

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT IN NORTH TEXAS AFFLUENT SCHOOLS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Jon Lawson, for his endless support throughout my doctoral journey. I could not have achieved any of this if it were not for your love, understanding, and encouragement. On days when I felt overwhelmed and defeated, you assured me that you would take care of everything at home so that I could put all of my energy into my schoolwork. For that, I am very grateful.

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ABSTRACT

This ex post facto, causal-comparative quantitative study examined the relationship between student socioeconomic status and academic achievement at affluent North Texas schools. Social constructionism, critical theory, and cultural and social reproduction theory were used as the foundation of the study. Using archival data from the 2018-2019 school year for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in mathematics and reading, scores for students identified as economically disadvantaged were compared with scores of affluent students. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze test scores. The t-tests revealed that there were differences in STAAR scores between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students. Chi-square tests of independence, descriptive statistics, and multivariate linear and logistic regressions were used to ascertain significant group differences. The analyses presented results that showed a significant association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Economically disadvantaged students scored significantly lower than affluent students in both mathematics and reading. To analyze results further, economically disadvantaged students and affluent students were compared within their race/ethnic group. These analyses yielded the same results. Economically disadvantaged students in one race/ethnic group scored lower in mathematics and reading than affluent students in the same race/ethnic group. Analyses also showed that socioeconomic status was the most significant predictor of student score on the Mathematics and Reading STAAR when compared to race/ethnicity, gender, and grade

level. A call for additional studies is warranted to examine why economically disadvantaged students score lower on STAAR than affluent students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students who are identified as low-income, high poverty, and high risk are at a disadvantage in our country. One of our country's charters, the Declaration of Independence, states that all men are created equal, but the founders of our country considered *men* to be White men only, not people of color or women (Noddings, 2012, p. 199). When a country is built on a foundation of inequality, how can lower socioeconomic students be expected to emancipate from the power that keeps them from being equal to their affluent counterparts? The issue of equity between people identified as economically disadvantaged and the upper class still exists today in society. Students identified as economically disadvantaged are "made to be invisible" (Greene, 1995, p. 32). Economic disadvantage affects individuals of all backgrounds but people of color are disproportionately subject to its effects. The inequality in this country makes students who live in poverty feel insignificant and nonexistent. Inequality in schools reproduces the inequality in society (Drake, 2017).

This study focuses on student academic achievement in affluent schools where the student population is mostly White. The study investigates the relationship between student socioeconomic status and student academic achievement in predominately White affluent schools in one school district in North Texas. The researcher seeks to analyze the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement in North Texas affluent schools and develop deeper insight into the factors influencing low-socioeconomic student academic achievement in affluent schools.

Background of Study

There are many different ways that schools can be categorized. For example, schools can be sorted by their socio-economic characteristics (Posen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2015). Schools located in wealthy neighborhoods with students whose families are considered to be in the middle-upper to upper economic class are referred to as high-income, advantaged, and/or affluent schools. Jacob and Lefgren (2007) found that teachers at affluent schools, when compared to teachers at low-income schools, have more years of teaching experience, are more likely to have a degree from a prestigious university, and have earned a degree beyond a Bachelor's Degree. Schools located in wealthy neighborhoods have classrooms that are equipped with the latest technology, have rigorous curriculum and enrichment classes (Orr & Rogers, 2011). Parents of students who attend affluent schools usually hold positions of power, actively participate in local politics, and are members of organizations that allow their voices to be heard (Orr & Rogers, 2011). Students who attend affluent schools have access to more resources and networking opportunities that help open more doors for their future and gain acceptance into prestigious colleges and universities (Harris, 2007; Orr & Rogers, 2011).

In my teaching career, I have taught in two different schools that were on two different sides of the economic spectrum. My first teaching position was at a Title 1 school. On this campus, 95 percent of the students were on free-and-reduced lunch, 26 different languages were spoken on campus, and the majority of the students were African-American and Hispanic/Latino. My second teaching position was on a campus located in an affluent community. Three percent of the students were on free-and-reduced

lunch, and the majority of the students were White. Working on two campuses that had different demographics, climates, and cultures, I observed the similarities and differences between a school located in a low-income community and a school in an affluent community.

On the Title 1 campus, most of the students lived in the apartments behind the school, and many of their parents did not own cars. In the three years that I taught there, I had one student who lived in a house. There were active gangs in the surrounding neighborhood. Parents usually worked two to three jobs in order to make ends meet. Teachers tutored students before and after school and during their lunch, taught enrichment classes, and attended community nights. The teachers focused on teaching their students in a way that their students could be successful.

On the campus located in an affluent community, most of the students' families held positions of power and privilege. Their parents were attorneys, doctors, board members, and entrepreneurs. When I was hired at the school, I had to adjust to the difference between my new campus and my old one. I was used to students coming to school hungry with holes in their shoes or tired because they had to take care of their siblings the night before. I was used to buying classroom supplies from my paycheck. I was used to getting to school early and working until dark because my students were struggling with the curriculum. On my previous campus, if a student didn't understand a concept, I would tutor them before and after school and during my lunch. On the affluent campus, I would tell parents that their child was struggling and they would immediately hire a tutor. When I switched campuses, I was a bit overwhelmed with the amount of

parental involvement on campus and the funds that were available to me to use in my classroom, which were provided by parents.

Even in the abundance of affluence, there were students who were not as economically privileged as most of the others. Teachers often talked negatively about the low-socioeconomic status (SES) students on the campus. They commented on the changing demographics and made remarks like, “Apartment kids are bringing down our campus test scores” or “We did not have these academic problems before they built all of those apartments.” I was taken aback one time when I went to my student’s previous teacher to ask for help. One of my students was struggling in math, so I went to her first-grade teacher to gain insight on how I could help the student. The teacher informed me that the student moved into the community in the middle of the year, and she was an ‘apartment kid.’ I was shocked that the teacher would attribute a student’s learning ability to his/her socioeconomic status. That conversation, and other conversations following, are what led me to my current study. I wanted to know if students who were identified as economically disadvantaged were actually scoring lower than their affluent counterparts.

I have seen first-hand how teachers have lower expectations for low SES students and how schools are structured to make sure those students maintain their societal status. All students should be held to high standards regardless of socioeconomic status, culture, and/or family background. As a result of my experiences on two separate campuses, I wanted to research other schools in North Texas to see if there was an association between student socioeconomic background and student academic performance and success at affluent schools.

Another important aspect to consider is my own. My father joined the military after he graduated from high school, and the highest level of education that my mother received was an associate's degree. My family grew up in the U.S. Virgin Islands and moved to Texas because they wanted their children to have access to a better education. Our family was part of the lower-middle socioeconomic class. I grew up in an affluent city, but I did not live in the affluent part of the city. My parents owned our house, and my sisters and I attended the neighborhood elementary school. I was in the racial/ethnic minority from kindergarten to twelfth grade. All of the schools I attended were predominately White. In junior high and high school, I was enrolled in honors classes, and I was usually the only Black student in my classes. As an adult, I'm married to an attorney and our combined household income puts us in the upper-middle socioeconomic class. The study's focus on predominately White affluent schools is influenced by my childhood experiences as well as my teaching experiences.

Statement of the Problem

According to Milner (2010), "schools can structurally produce and perpetuate inequity, poverty, and cultures of apathy while pretending to be designed to be the opposite" (p. 27). This reproduction can be seen in different aspects of the school. Students identified as low-socioeconomic are more likely to have low academic achievement (Hirsch, 2007). Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are also aware of their social difference, and its limitations, and teacher behaviors toward them (Horgan, 2007; Sutton, Smith, Dearden, & Middleton, 2007).

Educational policy makers have made attempts to close the achievement gap between low socioeconomic students and affluent students, but they have failed in scope

and practice (Arnold, 2016). The No Child Left Behind Act is an example of a failed attempt to close the gap. The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act was to guarantee that every child was taught and held accountable for the same standards. High-stakes testing shifted educators and school leaders focus from student learning needs to accountability (Harris, 2007). The achievement gap that the No Child Left Behind Act was attempting to close has actually widened (Bates, 2017; Fullan, 2015; Keeley, 2015; Piketty, 2014).

There is existing literature on the relationship between race/ethnicity and academic achievement in affluent schools (Drake, 2017; Ispa-Landa, 2013; Matrevec, 2011; Rury & Rife, 2018). There is a lack of quantitative research related to socioeconomic status and academic achievement on affluent campuses, especially affluent schools with a predominately White student population. This research will help clarify our understanding of the association between student socioeconomic status and student academic achievement in predominately White affluent schools, specifically in North Texas.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is based on critical and social theories: social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), critical theory (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008), and cultural and social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1973). Social constructionism is used to explain how social interactions help people construct meaning of their world. Critical theory draws from the work of Karl Marx (1848) and his focus on social class structure. Cultural and social reproduction theory originates from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1973) and his criticism of France's educational system's reproduction of class structure. All three

theories work together to inform the research on the relationship between socioeconomic status and student academic success in affluent schools (See Figure 1).

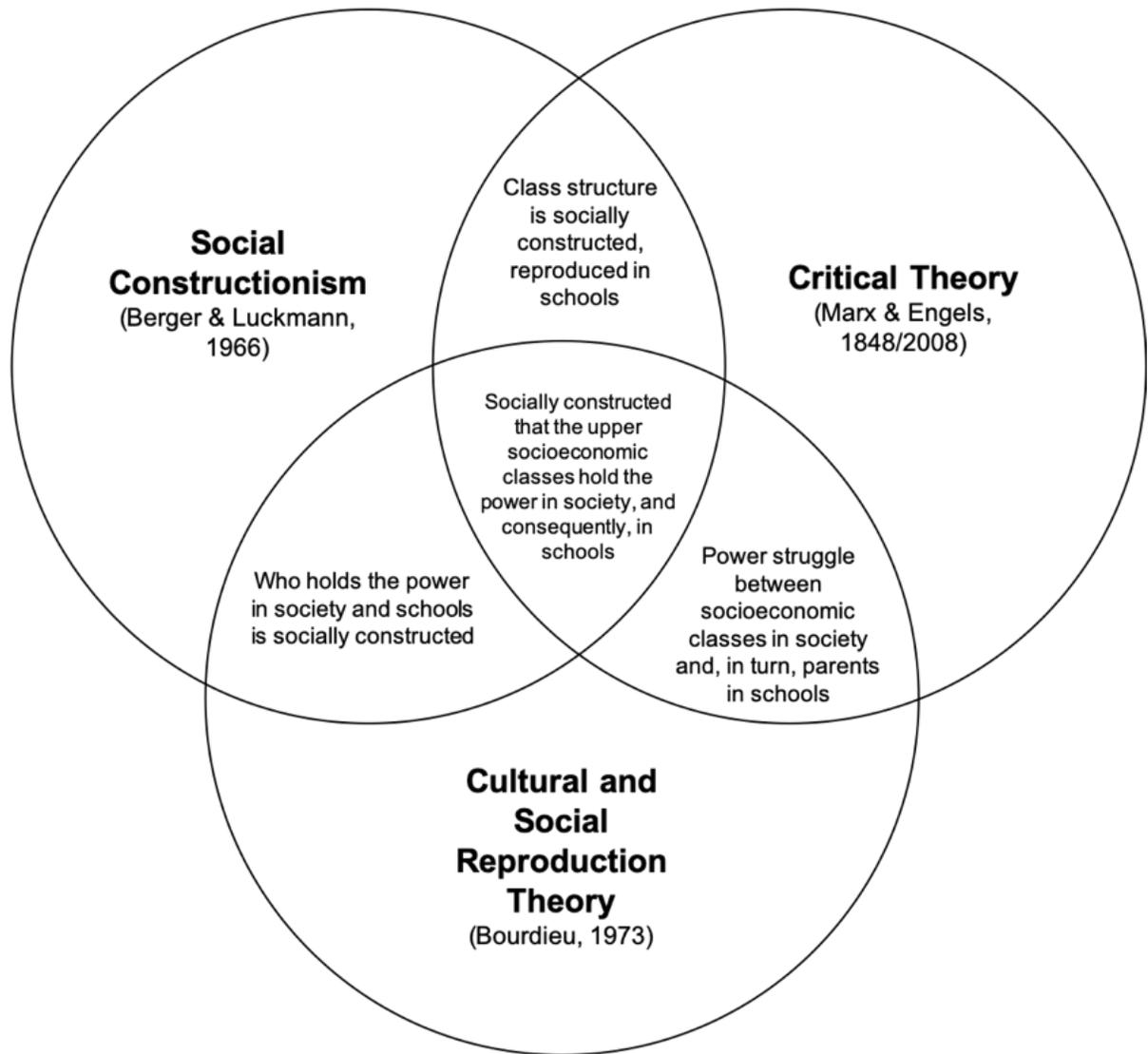


Figure 1. The Interrelationship of the Theories in the Study

Social constructionism. The theory of social constructionism stems from Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) work on social constructs. Social constructionism is a focus “on how knowledge is socially constructed in communities” (Hruby, 2001, p. 58). We share

our world with others, interacting and communicating with them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It is the way that people explain the world that we live in (Gergen, 2008a). People make meaning of their world through interactions. Humans construct their thinking, learning, beliefs, and self-identity through interaction with others (Lucey, 2010). Socialization takes place in social structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann found that socialization is unsuccessful when it is impaired due to a biological or social accident. For instance, a child's socialization may be compromised because he/she is born with a physical disability that is "socially stigmatized or because of a stigma based on social definitions" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 184). In this study, for example, a student identified as economically disadvantaged may be subject to negative perceptions and deficit thinking, which illustrates the social constructs of the teachers.

