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## A Strategic Exploration of Bilingual Education Policy: An Interpretive Policy Analysis

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# A Strategic Exploration of Bilingual Education Policy: An Interpretive Policy Analysis

Cover Page Footnote

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## **A Strategic Exploration of Bilingual Education Policy: An Interpretive Policy Analysis**

There has been an increase in global engagement activities in k-12 and higher education particularly since the call for such action in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Guterres, 2019), and part of that includes language-based components. In fact, the National Education Association (2020) predicted “by 2025, 1 out of every 4 children in classrooms across the United States will be an English language learner”. Spanish is the second most spoken language in the United States, and its speakers are the fastest growing minoritized linguistic group in the country (US Census Bureau, 2019).

Even though language diversity in the United States has always been part of its history, policy and funding have not always promoted bilingualism or multiculturalism. Throughout the history of bilingual education, administrators, politicians, and policymakers have changed their preferences and practices in response to trends and ideological shifts (Crawford, 2004). Even with a plethora of research regarding the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy in support of bilingual education (Baker, 2011; Camilleri, 1996; Fuh Suh, 2022; Goodman, & Tastanbek, 2021; McCarty, 1980), the literature on bilingual policy exclusively focuses on the use of two languages as languages of instruction with the sole purpose of eventually transitioning fully to English. There is a clear hierarchy of languages, and English literacy seems to be more valuable than biliteracy or literacy in other languages in curricular decisions. The discourse on language policy in the U.S. has been framed as an either-or choice between English and other languages.

Specifically, Texas has one of the largest number of students attending public schools in the United States, with approximately 5.371 million students enrolled (Morath, 2022). According to the Texas Education Agency, the number of English language learners in Texas schools have increased by 33.3%. During the 2020 – 2021 school year, English learners comprised 20.6% of students in the 1,204 districts (TEA, 2021; TEA 2022c). Yet, most English languages learners are in bilingual programs that do not foster or promote bilingualism (Baker, 2011; Howard et al., 2007).

### **Multi-Language Instruction**

From a pedagogical perspective, the development of bilingual education happened through the implementation of different educational approaches. Ofelia García (2009) introduced the term translanguaging in her book, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*. Translanguaging is composed of two parts: the prefix trans-, meaning “across” or “beyond,” and languaging, a term used by scholars to emphasize the ongoing meaning-making processes, the interactive aspects, and the social and political contexts that are inextricably linked to language (García, 2014, 2020). Translanguaging is a theoretical lens that offers a different view of bilingualism and multilingualism, and is distinct from code-switching, which examines language utilization from the perspective of distinctions within a language looking at specificity in dialect (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1967). This theory is an adjacent linguistic theory to bilingualism that is the more “preferred conceptualization” in regard to language learning (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021, p.30). Translanguaging suggests that rather than possessing two or more independent language systems, as has been traditionally believed, bilinguals, multilinguals, all users of language, select and organize features from a single linguistic repertoire, comprised of two or more languages, to make meaning and to negotiate communicative contexts (Garcia, 2014).

In the United States, legislation, such as The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 were landmark policies, which were intended to improve educational access and equity for students while ending segregation, especially in the Southwest (Trujillo, 1993). Bilingual education developed after the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) was passed in 1968. The goal of these new bilingual education (B.E.) programs in public schools was to better serve the educational needs of the non-English-speaker minority students (and to foster political participation) by finding more effective ways to teach English (Spolsky, 2005). The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 provided federal funding to encourage local school districts to adopt pedagogical strategies that would incorporate native-language instruction. Most states followed the lead of the federal government, enacting bilingual education laws of their own or at least decriminalizing the use of other languages in the classroom (Rodríguez et al., 2014).

