



Expanding Literacy Support for Texas's Emergent Bilinguals

Breaking down barriers to achievement with student-driven literacy solutions

National reading progress has come to a standstill across every grade level, and for multilingual learners, that lack of growth is even more severe. Results from the [NAEP Reading Assessment \(The Nation's Report Card\)](#) show persistent national declines in reading performance across 4th and 8th grades. According to the [2024 NAEP Reading Results](#), average reading scores for lower- and middle-performing students dropped significantly compared to pre-pandemic levels, with score gaps widening sharply for English learners and Hispanic students. In Texas, the [2024 Texas NAEP Reading Snapshot Report](#) shows that 8th-grade reading scores fell to an average of 252, with 39% of students scoring below the NAEP Basic level, which highlights an urgent need for targeted literacy interventions across the state.

In Texas, meeting the needs of Multilingual Learners—[officially designated as Emergent Bilinguals \(EBs\)](#)—has to be a top priority for district leaders. More than 1.26 million public school students in Texas are Emergent Bilinguals, accounting [for 20% of total state enrollment](#). This student population has grown by 49% over the past decade, bringing both rich cultural diversity and significant operational demands to Texas schools.

Key state data points illustrate the scope of the literacy challenge facing Texas districts:

- **STAAR Reading Benchmarks:** On the 2024 [STAAR Reading Assessment](#), 48% of Texas third graders met or exceeded grade-level expectations.
- **Classroom vs. Test Fluency:** On state language evaluations like the [TELPAS Language Assessment](#), Emergent Bilinguals often master everyday conversational English within one to two years, but acquiring the complex academic vocabulary needed for grade-level reading tests takes five to seven years.
- **Graduation and Attendance Rates:** Chronic absenteeism among Texas Emergent Bilinguals stands at [21%](#), and [graduation rates for EBs average 89%](#), compared to 95% for non-EBs statewide.
- **Bilingual Educator Shortages:** Severe shortages of certified bilingual and ESL teachers leave many districts with high student-to-teacher ratios, making individual reading intervention difficult.

Unaddressed literacy barriers make it difficult for students to keep up in every academic subject. To help students succeed, Texas school leaders need an approach that builds lasting reading confidence rather than long-term reliance on full-time assistance.

Moving From Dependency to Independence

Standard classroom reading supports often rely on permanent modifications, such as full-text translations, simplified or below-grade-level readings, or continuous staff assistance. While these tools offer short-term help, they ultimately do the heavy lifting for the student. Over time, students come to rely on constant help instead of developing their own reading stamina. Or they remain behind their peers for their entire academic career.

Reading comprehension requires both word recognition and language comprehension. For Emergent Bilinguals in Texas, learning grade-level academic vocabulary is the single largest barrier to state assessments.

A student's home language is a [powerful asset for learning](#) to read in English. Literacy built in Spanish or another native language transfers directly to English, provided students have the right tools to bridge the two. Offering flexible supports that students control themselves helps accelerate learning without creating permanent reliance on scaffolding.

The Research: Principles of Student Independence

To move away from long-term dependency, Texas district strategies must align with key research on how multilingual learners build lasting literacy:

- **[Native Language Transfer](#):** Strong literacy in a student's home language speeds up English growth. Background knowledge and reading skills built in primary languages transfer directly into English comprehension.
- **[Grade-Level Text Rigor](#):** Lowering reading levels limits vocabulary growth. Emergent Bilinguals make the biggest gains when kept on grade-level text paired with immediate, just-in-time support.
- **[Bimodal Learning](#):** Connecting written text with audio reinforcement strengthens word recognition, bridging the gap between everyday conversational fluency and complex academic vocabulary.
- **[Student-Controlled Scaffolding](#):** For supports to be effective, they need to be dynamic. Giving students agency over when they access help allows supports to fade naturally as reading confidence grows.

How Sora Empowers Texas Districts

Sora brings this strategy directly into Texas classrooms. Built exclusively for PreK–12 schools, Sora is a safe, ad-free reading platform that gives Emergent Bilinguals equitable access to grade-level text while taking pressure off busy teachers. Its built-in tools put students in charge of their own growth:

- **On-Demand Supports:** Students select inline definitions, pronunciations, or line-by-line translations only when they hit a difficult word. As their vocabulary grows, they rely on these supports less often.
- **Home Language Access:** Ebooks and audiobooks in more than 15 languages, along with a multilingual platform interface, let students use their home-language skills to build confidence reading in English.
- **Academic Vocabulary Boosters:** Text-to-speech, read-alongs, annotations and highlights, and personal vocabulary lists help students build the academic vocabulary they'll encounter on STAAR and TELPAS.
- **24/7 Access to Grade-Level Books:** Students can read anytime, anywhere, on any device. Lexile and ATOS filters help them find grade- and age-appropriate titles that match their interests, and Sora can connect to local public library collections to expand choice even further.
- **Clear Progress Tracking:** Teachers can assign and monitor reading, and easy-to-read analytics give teachers, principals, and district leaders clear visibility into reading time, habits, and progress throughout the school year.