Language is critical to human society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). People need to interact in order to communicate. If humans were meant to derive meaning of the world individually, there would be no communication (Gergen, 2008b). Words that humans create in their minds have no meaning until they are shared with another person and affirmed (Gergen, 2008b). For example, when a baby first begins to speak, his/her language is nonsensical. No one understands the baby's communication, but the language makes sense in the baby's mind. The baby's language is useless because he/she is the only one who can understand it. According to Gergen (2008b), if others do not acknowledge a person's language as communication, the person's language is considered to be nonsense.

Social constructionism effects the way that we view the world (Crotty, 2015). Humans construct meaning through interactions with people whom they encounter on their journey, without the intention to do so (Hruby, 2001). Lock and Strong (2010) found that humans are constructed through shared experiences with others. Social constructs created through the interaction with others form our society. The way that humans interpret the world produces “rules, norms, identities, concepts, and institutions” (Schneider & Sidney, 2009, p. 106). According to the theory of social constructionism, all things that we give meaning to were constructed at one time through our interactions with others. The construction of our presence in the world is a construction that involves interactions with others (Freire, 1998). For instance, money is socially constructed (Elder-Vass, 2012). Money only has value because humans have given it value. Otherwise it would be worthless paper. Gender is also socially constructed. Social expectations and how a specific gender should act or behave is constructed by society (Elder-Vass, 2012). Gender expectations differ between civilizations. What is acceptable for women in the United States might be different than what is acceptable for women in other parts of the country. Gender expectations also change as the society changes. Poverty is also social construct. I might consider myself to be poor, but someone else may not recognize my financial situation as one of a poor person because poverty looks very different to him/her– how can I be considered poor when I have clothes, shelter, and food? (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

With these understanding of social constructs in mind, it’s important to note that education is also a social process. Students depend on the school’s culture to direct their behavior and understand their school experience. The way that humans make meaning

through relationships define who they are as individuals (Gergen, 2008b). Berger and Luckmann (1966) noted:

Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality and, like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. (p. 194)

Students construct meaning of their place in the classroom and, consequently, their place in society from interactions with peers and school authorities, such as teachers and campus administrators (Dewey, 1916). There are different types of relationships present in the school setting. Social relations of education include the vertical relationship between teachers and students and the horizontal relationship between students (Finke, 1993). It is through interactions with teachers and students that “children find out what the culture is about and how it conceives of the world” (Bruner, 2008, p. 169). Students learn cooperatively through their relationships (Gergen, 2008a) and through real-life situations. Students learn by doing rather than merely receiving information from a teacher (Bruner, 2008; Dewey, 1916; Haberman, 2010). According to Dewey (2019), “true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of social situations in which he finds himself” (p. 35).

Classroom practices have an effect on the way that students construct their realities (Goudeau & Croizet, 2016). In this view, student interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators aid in the construction of student self-image and shape student behavior and experiences. Student self-worth and expectations for the future are

influenced by their social interactions in school (Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018). For instance, if teacher perceptions of students are based on student academic success, rather than student character and talents, students will begin to construct meaning of their self-worth by attaching it to their academic success (Harris, 2007). School experiences help students learn how to “use the tools of meaning making and reality construction, to better adapt to the world in which they find themselves and to help in the process of changing it as required” (Bruner, 2008, p. 169). Hence, students are “socially constructed participants in their shared lives” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 10).

Critical theory. Critical theory is grounded in the work of Karl Marx. Marx was concerned with “what people produced socially, and how they could become estranged from the products of their social interactions” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 85). He wanted to understand which “forms of social organization optimize or constrict the possibilities between people” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 86). Critical theory relies on the organization of social classes. Class is a social structure that aims to maintain the status quo of economic differences in society (Bates, 2017). It is composed of social arrangements between the haves and have-nots, even though the haves have more than enough to sustain (Bates, 2017). According to Marx and Engels (1848/2008), society is composed of two groups: the bourgeoisie and the proletarians. The bourgeoisie society is the ruling class, and the working class is the proletariat. The bourgeoisie holds the power in society and influences the dominant culture. Marx’s vision saw the bourgeoisie “remaking the world in its own image” (Banfield, 2014, p. 6). The bourgeoisie preserves its privilege by supporting judgements that unequally distribute economic resources and opportunities (Bates, 2017).

Some members of the bourgeoisie secede and join the proletarians. The bourgeoisie is constantly battling the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie itself, so the bourgeoisie enlists the proletarians for help (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008). The bourgeois society shares their “elements of political and general education” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008, p. 47) with the proletariat which gives the proletarians the weapons they need to be able to fight the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is threatened by the proletarians (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008), so the bourgeoisie work to ensure the power of labor is contained (Banfield, 2014). The class struggle causes some members of the ruling class to dissociate themselves from the bourgeoisie and join the proletariat, “the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008, p. 48).

The existence of the bourgeoisie depends on capital. The bourgeoisie is constantly transforming production (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008) and works to maintain the social conditions in order for production to continue. Marx and Engels found that as modern industry develops and expands, the demand for laborers increase. Therefore, the bourgeois society’s existence relies on the proletarians. The bourgeoisie has developed a “class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital” (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008, p. 43). Marx and Engels also mentioned that education transforms children of the working class into instruments of commerce and labor.

The bourgeoisie and proletariat division of society can still be seen in classrooms today. Classroom practices have an effect on student self-recognition and perception of social class and his/her place in society. Class prejudice is “socially constructed from childhood – deeply ingrained in how we think; they cannot easily be overcome” (Bates,

2017, p. 9). Goudeau and Croizet (2016) found that classroom practices, such as raising of a hand to show completion of an assignment, make social inequalities more pronounced and visible. Marx and Engels (1848/2008) stated that social conditions under which students are educated at school are influenced by society (p. 59). Classrooms are structured to preserve inequality (Bates, 2017). Rather than “empowering and emancipating children,” schools “marginalize, exploit, repress, and alienate – reifying social beliefs and structure that uphold economic disparities” (Bates, 2017, p. 3).

The education system sustains social inequality. Education must be rescued from the ruling, upper and upper-middle classes (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008). Banfield (2014) stated “education is class struggle” (p. 21), but Marx and Engels (1848/2008) indicated that “every class struggle is a political struggle” (p. 47). Therefore, education is a political struggle.

Cultural and social reproduction theory. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of cultural and social reproduction stems from his critique of the educational system in France and its “reproduction of the structure of power relationship and symbolic relationships between classes, by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these classes” (p. 257). Bourdieu explained how society is divided into three classes: lower class, middle class, and upper class. The lower class is made up of blue-collar workers “agricultural professions, workers, and small tradespeople” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 262). The middle class consists of working professionals such as “heads and employees of industry and business” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 262) and “intermediate office staff” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 263). The upper class is considered to be “higher office staff and professionals” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 263). Social

classes exist because people with power (upper class) wield their power to stay in control and make others feel insignificant. Bourdieu (2013) stated the following about the upper class:

They strive to establish that agents recognize the existence of classes differentiated according to their prestige, that they can assign individuals to these classes based on more or less explicit criteria, and that these individuals think of themselves as members of classes. (p. 294)

Capital. Capital separates one class from another. According to Bourdieu (1986), there are three kinds of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. The possession of economic, cultural, and social capital is how social classes are able to exist and sustain (Bourdieu, 2013). Social classes are distributed based on economic power as well as economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973).

Economic capital determines one's socioeconomic status. This capital is the "capacities for material appropriation of the instruments of material or cultural production" (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 295). Economic capital can be converted into money and property (Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, income contributes to economic capital. The more money and property that one possesses, the higher his/her economic capital. Other types of capital can be turned into economic capital. Cultural capital and social capital can both be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural capital is comprised of cultural activities, exposures, and experiences which contribute to academic success. Cultural capital is "institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16). According to Bourdieu, there are

three states of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The embodied state affects the mind and body, the objectified state consists of cultural goods (such as books and media), and the institutionalized state involves academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is considered to be the dominant culture in society (Jaeger & Breen, 2016). The more cultural activities one partakes in, the higher his/her status in society. People in the upper classes are more likely to participate in sophisticated cultural activities “such as reading, and theatre, concert, art-cinema, and museum attendance” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 263). Investing in cultural capital can aid in the movement within a social hierarchy (Jaeger & Breen, 2016).

Social capital consists of relationships that people make and the groups into which they are accepted. Social capital is composed of social connections and group membership (Bourdieu, 1986). Groups have different levels of prestige or eliteness which is set by other members in the group. Socialites get their prestige by choosing who does and does not receive entrance into elite groups (Bourdieu, 2013). The more difficult it is to become a member of a particular group, the more exclusive and elite the group is considered to be in society (Bourdieu, 2013).

Social reproduction and education. Social reproduction occurs when parents transmit their cultural capital to their children (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986; Jaeger & Breen, 2016). Parents begin investing cultural capital in their children from birth (Jaeger & Breen, 2016). Parents decide how much cultural capital to invest in their children by determining their return on investment. Parents modify “their investments in cultural capital on the basis of what they believe to be the educational payoffs of past investments” (Jaeger & Breen, 2016, p. 1082). Once the cultural capital is invested, the

children use their cultural capital to their benefit in school. They then turn their cultural capital into academic performance (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986; Jaeger & Breen, 2016). The higher the cultural capital at home, the higher the child's academic success at school which contributes to the child's future socioeconomic success.

Cultural capital, in part, explains the unequal academic achievement of students from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1986). Language is an important component of cultural capital and is the basis for all knowledge. Language is the foundation that allows students to understand more complex structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu and Passeron found that language depends on the family structure and, in the early years of schooling, student ability to understand and use language is the basis of teacher assessments. This explains why students with more developed language skills seek and obtain higher levels of education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The educational impact that families have on building social capital in a child is tremendous. Students whose families expose them to art, such as museums, books, theaters, and trips, are more likely to be successful in school (Bourdieu, 1973) because they possess more of the cultural capital that is valued by society and, consequently, schools. When a student converts his/her cultural capital into academic performance, teacher perceptions of the student become more positive which leads to greater teacher involvement in the student's academic success, better grades, and consequently a better learning environment (Jaeger & Breen, 2016).

The educational system reproduces and maintains the class structure and power relations in society by contributing to the reproduction of cultural capital valued by society. Schools determine student advantage based on the student's social origin even

though the educational background and experiences of a student's family are not determinants of student work ethic, behavior, or academic performance (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu (1973) stated that the educational system contributes to the imbalanced division of power and privileges by reproducing class structure and legitimizing the dominant culture while hiding the fact that it does so. Schools are intended to be institutions where students are given the same opportunity to be academically successful regardless of their background. But in reality, schools legitimize the dominant culture by securing the dominant culture's access to cultural and social capital that deprived groups are unable to acquire (Bourdieu, 1973).

Significance of Study

The rationale and significance of this study is demonstrated by the growing number of racially, ethnically, and economically diverse students in America. The number of students from diverse backgrounds has grown in recent years and continues to grow rapidly in U.S. schools (Arnold, 2016). Student academic success is determined by student motivation and performance, but it is also determined by a student's economic background (Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandembroucke 2014). The phenomenon under investigation in this study is the association between socioeconomic status and student academic achievement in affluent schools in North Texas. School leaders are encountering more student diversity than before, and they require data to inform their decisions about school policy and practices that affect the academic success of all students, regardless of economic background.

Race and socioeconomic status are related within the context of society and schooling. Students who are identified as economically disadvantaged are

disproportionally minorities, and the achievement gap between minority students, especially Black students, and White students is one of the most widely studied topics in educational research (Covay Minor, 2016; Farkas, 2004; Mckown, 2013). Therefore, this study focuses on the achievement gap between low-SES students and affluent students; more specifically, low-SES students who attend affluent schools. Income segregation between schools is getting worse (Owens, Reardon, & Jencks, 2016), and school SES contributes to the achievement gap between the rich and the poor (Kotok, 2017). Low-SES students who attend affluent schools are at an advantage because they are more likely to have highly-qualified and experienced teachers and more access to funds and resources than students who attend low-income schools (Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2014). This research explores the variance in academic achievement between low-SES students and affluent students who attend high-income elementary schools.

While there is extensive research on the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Bannerjee, 2015; Gabriel et. al, 2016; White et. al, 2016), there is little research on the association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement at affluent schools. The importance of whether or not socioeconomic status is associated with student academic achievement in affluent schools is imperative to the education profession, especially for educators and school leaders who work at affluent schools. The results of this study may also be helpful for the administrators in the school district where the study is taking place as they analyze their STAAR data and, subsequently, their teaching practices. In order to understand if socioeconomic status affects student academic achievement at affluent schools, it was essential that a quantitative study be conducted.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

Research Question 1a: Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status?

Research Question 2: Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

Research Question 2a: Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status?

Definition of Terms

Affluent schools, in this study, refers to schools with less than 20 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch programs.

Deficit thinking, in this study, is a mental model that occurs when a person places blame for a student's lack of motivation and academic achievement on their social class rather than the educational and social system of class oppression that created inherent advantages or disadvantages (Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018; Valencia, 1997).

Self-fulfilling prophecy, in this study, refers to a teacher's expectation about a student, initiating a sequence of events that causes the student to behave as if the initial false expectation were true (Madon et al., 2018).

Social class is an informal division of hierarchy in society. In this study, social class consists of upper class, middle/working class, and lower class. The upper class is the top five percent of income distribution and lower class is the bottom 40 percent of income distribution.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is the social standing of a group or person. It is a combination of education, income, and occupation. In this study, low socioeconomic status refers to students who are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch programs in the school system.

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is a series of standardized assessments given to public school students in grades three through twelve. It assesses student achievement and knowledge of curriculum from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). STAAR is administered once a year in the spring semester.

Student achievement is the measure of student performance on learned material. For the purpose of this study, student achievement was measured by student performance on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), in reading and mathematics. Student performance was comprised of STAAR scale scores and performance levels.

