environment where these students can thrive academically and socially.

Moving forward after adoption, the focus will be on implementing the certification effectively. This includes ensuring that teacher preparation programs incorporate the new standards, providing ongoing professional development for current educators, and continuously evaluating the impact of the certification on student outcomes. This certification should lead to more effective teaching practices, better student support, and, ultimately, improved educational outcomes for all students.

Resources

- Craven, M., & Piñón, L. (April 2024). Navigating Policy Landscapes for Linguistic and Cultural Equity. IDRA Newsletter.
- ECEL Initiative. (January 2021). *Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative Policy Roadmap*. Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative.
- García, A. (June-July 2021). Exciting Advances for Emergent Bilingual Students in Texas. IDRA Newsletter.
- García, A. (April 6, 2021). HB 2256 Creates More Ways for Teachers to Serve Bilingual and Special Education Students – IDRA Testimony for House Bill 2256 to the House Public Education Committee.
- Piñón, L. (February 10, 2023). Texas' Forthcoming Bilingual Special Education Certificate Should Require Specific Skills for Teachers of Dually Identified Students, IDRA Testimony for the proposed Bilingual Special Education Educator Standards to the Texas State Board for Educator Certification. IDRA.

Lizdelia Piñón, Ed.D., is an IDRA education associate. Comments and questions may be directed to her at lizdelia.pinon@idra.org.