Bilingualism has been both permitted and restricted in the United States educational structures (Lemberger, 2013) which speaks to the complicated relationship formal education has continued with languages other than English. Arce (2004) raised the question, “Why is there so much controversy over bilingual education?” (p. 203), when the core of bilingual education is to embrace diverse cultures and advocate various languages to have significant and/or equal status at mainstream schools. Arce also highlighted, “To be bilingual in the United States creates the potential for the bilingual person to navigate in the sphere of resistance toward cultural and linguistic hegemony” (2004, p. 230). This said, bilingual education is a type of school program in which students use two or more languages — usually English and languages other than English (LOTE), to varying degrees — in their education (García, 2009). A large body of research shows that long-term, high-quality bilingual education programs provide cognitive, academic, and social benefits to multilingual children, as opposed to English-only schooling (Baker et al., 2012; Bialystok, 2018; Butvilofsky et al., 2017; Collier & Thomas, 2017; McField & McField, 2014) that include considerations for both professionalism and overcoming (linguistic) social distancing (Camilleri, 1996; Goodman, & Tastanbek, 2021; McCarty, 1980).

Despite increasing evidence of the need for a more holistic approach to bilingual education (Cenoz, 2013; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Williams, 2000) many U.S. schools continue to reflect monolingual ideologies that oppose bilingualism (Solorza, 2019) or offer subtractive bilingual education programs, such as early-exit programs in which multilingual learners are expected to learn a new language, (i.e. English) at the expense of their home language (García, 2009, p. 390). In this model the main purpose for the learner is to acquire the new language, if in the process of learning the new language, the first language the learner speaks loses fluency, this is not seen as problematic. This is referred to as a subtractive bilingual program. The terms ‘subtractive’ and ‘additive’ have been used to categorize bilingual programs and were introduced by Lambert’s (1973) study in Canada in which he found that bilingual students had a cognitive and cultural advantage over monolinguals.

In contrast to subtractive bilingual education programs, additive bilingual education programs, such as dual language and late exit programs, exist to deliver content knowledge through English and a second language. Students in this bilingual educational program achieve higher academic goals, bilingualism, biliteracy, and greater intercultural awareness (Baker, 2011; Howard et al., 2007). There are four bilingual education program models approved by the Texas Education Agency and include: 1) transitional bilingual/early exit model, 2) the transitional bilingual/late exit model, 3) the dual language immersion/one-way, and or 4) the dual language immersion/two-way is a bilingual program model (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). To clarify the focus between early and late-exit programs, the main difference is that in the early exit model,

learners receive fewer years of instruction in their first language. School districts have the option to select from the four approved bilingual education models to offer to students in their district.

In the dual language or one-way bilingual program model in which students are taught in their native language and in English, all participating learners are identified as English language learners (Texas Education Agency, 2019). In this model, learners are taught in their native language along with instruction in English across all content areas. This model requires that instruction in learners' first language must comprise 50% of instructional time. Learners may not exit "earlier than six years or later than seven years" unlike other programs. When English learners in other bilingual programs meet the requirements set forth by the Texas Education Agency, students are considered ready to exit the program, and enter mainstream classes. In the dual language programs, the goal is for English learners to reach proficiency in English and their native language. During the 2019–2020 academic school year, 33% of students enrolled in a bilingual program in Texas were enrolled in a dual language/one-way bilingual program (Texas Education Agency, 2019–2020).

### **Educational Policy and Social Implications**

In the United States, the federal structure of government affords states the opportunity to determine individual educational structures and systems. The result of this structure is that each state creates their own public education system through the state legislative bodies. These programs are administered through a bureaucratic agency. In Texas, there are several layers to the oversight of public education. The state legislature creates educational policy, structures, and determines the budget. Educational policies are administered through the Texas State Board of Education, a 15-member elected body, who follow the direction of the legislature, and oversee the Texas State Board of Educator Certification and the Texas Education Agency. Policies are interpreted and administered directly to public schools from the Commissioner of Education and the TEA.

Although bureaucratic agencies are not intended to function along political lines, the Commissioner of Education is an appointed position by the Texas governor and confirmed by the Senate. A compounding challenge is the 28-year majority held by the Republican party in Texas. This is not a simple majority, but a large enough majority that legislators are not required to function in a bi-partisan manner (Brooks Harper, 2022). This is significant because the legislation produced for the state of Texas and Texas public schools, promotes a particular worldview in the wording of educational policies (Strunc, 2017; Strunc 2019; Strunc et. al, 2022; Lopez 2022).

