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Economic Status and Hispanic Student Reading College Readiness: A Pre- and Post-Pandemic Comparison

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the relationship of economic status to reading college readiness was examined for Hispanic high school students in Texas. Texas statewide data on the state-mandated English I End-of-Course exam were analyzed for two years pre-pandemic and the last four years post-pandemic. Inferential statistical analyses revealed that lower percentages of Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level standards than Hispanic students who were not in poverty. Extremely low percentages of Hispanic students met the Master's Grade Level standard, regardless of their economic status. Of note was that almost three-fourths of Hispanic students were economically disadvantaged. Implications for policy and for practice regarding the reading college-readiness of Hispanic students were provided, as well as recommendations for future research investigations.

Keywords: College reading readiness, economic status, grade level standards, Hispanic students

INTRODUCTION

Gaps are present in the existing research literature regarding the reading college-readiness rates of Hispanic students. Given evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively influenced student academic performance, the degree to which losses were present in the reading performance of Hispanic students is not known. Moreover, with clear evidence of the relationship between poverty and academic achievement, the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on reading may have been further exacerbated for Hispanic students because of their high rates of poverty. As of the writing of this article, few published articles could be located about the post-pandemic performance of students, particularly about the performance of Hispanic students. In the literature review, we will discuss the current state of affairs regarding reading college-readiness of Hispanic students and provide a framework for interpreting the findings from this multiyear analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationally, according to the United States Census Bureau, Hispanics are one of the fastest-growing groups in the United States (Funk & Lopez, 2022). Since 1970, the Hispanic population has increased by more than six times (Funk & Lopez, 2022). In just over the last decade, the Hispanic population has increased by 23% in the United States (Funk & Lopez, 2022). The US Hispanic population reached 62.5 million in 2021 and now accounts for 19% of the total United States population (Zong, 2022). By 2060, the Hispanic population is projected to increase to 111.2 million, or 28% of the US population (Mendez, 2022). One in every four children in the United States was of Hispanic origin in 2020, which was up 23.1% from 2010 (Pena et al., 2023).

Half of the U.S. Hispanic population is based in California, Texas, and Louisiana (Funk & Lopez, 2022). Texas, the state of interest for this article, has the highest increase in the Hispanic population growth (Hernandez et al., 2015). As of 2021, the Hispanic population in Texas increased by 40%, totaling nearly 12 million Hispanics (Krogstad et al., 2023). The United States Census Bureau has estimated that the Hispanic population in Texas is 40.2% (Ura, 2023).

From 2011 to 2021, public school enrollment of Hispanic students increased to 52.7%, from 50.8% in Texas and 23.7% to 28.4% in the United States. The

highest enrollment population for Hispanic students in Texas was in the 2010-2011 school year, in which Hispanic students were 50.2% of the total student enrollment (Texas Education Agency, 2011). Over 10 years (i.e., 2012-2013 through 2022-2023), public school enrollment increased by 8.7%, with an increase of 12.7% in Emergent Bilingual student enrollment.

With respect to academic achievement, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2019), gaps in reading have widened, resulting in only one out of every three students in the United States reading at a Proficient level at Grade 12 (Sparks, 2021). Following the post-pandemic in 2022, according to the National Association of Educational Progress, reading scores for students were lower in 2019 than for students in Grade 8, comparable to initial scores as late as 1992 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Examining another 15-year difference in reading scores, Grade 12 students scored lower in 2015, ranging from 249 to 333.

In 2019, over 1.78 million graduates, 52% of the US high school graduating class, took the ACT (ACT, 2019). The national ACT composite score for the 2019 graduating class was 20.7, down slightly from the composite score in 2018, an average of 20.8 (ACT, 2019). College readiness statistics for 2019 graduates show that a slightly lower percentage of ACT graduates are ready for college coursework this year than the previous year. Reading levels decreased compared to 2015, with English being one of the most significant declines: only 59% of the US graduates met the English benchmark, and only 45% met the reading benchmark.

With respect to the academic achievement of Texas students, 30% of students in Texas performed at or above the National Association of Educational Progress Proficient level in 2022, and 58% of students performed at the Basic level (National Association of Educational Progress, 2022). Of importance is that the average Texas scores decreased by 2 points from 2019 to 2022. In 2022, Hispanic students had an average score in college readiness performance that was 24 points lower than the average readiness score of White students.