Title 1 is a federally funded education program. The amount of funds allocated to a school are based on the number of students who are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch programs. Schools who qualify for Title 1 funds must have at least 40 percent of students identified as low-income.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The researcher assumed that the participants were honest about their economic status when they filled out enrollment paperwork submitted to the district. The researcher assumed that the school district maintained both academic and personal records on the students in the study. The researcher assumed that the school district

quantified data needed on socioeconomic status, demographics, and student achievement on the STAAR.

This study was limited to students identified as economically disadvantaged in grades four to six who were enrolled in affluent public elementary schools in one school district in North Texas, which might have caused the predictive power of the analysis to be weaker. It was also possible that statistically significant differences may not be found due to the small sample size. Student data was limited to student scores on the STAAR, in reading and mathematics. Another limitation was that standardized test scores might not be an accurate representation of student knowledge, since the scores are based on student achievement on a cumulative test given once a year.

Summary

This study investigates socioeconomic status and how it is related to academic achievement for students who attend affluent schools. It compares the academic achievement of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and the association that economic status has with academic success. It also examines what other factors might influence academic success.

In Chapter One of this study, the following information was presented: introduction to the problem, background to the study, statement of problem, theoretical and conceptual framework, significance of study, definition of terms, and assumptions and limitations of the study. In the next section, a review of the literature is conducted in order to see how the history of schooling in America and current schooling practices contribute to the relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to explore affluent schools and the relationship between student socioeconomic status and academic achievement. The overarching research question is: What association, if any, does student socioeconomic status have with academic achievement in affluent schools?

This chapter includes a review of literature related to the structure of the education system, individuals identified as low-income, and affluent schools. I look at school reforms, specifically the No Child Left Behind Act, and how reforms have impacted classroom instruction. I investigate how schools perpetuate and maintain the class structure in society. I then turn to how classroom practices affect student identity and academic success and the impact of deficit thinking on student performance. I conclude with research on affluent schools, including the influence of parents and resources on student academic success.

No Child Left Behind Act

School reforms, specifically the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), contribute to the growing divide in the academic achievement between low-income and high-income students. Despite policymakers' efforts, national policy initiatives have not closed the academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor (Mickelson, Giersch, Stearns, & Moller, 2013; Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011). Many reformers have tried to improve the school system by making small changes in hopes that it will be "transformed into a modern, well-functioning system" (Papert, 1991, p. 21). They focus on surface issues, such as funding, the school leadership team's role, parent involvement,

management, choice, and other reforms instead of focusing on pedagogy (Haberman, 2010). In turn, school reforms end up hurting children and failing to improve schools. Per Mickelson et al. (2013), an example of a major educational policy failure was the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB was implemented in January of 2002, under the presidency of George W. Bush. NCLB was concerned with eliminating the achievement gap between White students and Black and Latino students. Bush hoped the NCLB would end the racism behind low expectations (Orfield & Lee, 2005). The act required that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other groups, make yearly progress toward proficiency standards determined by the state. Under the NCLB, student academic achievement was to be measured by standardized test scores (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007). The goals of NCLB were to achieve equity and excellence, and policy makers planned on reaching those goals through “market principles of choice, competition, standards and accountability,” but it did not achieve either goal (Mickelson, et al., 2013, p. 3). Instead, NCLB left behind the students that the policy makers were allegedly trying to help.

NCLB was passed in part because conservative critics claimed that the educational system needed standards and accountability (Mickelson, et al., 2013). Consequently, NCLB took the attention away from access and resources and turned it toward accountability (Harris, 2007; Ravitch, 2010) despite the lack of literature that policies grounded in standards and accountability accomplish equity (Heilig & Nichols, 2013). Since the implementation of NCLB, schools are judged solely by their scores on standardized tests, and some school districts tie teacher salaries to student test scores (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007). Under NCLB, schools face penalties when their students

perform poorly on state-mandated standardized tests; but penalizing schools leads to schools raising student scores without actually increasing student knowledge and skills (Chiang, 2009). It also leads some teachers and administrators to resort to cheating in order to meet accountability standards (Ravitch, 2010). On the other hand, proponents of high-stakes testing argue that external incentives motivate students and educators to improve and rid the educational system of underperforming teachers (Harris, 2007). But others dispute that teachers cannot be held accountable for low scores attained by low-income students because of societal factors that affect student academic performance which are out of teachers' control (Harris, 2007).

The focus on standards, accountability, and high-stakes testing has been unsuccessful in fostering student learning and development (Chambers, Huggins, Locke, & Fowler, 2014). With the implementation of high-stakes standardized testing, student success is measured by performance on standardized tests; if you pass, you graduate and if you fail, you lose the benefits that come with earning a diploma (Harris, 2007). Yet Bowles and Gintis (1976) found that test scores contribute little to a person's economic success. High-stakes testing takes attention away from student motivation, needs, and interests and turns focus towards the ability of students to perform well on standardized tests (Harris, 2007; Loveless 2013), even though testing is a narrow measure of student ability (Giersch, 2018). Accountability is "dumbing down" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 13) schools and causing teachers to narrow curriculum and focus on tested standards, ignoring other important subjects, such as social studies, science, and art (Ravitch, 2010). In the process, teachers are failing to teach to the students.

NCLB attempted to be a civil rights effort that has actually disadvantaged students, especially students of color (Arnold, 2016). The nation's obsession with reforms and movements (Ravitch, 2010) keeps us from identifying what is really needed to improve schools. Reforms will only work if they are supported by pedagogy tailored for the targeted district or school; not a widespread, one-size-fits-all movement (Haberman, 2010). For a lasting change to take place, reformers need to restructure schools or else the large parts that the reformers failed to change will cause the little parts they did change to go back to the way they were (Papert, 1991).

History of Testing in Texas

The issue of the school system failing students identified as low-income and students of color is heightened by the focus on high-stakes standardized testing. Texas was a pioneer in the high-stakes testing culture. According to Lorence (2010), "Texas was one of the first states to implement a state-wide accountability system providing data evaluating the performance of all public schools in the state" (p. 19). State-wide testing began in 1980 when Texas adopted Texas Assessment of Basic Skills, or TABS. This criterion-referenced test assessed basic skills in mathematics, reading, and writing in grades three, five, and nine (Cruse & Twing, 2000). Students in ninth grade who failed TABS had to retake the test, but student performance on TABS was not a deciding factor in whether or not a student would graduate from high school. In 1986, Texas replaced TABS with TEAMS, Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (Neumann, 2013). Per Cruse & Twing (2000), rigor was increased with TEAMS, and students were held responsible for their scores, not just the schools. They reported that TEAMS increased the number of students tested, and it required schools to offer remediation

programs for students who failed. TEAMS assessed students in mathematics, reading and writing in grades one, three, five, seven, nine, and eleven. Under TABS, students who failed the test were still allowed to graduate; but with the implementation of TEAMS, students in grade 11 had to pass the test in order to graduate the following year. TEAMS ended in 1989 with the passage of TAAS, Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (Neumann, 2013). TAAS was implemented because the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education wanted students to achieve at higher levels (Cruse & Twing, 2000). TAAS was a criterion-based test that measured content covered in each grade level. TAAS scores were made available to the public. Policy makers thought accountability systems would raise academic performance because teachers and administrators would not want their school to have a low rating (Lorence, 2010). Students were required to pass TAAS in grade ten, previously they were required to pass in grade 11, so that teachers had more time to get failing students on-level before graduation. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) replaced TAAS in 2003 (Neumann, 2013).

In 2011, Texas adopted the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR (Lorence, 2010). Like the prior tests, STAAR is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Students are tested in grades three to twelve in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. In grades three to twelve, every student takes STAAR mathematics and reading. In grade four, students take STAAR Writing, and in grade five, students take STAAR Science. STAAR is the first timed assessment in Texas testing history with students given a maximum of four hours to complete each test, unless students qualify for extra time.

STAAR is a paper test but can be taken online if students receive online accommodations. Each test is given on separate days, and an alternative test is given to students receiving special education services who meet certain requirements. STAAR report cards are given to each public school in the state of Texas, and schools receive a rating ranging from A to F. This study used STAAR, the current test adoption, to evaluate student academic achievement.

STAAR has been a point of contention among parents, students, educators, and school leaders. Some argue that standardized tests measure a limited range of knowledge and skills, are not accurate representations of student knowledge, and restrict student responses with multiple-choice questions (Ravitch, 2010). Another critique of STAAR is that meeting the basic standards of the assessments has proved challenging for many students, especially economically disadvantaged students (McGown & Slate, 2019). Due to their comparability of scores and objective nature, most researchers use standardized tests scores in their research (Nicks, Martin, Thibodeaux, & Young, 2018). Even though STAAR is controversial, it is the one assessment that every public-school student in Texas must take regularly and is used for accountability across the state. It is for this reason that STAAR was used in this study to measurement student academic achievement in mathematics and reading.

Students Classified as Economically Disadvantaged

Students who are identified as low-income are stigmatized in education. Being labeled low-income, high-risk, and economically disadvantaged “forces young persons to become recipients of *treatment* or *training*, sometimes from the most benevolent motives on the part of those hoping to *help*” (Greene, 1995, p. 41). Low-income students are

treated as if *they* need to be fixed, not the educational system. Students have been “socialized to fundamentally misunderstand poverty and its impact on educational outcome disparities” (Gorski, 2016, p. 379). Marginalized students have been silenced in the classrooms (Greene, 1995). They are conditioned to believe that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, that lack of family involvement on campus equates to lack of parental care about academics, and that they fail to succeed academically due to absence of grit (Gorski, 2016). Students are so accustomed to the pedagogy of poverty that when new teachers try to implement authentic learning experiences in the classroom, students are resistant to accept a different way of teaching and learning (Haberman, 2010), one that allows them to have a voice.

Low-income students face both economic and psychological barriers to education (Jury, Smeding, Stephens, Nelson, Aelenei, & Darnon, 2017). Negative stereotypes have an effect on students (Jury et al., 2017). Low-income students feel like they are judged by their teachers and are not expected to achieve as high as their affluent peers (Thiele, Pope, Singleton, Snape, & Stanistreet, 2017). Through their actions and dialogue, parents and teachers compel students to become aware of their social class differences which affects student identity and academic success (Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, & Rogers, 2012). Students also recognize their social class in relation to receiving free lunches, school supplies, care packages, school uniforms, and class funds such as field trips and parties, and they try to conceal these differences from their peers (Thiele, et al., 2017).

Students who possess capital that does not align with the dominant culture are at a disadvantage in education (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009). Teachers often misjudge

students living in poverty as not having the capital needed to succeed in school (Thiele et al., 2017). According to Batruch, Autin, and Butera (2017), when low-income students outperform their peers, teachers view them as threats to the social-class hierarchy, which keeps students from advancing to a higher social class. Some students are motivated by these negative perceptions. Thiele et al. (2017) found that low-income students were motivated by their teachers who had low expectations of them because the students wanted to prove them wrong. Other students fear that they will confirm the negative stereotypes, impacting their ability to perform to their full potential (Jury et al., 2017).

The majority of students who drop out of high school are identified as low-income and of color. Hernandez (2011) found that 70 percent of all high school dropouts lived in poverty for at least a year. In fact, the graduation gap between low-income and high-income students is higher than the graduation gap between Whites and students of color (Swanson, 2004). Students from low-income families have fewer opportunities to succeed (Jury et al., 2017) and are less likely to enter college compared to affluent students (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, 2015). Research shows that family socioeconomic status and student achievement are directly related (Bannerjee, 2015; Gabriel et. al, 2016; White et. al, 2016), and parents' socioeconomic status is a predictor of their children's future status (Lareau, 2011). Thiele et al.'s (2017) study found that underprivileged students reported that their family background and school experiences disadvantaged them, which "influenced their engagement with education, including their motivations for overcoming obstacles, achieving high grades and pursuing HE [higher education]" (p. 63). This deficit ideology is supported by research which

claims that people living in poverty are the problem (Payne, 2005), not the inequity of social structures in place.

The students are not the problem; schools are the problem (Gorski, 2016; Jenson, 2013; Jury et al., 2017; Lareau, 2011; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). Jenson (2013) argued that schools are failing students:

This is not a failure within the students. There are no poor students with deficits; there are only broken schools that need fixing. There are no failing students; there are only schools that are failing our students. There are no unmotivated students; there are only teachers whose classrooms are frightfully boring, uncaring, or irrelevant. (p. 1)

There are several factors that contribute to the inequitable conditions perpetuated by schools, such as lack of access to resources, academic tracking, classroom practices, and deficit ideology. For instance, parents experiencing poverty do not visit their children's campus as much as wealthy parents; this is not the fault of the parents but the fault of conditions inside and outside of school that work against low-income families, such as inadequate transportation or school events held during times when parents are working (Gorski, 2016). Educators and leaders in schools are quick to blame students and families in poverty for their academic performance when blame should be placed on schools.

The Struggle of Families and Communities of Low Socioeconomic Status

Many people associate people of color with poverty (Orfield, 2002). According to Orfield, middle-class minorities started moving into predominately White neighborhoods, which initiated *White flight*, or White families quickly leaving an area.

White families leaving the neighborhood caused many companies to lose a majority of their customers. Since business was slow, companies also moved out of the neighborhood. As White families leave the neighborhoods, there are housing demands that cannot be filled as quickly as people are leaving. Therefore, the housing prices drop and poorer individuals move into the community. While this explains the original common misconception that associates segregated communities and poverty with people of color (Orfield, 2002; Rury & Rife, 2018), there are strong correlations between race and socioeconomic status (Harris, 2007). For 2018, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2019) reported that 15 percent of Texas' population was living in poverty. Of that 15 percent, 27 percent were Black or African American; 29 percent were Hispanic or Latino; 9 percent were non-Hispanic White; and 10 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander. In 2017, Kids Count Data Center reported the median household income by race and ethnicity for the state of Texas. The average household income for Black or African Americans was \$47,900; Hispanic or Latinos was \$45,800; non-Hispanic White was \$97,300; and Asian or Pacific Islander was \$101,900. In this study, the focus will be on socioeconomic status, not race or ethnicity but it is important to acknowledge the correlation between the two.