Traditional policy analysts write and research for governmental entities, policymakers, interest groups, nonprofit organizations, and community groups, most frequently to provide information about the impact of the proposed or executed legislation. Analysts seek to learn if the policy will positively or negatively impact time in office, organizational function, or will the policy benefit constituents of the interest group, community organization, or nonprofit agency (Yanow, 2000). The researchers are more interested in interpretative policy analysis of Texas S.B. 560 to learn more about how different communities in education understand the new policy. Interpretative policy analyses focus on the "meaningfulness of human action" (Yanow, 2000, p. 23). Rather than providing technical knowledge about policies for elected officials, lobbyists, or other actors in the policymaking process, interpretative analyses seek to understand the way the people involved in implementation of the policy understand the situation (Yanow, 2000). As educational researchers in Texas, our focus is to understand the interpretation of those *in* Texas

who will most likely feel the direct impact of the policy in action. Technical expertise of policies, according to interpretative policy analysis, does not provide a neutral report of the policy because it is written by a human, and we learn through interpretation.

As Yanow (2000) writes:

“What this underscores is that policy analysis cannot be conducted from a position external to what is being studied. Although interpretative analysis uses systematic, rigorous methods, these methods do not lead to universal, objective claims. Much as Heisenberg argued in the context of physics that the presence of an observer affects the actions of the observed, here, too, one cannot escape interpreting.” p. 18

Interpretation, then, is a way in which to remove the single perspective of bilingual education narrative in Texas. Texas Education Code describes the purpose of the Bilingual Education and Special Language programs for the purpose of students developing standard communication skills in English. The program further clarifies specific supports in elementary school for students whose first language is not English is bilingual education. Middle school usually consists of grades 6 – 8 and moves the curriculum from bilingual education to English as a second language, noting “or other transitional language instruction approved by the agency in post-elementary grades through grade 8” (Texas Education Code Sec. 29.053). In high school, the opportunities available for English learners shift to only English as a Second Language programs. The intent, within the Texas code, is for students who do are not proficient in English to acquire enough skills reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English so they are able to be successful in school in their use and knowledge of English.

### **Methods and Analysis**

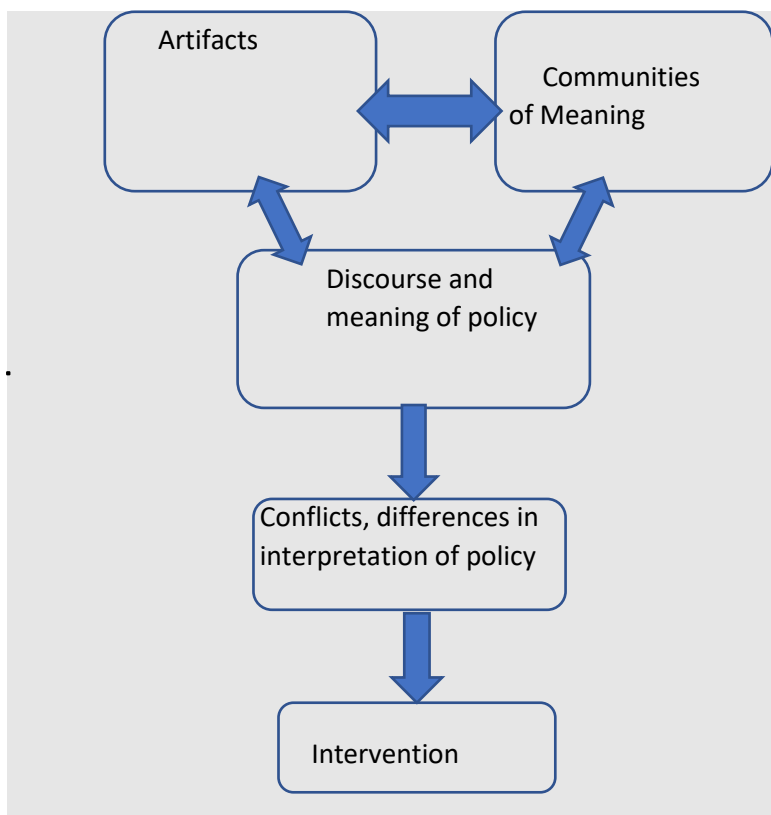
The researchers selected interpretive policy analysis as the tool to study Texas S.B. 560 primarily because this method seeks to provide understanding of the policy from a multifaceted perspective of different groups. The researchers wanted to access the local discourse surrounding S.B. 560 and share the views of the communities of meaning.