In the United States, since 1959, nearly 18.1% of the population has lived in poverty (Creamer et al., 2022). According to the PEW Research Center, 18% of the Hispanic population lives in poverty (Moslimani & Noe-Bustamente, 2023). In 2020, 17% of Hispanic individuals were living at the poverty level, a figure that was substantially higher than the poverty rate of non-Hispanic individuals at 8.2% (Health and Human Services, 2023). Hispanics are most likely to experience poverty, as 29% of Hispanic children in 2019 lived below the poverty line, compared to 22% of children nationally (Ahn et al., 2023). Risk factors of living in poverty are associated with low achievement scores, repeating a grade level, and dropping out of high school (Irwin et al., 2022). Hispanics, in particular, have experienced an accumulation of disadvantaged educational experiences. Initial disadvantages stem from immigrant parents, economic status, and unfamiliarity with the United States education system (Schneider et al., 2006).

Hispanic individuals in Texas are disproportionately poor (Ura, 2023) in comparison to other ethnic/racial groups of students. During the 2022-2023 school year, 77% of Hispanic students were economically disadvantaged. Hispanic children in Texas are three times more likely to live in an overcrowded household, as 51% are housing hardships, meaning that 30% of their income is focused on housing costs (Ahn et al., 2023). According to the United States Census Bureau, Hispanic individuals living in Texas are twice as likely as White students in Texas to live below the poverty level and less than likely to graduate from college with a bachelor's degree or higher (Ura, 2023).

With respect to Texas, the long-term trend assessment conducted in the 2012-2013 school year showed a decline in Hispanic reading scores from 249 to 250 in 2020 to an average score of 247 in 2023. Examining scores pre-COVID, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) English I overall scores were lower compared to students taking the exam in Spring 2023. On the STAAR English I End-of-Course exam, only 71% of students met the Approaches Grade Level standard, only 54% met the Meets Grade Level standard, and only 14% met the Masters Grade Level standard. The overall rates of students meeting these standards for Spring 2023 were lower than the percentages in the previous Spring 2021 and Spring 2022 semesters. In Spring 2021, the percentages of students who met the Approaches Grade Level standard were 63%, 50% met the Meets Grade Level grade, and only 12% met the Masters Grade Level standard. In the Spring of 2022, 63% of students met the Approaches Grade Level standard, 48% met the Meets Grade Level standard, and only 11% met the Masters Grade Level standard.

Postsecondary attendance is critical for student mobility after graduation (Huerta et al., 2013). College readiness is essential for students to pursue further academic endeavors and prepare for workplace readiness (An & Taylor, 2015). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, fewer than 640,000 Hispanic students were enrolled in postsecondary settings compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Mora, 2022). In 2020, less than a fifth of all Hispanic postsecondary students were enrolled in a degree-granting institution.

Camera (2016) documented the presence of an increase in reading scores from 2005 to 2015; however, only 21% of Hispanic Grade 4 students performed at the Proficient level. Reardon et al. (2016) documented that from 2009 through 2012, Grades 3 through 8 students were in schools and neighborhoods exposed to much higher poverty levels than students in predominantly White schools. Middle-class and Black and Hispanic children live in neighborhoods and attend schools with higher poverty rates than most White children in poverty. White Hispanic achievement gaps are negatively correlated with Hispanic students' exposure to poor peers and neighbors. White Hispanic achievement gaps remain correlated with differences in exposure to poverty.

Statement of the Problem

Hispanic students are underrepresented in postsecondary settings (Morley et al., 2020). Hispanic students in underserved communities do not have adequate access to resources. A strategy to improve academic performance and college readiness is exposing students to collegiate experience before attaining postsecondary opportunities (Iatarola & Conger, 2011). Postsecondary attainment is crucial in today's workforce. Students of color and students in poverty face barriers to pursuing a more successful pathway. Given the importance of postsecondary enrollment, being college-ready is essential for student success. The reading college readiness skills of Hispanic students are not at the level they should be. Given the COVID pandemic, the extent to which their college reading skills were affected is not known.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which differences were present on the English I End-of-Course exam by the economic status of Hispanic students. Specifically addressed was the relationship between the economic status of Hispanic students and their performance on three grade-level standards (i.e., Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, Masters Grade Level). Because six school years of data were analyzed, the third purpose of this study was to ascertain the degree to which trends were present across the three grade-level standards both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic.

Significance of the Study

Being college-ready is a process that begins years prior to the final year of a student attending high school when classified as a graduating senior (Royster et al., 2015). Although educational researchers have previously examined the reading college readiness rates of Hispanic students, reading college readiness rates from pre-pandemic to post-pandemic school years still need to be addressed. Findings from this investigation can provide additional information on necessary reforms and interventions for school districts and educational leaders to support Hispanic students being better prepared for postsecondary education.

