



Voces Unidas: Empowering Communities for A Stronger Future

Unidos Para Texas Education Conference Sessions
Saturday, September 13, 2025

PRE-REGISTRATION / BREAKFAST: 7:00-8:00 AM

Location: Student Center Ballroom

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF KEYNOTE SPEAKER: 8:05-8:20 AM

Location: Student Center Ballroom

Presenters: Dr. Gilda Y. Martinez, Founder and Chair of Unidos Para Texas Bilingual Education Conference
and Dr. Alfredo Ramirez, Jr., Dean of the College of Education

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: 8:20-9:20 AM

Presenter: Dr. Joy Esquierdo, Bilingual Integration at the University at Texas Rio Grande Valley

Session: Voces Unidas – Empowering Communities for a Stronger Future

Location: Student Center Ballroom

TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD PRESENTATION: 9:25-9:35 AM

Recipient: Ms. Priscilla Mendoza, Tomas Sanchez/Hermelinda Ochoa Elementary

School District: Laredo Independent School District

Location: Student Center Ballroom

MORNING TEACHER WORKSHOP: 9:45 – 11:35 AM

Presenters: Dr. Filiz Shine, Dr. Puneet Gill, and Dr. Gilda Y. Martinez, Texas A&M International University

Session: Creating Play Libraries in Classrooms and Producing Bilingual Picture Books

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 111, Capacity 70

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: This interactive workshop introduces participants to the possibilities of play libraries as creative, multilingual literacy spaces. Drawing on research and practice, we will explore how teachers can incorporate play libraries in their classrooms. We will also discuss how to design bilingual and translingual picture books that reflect their cultures, languages, and identities. We will share some of the books that have been published in the past. Together, we will discuss how these practices promote emergent literacy, cultural awareness, and community building in diverse educational content. By the end of the session, participants will leave with a way to incorporate bilingual and translingual books into their own classrooms.

SESSION ONE: 9:45-10:35 AM

Presenter: Mrs. Iliana Hinojosa-Molina and Ms. Maria F. Gonzalez, Laredo Independent School District, Laredo, Texas

Session: Introduction to Content-Based Language Instruction (CBLI)

Location: Student Center 120, Capacity 40

Audience: Educators

Abstract: Participants will learn about the three elements of Content-Based Language Instruction (CBLI) and how to implement strategies and activities to help promote academic language and authentic conversations in the classroom.

Presenter: Dr. Kele Anyanwu, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Integrating Technology to Support Language Acquisition and Learning

Location: Student Center 236, Capacity 186

Audience: Teachers

Abstract: This presentation is geared towards examining how technology can be used to enhance pedagogy in our classrooms to improve language development and improved student outcomes. During the presentation, we shall examine various technologies, adaptive learning, immersive tools, and collaborative platforms that provide positive pedagogical outcomes. We shall also explore high level practices that impact integration of home languages into digital projects. By the end of the presentation, each attendee will be armed with technology mediated practical strategies that he or she can use in the classroom to empower multilanguage learners. Discover innovative ways to integrate technology that foster language acquisition, cultural responsiveness, and academic success for multilingual learners in today's K–12 classrooms.

Presenters: Dr. Erica Guerrero, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas and Dr. Roberto Torres, Texas A&M-Kingsville, Kingsville, Texas

Session: From Playground Talk to Academic Rockstars: Understanding BICS and CALP

Location: Student Center 230, Capacity 50

Audience: Elementary Teachers and Campus Administrators

Abstract: This presentation will engage participants in examining classroom scenarios that illustrate the gap between BICS and CALP. Educators will learn practical strategies for supporting language acquisition, explicit teaching of academic vocabulary, and the integration of culturally responsive practices. This presentation is designed for educators committed to supporting the linguistic and academic growth of Emergent Bilinguals.

Presenters: Dr. Patricia Garza-Gonzalez Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Between Dreams and Circuits: AI to Awaken Curiosity in Two Languages

Location: Student Center 231, Capacity 50

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: This session is a bilingual exploration of artificial intelligence as a creative companion, nurturing intercultural awareness and introducing key technological concepts. Participants will engage in hands-on experiences that blend language invention and digital curiosity, allowing children to become co-creators of their own language—fostering ethical engagement and learning across linguistic borders.