To begin our work, we followed the structure outlined by Yanow (2000) and identified “artifacts that are significant carriers of meaning for the interpretive communities relative to a given policy issue” while also determining the communities who are closely linked or affected by the policy and who frequently produce the artifacts (p.20). Yanow (2000) explains that these two steps are not precisely linear: communities of meaning could be identified first, or the artifacts could identify the community of meaning initially. The movement between the first two steps is fluid and can occur simultaneously. Next, we looked for the discourse from each community of meaning. How did each identified group talk, think, act and respond to the policy. The primary aim for this step is to look for meaning from the values and beliefs of each group through the discourse of artifacts. It is important to note that a common artifact to several communities of meaning, such as the text of the bill, will have different meanings to each group. The fourth step is to ascertain the conflicts in meaning from each community to examine the constructs at the root of the conflict. Yanow (2000) notes that it is possible for researchers to conclude the work at this point, but cautions the next step is an opportunity for interpretive analysts to intervene and assist stakeholders in the process of implementing policy to understand the complex nuances of interpretation which bring about the conflict. In this way, the researcher

has the potential use the work not only to inform, but to participate in social change. Figure 1 represents the process of interpretive policy analysis.

**Figure 1**

*Interpretive Policy Analysis Process*



*Note.* Adapted from “Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis,” by D. Yanow, 2000, *Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods*, 47, p. 20.

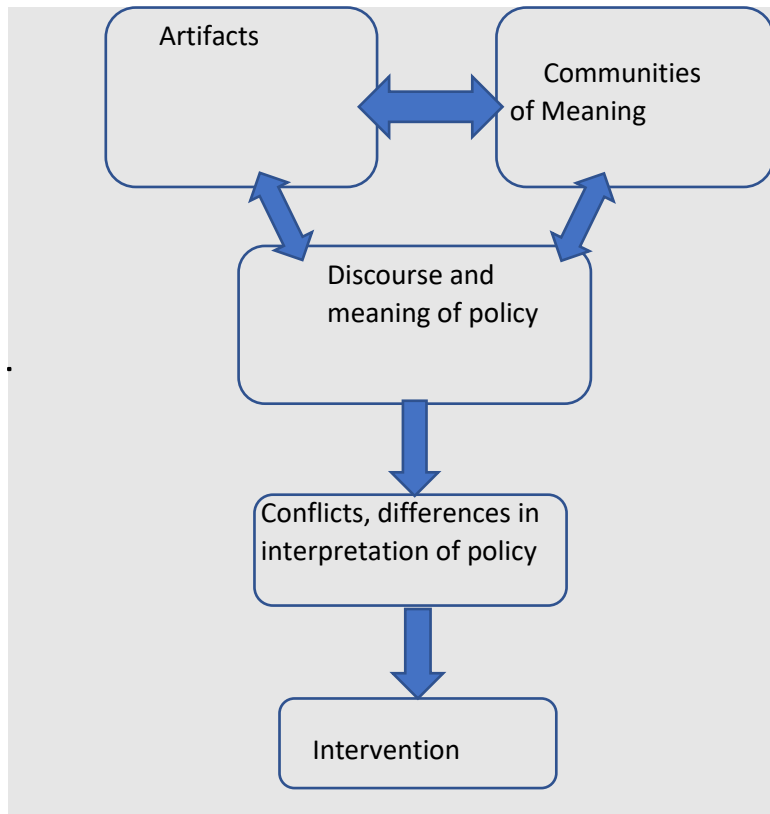
It is essential to note that we do not have intervention recommendations. Interpretive policy analysis does not seek to intervene or correct the policy. The purpose of the analysis is to learn about the meaning and ways in which different communities make meaning of the policy in their context. Texas S.B. 560 passed into law in the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session in 2021. The bill was approved in the Texas House and the Texas Senate on June 16, 2021; it went into effect immediately. In the bill, the agency responsible for administering public education, the Texas Education Agency, must submit a plan under Subchapter B, chapter 21 for bilingual education of the Texas Education Code to execute the requirements of the policy no later than December 1, 2022 (Senate Bill 560 2022). Our work first began in the early part of 2022 as we sought to identify communities of meaning and the developing interpretations of this policy. The policy interpretation cannot be considered fully complete without a final plan from TEA submitted to all elected officials in Texas considered to have “primary jurisdiction over public education” (SB 560, Section 1, subsection d). However, this policy has the potential to significantly impact bilingual education in Texas, since the stated summary of the policy is to develop and expand quality bilingual education programs. We believe it is important to study the current and