Research Questions

The following overarching research question was addressed in this study: What is the difference in the reading performance of Texas Hispanic high school students by their economic status (i.e., economically disadvantaged, not economically disadvantaged)? The subquestions under this overarching research

question were: (a) What is the difference in the English I End-of-Course exam Approaches Grade Level standards by the economic status of Hispanic students?; (b) What is the difference in the English I End-of-Course exam Meets Grade Level standard by the economic status of Hispanic students?; (c) What is the difference in the English I End-of-Course exam Masters Grade Level standard by the economic status of Hispanic students; and (d) What trend is present in the English I End-of-Course exam performance by the economic status of Hispanic students across six school years? The first three research questions were repeated for the two pre-pandemic school years (i.e., 2017-2018, 2018-2019), and for the most recent four post-pandemic school years (i.e., 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024) school years, whereas the last research question involved all six school years.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This quantitative study was a causal-comparative, non-experimental research design. An archival data set of the STAAR English I End-of-Course exam was analyzed to determine the relationship between economic status and Hispanic student achievement in reading. The independent variable in this research study was student economic status (i.e., economically disadvantaged, not economically disadvantaged), and the dependent variables were the three-grade level standards (i.e., Approaches Grade Level, Masters Grade Level, and Meets Grade Level) on the English I End-of-Course exam.

Participants and Instrumentation

A Public Information Request was submitted to the Texas Education Agency Public Education Information Management System for data for the two pre-pandemic school years (i.e., 2017-2018, 2018-2019) and for the four most recent post-pandemic school years (i.e., 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024). Data requested were: (a) student economic status, (b) student ethnicity/race, (c) gender, and (d) performance on the STAAR English I End-of-Course exam grade-level standards. Once received from the Texas Education Agency, data were then analyzed to determine the degree to which economic status was related to Hispanic student reading performance over six school years.

In the 2017-2018 school year, slightly more than three-fourths of Texas Hispanic students were in poverty compared to almost fourth of Texas Hispanic students not in poverty. In the 2018-2019 school year, more than three-fourths of Texas Hispanic students were in poverty compared to slightly less than a third of Texas Hispanic students not in poverty. Examining the school years following the

pandemic, during the 2020-2021 school year, less than three-fourths of Texas Hispanic students were in poverty, compared to more than a fourth of Texas Hispanic students not in poverty. In the 2021-2022 school year, almost three-fourths of Texas Hispanic students were in poverty compared to slightly more than a quarter of Texas Hispanic students not in poverty. In the 2022-2023 school year, almost three-fourths of Texas Hispanic students were in poverty compared to almost a fourth of Texas Hispanic students not in poverty. In the 2023-2024 school year, slightly more than three-fourths of Texas Hispanic students were in poverty compared to slightly less than a quarter of Texas Hispanic students not in poverty. Table 1 contains the sample sizes for the six school years of data analyzed. Depicted in Figure 1 are the percentages of Hispanic students by their economic status for the six school years.

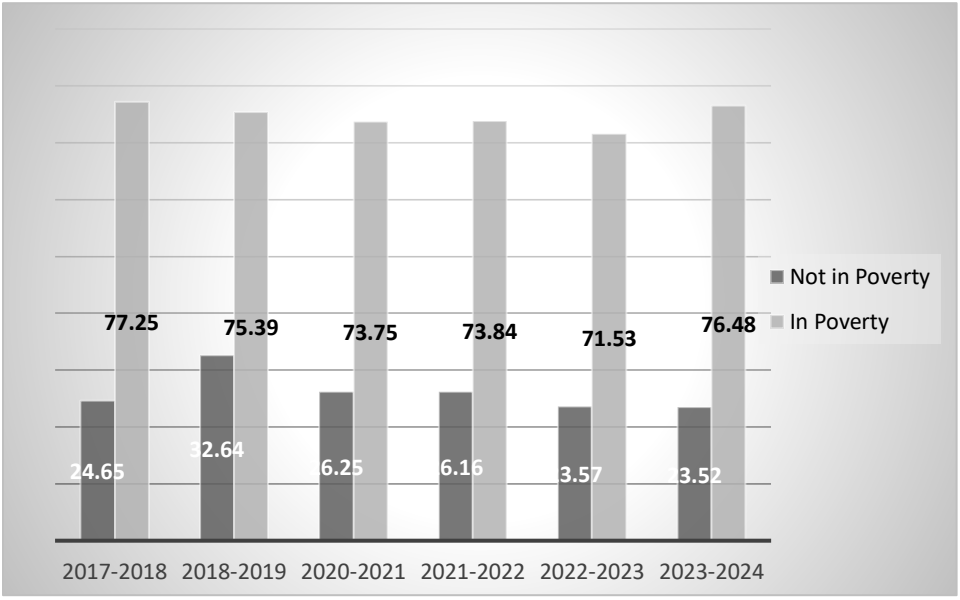
Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Texas Hispanic Students and Their Economic Status for All Six School Years