Presenters: Dr. Ricardo Lozano, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Educational Leadership Matters: Educational Leadership Preparation Matters Too

Location: World Hemispheric Trade Center 103, Capacity 45

Audience: Campus/District Administrators

Abstract: This session explores the growing understanding that, after quality teaching, educational leadership is the second most significant factor influencing student success. Leaders in education hold the unique responsibility of unifying the many independent variables within schools to cultivate an environment where the resulting synergy extends well beyond academic achievement. Consequently, educational leadership preparation programs must take on the critical task of addressing the fundamental distinction between managing schools effectively and leading them with vision and purpose.

Presenters: Rosa Esthela Mora, Valley View ISD, Mc Allen, Texas

Session: Self-discovery through multilingualism and literature

Location: Western Hemispheric Center 104, Capacity 45

Audience: Secondary Teachers

Abstract: Multilingualism and multiculturalism go hand in hand to take learning to the next level: we discover ourselves through a diversity of cultures and languages. But even better: through stories (literary works) with which we can identify.

Presenter: Ms. Shelly Briggs, RisePoint National Consultants, Dr. Alfredo Ramirez, Texas A&M International University, and Nancy Ramos, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: From Access to Achievement: RisePoint's Commitment to Student Success

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 125, Capacity 22

Audience: Teachers

Abstract: RisePoint is committed to transforming educational opportunities by providing comprehensive online programs that expand access, improve outcomes, and support educators. This presentation will highlight RisePoint's innovative approach to supporting teachers and administrators through flexible, research-based online programs designed to address the evolving needs of today's classrooms. Participants will learn how RisePoint partners with institutions to streamline the advising process, provide professional development, and ensure successful implementation of these initiatives. The session will also include a walkthrough of the advising process, program features, and practical steps for connecting teachers and students with the resources they need to thrive. By the end of the session, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how RisePoint's solutions can be tailored to their specific contexts, empowering educators to focus on what matters most—student success.

Representatives from the College of Education, including Dean Alfredo Ramirez, Jr., will also be available during the session to answer questions and provide additional insights.

SESSION TWO: 10:45 – 11:35

Presenter: Ms. Gracie Martinez and Ms. Sylvia Hein, Laredo Independent School District, Laredo, Texas

Session: Scaffolding Speaking and Writing for Emergent Bilingual

Location: Student Center 120, Capacity 40

Audience: Teachers

Abstract: Session attendees will have the opportunity to learn about the research behind the LISD 7x7 speaking/writing scaffold tool. The expected outcomes of using the 7x7 tool to support EB language development in the areas of speaking and writing will also be discussed. Attendees will have the opportunity to experience the benefits of the 7x7 firsthand and then share the (immediate) practical applications of the tool.

Presenter: Dr. Gilberto Soto, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: When Bilingual Education Programs Meet the Magic of Music and Movement

Location: Student Center 236, Capacity 186

Audience: Elementary Teacher

Abstract: The main objective of this presentation is to provide principles and strategies of how music and movement can be related to the expressive and developmental needs of dual language programs for children from early childhood to elementary programs. These music activities and/or curriculum materials presented are intended increase the enactive, iconic and symbolic learning experiences when creating a dual language lesson plan. This will be a mostly hands-on presentation so be ready to sing, move and participate at all times!

Presenter: Dr. Claudia San Miguel, Dr. Marcus Ynalvez, Ms. Perla Echeverria, and Ms. Maria Espericueta, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: AIRES: A Specialized STEM Internship Program

Location: Student Center 230 Capacity 50

Audience: Campus/District Administrators

Abstract: This presentation shares preliminary findings on the AIRES internship program's impact on undergraduate students' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and identity within STEM disciplines. These findings can inspire educators to think about how early exposure to STEM and mentorship can be contributors for long-term success in STEM.

Presenter: Eva Sandoval, Benchmark Education, League City, Texas

Session: Using Magnetic Letter Tiles and Decodable Readers to Boost Phonics Instruction

Location: Student Center 231, Capacity 50

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: This session is a bilingual exploration of artificial intelligence as a creative companion, nurturing intercultural awareness and introducing key technological concepts. Participants will engage in hands-on experiences that blend language invention and digital curiosity, allowing children to become co-creators of their own language—fostering ethical engagement and learning across linguistic borders.