evolving interpretations of this policy because there are many definitions of “high-quality bilingual education” (Texas S.B. 560 2021). The analyses have been guided by the following questions: How does legislation change the way in which legislators, special interest groups, state and educational agencies view bilingual education? What are the important artifacts which communicate the various interpretations for each group, and ultimately, what ramifications do these interpretations mean for Texas education? What is the meaning of Texas S.B. 560? For whom does this policy have meaning? What discourses exist around S.B. 560? What are the points of conflict surrounding S.B. 560?

The researchers identified the following artifacts as those that dominated the discourses surrounding S.B. 560 in 2022: the text of the bill, Texas Education Code 29.051 - 20.064, as amended by the legislation, press releases from legislators, documents from state agencies, press releases from special interest groups, teacher organizations, and news articles written about the bill. These artifacts pointed to four distinct communities of meaning created by the interpretations of the policy.

**Figure 1 Interpretive Policy Analysis Process**



Adapted from D. Yanow (2000). *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis. Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods*, 47, 20.

## Findings

### Communities of Meaning

The artifacts and interpretations revealed three communities of meaning related to S.B. 560: Texas legislators, bureaucratic agencies in Texas responsible for enacting policy, and special interest groups.

### ***Texas Legislators***

The first community of meaning is Texas legislators. We examined the text of S.B. 560, the Texas Legislature online information page for S.B. 560, press releases from sponsoring co-authors, sponsors, the Texas Education Code, and news articles about the passage of the policy. Senate Bill 560 was written by Representative Eddie Lucio Jr., Democrat from Brownsville, TX, and introduced in March 2021 for the first reading in the Texas Senate during the 87<sup>th</sup> legislative session. Rep. Lucio stated the Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission had until December 1, 2022, to develop a plan to implement quality bilingual education programs across the state (Smith, 2021). In an open letter to the constituents of Senate District 27, Lucio described the legislative accomplishments of the 87<sup>th</sup> session, specifically referencing S.B. 560. The letter noted his authorship and claimed, “the Texas Education Agency [was directed] to develop a strategic plan to increase the number and quality of bilingual educators in the state, so that students learning English will have highly-qualified teachers helping them master this new language” (Lucio, 2021, p. 4).

The artifacts related to Rep. Lucio indicate his meaning as one of credit-claiming. This is a normal response for elected officials, often necessary to win re-election. The text of the bill aligns with the reference in the open letter, except for the exclusion of the Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission’s joint roles in developing the strategic plan. The bill directs state agencies to include in their strategic plan a way to increase bilingual high school graduates, increase the quantity and quality of bilingual educators in Texas, which includes partnering with other state, non-profit, and religious entities as appropriate. Further, the bill specifies state agencies should also consider the certification exams required to become a bilingual teacher in Texas, noting “if any barriers to the certification of bilingual educators exist based on differences between the dialect of the educator and the dialect used on the test” (S.B. 560 Section 29.067 (B)3(ii)). Rep. Lucio is midway through his current senate term and has noted on multiple occasions that he plans to retire from the senate seat he has held since 1991 (Texas Senate, 2022b). Lucio’s personal political website, Texas Senate website, and press releases all structure the meaning of S.B. 560 to be an expansion of practices that would increase the number of bilingual high school graduates, increase the number of certified bilingual teachers, and potentially add more additive practices to bilingual instruction in Texas. The greatest barrier to ascertaining the meaning is that there is not any mention in how to accomplish the goals of this policy, beyond assigning the task to state agencies.