School Year	Economically Disadvantaged *n* (%age)	Not Economically Disadvantaged *n* (%age)
2017-2018	*n* = 203,804 (77.35%)	*n* = 66,672 (24.65%)
2018-2019	*n* = 204,631 (75.39%)	*n* = 66,792 (32.64%)
2020-2021	*n* = 188,035 (73.75%)	*n* = 66,922 (26.25%)
2021-2022	*n* = 211,686 (73.84%)	*n* = 74,982 (26.16%)
2022-2023	*n* = 226,168 (71.53%)	*n* = 69,755 (23.57%)
2023-2024	*n* = 212,393 (76.48%)	*n* = 65,314 (23.52%)

Figure 1

Per*centages of Hispanic Students by Their Economic Status Across All Six School Years.*



For this article, economic status will refer to two student groups (i.e., Poor, Not Poor). The Texas Education Agency defines educationally disadvantaged as "eligible to participate in the national free or reduced-price lunch program (Texas Education Agency, 2023)." Students eligible for free lunch (i.e., family income of 131% to 185% of the federal poverty line) or for reduced-price lunch (please insert their family income here) will be identified as students of poverty. Students who did not qualify for either program will be identified as Students Not in Poverty.

The three dependent variables were the three grade-level performance standards assessed on the English I End-of-Course exam. The Approaches Grade Level standard is a performance level descriptor linked to the state-mandated content standards. The performance level descriptor assists teachers and schools in understanding student performance and how to enhance students' academic strengths and weaknesses. Students who meet the Approaches Grade Level standard are most likely to be successful with incorporated targeted academic intervention that focuses on specified objectives on familiar text with applied skills (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Regarding the Meets Grade Level standard, students who meet this standard require a short-term but targeted academic intervention is short-term to focus on the deficit areas for improvement. Short-term but targeted academic intervention is short-term to focus on the deficit areas for improvement (Texas Education Agency, 2017b). With respect to the Master's

Grade Level standard, students at this level demonstrate exemplary performance by mastering familiar and unfamiliar contexts through various skills. Students are expected to excel in the subsequent grade placement with little academic support (Texas Education Agency, 2017b).

RESULTS

Data Analysis

To determine the degree to which differences were present on three performance standards (i.e., Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level) by the economic status of Hispanic students, Pearson chi-square analyses were conducted. The Pearson chi-square is the most appropriate statistical procedure when the independent variable (i.e., economic status consisting of two groups of students) and the three dependent variables (i.e., the three grade level standards of Met and Not Met) are categorical (Slate, 2023). Before calculating any Pearson chi-square procedures, the underlying assumptions were checked and determined to have been met.

Results for the Approaches Grade Level Standard Across All Six Years

For the first research question for the 2017-2018 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 4150.09$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .12, was small (Cohen, 1988). As revealed in Table 2, less than half of the Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to almost two-thirds of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of the Approaches Grade Level Standard by the Economic Status of Hispanic Students for All Six School Years

School Year and Economic Status	Did Not Meet *n* and %age of Total	Met *n* and %age of Total
2017-2018		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 24,635) 36.9%	(*n* = 42,037) 63.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 104,564) 51.3%	(*n* = 99,240) 48.7%
2018-2019		

Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 22,163) 33.2%	(*n* = 44,629) 66.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 99,527) 48.6%	(*n* = 105,104) 51.4%
2020-2021		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 23,216) 34.7%	(*n* = 43,706) 65.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 100,090) 54.8%	(*n* = 87,945) 46.8%
2021-2022		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 25,122) 33.5%	(*n* = 49,870) 66.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 106,463) 50.3%	(*n* = 105,223) 49.7%
2022-2023		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 17,615) 25.3%	(*n* = 52, 140) 74.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 91, 543) 40.5%	(*n* = 136,625) 59.5%
2023-2024		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 18718) 28.7%	(*n* = 46,596) 71.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 96, 792) 45.6%	(*n* = 115,601) 54.4%

Concerning the 2018-2019 school year, a statistically significant result was present, $\chi^2(1) = 4863.16$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .13, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Slightly more than half of the Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to two-thirds of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Regarding the 2020-2021 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 6792.14$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .16, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Slightly less than half of the Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to almost two-thirds of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