We cannot eradicate poverty without first addressing the issue of classism in society (Gorski, 2008). Social class ranks have an effect on the way that individuals perceive themselves, the world, and their relationships to others (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012). For instance, social structures keep classes separated, and individuals tend to associate with the people in their social structure, keeping them from deviating away from the group (Lareau, 2011). Social classes are also

characterized by unequal access to academic resources (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Members of the upper class have “more economic resources, alongside socialization into influential networks, clubs, business opportunities that build their social and cultural capital” (Kraus & Park, 2017, p. 55). Kraus and Park found that people in the lower classes have less access to economic resources and powerful groups. This difference in conditions between the upper class and lower class creates inequalities in society (Kraus & Park, 2017). There are resources that can help eliminate classism, but the people in power choose not to use them to help people living in poverty (Gorski, 2008). For example, people living in poverty have a difficult time finding work. Many employers “believe that people who live in distressed neighborhoods are an unsuitable work force” (Orfield, 2002, p. 54). People in poverty are also faced with hostile learning and work environments, which explains why they are “distrustful of people representing institutional power and privilege” (Gorski, 2008, p. 141). If people living in poverty perceive their abilities to be inferior, then they are less likely to achieve higher goals in education and work (Ivcevic & Kaufman, 2013).

Education policy makers underestimate working class parents and portray them as needy (Bertrand, Freelon, & Rogers, 2018) and are quick to blame the achievement gap on the lack of parental involvement (Gorski, 2016). Low income parents experience a disconnect between their culture and the school because they do not feel that schools value their cultural background (Orr & Rogers, 2011). Since there is a disconnect between low-income parents and the school, low-income parents tend to hold back when it comes to advocating for their child (Lareau, 2011). Working class parents have the

ability to “advance equity in education” but a “narrow and deficit social construction of these parents is evident in education policy” (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p. 7).

Educators and school leaders can use the assets in the community to build a bridge between schools and families. Guajardo, Guajardo, Janson, and Militello (2016) suggested building relationships within the community helps in the identification of assets and asset-building. By using the assets in the community, school leaders can increase social capital in their schools which contributes to the social capital in communities. Community organizing “reconnects families, schools, and secondary associations beyond the state or marketplace” (Shirley, 2011, p. 46). There are several groups that specialize in bringing communities and schools together (Block, 2008) in order to bring about restorative change. School leaders can reach out to community-organizing groups in order to establish a relationship and create a partnership with their community. It is important for community leaders to collaborate with educators and school leaders (Warren, 2011). Community leaders, educators, and school leaders can work together to create a vision for the school that fosters student academic success and real-world readiness. Comer (2015) found success in engaging students, parents, and staff in schools by implementing his Yale School Development Program (SDP), a community-based approach. Comer has been able to implement his SDP in over 1,000 schools, and the majority of the schools showed cultural and academic achievement gains. Engaging with the community allows schools to connect with community members and “establish relationships with and live and work together for the good of community” (Haddix & Mardhani-Bayne, 2016, p. 135) which, in turn, impacts schools.

Schools and Society

“Education was not about equality, but inequality...Education’s main purpose of the social integration of a class society could be achieved only by preparing most kids for an unequal future, and by insuring their personal underdevelopment.”

Willis, 1983, p. 110

Schools were created to do specific work – to assist in “maintaining life and advancing the welfare of society” (Dewey, 1897/2019, p. 10). The educational system is an important element in the transmission of the class structure of society (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Durkheim, 2000; Giroux, 1983). Schools perpetuate society by distributing “forms of knowledge, values, language, and modes of style” that align with the dominant culture (Giroux, 1983, p. 258) and preparing students to uphold societal conditions (Durkheim, 2000, p. 61). Cultural norms in schools, which align with upper-class students’ family culture, create psychological barriers for lower-class students and widens the performance gap between social classes (Jury et al., 2017; Lucy, 2010). Every school reform implemented is for the purpose of advancing the social agenda of the dominant culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), and the educational system hides its role in reinforcing the class structure which legitimizes its products and hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1973).

In order to understand education, one must study the relationship between the educational system and social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Family experiences give advantages and disadvantages to students and promotes “social inequality across generations” (Potter & Roksa, 2013, p. 1031). Depending on a child’s family background, he/she enters schools with different types of knowledge and skills, and the

differences grow between children from different backgrounds (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). According to Lareau (2011), there are two types of upbringing: *concerted cultivation* and *natural growth* (p. 32). Upper socioeconomic classes value *concerted cultivation* which involves “structured activities, language development and reasoning at home, and active intervention in schooling” (Lareau, 2011, p. 32). *Natural growth* is when “children ‘hang out’ and play, often with relatives, are given clear directives from parents with limited negotiation, and are granted more autonomy to manage their own affairs in institutions outside of the home” (Lareau, 2011, p. 32). *Natural growth* is associated with lower socioeconomic classes. Family factors contribute to the achievement gap between social classes (Condrón, 2009). Before students enter kindergarten, they have spent five years with their family, which has a major influence on their knowledge and skills development (Potter & Roksa, 2013). Children who grow up with concerted cultivation have an advantage in society and in schools because it usually aligns with the dominant culture (Lareau, 2011). Students from higher socioeconomic classes enter schools with more knowledge and skills than students from lower socioeconomic classes (Cheadle, 2009). Inequality is reinforced when institutions give value to some cultural practices over others (Lareau, 2011), making schooling inseparable from culture and society (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004).

The idea of schools enculturating students into society and political culture began early in our nation’s history when schools received financial support from taxpayers (Goodlad et al., 2004). The origins of the allocation of power are still present in schools today. Schools are operated by the state; therefore, schools must uphold the state’s political power (Giroux, 1983, p. 258). During the origins of public schools, Thomas

Jefferson gave power to affluent “parents and community members who had the greatest stake in their success” (Shirley, 2011, p. 28). The educational system is an “enterprise of the formal political structure. Those in power can and do determine how much schooling is available for whom and even who will learn what under what rules of inclusion and exclusion” (Goodlad et al., 2004, p. 7). The moral responsibility of those who conduct schools is to society (Dewey, 1897/2019).

Many people believe in the idea of an open society and the American dream – if you work hard, you can be successful (Lareau, 2011; Orfield, 2002). But the American dream disregards that a child’s family background has an impact on their future and achieving one’s goals does not rely solely on the individual (Lareau, 2011). There are social structures in place that prevent the American dream from becoming a reality for many students. Schools have a tradition of transmitting and reproducing advantages and disadvantages to students (Lucey, 2010). These advantages and disadvantages are assigned to students based on students’ socioeconomic status. Schools “advantage high-SES students but disadvantage low-SES students” (Smeding, Stephens, Nelson, Aelenei, & Darnon, 2017, p. 29) by promoting the dominant culture. Schools have an unequal effect on “children from different social classes, and whose success varies considerably among those upon whom it has an effect, tends to reinforce and to consecrate by its sanctions the initial inequalities” (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 266). In schools, social hierarchies are converted into academic hierarchies by making academic success appear to be based on talents or skills (Bourdieu, 1973). This practice perpetuates social order. Socioeconomic segregation in the community contributes to segregation in schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005), and segregation in schools is increasing, thus causing educational

inequality (Jury et al., 2017; Orfield, 2002; Shirley, 2011). School structures are not “used to sustain a sense of agency among those they shelter; instead, they legitimate treatment, remediation, control – anything but difference and release” (Greene, 1995, p. 41).

School life should be a continuation of home life; that it should be an extension of activities that the child has experienced at home (Dewey, 1897/2019). Instead, schools reproduce the social order by transmitting culture of the dominant culture, which may be removed from the family culture (Bourdieu, 1973). Schools tend to promote independence rather than interdependence (Smeding, Stephens, Nelson, Aelenei, & Darnon, 2017). Students are encouraged to work through issues and assignments on their own instead of adopting a community-type of learning. The school experience affects student growth and development through daily school practices. Schools replicate the relationships of power and oppression in society “through competition, success and defeat in the classroom” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 106). Students whose family background does not align with the dominant culture in society and are unfamiliar with the school’s structure and standards (Goudeau & Croizet, 2016) have more difficulty with assignments. Education also allows social groups to exist and maintain (Dewey, 1916). This is important because students learn how to socialize and prepare to be citizens in society in school (Matrenec, 2011, p. 227). Classroom practices effect how students identify themselves and others (Wentzel, 2009). Everyday situations that students experience in school have an effect on their perception of the world and their place in society.

Public schooling affects student life even after graduation. The Great Recession of 2007 made the job market more competitive, changing the level of education required to secure a job; most jobs required a bachelor's degree or higher (Jury et al., 2017). The trend is moving towards more employers requiring bachelor's degrees or higher from potential employees, with a projection of 65% of employers seeking bachelor's degree-holding employees by the year 2020 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Schools greatly affect the chances of students securing careers upon graduation. Differences in social relationships in schools reflect social background of the students and likely economic positions in the future (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Public schools are key players in skill development and providing students with the qualifications they need to enter the job market (Orr & Rogers, 2011, p. 11). Inequality in schools reproduces socioeconomic inequality in society, leaving less educational opportunities and resources for the poor and working class (Drake, 2017). Social structures have an effect on school structures which directly and indirectly influences individual behaviors, contributing to one's level of educational success (Kraus & Park, 2017). Our educational system has a "legacy of inequality" (Shirley, 2011, p. 29) and injustice which is difficult to overcome (Goodlad et al., 2004). We ask if schools are safe for society more often than we ask if society is safe for schools (Goodlad et al., 2004).

Conformity. Schools prevent student individuality in preparation for life in society. Society functions because there is a level of uniformity that is reinforced by educational practices in schools (Durkheim, 2000). Students who are uniquely different are expected to conform to uniformity (Noddings, 2012, p. 195). Education is the means that society uses to prepare students to uphold societal conditions (Durkheim, 2000, p.

61). Students are meant to be shaped for uses defined by policy makers and society (Greene, 1995). Bureaucrats are concerned with holding teachers accountable for what goes on in the classroom (Papert, 1991), so they create a curriculum where they can control what is taught. Teachers and students are expected to conform and to serve the dominant voices of officials who create school policy (Greene, 1995). School policy officials decide which kinds of knowledge are important and disregard the schools' mission which is to "meet national economic and technical needs" (Greene, 1995, p. 9).

When students leave school and enter the real world, they are not expected to challenge the status quo or fight against injustice and inequity. Besides the family, "the educational system is the primary 'state apparatus' or 'disciplinary mechanism' through which assimilation takes place" (Finke, 1993, p. 15). Clycq, Ward Nouwen, and Vandembroucke (2014) found that when students enter the US public school system, the knowledge students attained from home is unlearned at school in order to condition the student to societal expectations. According to Finke (1993), "students and teachers are universalized; the method is the same whatever the historical moment, location, institution, discipline, or the gender, race, or class of the participants" (p. 16). The educational system fails and oppresses students.

Tracking. Tracking is the sorting of students by ability or choice into different academic courses (Giersch, 2018; Horn, 2002). Students are assigned to different classrooms and teachers, and they are taught different curriculum based on the assigned or selected track (Loveless, 2013). Tracking looks different depending on the campus. The way tracking is implemented on a campus reflects the school's climate, culture (Ansalone, 2009), and policies (Kelly & Price, 2011). In most American schools,

tracking is seen across all levels: high school, middle school, and elementary school. In high school, higher tracks are denoted by name, such as, advanced placement (AP), college preparatory, or honors (Giersch, 2018; Kelly & Price, 2011; Loveless, 2013). In middle school, high-track classes are referred to as pre-advanced placement (Pre-AP) or accelerated. In elementary schools, tracking happens inside each classroom when teachers put students in groups based on academic ability (Werblow, Urick, & Duesbery, 2013). On average, schools offer “five or more track levels in mathematics and three or more in science” (Kelly & Price, 2011, p. 581). Learning varies depending on the selected track (Werblow et al., 2013). High-track classes come with academic benefits, rich academic content, internalization of norms, more opportunities to learn, and more rigor than the low-track classes (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giersch, 2018; Harris & Anderson, 2012). Students enrolled in high-track classes engage in authentic, meaningful lessons and higher-level thinking skills (Harris & Anderson, 2012). Low-track courses, also known as regular, remedial, or vocational classes, emphasize student behavior (i.e. following directions), close supervision, and are less rigorous than high-track classes (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giersch, 2018; Harris & Anderson, 2011; Kelly & Price, 2011).