Presenters: Dr. Christina Hernandez, Texas State University, Converse, Texas, and, Dr. Marissa De Hoyos, Independent Scholar, San Antonio, Texas

Session: Effective Tier 1 Strategies for Making Content Comprehensible for Emergent Bilingual (EBs)

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 103, Capacity 45

Audience: Secondary Teachers

Abstract: This professional development focuses on Content-Based Language Instruction (CBLI) strategies that support emergent bilingual (EB) scholars during Tier 1 instruction. Teachers will learn practical, research-based methods to make academic content more comprehensible and accessible for EBs without lowering rigor.

Strategies include enhancing visuals to support meaning; total Physical Response (TPR) to connect language with movement; using sentence stems to scaffold academic language. These approaches help EBs engage with grade-level content while receiving the linguistic support they need to develop their English Language Development (ELD) skills.

Presenter: Dr. Elsa Reyna-Barron and Ms. Pilar Tristan, Laredo Independent School District, Laredo, Texas

Session: Question, Signal, Stem, Share, Assess

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 104, Capacity 45

Audience: Teachers

Abstract: Participants will learn how to use the QSSSA Graphic Organizer to facilitate classroom discussions and student engagement.

Presenters: Dr. Heriberto Godina, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, TX

Session: Transforming Literacy Instruction with AI: Preparing English Language Learners for Reading Success

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 116, Capacity 114

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: AI can be a powerful ally in structured literacy instruction. This session shares classroom-ready strategies—like the contrapuntal assignment model—that balances technology with authentic learning to empower bilingual students, strengthen reading outcomes, and empowering teachers to strengthen reading outcomes while fostering AI literacy skills essential for today's changing world.

PRESENTATION OF PIONEER AWARD: 11:45-12:00 PM– Student Center Ballroom

Honoree: Dr. Carmen Pompa, Student Center Ballroom

Presenter: Dr. Gilda Y. Martinez, Chair of Unidos Para Texas Bilingual Education Conference

LUNCH 12:00-1:00 PM – Student Center Ballroom

AFTERNOON TEACHER WORKSHOP: 1:10 – 3:00 PM

Presenter: Dr. Youmna Deiri, Ms. Ximena Vidal, and Ms. Victoria Camacho, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Not Just Another Book: Elevating Community Cultural Wealth Through Translingual Children's Literature

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 111, Capacity 70

Audience: Teachers

Abstract: This session will explore how translingual children's books and storytelling practices can elevate the cultural wealth of multilingual students. Using Ximena Vidal's book Not Another Baseball Game! As inspiration, participants will gain strategies for family collaboration and community storytelling that foster equity, belonging, and joy in early childhood classrooms.

SESSION THREE: 1:10-2:00 PM

Presenters: Mrs. Marta Valdez, RGV Texas Association of Bilingual Education, Brownsville, Texas
Mr. Omar Ramirez and Ms. Janet Carrillo, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Motivating EBs to Read

Location: Student Center 120, Capacity 40

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: This presentation highlights strategies to motivate emergent bilingual students by integrating their languages, cultures, and identities into reading instruction. It emphasizes translanguaging, culturally relevant texts, and family engagement as key drivers of literacy development. The goal is to foster deeper comprehension, greater motivation, and a supportive classroom environment where all learners thrive.

Presenters: Mrs. Michele Garza, United Independent School District, Laredo, Texas

Session: Batter Up for New Words!

Location: Student Center 230, Capacity 50

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: Unlock vocabulary development at its easiest! Discover how creating alpha boxes can help you spiral content vocabulary daily, making abstract concepts more concrete and accessible for your students.

Presenter: Mrs. Melissa Tobias, Northside ISD, San Antonio, TX

Session: Visuals That Talk: Using the Visual Non-Glossary to Boost Language and Participation

Location: Student Center 231, Capacity 50

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: Unlock the power of visuals to boost emergent bilinguals' language and content learning. This session introduces the Visual Non-Glossary, an innovative Seidlitz Education tool that transforms vocabulary instruction through visuals, prompts, and routines. Experience engaging strategies that spark conversation, deepen thinking, and ensure equitable access for all learners.

Presenters: Dr. Patricia Garza-Gonzalez Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Between Dreams and Circuits: AI to Awaken Curiosity in Two Languages

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 103, Capacity 45

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Presenters: Mrs. Maria Piedra, REGION ONE, Weslaco, Texas

Session: Genre as a Roadmap: Strengthening Bilingual Reading Comprehension

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 104, Capacity 45

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: Language Explore how a genre-based approach strengthens bilingual students' reading comprehension. Participants will examine the features and academic vocabulary of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama, applying strategies like Preview-View-Review, cognates, and bilingual organizers to build biliteracy, deepen comprehension, and support success on STAAR and TELPAS assessments.