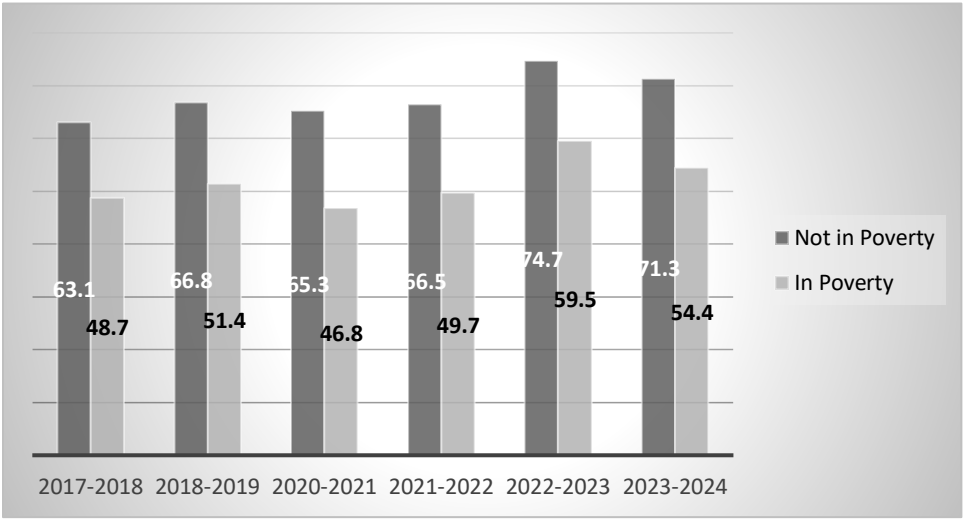
For the 2021-2022 school year, a statistically significant result was present, $\chi^2(1) = 6294.98$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .15, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Slightly less than half of the Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to two-thirds of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. With respect to the 2022-2023 school year, the difference was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 5306.82$, $p < .001$,

Cramer's V of .13, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Almost 60% of the Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to almost three-fourths of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

Regarding the 2023-2024 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded, $\chi^2(1) = 5882.27$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .15, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). More than half of the Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to more than two-thirds of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Revealed in Table 2 are the descriptive statistics for these analyses. Shown in Figure 2 are the percentages of Hispanic students by their economic status who met this grade level across the six school years.

Figure 2

Percentages of Hispanic Students Who Met the Approaches Grade Level Standard Across Six School Years.



Results for the Meets Grade Level Standard Across All Five Years

Concerning this research question for the 2017-2018 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 5992.15$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .15, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). Almost one third of Hispanic students in poverty met the Meets Grade Level standard, compared to almost half of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for the Meets Grade Level standard analyses.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of the Meets Grade Level Standard by the Economic Status of Hispanic Students for All Six School Years

School Year and Economic Status	Did Not Meet *n* and %age of Total	Met *n* and %age of Total
2017-2018		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 34, 962) 52.4%	(*n* = 31,710) 47.6%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 140,475) 68.9%	(*n* = 63,329) 31.1%
2018-2019		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 30, 637) 45.9%	(*n* = 36,155) 54.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 131, 375) 64.2%	(*n* = 73,256) 35.8%
2020-2021		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 32, 682) 48.8%	(*n* = 34, 240) 51.2%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 129,230) 68.7%	(*n* = 58, 805) 31.3%
2021-2022		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 35, 372) 47.2%	(*n* = 39, 610) 52.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 139,725) 66%	(*n* = 71,961) 34%
2022-2023		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 27, 610) 39.6%	(*n* = 42, 145) 60.4%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 18,718) 28.7%	(*n* = 46, 596) 71.3%
2023-2024		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 18718) 28.7%	(*n* = 46,596) 71.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 96, 792) 45.6%	(*n* = 115,601) 54.4%

With respect to the 2018-2019 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 7032.96$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .16, was small (Cohen, 1988). Slightly more than one third of Hispanic students in poverty met the Meets Grade Level standard, compared to more than half