Advocating for Funding in Your District

Securing budget for a new platform requires showing how one investment solves problems across multiple district priorities. When you connect platform adoption directly to state mandates, teacher support, and shared funding streams, building administrative buy-in becomes much easier.

- **Meet state mandates** by aligning adoption with [Texas Administrative Code \(TAC\) Chapter 89 Subchapter BB](#), which requires districts with 20 or more Emergent Bilinguals in a grade level to offer structured bilingual or ESL instruction.
- **Show** principals how student-managed tools free up time for targeted small group instruction.
- **Consider** partnering with Bilingual, Special Education, and Library leaders to blend HB 3, Title III, and special education funds.
- **Demonstrate** how Sora connects to local library collections to expand access without extra spending.

- **Show how** Sora's built-in analytics can help grant managers satisfy federal Title I and Title III reporting requirements.
- **Explain how** transitioning to digital platforms bypasses traditional physical space limits and logistical barriers, directly enabling access to vast multilingual catalog collections for diverse student populations.
- **Align with [Texas Reading Academies](#)** by showing how embedded audio and vocabulary tools reinforce key state literacy goals.

Where to Find Funds in Texas

Texas districts can draw from dedicated state and federal funding streams to implement digital reading platforms:

- **House Bill 3 (HB 3) Bilingual Education Allotment:** Under [Texas Education Code §48.105 / HB 3 Overview](#), Texas applies a 0.15 funding weight for students in bilingual programs. State law requires districts to spend at least 55% of these funds directly on bilingual learning materials, teacher training, and digital resources.
- **Federal Title III, Part A Grants:** Title III provides federal funds specifically designed to help Emergent Bilinguals learn English and meet state academic standards. Additional guidance is available through the [TEA Title III, Part A Portal](#).
- **Title I, Part A Funds:** Federal Title I funds allocated to high-need campuses can support supplemental reading tools for schoolwide literacy initiatives. Guidance is accessible via the [TEA Title I, Part A Page](#).
- **Bilingual Special Education Funds:** Legislative frameworks under [Texas House Bill 2256 \(HB 2256\)](#) offer funding pathways for Emergent Bilingual students who also receive special education services.

Action Steps for Texas Districts

Ready to take action? Here are three practical steps you can take to boost literacy growth and help your Multilingual Learners become confident, grade-level readers:

- **Review your current literacy tools:** Take stock of the reading resources across your schools to ensure they give Emergent Bilinguals the direct support they need to master complex, grade-level text.
- **Uncover available funding:** Work with your finance team to tap into dedicated HB 3 Bilingual Allotment and Title III funds before your district's budgeting cycle closes.
- **Team up with Sora:** Bring flexible reading supports into your classrooms with targeted training for your teachers, media specialists, and Language Proficiency Assessment Committees.

By shifting from permanent scaffolding to dynamic, student-driven digital reading tools, Texas districts can transform how they support their 1.26 million Emergent Bilinguals and move them from classroom reliance to lifelong reading independence. Equipping students with flexible, on-demand supports honors their native language as an asset, preserves access to grade-level rigor, and provides educators with much-needed relief amid statewide staffing challenges.

About Sora

Sora, developed by OverDrive, is a reading platform built exclusively for PreK–12 schools. It gives students 24/7 access to ebooks, audiobooks, read-alongs, digital magazines, and multilingual content through their school’s collection and local public libraries, anytime, anywhere, on any device. Sora’s safe, distraction-free environment turns screen time into active reading time, with built-in tools that support every reader: dictionary definitions, text-to-speech, customizable fonts and text sizes, professional audio narration, and annotation features like highlighting and note taking.

Sora is designed with the privacy, security, and compliance needs of schools in mind, offering robust student data privacy protections, seamless integration with learning management systems, and WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility compliance. It is also ESSA Level IV certified, reflecting a well-defined logic model grounded in research. Educators gain real-time insights into reading time, sessions, and engagement, while students set goals, track progress, and personalize their reading experience, building lifelong literacy habits inside and outside the classroom.

Ready to Help Every Student Become a Confident, Independent Reader?

[**Reach out**](#) to our team today to explore how we can help your district deploy student-driven reading tools, maximize available state funding, and transform literacy outcomes for the students who need it most.