Presenter: Dr. Lourdes Viloria, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Building Academic Success Early for STEM (BASE) 2025

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 125, Capacity 22

Audience: Campus/District Administrators

Abstract: Building Academic Success Early for STEM (BASE for STEM) embeds culturally responsive teaching strategies to improve the metacognitive skills and self-efficacy of minority first-time freshman and transfer students in STEM. The research design is both qualitative via the collection of student and stakeholder interviews and focus groups discussions, and quantitative via the collection of student surveys and program assessment data.

SESSION FOUR: 2:10-3:00 PM

Presenters: Dr. Vanessa Rosales Cerda, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Arithmetic in the Bilingual Brain: How Language Affects Simple Arithmetic Processing in Childhood and Adulthood

Location: Student Center 120, Capacity 40

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: Literary Bilinguals typically learn arithmetic facts by rehearsing them in one language, creating a performance advantage in that language compared with their other language. This can have real-world implications in the bilingual classroom. This session will highlight recent research investigating how bilingual brains process simple arithmetic in each of their languages.

Presenters: Ms. Mayra Hernandez, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: How Supporting Student Parents Strengthens Schools, Communities, and Economic Mobility

Location: Student Center 230, Capacity 50

Audience: Campus/District Administrators

Abstract: Behind every university student parent is a family, a classroom, and a community whose future depends on their success. This session uncovers how supporting student parents not only transforms university outcomes but also strengthens PK–12 schools and drives community economic mobility. Join us to discover practical strategies and advocacy tools that build bridges across education and create lasting impact for generations.

Presenters: Mrs. Dora Guerrero and Mrs. Michele Garza, United Independent School District, Laredo, Texas

Session: Transition: Swinging for the Fences and Bridging the Gap

Location: Student Center 231, Capacity 50

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: This presentation aims to spark new ideas for facilitating students' transition from Spanish to English. It offers practical activities, valuable resources, and innovative strategies to empower teachers in guiding language development.

Presenters: Ms. Carmen Cadena, Laredo Independent School District, Laredo, Texas

Session: Talk the Talk: Assessing Young Bilingual Voices

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 103, Capacity 45

Audience: Elementary Teachers

Abstract: This presentation focuses on the importance of early oral language assessment in childhood education, especially for bilingual learners. Participants will explore challenges and benefits of bilingualism, discover classroom tools that foster language growth, and reflect on the moral responsibility educators hold in supporting students' full linguistic and cultural identities.

Presenter: Ms. Shelly Briggs, RisePoint National Consultants, Dr. Alfredo Ramirez, Jr., Texas A&M International University, and Nancy Ramos, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas

Session: From Access to Achievement: RisePoint's Commitment to Student Success

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Presenter: Ms. Maricela Arce, Texas Comptroller of Public Affairs, Austin, Texas

Session: Texas 529 Plans and Matching Scholarship Opportunities

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 125, Capacity 22

Audience: Teachers

Abstract: Learn about the Texas Tuition Promise Fund® (Plan), the state's tax-advantaged prepaid college tuition plan, and the Texas Match the Promise FoundationSM (Foundation), a 501(c)(3) public charity offering unique scholarship opportunities to eligible Plan participants. Our webinar provides an overview of the Plan, including tuition unit types, payment options, and how to open a contract or contribute to an existing one.* Plus, we will present information about matching scholarships and tuition unit grants available through the Foundation**. More details can be found at TuitionPromise.org and MatchThePromise.org

* Residency restrictions apply.

** Residency restrictions, age requirements, eligibility criteria, household income restrictions, and contribution requirements apply.

Presenters: Dr. Lina Marie De La Garza, Texas A&M International University and Ms. Victoria Palacios, Delta Kappa Gamma Alpha Nu President, Dr. Rosa Maria Vida, Former Superintendent, Laredo, Texas

Session: Discover the Delta Kappa Gamma Magic: An Educator's Group for Networking and Learning

Location: Western Hemispheric Trade Center 126, Capacity 20

Audience: Teachers and Administrators

Abstract: We invite all interested educators to learn about the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, an organization dedicated to the advancement and recognition of women educators globally. Discover unique opportunities for professional development, networking, and service in education!

Mark your calendars!



September 12, 2026

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