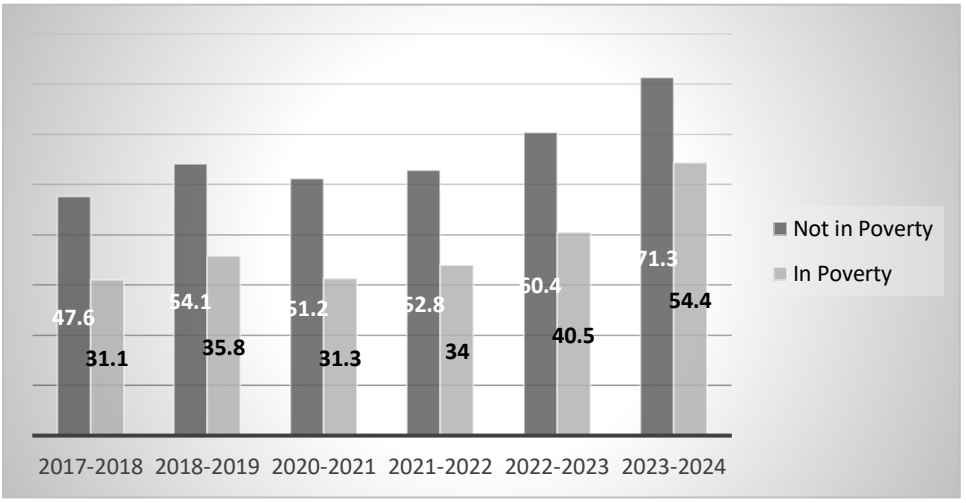
Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Regarding the 2020-2021 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded, $\chi^2(1) = 8425.56$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .18, was small (Cohen, 1988). A third of Hispanic students in poverty met the Meets Grade Level standard, compared to slightly more than half Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

Concerning the 2021-2022 school year, the difference was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 8260.03$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .17, was small (Cohen, 1988). Slightly more than one third of Hispanic students in poverty met the Meets Grade Level standard, compared to slightly more than half Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. For the 2022-2023 school year, a statistically significant difference was yielded, $\chi^2(1) = 8555.18$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .17, was small (Cohen, 1988). More than one third of Hispanic students in poverty met the Meets Grade Level standard, compared to 60% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

With respect to the 2023-2024 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 8160.21$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .17, was small (Cohen, 1988). More than one third of Hispanic students in poverty met the Meets Grade Level standard, compared to 60% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Illustrated in Figure 3 are the percentages of Hispanic students by their economic status who met this grade level across the six school years.

Figure 3

Percentages of Hispanic Students Who Met the Meets Grade Level Standard Across Six School Years.



Results for the Master's Grade Level Standard Across All Six Years

With respect to the 2017-2018 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 3408.97$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .11, was small (Cohen, 1988). As delineated in Table 4, a low percentage, almost 3%, of Hispanic students in poverty met the Masters Grade Level standard, compared to 8% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of the Masters Grade Level Standard by the Economic Status of Hispanic Students for All Six School Years

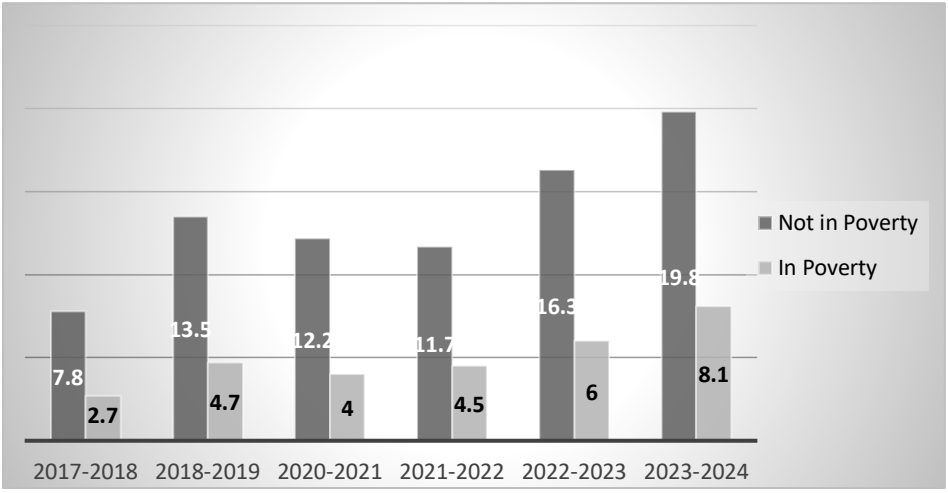
School Year and Economic Status	Did Not Meet *n* and %age of Total	Met *n* and %age of Total
2017-2018		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 61,502) 92.2%	(*n* = 5,170) 7.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 198,325) 967.3%	(*n* = 5,479) 2.7%
2018-2019		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 57, 780) 86.5%	(*n* = 9,012) 13.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 195,034) 95.3%	(*n* = 9,597) 4.7%
2020-2021		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 58, 729) 87.8%	(*n* = 8, 193) 12.2%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 180, 475) 96%	(*n* = 7, 560) 4%
2021-2022		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 66, 203) 88.3%	(*n* = 8, 779) 11.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 202, 128) 95.5%	(*n* = 9, 558) 4.5%
2022-2023		
Not Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 58,361) 83.7%	(*n* = 11,394) 16.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	(*n* = 21, 254) 94%	(*n* = 13, 644) 6%
2023-2024		

