

Tackling Enrollment Barriers

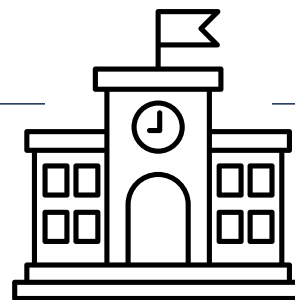
All children in the United States have the right to an education, regardless of immigration status. Nevertheless, children of immigrants, especially newcomer students, still encounter significant barriers to public school enrollment.

By all accounts, enrollment barriers may appear to be straightforward issues to address. Yet, these issues can quickly become overwhelming obstacles for parents. That is especially so when stakeholders fail to work collaboratively. Our engagement with local service providers in the greater Houston area on the topic reveals that partners strongly believe successful school enrollment should be a shared responsibility amongst all school and district level staff.

Moreover, comprehensive training ensures all staff are equipped to engage with and assist families effectively. Spring ISD addresses these growing needs by training every district employee to recognize and address the real barriers that students and their families face. Similarly, Alief ISD has introduced resource fairs, ESL classes for parents, and connections to faith communities. These strategies proactively address family needs, significantly improving the chances of students' academic success and access to education.



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- **55%** of students served experienced enrollment barriers.
- **52%** of students served lacked proper documentation.
- **42%** found a language barrier as the top barriers to enrollment.

Findings from community engagement of service providers in the Greater Houston Area who work closely with immigrant families.

Enrollment barriers disproportionately affect immigrant families due to:

- Language barriers and lack of multilingual staff.
- Insufficient all-staff awareness of immigrant family challenges, leading to disengagement.
- Complex registration requirements and lack of streamlined processes.
- Distrust of systems due to immigration status or trauma.

Best Practices:

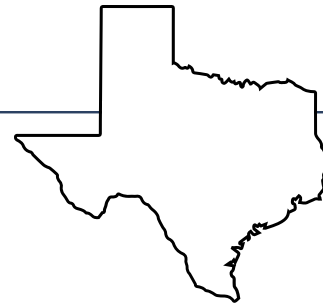
- **Spring ISD:** Addresses enrollment barriers by training all staff to recognize and mitigate challenges faced by immigrant families.
- **Pflugerville ISD:** Offers ESL academies for educators to improve outreach and communication with immigrant families.
- **Alief ISD:** Hosts resource fairs and ESL classes for parents, the goal is to build trust and simplify the enrollment process.

Teacher Support for Emergent Bilingual Students and English Learners

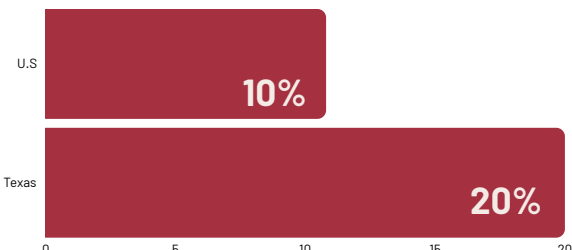
Teachers play a pivotal role in student outcomes, particularly for EB/EL students who face additional challenges in mastering content and language simultaneously. Our report finds that districts with better teacher-to-student ratios and bilingual-certified educators see improved student performance, such as higher STAAR and TELPAS scores. These districts also experience less chronic absenteeism.

Our report finds that investing in teacher support is vital to addressing learning gaps. Continuous professional development equips educators with strategies to better serve EB/EL and newcomer students, such as real-time coaching and interactive training. Districts that prioritize these initiatives report stronger student engagement and improved academic outcomes. Successful districts have also incorporated stipends and reimbursement programs to encourage new and existing teachers to pursue bilingual certifications. This is especially needed to bridge the salary gap for certified bilingual teachers. For example, United ISD in Laredo, Texas actively supports teachers in obtaining ESL certification and offers comprehensive professional development opportunities.

These efforts expand the pool of qualified educators and strengthen the implementation of high-quality bilingual education programs. People centered efforts geared towards supporting and inspiring teachers help ensure teachers are appropriately treated like a valuable resource in their school districts.



- Texas has **1 bilingual teacher per 16 students**, above the 15:1 state average for all teachers.
- Certified bilingual teachers earn, on average, **7% less** than their peers statewide.



The percentage of public-school students in the U.S. and Texas who were English learners, 2021.