The Texas Tribune reported on Lucio’s November 2021 announcement that he would not seek reelection after his current term concludes (Svitek, 2021). The article went on to detail Lucio’s status as the most moderate Democrat in the Texas Senate who frequently voted alongside Republicans on key legislation. His work on the Education and Finance committees was noted, but nothing specific to bilingual education. The most meaningful expression of intent is found in the open letter Lucio penned in the fall of 2021 where S.B. 560 is referenced as increasing and expanding bilingual education through more teachers but says nothing more. Lucio’s meaning relating to S.B. 560 seems to lie in credit claiming for his service as a senator (Lucio, 2021). It is noteworthy that on the press release section of Rep. Lucio’s Texas Senate webpage, there is no reference to S.B. 560 dating back to the beginning of 2021. There are not

artifacts with more detail or specificity which interpret the meaning beyond another contribution to educational policy in Texas.

Representative Cesar Blanco of District 29 co-authored S.B. 560 (Texas Legislature Online, 2022). Rep. Blanco does not list education as one of his many areas of legislative policy work, and on the press release section of his Texas Senate webpage, there is no mention of S.B. 560 all the way back to the start of 2021 (Texas Senate, 2022a). It is critical, in the absence of comments on S.B. 560, that it is important to note what is found in press releases from Rep. Blanco's office. In late January 2021, a press release indicated Rep. Blanco filed eight bills in the Texas Senate to address concerns related to the lingering effects of COVID-19, among bills proposed to address electricity charge regulation, the cost of insulin, military sexual assault protections, and Texas-Mexico border plans. The only press release from Rep. Blanco in 2021 dealt with school safety (Texas Senate, 2022a). Senate Bill 560 was a partisan bill, which made it out of the Education committee and to the floor of the Senate with partisan support (Texas Legislature Online, 2022). A singular opinion editorial from Rep. Blanco in the El Paso Times on January 7, 2022, references his co-authorship of a bill supporting bilingual education and the shortage of bilingual teachers in Texas (Blanco, 2022). Both lawmakers marginally referenced bilingual education and the content of the bill before, during, and after the bill was passed. The meaning derived for them from the policy is an opportunity to credit claim work in an area likely to be important to their constituents.

### *State Educational Agencies*

A second community of meaning emerged from the state educational agencies tasked with creating the strategic plan to expand and increase bilingual education programs in Texas with the plan sent to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house, and members of the Senate Education committee by December 1, 2022 (S.B. 560 2022). Numerous artifacts helped to develop the meaning of S.B. 560 for the Texas Education Agency. Artifacts include the Bilingual and ESL Education Programs portion of the TEA website, S.B. 560 surveys for parents, educators, and administrators, frequently asked questions for LPAC and bilingual students' handout, and videos created by the TEA relating to bilingual education updates. There is a video playlist created by the English Learner Support Division which has 15 of 24 videos created after S.B. 560 was passed (English Learner Support Division, 2022). The different videos offer the new structure of bilingual education programs in Texas. In the September 2022 English Learner Support Division webinar, Dr. Xochitl Anabel Rocha explains Texas has different programs under the umbrella of bilingual education – the two main categories are bilingual programs and English as Second Language (ESL) programs. Notably, there are still 4% of emergent bilingual students who are not provided services, while 48% of students under the umbrella of bilingual programs are in ESL for content (11%) or pull-out services (37%). There are 8% of bilingual students receiving instruction under an alternative program and 6% of students receiving ESL instruction in an alternative program through waivers for teachers who teach in these programs without the necessary credentials (TEA, 2022c). There are also videos highlighting methods for bilingual instruction from Carlene Thomas in the English Learner Support Division at TEA. She narrates each of the three videos to provide instructional methods for bilingual students, more quarterly webinars for the English Learner Support Division, and a video explaining the exception and waiver application process for bilingual and/or ESL education (TEA, 2022h).