Not Economically Disadvantaged	(n = 52,390) 80.2%	(n = 12,924) 19.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	(n = 195,101) 91.9%	(n = 17, 292) 8.1%

For the 2018-2019 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 6110.17$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .15, was small (Cohen, 1988). Only about 5% of Hispanic students in poverty met the Masters Grade Level standard, compared to almost 14% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Regarding the 2020-2021 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 5755.81$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .15, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). A very low percentage, 4%, of Hispanic students in poverty met the Masters Grade Level standard, compared to slightly more than 10% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Concerning the 2021-2022 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 4784.60$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .13, was small (Cohen, 1988). Only about 5% of Hispanic students in poverty met the Masters Grade Level standard, compared to almost 12% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard.

With respect to the 2022-2023 school year, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(1) = 7304.87$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .16, was small (Cohen, 1988). A low percentage, 6%, of Hispanic students in poverty met the Masters Grade Level standard, compared to slightly more than 16% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. For the 2023-2024 school year, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 6986.97$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V of .16 was small (Cohen, 1988). A low percentage, 8%, of Hispanic students in poverty met the Masters Grade Level standard, compared to almost 20% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Delineated in Table 4 are the descriptive statistics for the Masters Grade Level analyses. Depicted in Figure 4 are the percentages of Hispanic students by their economic status who met this grade level across the six school years.

Figure 4
Percentages of Hispanic Students Who Met the Masters Grade Level Standard Across Six School Years.



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Six school years of Texas statewide data were analyzed in this multiyear investigation. One major finding was the high percentage of Hispanic students who were economically disadvantaged. In all six school years, three-fourths of Hispanic students met the state criteria for being economically disadvantaged. Regarding the relationship of economic status to reading college-readiness, performance was assessed on three grade level standards.

In the 2017-2018 school year, just slightly more than half of Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, compared to almost two-thirds of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. In the 2018-2019 school year, similar percentages were present for both groups of students. Similar percentages were observed for the 2020-2021 and the 2021-2022 school years. An increase to 60% was present in the 2022-2023 school year for Hispanic students in poverty, compared to an increase to about 75% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. These percentages for the 2023-2024 school year were similar to the percentages for the first four school years. Across the six school years of data that were analyzed, an average of about 50% of Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard, whereas about 65% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level standard. In all six years of data that were examined, statistically significantly lower percentages of Hispanic students in poverty met the Approaches Grade Level Standard than Hispanic

students not in poverty. Effect sizes were small. Presented in Table 5 is a summary of the statistical analyses for the Approaches Grade Level standards by economic status for all six school years.

Table 5

Summary of Results of the Approaches Grade Level Standard by Economic Status for All Six School Years

School Year	Statistically Significant	Effect Size	Lowest Performing Group
2017-2018	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2018-2019	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2020-2021	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2021-2022	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2022-2023	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2023-2024	Yes	Small	In Poverty

With respect to the Meets Grade Level standard, in the 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years, on average, about a third of Hispanic students in poverty met this grade level standard compared to an average of about half of Hispanic students not in poverty who met this standard. Similar to the Approaches Grade Level standard, in the 2022-2023 school year, an increase to about 40% was noted for Hispanic students in poverty who met this grade level standard, compared to about 60%s of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. In the 2023-2024 school year, the percentages were similar to the first four school years. As such, an average of about a third of Hispanic students met the Meets Grade Level standard, whereas an average of more than 50% of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Effect sizes were small. Table 6 contains a summary of the statistical analyses for the Meets Grade Level standards by economic status for all six school years.

Table 6

Summary of Results of the Meets Grade Level Standard by Economic Status for All Six School Years

School Year	Statistically Significant	Effect Size	Lowest Performing Group
2017-2018	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2018-2019	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2020-2021	Yes	Small	In Poverty

2021-2022	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2022-2023	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2023-2024	Yes	Small	In Poverty

Regarding all six school years for the Master's Grade Level standard, very low percentages of Hispanic students in poverty met the Master's Grade Level standard. The percentages ranged from a low of 3% in the 2017-2018 school year to a high of 8% in the 2022-2023 school year. Also observed were very low percentages of Hispanic students who were not in poverty who met this grade level standard. Their percentages ranged from a low of 8% in the 2017-2018 school year to a high of 20% in the 2022-2023 school year. Effect sizes were small. Table 7 contains a summary of the statistical analyses for the Master's Grade Level standards by economic status for all six school years.