Citations

1- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2021-22; and ED Facts file 141, Data Group 678, 2021-22. See Digest of Education Statistics 2023, table [204.20](#).



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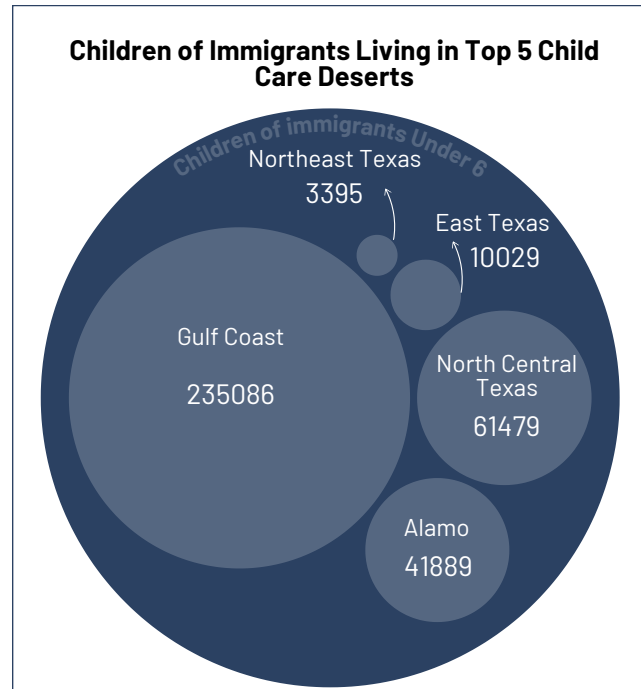
Barriers to Access for Early Childhood Education

Exposure to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) lays the foundation for future academic success, particularly for children from low-income families. Research shows that children who participate in high-quality ECE programs are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to require special education services, and will experience fewer behavioral challenges later in life.

Programs like those in Alief ISD, located in Greater Houston, demonstrate the transformative impact of accessible ECE. The district’s implementation of full-day pre-K programs resulted in remarkable improvements in vocabulary development, increasing from 40% to 72% among participants.

Despite these benefits, many immigrant families face significant barriers to accessing ECE, including language challenges, lack of information, and logistical obstacles. Insights from our Immigrant ECE Working Group in North Texas underscore the need for a holistic approach to help support immigrant families. A key recommendation is the development of a clear communication strategy that incorporates tools, stories, and an asset-based approach to highlight the positive impacts an early childhood education has on children. Such strategies not only help families navigate challenges but also help foster collaboration across communities and stakeholders.

For the nearly 150,000 children under the age of six in Texas with a sole parent who is an immigrant, access to high-quality child care is not just beneficial—it is essential.¹ These parents, often the sole providers for their families, depend on reliable child care to work and sustain their households. Without affordable and accessible ECE options, these families face difficult trade-offs that can jeopardize both their employment and their child’s development.



A zip code is deemed a “Child Care Desert” if the number of children under age 6 with working parents is three times greater than the licensed capacity of child care providers in the area.²

Region	Total Zip Code Deserts	# of children of immigrants
North Central	51	61476
Gulf Coast	43	235086
East Texas	38	10029
Alamo	30	41889
Northeast Texas	29	3395



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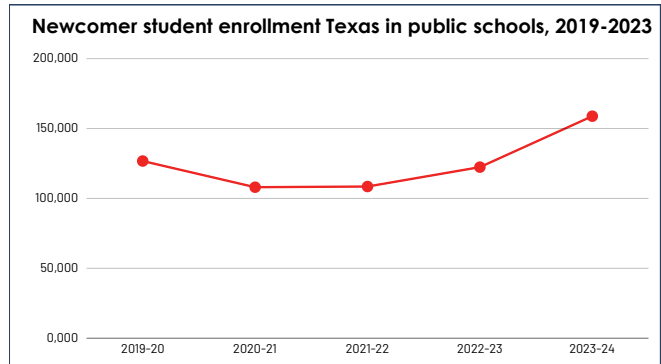
1-Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Matthew Sobek, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Renae Rodgers, and Megan Schouweiler. IPUMS USA: Version 15.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V15.0>

2-See Footnote 1

Teacher Support for Newcomer Students

Newcomer students are foreign born students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for three years or less. They often require tailored instruction to master academic content as they simultaneously acquire language skills. Teachers are at the forefront of efforts to ensure newcomer students succeed, providing the essential guidance and instruction they need to navigate academic content while adapting to a new language and culture. However, the responsibility of supporting newcomer students cannot fall solely on teachers or schools. To ensure sustainable support, school districts must lean on wraparound services and community resources. Partners across Texas have demonstrated how leveraging these resources can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments for students and teachers.