In constructing the meaning of S.B. 560, the TEA updated and edited references to the students whose first language is not English. The English Learner Support Division updated language from limited English proficiency (LEP) to emergent bilingual (EB) students (FAQ, 2021). The underlying thesis of each of the 15 videos is to demonstrate how the agency is successfully implementing the requirements of S.B. 560 and the Texas Education Code relating to bilingual education. The video begins with the allusion to the goal of English Learner Supports which is to state the goal of the TEA is to “lead the increase of achievement and equity of bilingual students, expressed by the director of English Learner Support, Dr. Julie Lara (TEA, 2022c; TEA, 2022d; TEA, 2022e; 2022f; 2022g). The community of meaning built from the artifacts from the state agency shows a slight shift toward expanding bilingual education programs, but the progress markers continue to lead the majority of students toward a subtractive program in which English supersedes as the dominant language. TEA interpretations do not engage in the expansion of bilingual programs in which students are able to use their first language skills alongside their acquired skills in English. Simply changing the name from LEP to EB does implement authentic change in the Texas curricula which continues to elevate monolingual, to the detriment of English learners’ opportunity to be bilingual.

### ***Special Interest Groups***

There were many groups who advocated in support of S.B. 560, including Texans Care for Children. This non-profit organization is a multi-issue special interest group working to support better, more equitable outcomes for all children in Texas. To accomplish this goal, the organization works to influence change in policy (Feigen, 2021). The testimony provided by Texans Care for Children in the Texas Senate Education Committee builds a community of meaning around the need to expand upon the existing models of dual language immersion programs in Texas. According to the testimony, in 2021 only 20% of the more than one million emergent bilingual students in Texas, were in a dual language immersion program. Texans Care for Children argued strengthening literacy skills in a student’s first language “speeds up the ability to learn English” (Feigen, 2021, p. 2). Furthermore, Texans Care for Children suggested “helping students become bilingual has well-documented cognitive benefits for children and strengthens the ability of the state to compete in a global, multilingual economy” (Feigen, 2021, p. 2). The meaning derived from this testimony around S.B. 560 is that bilingual education assisted students’ academic achievement in order to build a better, stronger workforce and economy in the future.

Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a special interest group whose “mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college” (IDRA, 2022a). IDRA has an entire section of the organization devoted to education policy, with a specific focus on emergent bilingual student education (IDRA, 2022b). Artifacts examine the discourse around S.B. 560 included infographics, web pages, press releases, electronic handouts, reports, podcasts, and webinars. In the report, “Creating a More Bilingual Texas”, (Latham Sikes & Kring Villanueva, 2021) IDRA notes several challenges to increasing the frequency of bilingual education programs in Texas are directly tied to the teacher shortage. The report recommends several actions to address the needs of Texas public schools: increase funding for bilingual programs with adjustments for inflation, extend bilingual education programs to secondary students, and tackle the teacher shortage with increased pay for bilingual educators and a serious examination of the barriers to certification in Texas (Latham Chavez & Kring Villanueva, 2021). IDRA

additionally contributes to the community of meaning for special interest groups with an infographic, “Celebrating Emergent Bilingual Students – Infographic” (2022c). The information relayed shares the perspective that emergent bilingual students are an asset to the state, even referring to the term emergent bilingual as an “asset-based term” (IDRA, 2022c). The graphic draws attention to the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism for students, the tone of emergent bilingual to acknowledge students' ability, and the preparation for college and career readiness of bilingualism. A final celebratory point is “students will grow their bilingual strength, benefitting all Texans” (IDRA, 2022c). This point builds upon the earlier suggestion from Texans Care for Children that there is an economic benefit to additive bilingual education programs: better prepared workers for the economy. This point is subtly interspersed in the materials presented by IDRA and Texans Care for Children.