Academic tracking has a long history in education. In 1893, the Committee of Ten published a report that suggested a core curriculum for all high schools, instead of one curriculum for those pursuing higher education and another for those entering the workforce. Critics of the report argued that schools were too heterogenous and there was need for differentiated curriculum, which assigned students to tracks in order to prepare them for their future (Horn, 2002). The practice of using tracks to guide students has been prevalent in schools since the early twentieth century when students were put on

tracks based on their family's socioeconomic background (Shirley, 2011, p. 29). Differentiated curriculum was originally implemented to ensure that students were learning skills that would be useful to them after graduation rather than waste their time learning information they would never use (Horn, 2002). Educators find it difficult to teach students with differing ability levels in the same class, which has sparked an interest in the ability grouping and tracking movement (Loveless, 2013). Tracking was designed as a way for schools to provide students with different courses that appeal to students' needs and interests (Noddings, 2008, p. 35). Over the years, the purpose of tracking has changed and evolved. Students who take high-track courses are labeled promising students and are expected to attend college, while students who take low-track courses are expected to enter vocational programs or the workforce after high school (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Tracking produces inequality in schools (Chmielewski, 2014) and has a detrimental effect on the relationship between socioeconomic status and student academic success (Bol, Witschge, Van de Werfhorst, & Dronkers, 2014). Tracking in schools provides "different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they need to occupy their respective places in a labor force stratified by class, race, and gender" (Giroux, 1983, p. 258). It is a form of curriculum segregation and inequality (Drake, 2017; Giersch, 2018). Academic tracking reflects "socioeconomic and ethnoracial inequality. Different academic tracks come to be associated with different ethnoracial groups in a way that mirrors common social and cultural stereotypes" (Drake, 2017, p. 2425-2426). For example, research shows that low-income students enter lower tracks and high-income students enter higher tracks (Klugman, 2012), even when low-income

students receive the same grades as the high-income students (Batruch, Autin, Bataillard, & Butera, 2018). Tracking disadvantages students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Werblow et al., 2013) by advancing high-income students and leaving low-income students behind (Giersch, 2018). Racial/ethnic minority and low-income students are enrolled in general or remedial classes while their affluent peers are assigned to more advanced classes with rigorous curriculum and highly-qualified teachers (Batruch et al., 2018; Mickelson et al., 2013; Noddings, 2008; Werblow et al., 2013). Students on lower tracks are not expected to perform as well as students on the higher tracks (Ansalone, 2009), affecting the way that students view their abilities and academic achievement (Giersch, 2018; Werblow et al., 2013).

Tracking is a political process; students internalize the track they are put on and it defines who they are and their future careers (Horn, 2002). Academic tracking assigns students to academic paths and courses that guide their career through high school (Drake, 2017, p. 2425). Research shows the tracks that students are on in high school determines their monetary, or economic, success in life (Moller & Stearns, 2012). Tracking matches students to careers just as they are assigned to classes in school (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 105). It excludes low-income students from achieving higher academic goals and gaining access to higher education (Batruch et al., 2018). Once students are put on a low track, it is difficult for them to move to a higher track. Student access to high-track classes are limited due to “course prerequisites, test and grade minimums, and subjective requirements” (Kelly & Price, 2011, p. 581). Kelly & Price (2011) found that once students are put on a track, they usually stay there until graduation.

Tracking affects student achievement (Giersch, 2018). High stakes testing and tracking together contribute to the widening gap between the rich and the poor (Mickelson et al., 2013). Countries that use tracking have a higher achievement gap between social classes than countries who do not use tracking (Schofield, 2010). Compared to the academic gap between social classes when students enter high school, the academic gap widens even further by the time students graduate from high school (Klugman, 2012). Students who are on lower tracks are 60 percent more likely to drop out of high school than students on higher tracks (Werblow et al., 2013).

Despite the fact that tracking reinforces educational inequality and has negative student outcomes, it is prevalent in American schools (Loveless, 2013; Schofield, 2010; Werblow et al., 2013). Tracking influences teacher perceptions, which reproduces inequalities in education (Batruch et al., 2018). Deficit views and beliefs that teachers and parents hold about students in poverty are reflected in tracking (Ansalone, 2009; Werblow et al., 2013). Proponents of tracking argue that detracking would result in lower achievement for students on higher tracks (Loveless, 2009). Affluent parents want their children to be better than average, so they advocate for accelerated reading and math programs and gifted services (Landeros, 2011). Since students on higher tracks tend to be high-income students, supporters of tracking are attempting to advance the upper classes and leave the lower classes behind. Even though tracking fails to improve average student performance and provide equal opportunities for all students (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010), it is still practiced in American schools (Giersch, 2018) and continues to thrive (Loveless, 2013).

Classroom Practices

A classroom can have a lasting impact on students (Bruner, 2008). Classroom practices affect student development and student identification. Identification is how we “unconsciously internalize aspects and encounters with the external world (including relationships, experiences, ideas)” which then merge with our own subjectivity (Lucey, 2010, p. 448). Student identity is formed through relationships and dialogue (Greene, 1995). Therefore, the classroom environment can “amplify the social-class achievement gap” (Goudeau & Croizet, 2016, p. 168) and reinforce class differences (Harris & Williams, 2012) through the way that information is presented and how it is received (Goodlad et al., 2004). Teachers must understand the role of schools in fostering moral development in students and preparing them to be active participants in a political democracy (Dewey, 1897/2019; Goodlad et al., 2004).

The educational system is able to perpetuate the relationship among the classes because policy makers expect educators to teach the dominant culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Instead of creating pedagogy that fits the students, students are expected to adhere to an unchallenged method (Haberman, 2010). In the U.S. education system, teachers and school leaders are given a curriculum with state standards that students are expected to learn in the course of the school year. Rigid, universalized curriculum forces students to conform to a one-size-fits-all approach to learning instead of using a student’s instincts and powers as a starting point for instruction (Dewey, 1897/2019). Teachers sometimes inadvertently reinforce class structures. Calarco (2011) found that middle-class students are more likely to seek help from the teacher than their lower-class peers. Teachers tend to help students who are assertive and pro-active in

their learning, which translates to teachers giving more attention to middle-class students than lower-class students (Calarco, 2011).

In schools, “the emphasis falls upon construction and giving out, rather than upon absorption and mere learning” (Dewey, 1897/2019, p. 16). State-mandated standards and curriculum neglect the unique assets of students and teachers. According to Papert (1991), a teacher’s role should be to:

Guide students, to act as consultants, to help when a child may be in trouble, to spot a child who is in a cul-de-sac or on a plateau and could be encouraged to take a leap forward, or to spot a child who is on the track of something really wonderful and give encouragement. (p. 19)

Students need help finding their voice, not memorizing and repeating information given by the teacher (Finke, 1993). Students need to learn about things that are “personally meaningful rather than what was laid down in someone else’s program” (Papert, 1991, p. 19). Discussions in the classroom should include crucial and sometimes controversial topics such as “classism, consumer culture, the dissolution of labor unions, global corporate domination, imperialism, environmental pollution, and other injustices disproportionately affecting people in poverty” (Gorski, 2008, p. 145). According to Freire (1998), there is a difference between teaching and transferring knowledge. Teaching is a creation of “possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge” (Freire, 1998, p. 49). Students do not need to be “directed by a technician-policeman-teacher but rather be advised by an empathetic, helpful consultant-colleague-teacher” (Papert, 1991, p. 19). Both students and teachers are learners, with the teacher facilitating the lessons (Bruner,

2008). The role of a teacher is to use student curiosity to lead to student learning, opposed to merely dumping information on the student. If teachers spent more time on teaching creativity, students would have a higher self-concept and, in turn, achieve higher academic goals (Ivcevic & Kaufman, 2013). Curriculum cannot be the only factor that guides instruction since “freedom, choice, decision, and possibility are only possible because they can also be denied, despised, or refused” (Freire, 1998, p. 57). Freire explained that when student curiosity is suppressed, it impedes student freedom and adventure which promotes domestication, not education.

Effective classrooms are collaborative. The teacher is not the only person in the classroom who can help a student learn; the role is shared with other students (Bruner, 2008). Learning is an “interactive process in which people learn from each other, and not just by showing and telling” (Bruner, 2008, p. 170). Peer selection and peer influence have an effect on student academic performance (Rambaran, Schwartz, Badaly, Hopmeyer, Steglich, & René, 2017). When students associate with other students who make good grades, their grades will also increase (Rambaran et al., 2017). Good grades bring symbolic and material rewards, such as climbing higher on the academic ladder and acceptance into prestigious universities (Felouzis & Charmillot, 2013). It works both ways. Strong readers prefer to interact with struggling readers (Cooc & Kim, 2017). But high achievers who associate with low achievers usually experience a decrease in their grades (Shin & Ryan, 2014).

In an effective classroom, students are actively involved in learning and engaging in discussions about human differences (Haberman, 2010). Learning happens through “discussion, practice, experiment, reading or production of work” (Bourdieu & Passeron,

1990, p. 120), not through the mouth of the teacher. Open questions encourage students to use higher order thinking skills, while a closed question allows the teacher to “funnel children’s responses toward the teacher’s objectives” (Harris & Williams, 2012, p. 392). Students are taught to question common ideas, practices, and assumptions (Haberman, 2010).

Teachers believe that they are in control of their students when in reality, students control the teachers. For instance, Haberman (2010) found students reward teachers through compliance and punish through resistance which leads teachers to believe that some strategies work but others do not. Teachers believe that they are reaching students’ needs when, in actuality, “they are more like hostages responding to the students’ overt or tacit threats of noncompliance and, ultimately, disruption” (Haberman, 2010, p. 84). Good teachers who try to create authentic learning experiences for their students are met with hesitation. Students are familiar with the traditional classroom setting which takes the responsibility of learning off students and projects it onto teachers, who are then responsible for student learning (Haberman, 2010). Teachers who take curriculum and personalize it to fit their class are teachers who are doing good work (Papert, 1991).

Deficit Thinking

People who hold deficit ideals believe that “the poor are poor because of their personal failings and the rich are rich because of their superior culture” (Bates, 2017, p. 12) – rather than associating poverty and wealth with the social structures in place that contribute to inequality. They believe that people living in poverty are the problem, not society (Gorski, 2016). When deficit thoughts are “ingrained in the mainstream psyche, they result in middle socioeconomic class assumptions of moral, spiritual, and intellectual

deficiency among economically disadvantaged people” (Gorski, 2008, p. 138). Deficit thinking is the idea that people living in poverty are broken and need to be fixed rather than analyzing classism and the societal structures in place that keep the poor oppressed (Gorski, 2008; Gorski, 2016).

Deficit thinking affects teaching practices. Deficit-laden perspectives about students affect student motivation and academic success. Batruch et al. (2017) conducted a study with 73 psychology students at a Swiss university who were given “six school files containing administrative and academic information about 12-year-old pupils: parental occupation, grades, and academic status” (p. 47) as well as other background information. The participants studied the files and were asked to recall specific information about the students. Batruch et al. found that when low-income students outperformed their affluent peers, the participants recalled them having lower grades than they actually received. This deficit thinking keeps low-income students from advancing their place in social-class order (Batruch et al., 2017). Deficit thinking focuses on student deficits rather than student assets. Keefer (2017) found that teachers’ perceptions of low-income students was limited to student inability to access “financial and educational resources” (p. 66). Students have more to offer than their economic status. Students have stories, assets, and sources of pride (Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018) that go unnoticed due to deficit thinking. Through storytelling, teachers can find connections between their personal journey and the personal journeys of their students (Greene, 1995).

Teachers often view students of color and low-income students differently than they view their high-income counterparts. They have lower expectations for low-income

students (Harris, 2007; Harris & Williams, 2012; Noddings, 2012). Educators who hold deficit beliefs often misinterpret the cultural assets and contributions that students possess (Harris & Williams, 2012). They perceive low socioeconomic students as lacking rather than highlighting their assets, which creates a disconnect between parents, students, and school personnel (Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandebroucke, 2014; Keefer, 2017; Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018). Deficit ideology compels educators to perceive a lack of parental involvement in schools among parents experiencing poverty and high absence rates among students identified as economically disadvantaged as evidence that parents living in poverty do not value education (Gorski, 2016). They believe that low socioeconomic students do not work hard enough and need to be more resilient (Bates, 2017). Clycq, Ward Nouwen, and Vandebroucke (2014) surveyed 114 students, ages 14 and 15, in three Flemish cities to determine how students define their educational success and failure and which actors have an effect on the educational process. In their study, they found that lower socioeconomic students have “internalized negative perceptions about their (family) environment” (Clycq et. al, p. 806). Students begin to believe the deficit beliefs held by school personnel as truth. When educators expect “low-income students to fail or have difficulties” (Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018, p. 88), they are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for low-income students. Students will begin to believe that they can only achieve what their parents have achieved and will be unable to see their future in any other capacity.

Affluent Schools

Affluent schools located in the suburbs make up “more than half the U.S. population, an even higher percentage of voters, and an overwhelming majority of elites”

(Orfield, 2002, p. 28). The families of dominant socioeconomic classes are the major players in the educational market (Bourdieu, 1973), and they determine educational policy and politics (Orfield, 2002). The educational system serves the elite, or the “classes or groups from whom it derives its authority” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 114), and attributes value to the products of the educational work of the dominant classes, which is a direct function of the kind of cultural capital that schools value (Bourdieu, 1973).

The quality of education a student receives varies from one area to another (Durkheim, 2000). Students who attend affluent schools have different educational experiences than those who do not attend affluent schools (Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011). Schools located in affluent areas have more access to resources and more advanced classes, higher academic expectations, abundant financial and academic resources, and highly-qualified teachers compared to schools located in low-income neighborhoods (Jacob & Lefgen, 2007; Orr & Rogers, 2011; Poesen-Vandeputte & Nicaise, 2015; Werblow et al., 2013). Teachers at affluent schools have more experience, which makes them more effective teachers (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Affluent schools have a lower teacher mobility rate, allowing school leaders to collaborate with teachers and build an effective team (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Students from affluent schools have access to skills and resources that allow their voices to be heard and are often accepted into the most prestigious colleges and universities (Orr & Rogers, 2011).