Table 7

Summary of Results of the Master's Grade Level Standards by Economic Status for All Six School Years

School Year	Statistically Significant	Effect Size	Lowest Performing Group
2017-2018	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2018-2019	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2020-2021	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2021-2022	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2022-2023	Yes	Small	In Poverty
2023-2024	Yes	Small	In Poverty

Connections to Existing Literature

Results from this multiyear investigation were commensurate with Romeo et al.'s (2022) research findings. Examining scores pre-COVID, reading test scores were lower compared to students' scores in the spring of 2023. Only 50% of students met the Approaches Grade Level standard, only 41% met the Meets Grade Level standard, and only 6% met the Masters Grade Level standard. The overall rates of students meeting these standards for Spring 2023 were higher than the percentages in the previous Spring 2021 and Spring 2022 semesters. In Spring 2021, the percentages of students who met the Approaches Grade Level standard was 47%, 31% met the Meets Grade Level grade, and only 4% met the Masters Grade Level standard. In the Spring of 2022, 50% of students met the Approaches

Grade Level standard, 35% met the Meets Grade Level standard, and only 5% met the Masters Grade Level standard.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

Argued in Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital is that students in poverty often lack the cultural capital necessary for academic success. Upper-class families have greater access to cultural resources and are, thus, more likely to achieve academic success (Jin et al., 2022). Cultural capital includes not just financial resources but also exposure to books, academic language, and structured learning environments that foster reading proficiency. For many Hispanic students from low-income backgrounds, access to high-quality literacy resources may be limited due to underfunded schools, fewer books in the home, and parents who may not have had strong educational opportunities themselves. Additionally, if parents work multiple jobs or lack formal education, they may have less time or ability to engage in reading activities that build early literacy skills. The absence of these forms of cultural capital places Hispanic students at an academic disadvantage compared to peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, contributing to lower reading readiness upon entering college.

Also important to the findings of this multiyear investigation is Critical Race Theory in which the manner in which systemic inequities create and reinforce racial and economic disparities in education is addressed. Many Hispanic students grow up in historically marginalized communities where schools receive less funding, have overcrowded classrooms, and lack access to qualified teachers and advanced coursework—all of which negatively affect literacy development. Systemic barriers such as language discrimination, lack of bilingual resources, and racial biases in curriculum and assessment further contribute to the gap in reading proficiency. These disparities are not just a reflection of individual effort but rather the result of a long history of structural inequities that place Hispanic students in poverty at a disadvantage before they even begin college.

Implications for Policy and for Practice

Based upon the findings of this study, several implications for policy can be made. First, more resources need to be directed toward students of color, specifically Hispanic students. Federal and state education policies should allocate targeted funding for literacy programs, dual-language resources, and intervention strategies tailored to Hispanic students' needs. Second, more resources need to be directed toward students in poverty. Economic status plays a critical role in reading readiness, as students from low-income backgrounds often attend schools with fewer resources, outdated textbooks, and less access to trained literacy specialists. Increased funding should be allocated to high-poverty schools serving large

Hispanic populations. Most beneficial would be to have smaller class sizes for more individualized instruction, expanded access to technology (e.g., e-books, literacy apps) to support reading development, and tutoring and mentoring programs that provide additional reading support outside the classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon the findings of this investigation, several recommendations for future research can be made. First, researchers are encouraged to take a longitudinal approach to analyzing Hispanic student college readiness, particularly focusing on how early literacy experiences shape academic outcomes over time. Researchers should examine how access to quality early childhood education, bilingual literacy development, and K-12 instructional practices affect the student reading proficiency. Moreover, researchers are encouraged to address the effectiveness of interventions, such as dual-language programs, culturally responsive curricula, and community literacy initiatives. This research investigation should be extended to other states, as it is not known the degree to which findings from this multiyear study are generalizable to Hispanic students in other states.

Researchers are also encouraged to extend this investigation to other areas such as mathematics, writing, and science. Moreover, as the results of this study are limited to high school students, research should be conducted at the other grade levels at which the STAAR is administered. Finally, researchers should examine the relationship of other student demographics, such as at-risk status, Emergent Bilingual status, and special education status, with reading.

Conclusion

Addressed in this multiyear investigation was the relationship of economic status to the reading college readiness of Hispanic high school students in Texas for two years before and four years after the pandemic. Revealed was the presence of strong differences in reading college-readiness between Hispanic students who were economically disadvantaged and Hispanic students who were not in poverty. Also determined were very low percentages of Hispanic students who met the Master's Grade Level standard. Finally noted were the very high percentages of Hispanic students who met the Texas criteria for being in poverty.

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