### **Conclusions**

Each of the three communities of meaning interpreted S.B. 560 through lenses specific to their experiences, responsibilities, and the expectations placed upon their communities. Lawmakers derived meaning from the credit-claiming and political benefits the bill afforded them. The benefits included constituent support, with potential for political favors in exchange for supporting this policy. Simultaneously, the Texas Education Agency constructed a community of meaning through demonstrated compliance. The artifacts reveal discourses in which labels were changed, titles were clarified, and visuals were created to show that bilingual education in Texas functioned more inclusionary. Special interest groups celebrated S.B. 560 as a monumental piece of legislation that would offer exciting opportunities to move bilingual education forward. However, there is one essential community of meaning not discussed in depth from any of the three identified communities of meaning: the students. Why is there not more from lawmakers, the TEA, or special interest groups regarding any benefit of the new model?

Each community of meaning interpreted the legislation differently and offers three competing understandings which conflict in aims and scope. Policy makers support the curricular adjustments, title changes, and examination of certification processes as enough growth to celebrate the expansion of bilingual education. The Texas Education Agency developed a community of meaning centered around the need to demonstrate bilingual education in Texas meets the criterion of S.B. 560, the Texas Education Code, and ensured compliance. Special interest groups interpreted the policy as a great measure sure to become a “keystone” piece of legislation in bilingual education (Garcia, 2021). However, at the time of this writing, the mandated strategic plan from S.B. 560 from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has not been shared. The strategic plan could change the discourse around S.B. 560 and bilingual education.

### ***Implications***

What does this mean for bilingual education in Texas? Authentic bilingual programs in the more than 1,204 school districts across Texas could have allowed the 20% of Texas students who are bilingual the opportunity to learn and grow in both their first language and English with the cognitive benefits and intercultural awareness that accompanies bilingualism (Baker, 2011; Howard et al., 2007). Instead, the three communities of meaning identified in this analysis created meaning for S.B. 560 as a checklist, a way to credit-claim during the legislative term and report to their constituents that they co-authored and supported a bill to expand bilingual education in Texas, but in practice, did little beyond support.

The Texas Education Agency is by far the state agency with the most meaning built around S.B. 560. The numerous handouts, videos, webpages, newsletters, and updates indicate the agency has been working to construct meaning since the passage of the policy in June 2021. However, the message that is repeated throughout the discourse is compliance. The stated goal in the first line of S.B. 560 is “relating to developing a strategic plan for the improvement and expansion of high-quality bilingual education” (2021). The programs in place prior to the passage of the policy remain in place. Terminology changed, handouts were updated, but the ability of each school district to offer bilingual education programs and the criterion in Texas Education Code remain the same. The discourse drafted from the TEA implies compliance with the stated changes, but not an expansion of the programs. Expanding the programs recognizes administrators and teachers, in their educational practice, participate in an ongoing process of language planning, a process linked to power and social justice issues (Trujillo, 2005) It is early December 2022 as of this writing, and the strategic plan for bilingual education was due to key elected officials no later than December 1, 2022. The opportunity to truly expand bilingual education in Texas remains, depending on the content of the strategic plan. We have not been able to access or locate the plan to add to our interpretative analysis for state agencies.

Still, special interest groups tout the importance of bilingual education for students and the health of the state through an equity-based lens. However, the most dominant discourse is the continual reference to the economic benefits of providing bilingual education. The community of meaning derived from the special-interest group grounds the shared understanding with a neo-liberal perspective that the function of schools is to produce workers who can continue to build a strong economy (Apple, 2006, 2017).

Each of the three interpretations of the discourse surrounding S.B. 560 differs in the way in which the policy impacts each community of meaning. Lawmakers are oddly indifferent in their response to the implementation of the bill, while state agencies discourse within that community of meaning is compliance with expectations; there is not a sense of desire to change and expand bilingual education with fidelity to the models of bilingualism, only to prove and ensure compliance. Special-interest groups desire the expansion of bilingual education to benefit all through the production of better, more capable workers. These three communities of meaning conflict about the primary function and benefit of the policy. However, the most significant and glaringly absent community of meaning are the students. There are more than 1 million students in Texas public schools who are bilingual or are learning English (Morath, 2021) but there is no discourse among students about the way in which this policy impacts them directly.

Future interpretations of this policy will be necessary once the mandated strategic plan has been made public by the state agencies. Without authentically expanding bilingual education programs in Texas, the state, and more importantly, its students, fall victim to the danger of the single story by having a monolingual focus.

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