Affluent parents and students. Affluent schools have high levels of student achievement and parent involvement (Landeros, 2011). Affluent parents are able to use their power to put school structures in place that create advantages for their children, such

as accelerated programs and academic tracking (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). They invest a lot of resources into their children's education (Potter & Roksa, 2013), and they work with schools to ensure that their children are receiving the best education possible (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Parents in affluent schools have a sense of power and entitlement. In schools, entitlement occurs when students and parents are seen as customers and teachers are expected to acquiesce to their demands (Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, & Reinhardt, 2011). High-income parents "hold resources and participate in networks that allow their voices to be heard over the voices of others" (Orr & Rogers, 2011, p. 2), giving them more power. Affluent parents wield their power to secure advantages for their child (Reeves, 2017), such as acceptance into accelerated programs and gifted services (Landeros, 2011). Parents use their power to voice their concerns and make requests in favor of their children who attend the school. Jacob and Lefgren (2007) combined data on parent requests for specific teachers as well as principal evaluations of teachers from 12 elementary schools in one school district in the western United States. They found that high-income parents are more likely to make requests than low-income parents. Also, parents of higher-achieving students make more requests than parents of lower-achieving students. This sense of entitlement is reinforced by school administration who grant parent requests (Landeros, 2011).

Opportunity hoarding occurs in schools when parents acquire access to educational resources for their children without regard to educational opportunities taken away from other children in the process (Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015). Since high-income parents have more political power than low-income parents (Harris, 2007),

opportunity hoarding has been associated with affluent, suburban parents (Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011) These parents work toward “individualistic, goals benefitting their own children over the greater good to alter the tone of the larger school population, ultimately undermining the goals of a democratic educational system” (Landeros, 2011, p. 250). Affluent parents’ use of opportunity hoarding is an unfair way to access opportunities by helping their children but hurting other students by potentially taking opportunities away from them (Reeves, 2017) which contributes to the “social, economic and educational divide” (Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011, p. 308).

According to LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011), helicopter parenting is when parents micromanage and over-involve themselves in their children’s lives. Helicopter parenting, or overparenting, is most prevalent in middle and upper socioeconomic classes (Nelson, 2010) and contributes to the social class divide in both schools and society (Hamilton, Roksa, & Nielson, 2018). Overparenting is “high on warmth/support, high on control, and low on granting autonomy” (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012, p. 1178) which can have a negative influence on children (Nelson, 2010). Helicopter parents’ style of managing their children affects their children’s development and keeps their children from solving problems on their own (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Children of helicopter parents suffer from psychological issues and feel like they have “lower levels of perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness” (Schiffrin, Liss, Miles-McClean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2013, p. 554). Students who consider their parents to be helicopter parents usually have low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and/or prescription drug abuse issues (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Soenens & Vansteenkiste (2010) stated that the effects of overparenting differ depending on how parents control their

children. They suggested that when parents control children's behavior, there are positive outcomes, such as positive behavior in school and home. But when parents control children's psychological behavior, children are more likely to have psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety. Both behavioral control and psychological behavioral control can be harmful to children when the controls are overused.

Entitled parents create entitled students. Student entitlement impacts teachers and schools (Singleton-Jackson et al., 2011). Student entitlement occurs when students come to the "conclusion that if a student fails, the fault cannot lie in the student – it must lie in the teachers, the curriculum, the institution, or, more vaguely, the 'system'" (Morrow, 1994, p. 35). Students believe that teachers and schools are required to provide them with certain services, regardless of their academic performance or behavior in the classroom (Singleton-Jackson et al., 2010). Calarco (2011) conducted a study of 56 middle- and working-class White students, from one school situated in a suburb of an Eastern city, in order to determine if there is a correlation between student levels of help-seeking in the classroom and socioeconomic status. Calarco found that middle-class students had no trouble asking teachers for help, and they expected the teachers to respond to their needs. Teachers' ability to keep students happy is important to high-income parents. According to Jacob and Lefgen (2007), high-income parents value student satisfaction over student academic success, which is the opposite of what low-income parents value in their child's education. Jacob and Lefgen found that high-income parents are more concerned with student satisfaction than academics because at an affluent school, there are less disruptive peers, high academic expectations, abundant financial and academic resources, and highly-qualified teachers.

Students identified as low-income in affluent schools. There are advantages and disadvantages in regard to academic and personal development for low-income students who attend affluent schools. Having more advantaged peers is beneficial for low-income students and students of color, especially at the elementary level (Harris, 2007). Also, compared to low-income students at high-poverty schools, low-income students at affluent schools have larger academic achievement growth (Boger, 2005). Low-income students who attend affluent schools tend to have more opportunities. Studies show that students of color and low-income students who attend middle-class schools have “higher expectations and more educational and career opportunities” (Orfield & Lee, 2005, p. 16). Curriculum integration increases the academic achievement for students identified as disadvantaged, with no negative effects on high-income White students (Harris, 2007).

Low-income students who attend affluent schools are aware of their social standing and others’ views of them, which contributes to their incomplete sense of belonging (Gaztambide-Fernandez & DiAquoi, 2010; Thiele et al., 2017). Ispa-Landa (2013) conducted a study of 45 students in grades eight to ten who attended affluent, racially-integrated schools in 11 affluent suburbs. Out of the 45 students, 38 students were members of the Diversify program, which buses in Black, low-income students to affluent, predominately White schools across 40 school districts. The participants in the study who were enrolled in the Diversify program reported that Diversify students were placed on lower tracks and that peers and faculty viewed them as students who slack off, make trouble, and underachieve. Affluent students in the study confirmed the Diversify students’ feelings. Ispa-Landa’s data did in fact show that Black students were placed on

lower tracks. Affluent, suburban schools use tracking as a way to opportunity hoard by making it seem that tracks are based on merit; when they are actually used to exclude low-income students (Rury & Rife, 2018). Tracking privileges high-income, White and Asian students and disproportionately assigns low-income students of color to lower tracks (Drake, 2017).

Stereotyping plays a part in low-income students' sense of belonging in affluent schools. Underprivileged students are often misjudged by their teachers and peers (Ispa-Landa, 2013; Matrevec, 2011; Thiele et al., 2017). In Ispa-Landa's study (2013), students from the Diversify program reported that they were aware of the stereotyping that was prevalent on campus. They were labeled as lazy, underperforming, loud, violent, and troublemakers. Some low-income students attending affluent schools reject stereotypes to avoid being mistreated in school (Ispa-Landa, 2013; Matrevec, 2011). The housing divide is also a factor in students' sense of belonging. There is a divide between students whose families live in apartments versus those who live in a house; families who own and families who rent; and families who grew up in the community and families who recently moved into the community (Matrevec, 2011). There are academic benefits for low-income students who attend affluent schools, as well as psychological barriers that hinder their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

This review of the literature presented some of the factors affecting students related to standardized testing, society, classroom and school practices. The No Child Left Behind Act introduced high-stakes testing and made accountability the focus of the classroom, which has widened the gap between the rich and the poor (Mickelson et al.,

2013). Students from low-income families are at a disadvantage in the classroom due to fewer opportunities (Jury et al., 2017), negative stereotypes and perceptions (Thiele et al., 2017), broken social structures (Maunder et al., 2012), and undervalued cultural capital (Reay et al., 2009). Social class structures in society affect the way that low-income families view themselves and their children (Kraus et al., 2012). In order for society to function, schools have to condition students to uphold societal conditions (Durkheim, 2000). Students who possess cultural capital that is valued by society have more advantages than those who do not, and they enter school with more academic-based knowledge (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).

Academic tracking is a tool used to keep students in their societal positions (Chmielewski, 2014). Students who come from high-income families are usually put on higher-tracks with more rigorous coursework while low-income students are put on lower-tracks (Werblow et al., 2013). Classroom practices also have an effect on student achievement and can create a wider gap between social classes (Gourdeau & Croizet, 2016). When teachers hold deficit ideals about low-income students, they can contribute to the social class gap (Batruch et al., 2017).

Research on affluent schools indicates that high-income parents feel a sense of power and entitlement when it comes to their child's education (Singleton-Jackson et al., 2011). Parents hoard opportunities for their children without regard to the effects that their decisions have on other children and families (Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015). In affluent schools, there is a small percentage of students who are considered low-income. There are positive effects to low-income students attending affluent schools, such as better educational opportunities (Orfield & Lee, 2005). There are also negative effects

that low-income students experience when attending affluent schools, which contributes to an incomplete sense of belonging (Gaztambide-Fernandez & DiAquoi, 2010).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is an association between student socioeconomic status and academic achievement on enrolled grade-level reading or mathematics curriculum in affluent schools in North Texas. Two research questions and two sub-questions were utilized to guide the study:

1. Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

1a. Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status?

2. Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

2a: Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status?

This chapter is a discussion of the research methods that were utilized to answer the research questions listed above. The chapter is organized as follows: (a) research design, (b) key terms, (c) population and sample, (d) variables, (e) instrumentation, (f) data screening, and (g) data analysis.

Research Design

The study employs an ex post facto, causal-comparative research design. Quantitative causal-comparative research was appropriate since there were two variables: socioeconomic status (independent variable) and student academic achievement (dependent variable) with an investigation of whether one variable is associated with

another variable, and how that relationship could be represented through statistical analysis. Causal-comparative research involves four steps (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). First, the problem is identified. Second, the sample and instrument are “chosen with respect to the variables chosen for the study” (Tuckman & Harper, 2012, p. 197). Third, two criterion groups are created; “one that possesses a characteristic that is hypothesized to cause a change in the dependent variable and a second group that does not possess this characteristic” (Tuckman & Harper, 2012, p. 197). Fourth, the relationships between the variables are analyzed.

Key Terms

The following key terminology will be used in this study.

Causal-comparative research. A type of research design that finds the relationship between independent and dependent variables after an event has occurred (Salkind, 2010).

Chi-Square Test. A nonparametric test of significance used when data are in the form of frequency counts. It compares frequencies observed in the study to expected frequencies to test for significant differences (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000).

Cramer’s V. A test that measures the strength of association between two variables. A value of zero means no association, and a value of one means perfect association (Duignan, 2016).

Dependent variable. The variable that the independent variable is presumed to affect (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The variable depends on how the independent variable affects it.

Direct effect. One variable that directly affects another, represented by a line with an arrowhead (Kline, 2011).

Extraneous variable. A variable that makes possible an alternative explanation of results; uncontrolled variable (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

Independent variable. The variable used to assess its possible effects on one or more other variables (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The variable is presumed to affect another variable.

Indirect effect. One or more variables that transfer some of the causal effects of prior variables onto successive variables (Kline, 2011).

Path coefficient. Statistical estimates of direct effects (Kline, 2011).

Path model. A structural model for observed variables (Kline, 2011).

p-value. The p-value represents the probability that gives the significance level. The hypothesis will be accepted if the significance level is less than the p-value and rejected if it is greater than or equal to the p-value (Ross, 2004).

Standard deviation. The measure of the spread of scores from the mean (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). It is the index of variability in a set of scores.

Target Population and Sample

The target population from which the sample was drawn were students in grades four to six who were enrolled in affluent elementary schools located within a large urban school district in North Texas. At the time of the study, the school district served over 39,000 students, 55% were identified as economically disadvantaged. Students identified as economically disadvantaged are students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The student population of the district consisted of 21.5% African-American, 38%

Hispanic/Latino, 7.3% Asian, and 30.2% White. The school district under examination encompasses over 40 elementary schools; eight of them identified as affluent schools.

Population. The population for this study was composed of students in affluent elementary schools in North Texas, enrolled in grades four, five, and six. The study's participating schools had comparable demographics in regards to economically disadvantaged population, mobility rate, accountability scores, and ethnicity distribution of student population. All schools used the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in the fourth, fifth, and six grades to measure academic progress and performance.

Sample. The sample for the study consisted of 1,776 students in grades four to six who were assessed in mathematics and reading with an enrolled grade-level state assessment, STAAR, for the 2018-2019 school year. Student ages ranged from eight to twelve years old. All third-grade students who attend public schools in the state of Texas are also required to take the Mathematics and Reading STAAR. Due to issues with the data provided by the examined school district, third grade was not included in the study.

The sample included the eight affluent schools in the school district. In this study, affluent schools were identified as schools that had less than 20 percent of their student population eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Free or reduced-price meal programs are available to families who are at or below the poverty level (Texas Department of Agriculture, 2020). Eligibility is determined by total household income and household members. For the 2018-2019 school year, the poverty level household income for a family of four to receive free meals was \$32,630. Household incomes required for a family of four to receive reduced-priced meals, slightly above the poverty level, was

\$32,631 to \$46,435. Students are also eligible for free-and-reduced priced meals if a member of their family receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) benefits (Texas Department of Agriculture, 2020). There were 1,775 students who took STAAR in spring 2019 in grades four to six enrolled in affluent schools in the examined district. Of those students, 224 were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The research was records-based, and the individual identities for the student records included in the study were kept anonymous.

Variables

The demographic data provided the independent variable Socioeconomic Status. The independent variable had two levels: 1) students identified as low-income, based on eligibility for free or reduced-price meals (characteristic-present group) and 2) students identified as affluent (comparison group). The outcome measure was Student Academic Achievement on the STAAR in mathematics and reading during the 2018-2019 school year.

Extraneous variables were variables that were outside the scope of the research questions, but had a significant relationship with the outcome variables. By including them in a study, the researcher decreased the apparent variability of the outcome variable relative to the predictor variable. In other words, including extraneous variables in a study made it easier to detect significant associations between the variables of interest. Race/ethnicity was an extraneous variable that was controlled in the two groups. For example, student scores from economically disadvantaged Hispanic or Latino students were compared to student scores from affluent Hispanic or Latino students. Sex and

grade level were extraneous variables and were included in the model to make it is easier to detect the difference in scores between affluent and non-affluent students.