For example, ImmSchools collaborate directly with school districts to implement policies and practices that foster safer, more inclusive environments for immigrant students and their families. Similarly, Communities In Schools (CIS) integrates student support services at schools, providing newcomer students and their families with access to basic needs and more. By placing trained site coordinators on campuses, CIS alleviates pressure on teachers by addressing non-academic challenges that might otherwise fall on educators. Supporting teachers of newcomer students requires a shared commitment between schools and their communities.



Texas continues to see an increase in newcomer immigrant students throughout the years. Texas public schools saw a 30% increase in enrollment of newcomer students from 122,504 in the 2022 school year to 158,832 in 2023.¹

Recommendations for Expanding Impact:

- **Leverage Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with local organizations to provide wraparound services that address non-academic barriers, reducing pressure on teachers and schools.
- **Expand Teacher Training Programs:** Implement ongoing professional development initiatives, such as those in Spring ISD and Pflugerville ISD, to equip educators with the skills needed to support newcomer students effectively.
- **Enhance Family Engagement:** Follow models like Alief ISD's resource fairs, newcomer school and ESL programs to strengthen connections between schools and newcomer families.

Citations

1- "Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2023-24." Texas Education Agency, tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/school-performance/accountability-research/enroll-2023-24.pdf.



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Teacher Survey

The Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS) was originally developed for K-12 classroom settings and includes teaching practices about which participants report their frequency of use. The MTC scale aims to provide insights into the classroom experiences and teaching practices. By using the MTCS to identify teacher's pedagogies around their cultural teaching approach, this focuses on validating, facilitating, liberating, and empowering minority students, emphasizing their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success.¹ Our survey included 19 teachers from various schools within one district, covering multiple grade levels. Sixty three percent of these teachers reported having 10 plus years of teaching experience.

Culturally responsive teaching prioritizes students' culture in the learning process. When educators create classroom norms that are reflective of a student's native culture, they in turn help minimize the cultural mismatches between home and school. These approaches validate, facilitate and empower minority students and in turn aids academic success. As classrooms become increasingly diverse across Texas, the survey examines how teachers navigate cultural integration, language barriers, and educational support while facing limited resources.

In general, teachers reported that on average they usually agreed with statements indicating they possessed multicultural knowledge or skills. These teachers also identified that when it comes to finding help to

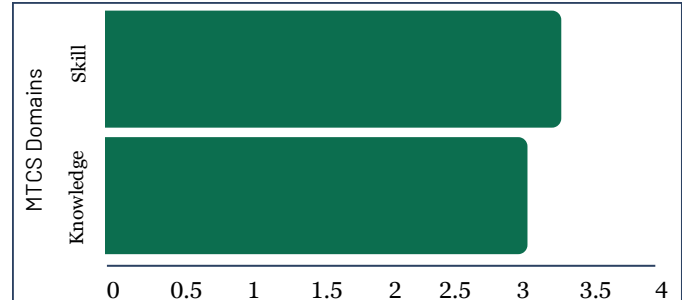


Fig. 1 Shows average Knowledge and Skill from teachers surveyed at around a 3 out of a 4-point scale indicating that the teachers surveyed have a slightly above average knowledge and skills of using pedagogy to cater to the diversity of the classroom.

support their teaching style and approach to supporting newcomer immigrant and EB/EL students, 53% rely on receiving that guidance and thought partnership with teachers within their own campuses. Practices that are typically incorporated into the classroom include activities to help students feel welcome, heard, and safe. These efforts are geared towards creating connections between the students and teacher. It is clear that there is a growing need for support and resources when it comes to teaching EB/EL students and newcomer students. Collaboration among educators is crucial in meeting this need.

The findings in this survey highlight both achievements and opportunities in supporting EB/EL and immigrant students in Texas classrooms. While teachers demonstrate positive knowledge and skill when it comes to multicultural engagement with immigrant families and attention to cultural representation, there may be a need for additional professional development and resources focused on increasing cross-cultural learning to be able to increase capacity to collaborate with immigrant students.

Citations

1- G. Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Teachers College Press, U.S.A. 2000.



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