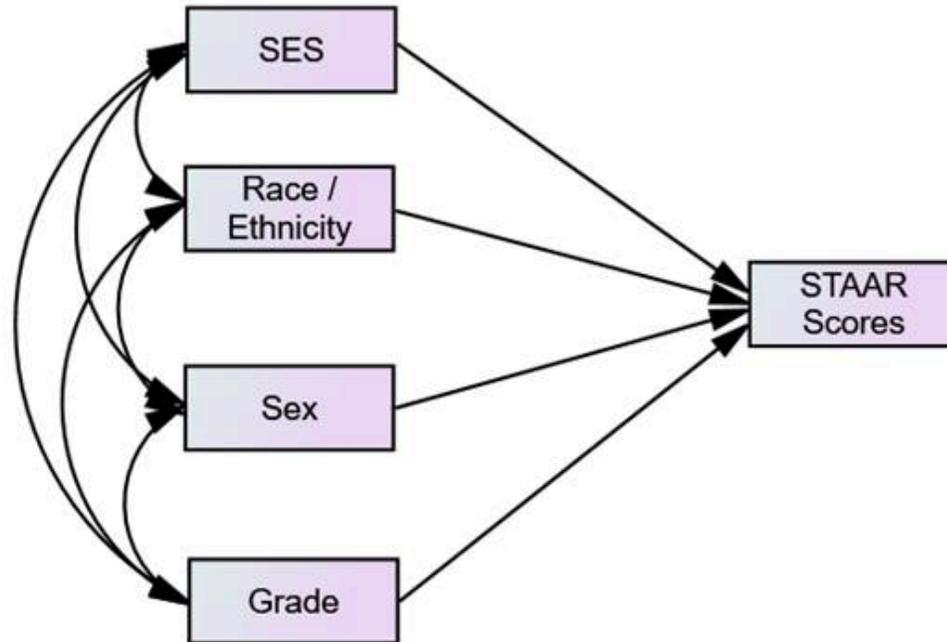


Figure 2. The Interrelationship of the Variables in the Study – Path Model

Instrumentation

The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and measures student knowledge in mathematics and reading. The items included on the assessments assess skills at a higher level of depth and cognitive complexity than previous state-wide assessments and are better able to measure growth (Texas Education Agency, 2010). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) conducted empirical studies in numerous stages to ensure validity of the STAAR. The assessments were validated for rigor by comparing them to the results on standardized national and international assessments. Once the STAAR was developed, TEA created advisory panels to set performance standards. The panels consisted of

“diverse groups of stakeholders, i.e., business leaders, superintendents, regional service center representatives” that established cut scores and matched the scores with policy definitions, relating to assessment performance (Texas Education Agency, 2010, p. v).

TEA collects and reports data regarding the performance of students identified as economically disadvantaged who take the STAAR. The full report includes school-wide scores distributed into categories: grade level, subject, student gender, student ethnicity, special education students, economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and at-risk students. The data from the TEA report was utilized to analyze student scale scores and performance levels in mathematics and reading. For the purpose of this study, these scores were taken as Academic Achievement. The demographic data provided the independent variable Socioeconomic Status.

Data Screening and Analysis

Data was screened for outliers. Students who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals were identified as low socioeconomic. Student data with missing information was removed.

The statistical analysis software IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data. Employing student standardized test data, the researcher explored academic achievement of students identified as economically disadvantaged in affluent schools.

The anticipated hypotheses outcomes for this research included the following: the null hypothesis is that there is no association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement at affluent schools. The alternative hypothesis is that there is an association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement at affluent schools.

Summary

The focus of this analysis was on the academic achievement of students identified as low socioeconomic, economically disadvantaged, and low income and the association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement in affluent schools in North Texas.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this ex post facto, causal-comparative study was to explore potential inequities in academic achievement between students identified as economically disadvantaged and affluent students in North Texas affluent schools. The guiding research question for the study was: What association, if any, does student socioeconomic status (SES) have with academic achievement in affluent schools? The null hypothesis was that there was no association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement at affluent schools. The alternative hypothesis was that there was an association between socioeconomic status and academic achievement at affluent schools. The study was guided by the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

1a. Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status?

2. Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

2a: Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status?

The data were obtained from the school district containing performance and related demographic information for students enrolled in affluent schools who took the Mathematics or Reading STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) in grades four, five, and six. STAAR scale scores were analyzed and converted into

performance levels. These scores and performance levels allow for comparisons across test administrations, such as in this study when scores are being compared across schools. STAAR performance levels are labeled: Did Not Meet Grade Level, Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, or Masters Grade Level (Texas Education Agency, 2020). For the 2019 test administration, students were considered to have passed STAAR if their scale test scores were within the following performance levels: Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, or Masters Grade Level. For this study, the performance levels were divided into two categories: Pass (Approaches Grade Level, Meets Grade Level, and Masters Grade Level) and Fail (Did Not Meet Grade Level). In addition to the Pass/Fail result, the following analyses also looked at the scale scores for mathematics and reading.

Any data with missing student information were removed. The data were coded and analyzed using the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The level of significance was set, a priori, at .05 for all analyses.

A Profile of Subjects

In this study, affluent schools are schools that had less than 20 percent of their student population eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Students were identified as either economically disadvantaged if they qualified for free or reduced-priced meals or affluent if they paid full price for meals. Participants in this study included fourth grade students ($n = 629$), fifth grade students ($n = 579$), and sixth grade students ($n = 568$). All of the eight elementary schools included in the study had a total of 1,776 students participate, with similar SES groups from each school. Participating students ranged in age from eight to thirteen years old.

The characteristic-present group (n = 224) included fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students identified as economically disadvantaged and the comparison group (n = 1551) consisted of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students identified as affluent. Since the sample was taken from affluent schools in the selected district, the minority of students were economically disadvantaged (12.6%), as determined by their eligibility for free and reduced lunch in the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition program. Race/ethnicity for the groups were coded as White, Hispanic/Latino, African-American, or Other (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and two or more races).

Table 4.1***A Profile of Subjects***

Demographic Characteristic		n	Percent
Socioeconomic Status	Affluent	1551	87.3
	Economically Disadvantaged	224	12.6
Race/Ethnicity	White	1302	73.3
	Hispanic/Latino	236	13.3
	African-American	115	6.5
	Other	123	6.9
Grade Level	Fourth	629	35.4
	Fifth	579	32.6
	Sixth	568	32.0
Gender	Female	875	49.3
	Male	901	50.7

t-Tests of Mathematics and Reading Achievement

Mathematics STAAR scores and Reading STAAR scores of both affluent students and students identified as economically disadvantaged were compared using an independent samples t-test. There were 224 low-SES and 1,551 high-SES students who took the STAAR in mathematics and reading. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if there were differences in STAAR scale scores between low-SES and high-SES students in mathematics and reading. On the mathematics assessment, the t-test revealed that low-SES students scored lower ($M = 1479.78$, $SD = 327.097$) than

high-SES students ($M = 1696.48$, $SD = 179.592$), a statistically significant difference, $M = 216.697$, 95%; CI (188.086, 245.309), $t(1773) = 14.854$, $p < .001$ (see Table 4.2). In reading, the t-test also showed that low-SES students scored lower ($M = 1425.55$, $SD = 305.704$) than high-SES students ($M = 1632.42$, $SD = 165.161$), a statistically significant difference, $M = 206.865$, 95%; CI (165.791, 247.939), $t(1773) = 15.339$, $p < .001$ (see Table 4.2). The null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4.2

Independent Samples Test

STAAR Scale Scores	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Mathematics	46.432	<.001	14.854	1773	<.001	216.697	14.588	188.086	245.309
Reading	51.818	<.001	15.339	1773	<.001	206.865	20.852	165.791	247.939

Chi-Square Tests of Independence

Pearson chi-square tests of independence were conducted to compare the characteristic-present and comparison groups on the basis of demographic characteristics of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, grade level, and gender. The test was significant for race/ethnicity and socioeconomic background: $X^2(3, n = 1775) = 465.219$, $p < .001$. The effect size for these results as determined by Cramer's V values (Cramer's V = .512) suggest that although race/ethnicity is moderately associated with socioeconomic background, there are other factors that contribute to student socioeconomic status.

Table 4.3 shows that within the four ethnic groups, White students were proportionately more likely to come from a high socioeconomic background compared to

their non-White peers. On the affluent campuses in the selected district, 80.9% of affluent students were White, 9.9% were Hispanic/Latino, 2.8% were African American, and 6.4% were categorized as Other.

Table 4.3

Socioeconomic Background by Race/Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Socioeconomic Background			
	<u>Not Low SES</u>		<u>Low SES</u>	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
White	1254	80.9	47	21.0
Hispanic/Latino	154	9.9	82	36.6
African American	43	2.8	72	32.1
Other	100	6.4	23	10.3

With respect to grade level and socioeconomic background, the chi-square test was significant, suggesting there is an association between students' current grade level and whether or not students were identified as having an economic disadvantage: $\chi^2 (2, n = 1775) = 7.087, p = .029$. The effect size measured by Cramer's V showed no association, suggesting that other factors exist that have a greater impact on a student's socioeconomic background than their grade level (Cramer's V = .063).

As shown in Table 4.4, grade level had little to no association with socioeconomic background. Fourth grade students were marginally more likely to come from a high socioeconomic background (36.6%) than fifth and sixth grade students (31.8% and 31.7%), respectively. Fifth grade students were only slightly more likely to come from a

low socioeconomic background (37.9%) than fourth and sixth grade students (27.7% and 34.4%).

Table 4.4

Socioeconomic Background by Grade Level

Grade Level	Socioeconomic Background			
	<u>Not Low SES</u>		<u>Low SES</u>	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
Fourth Grade	567	36.6	62	27.7
Fifth Grade	493	31.8	85	37.9
Sixth Grade	491	31.7	77	34.4

The chi-square test was insignificant for gender and socioeconomic background. This indicates there is a weak association between student gender and socioeconomic status: $X^2(1, n = 1775) = 2.220, p = .136$. The effect size measured by Cramer's V showed little association between gender and socioeconomic background (Cramer's V = .035).

As evidenced in Table 4.5, gender and socioeconomic status are not associated. Female students (50.0%) were just as likely as male students (50.0%) to come from an affluent background. Male students (55.4%) were slightly more likely to be economically disadvantaged compared to female students (44.6%).

Table 4.5

Socioeconomic Background by Gender

Gender	Socioeconomic Background			
	<u>Not Low SES</u>		<u>Low SES</u>	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
Female	775	50.0	100	44.6
Male	776	50.0	124	55.4

Research Question 1

Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

Mathematics multivariate linear regression. A multivariate linear regression was conducted to assess the interaction between observed variables. Measurements of the association between student achievement on the Mathematics STAAR and other variables, such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, and grade level were used to affirm the research hypotheses. After applying multivariate linear regression statistics to the data, the model revealed an association between Mathematics STAAR scale scores and some of the variables. This model explained 23.4% of the total variance in Mathematics STAAR scale scores (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6***Model Summary^b***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.487 ^a	.237	.234	189.305

^aPredictors: (Constant), Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Other, Female, Low-SES, Sixth Grade, Fifth Grade

^bDependent Variable: Mathematics STAAR scale score

The coefficients between student scale scores on the mathematics assessment and race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, and grade level are presented in Table 4.7. The baselines for race/ethnicity was White, gender was male, SES was high-SES, and grade level was four. Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic background were significant predictors of student performance on the Mathematics STAAR. Being Hispanic/Latino ($\beta = -.131, p < .001$) or African-American ($\beta = -.206, p < .001$) were significant, negative predictors of student performance, but being classified as Other ($\beta = .003, p = .876$) was not a significant predictor. Coming from an economically disadvantaged background ($\beta = -.230, p < .001$) was a significant, negative predictor of student scale scores. Female gender ($\beta = -.012, p = .568$) was not a significant predictor of student scale scores in mathematics. Being enrolled in grades five and six ($\beta = .151, p < .001$; $\beta = .330, p < .001$, respectively) were weak but significant, positive predictors of student performance on the mathematics assessment. Overall, socioeconomic background was the most significant predictor of student scale scores on the Mathematics STAAR.

Table 4.7***Coefficients^a Between Variables***

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1641.618	9.014		182.119	< .001
Hispanic/Latino	-83.305	14.280	-.131	-5.834	< .001
African-American	-180.942	20.632	-.206	-8.770	< .001
Other	2.823	18.027	.003	.157	.876
Low-SES	-150.094	15.778	-.230	-9.513	< .001
Female	-5.143	9.008	-.012	-.571	.568
Fifth Grade	69.511	10.935	.151	6.356	< .001
Sixth Grade	152.848	10.986	.330	13.913	< .001

^aDependent Variable: Mathematics STAAR scale score

Mathematics multivariate logistic regression. A multivariate logistic regression was conducted to assess the individual impact each variable had on student performance level (pass/fail) on the Mathematics STAAR. Measurements of the impact of the variables in the study on student performance level in mathematics were used to determine if any variables were indicators of whether or not students would pass the Mathematics STAAR. The model's overall effect size using the Nagelkerke R Square was .240 (see Table 4.8). The effect size was small.

Table 4.8***Model Summary***

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	738.390 ^a	.097	.240

^aEstimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

The regression coefficients for each variable in the equation for mathematics performance levels are shown in Table 4.9. The baselines for race/ethnicity was White, gender was male, SES was high-SES, and grade level was four. Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic background were significant predictors of whether or not students would pass the Mathematics STAAR. Being Hispanic/Latino ($B = -1.381$, $p < .001$), African-American ($B = -2.057$, $p < .001$), or classified as Other ($B = -1.159$, $p = .001$) were significant, negative predictors of student performance level, with African-American being the most significant predictor. $\text{Exp}(B)$ indicated the odds ratio for either passing or failing the Mathematics STAAR. Compared to White students, Hispanic/Latino students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .251$] were approximately four times more likely to fail the Mathematics STAAR, African-American students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .128$] were eight times more likely to fail, and Other students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .314$] were about three times more likely to fail. Coming from an economically disadvantaged background ($B = -1.236$, $p < .001$) was a significant, negative predictor of student performance level. Compared to affluent students, economically disadvantaged students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .291$] were two times more likely to fail the Mathematics STAAR. Female gender ($B = .064$, $p = .748$) was not a significant predictor of student performance level in mathematics. Being enrolled in grade level five ($B = -.799$, $p = .001$) was a weak but significant, negative predictor of student

performance level on the mathematics assessment. Being in sixth grade ($B = .108$, $p = .698$) was not a significant predictor.

Table 4.9

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Hispanic/Latino	-1.381	.268	26.596	1	< .001	.251
	African-American	-2.057	.305	45.391	1	< .001	.128
	Other	-1.159	.350	10.935	1	.001	.314
	Low-SES	-1.236	.237	27.082	1	< .001	.291
	Female	.064	.201	.103	1	.748	1.066
	Fifth Grade	-.799	.241	10.985	1	.001	.450
	Sixth Grade	.108	.278	.150	1	.698	1.114
	Constant	3.851	.251	235.093	1	< .001	47.062

^aVariable(s) entered on step 1: Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Other, Female, Low-SES, Fifth Grade, Sixth Grade

Mathematics descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics for the mathematics scale scores are presented in Table 4.10. The mean scale score of the mathematics assessment was 1669.3 with a standard deviation of 216.359. Overall, low-SES students scored lower ($M = 1479.78$, $SD = 327.097$) than high-SES students ($M = 1696.48$, $SD = 179.592$) on the mathematics assessment. In respect to race/ethnicity, low-SES students and high-SES students were compared within their race/ethnic group. Affluent White students scored higher ($M = 1707.46$, $SD = 170.608$) than economically disadvantaged White students ($M = 1614.21$, $SD = 253.583$). Affluent Hispanic/Latino students outperformed economically disadvantaged Hispanic/Latino students, with mean

scores of 1632.52 ($SD = 211.896$) and 1473.98 ($SD = 307.295$), respectively. Affluent African-American students achieved at a higher level ($M = 1545$, $SD = 211.320$) than economically disadvantaged African-American students ($M = 1371$, $SD = 360.162$). Affluent students who fell into the “Others” category performed at higher levels ($M = 1722.45$, $SD = 172.359$) than their economically disadvantaged counterparts ($M = 1566.3$, $SD = 313.793$).

Table 4.10

Descriptive Statistics for Mathematics STAAR Scale Scores

Socioeconomic Background	Race/Ethnicity	Mean	Standard Deviation
Affluent	White	1707.46	170.68
	Hispanic/Latino	1632.52	211.896
	African-American	1545.00	211.320
	Other	1722.45	172.359
Economically Disadvantaged	White	1614.21	253.583
	Hispanic/Latino	1473.98	307.296
	African-American	1371.00	360.162
	Other	1566.30	313.793

Table 4.11 shows the descriptive statistics for the mathematics performance levels. Overall, the passing rate for the Mathematics STAAR was 92.8% and the failing rate was 7.2%. Students identified as economically disadvantaged had a lower passing rate than affluent students. Out of 224 low-SES students who took the Mathematics STAAR, 161 students passed (71.9%) and 63 students did not pass (28.1%). Out of 1,551 high-SES students who took the Mathematics STAAR, 1,486 students passed

(95.8%) and 65 students failed (4.2%). To further analyze the results, the passing rate between economically disadvantaged and affluent students was compared within students' race/ethnicity group. More affluent White students passed the mathematics assessment (97.4%) than economically disadvantaged White students (89.4%). Affluent Hispanic/Latino students had a higher passing rate (90.3%) than economically disadvantaged Hispanic/Latino students (70.7%). A higher percentage of affluent African-American students passed the mathematics assessment (79.1%) than economically disadvantaged African-American students (59.7%). Affluent students in the "Others" category had a higher passing rate (92.0%) than their economically disadvantaged peers (72.3%).

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics for Mathematics STAAR Performance Levels

Socioeconomic Background	Race/Ethnicity	n	Pass	Fail
Affluent	White	1254	1221	33
	Hispanic/Latino	154	139	15
	African-American	43	34	9
	Other	100	92	8
	White	47	42	5
Economically Disadvantaged	Hispanic/Latino	82	58	24
	African-American	72	43	29
	Other	23	18	5
	White			
	Hispanic/Latino			

Research question 1a. *Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status?*

Table 4.12 shows the descriptive statistics for the mathematics scale scores by grade level and socioeconomic background. The mean scale score of the mathematics assessment was 1669.11 with a standard deviation of 216.3. The results show that as the grade level increased, mean scale scores increased. There were differences between the means for affluent and economically disadvantaged students between grade levels. The difference between means for socioeconomic background in fourth grade ($MD = 206.6$) was smaller than the difference between means in fifth grade ($MD = 268.89$). The difference between means in sixth grade was the smallest ($MD = 192.84$).

Table 4.12

Descriptive Statistics for Mathematics STAAR Scale Scores by Grade Level and Socioeconomic Background

Grade Level	Socioeconomic Background	Mean	Standard Deviation
4th Grade	Affluent	1624.26	162.467
	Economically Disadvantaged	1417.66	326.604
5th Grade	Affluent	1700.33	170.315
	Economically Disadvantaged	1431.44	352.346
6th Grade	Affluent	1776.01	173.268
	Economically Disadvantaged	1583.17	272.974

The descriptive statistics for the Mathematics STAAR performance levels by grade level and socioeconomic background are presented in Table 4.13. In fourth grade,

the passing rate for the mathematics assessment was 94.9%. The passing rate in fifth grade was 88.6%. In sixth grade, 94.7% of students passed the assessment. The passing rate decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but then increased from fifth grade to sixth grade.

In regard to socioeconomic status and grade level, there were differences in the passing rates between student groups. The passing rate for affluent fourth grade students was higher (94.5%) than the passing rate for economically disadvantaged fourth grade students (80.6%). Affluent fifth grade students had a higher passing rate (92.7%) than economically disadvantaged fifth grade students (64.7%). The passing rate for affluent sixth grade students was higher (98.2%) than their economically disadvantaged counterparts (72.7%). The passing rate for both affluent and economically disadvantaged students decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but the passing rate increased from fifth grade to sixth grade. The gap in the passing rate between affluent and economically disadvantaged students increased from fourth grade (13.8%) to fifth grade (28.0%) and slightly decreased from fifth grade to sixth grade (25.4%).

Table 4.13

Descriptive Statistics for Mathematics STAAR Performance Levels by Grade Level and Socioeconomic Background

Grade Level	Socioeconomic Background	n	Pass	Fail
4th Grade	Affluent	567	547	20
	Economically Disadvantaged	62	50	12
5th Grade	Affluent	493	457	36
	Economically Disadvantaged	85	55	30
6th Grade	Affluent	491	482	9
	Economically Disadvantaged	77	56	21

Research Question 2

Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

Reading multivariate linear regression. A multivariate linear regression was conducted to assess the interaction between observed variables on the Reading STAAR. Measurements of the association between student achievement on the Reading STAAR and other variables, such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, and grade level were used to affirm the research hypotheses. After applying multivariate regression statistics to the data, the model revealed an association between Reading STAAR scale scores and some of the variables. This model explained 22.2% of the total variance in Reading STAAR scale scores (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.474 ^a	.225	.222	177.083

^aPredictors: (Constant), Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Other, Female, Low-SES, Sixth Grade, Fifth Grade

^bDependent Variable: Reading STAAR scale score

The coefficients between student scale scores on the reading assessment and race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, and grade level are shown in Table 4.15. The baselines for race/ethnicity was White, gender was male, SES was high-SES, and grade level was four. Race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, and grade level were significant predictors of student scale scores on the Reading STAAR. Being Hispanic/Latino ($\beta = -.123, p < .001$) or African-American ($\beta = -.177, p < .001$) were significant, negative predictors of student performance, but being classified as Other ($\beta = .011, p = .597$) was not a significant predictor. Coming from an economically disadvantaged background ($\beta = -.250, p < .001$) was a significant, negative predictor of student performance. Female gender ($\beta = .008, p < .001$) was a significant, positive predictor of student performance in reading. Being enrolled in fifth or sixth grade ($\beta = .150, p < .001, \beta = .288, p < .001$, respectively) were significant, positive predictors of student scale scores on the reading assessment. Again, coming from a low-SES background was a larger predictor of scale score than race.

Table 4.15***Coefficients^a Between Variables***

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1565.728	8.432		185.689	< .001
Hispanic/Latino	-72.588	13.358	-.123	-5.434	< .001
African-American	-144.278	19.300	-.177	-7.476	< .001
Other	8.929	16.863	.011	.530	.597
Low-SES	-150.809	14.759	-.250	-10.218	< .001
Female	35.330	8.427	.088	4.193	<.001
Fifth Grade	64.159	10.229	.150	6.272	< .001
Sixth Grade	123.772	10.276	.288	12.044	< .001

^aDependent Variable: Reading STAAR scale score

Reading multivariate logistic regression. A multivariate logistic regression was conducted to measure the individual impact each variable had on student performance level (pass/fail) on the Reading STAAR. Measurements of the impact of the variables in the study on student performance level in reading were used to determine if any variables were indicators of whether or not students would pass the Reading STAAR. The model's overall effect size using the Nagelkerke R Square was .220 (see Table 4.16). The practical effect size was small.

Table 4.16

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	793.209 ^a	.092	.220

^aEstimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Table 4.17 shows the regression coefficients for each variable in the equation for reading performance levels. The baselines for race/ethnicity was White, gender was male, SES was high-SES, and grade level was four. Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic background were significant predictors of whether or not students would pass the Reading STAAR. Being Hispanic/Latino ($B = -1.065, p < .001$), African-American ($B = -1.541, p < .001$), or classified as Other ($B = -1.015, p = .002$) were significant, negative predictors of student performance level, with African-American being the most significant predictor. In Table 4.17, the odds ratio for passing or failing the Reading STAAR was indicated by $\text{Exp}(B)$. Compared to White students, Hispanic/Latino students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .345$] were approximately three times more likely to fail the Reading STAAR, African-American students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .214$] were about five times more likely to fail, and Other students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .363$] were three times more likely to fail. Coming from an economically disadvantaged background ($B = -1.574, p < .001$) was a significant, negative predictor of student performance level on the reading assessment. Compared to affluent students, economically disadvantaged students [$\text{Exp}(B) = .207$] were five times more likely to fail the Reading STAAR, making SES the largest significant predictor of Reading STAAR performance level. Female gender ($B = .449, p = .023$) was a significant predictor of student performance level in reading. Being enrolled in grade

level five or six ($B = -.186, p = .419$; $B = .137, p = .579$, respectively) were not significant predictors of student performance level on the reading assessment.

Table 4.17

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Hispanic/Latino	-1.065	.260	16.789	1	< .001	.345
	African-American	-1.541	.301	26.196	1	< .001	.214
	Other	-1.015	.330	9.440	1	.002	.363
	Low-SES	-1.574	.231	46.339	1	< .001	.207
	Female	.449	.197	5.196	1	.023	1.566
	Fifth Grade	-.186	.231	.653	1	.419	.830
	Sixth Grade	.137	.246	.308	1	.579	1.146
	Constant	3.247	.215	228.807	1	< .001	25.705

^aVariable(s) entered on step 1: Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Other, Female, Low-SES, Fifth Grade, Sixth Grade

Reading descriptive statistics. The descriptive data for the reading scale scores are presented in Table 4.18. The mean scale score of the reading assessment was 1606.25 with a standard deviation of 200.719. Affluent students scored higher ($M = 1632.42, SD = 165.161$) than their non-affluent peers ($M = 1425.55, SD = 305.704$). Affluent White students scored higher ($M = 1641.47, SD = 154.56$) than economically disadvantaged White students ($M = 1536.89, SD = 227.192$). Affluent Hispanic/Latino students performed at higher levels ($M = 1573.84, SD = 198.245$) than economically disadvantaged Hispanic/Latino students ($M = 1414.55, SD = 290.125$). Affluent African-American students outperformed ($M = 1491.21, SD = 208.361$) economically

disadvantaged African-American students ($M = 1354.54$, $SD = 352.813$). Affluent Others achieved at higher levels ($M = 1669.86$, $SD = 170.654$) than their economically disadvantaged counterparts ($M = 1459.57$, $SD = 288.264$).

Table 4.18

Descriptive Statistics for Reading STAAR Scale Scores

Socioeconomic Background	Race/Ethnicity	Mean	Standard Deviation
Affluent	White	1641.47	154.560
	Hispanic/Latino	1573.84	198.245
	African-American	1491.21	208.361
	Other	1669.86	170.654
Economically Disadvantaged	White	1536.89	227.192
	Hispanic/Latino	1414.55	290.125
	African-American	1354.54	352.813
	Other	1459.57	288.264

Table 4.19 shows the descriptive statistics for the mathematics performance levels. The passing rate for the Reading STAAR was 92.3% and the failing rate was 7.7%. Affluent students had a higher passing rate than students identified as economically disadvantaged. Out of 1,551 high-SES students who took the STAAR assessment in reading, 1,484 students passed (95.7%) and 67 students did not pass (4.3%). Out of 224 low-SES students who took the Reading STAAR, 154 students passed (68.8%) and 70 students did not pass (31.3%). To investigate further, the passing rate between economically disadvantaged and affluent students was compared within students' race/ethnicity group. Affluent White students had a higher passing rate on the

reading assessment (97.0%) than economically disadvantaged White students (80.9%). More affluent Hispanic/Latino students passed the assessment (92.9%) than economically disadvantaged Hispanic/Latino students (64.6%). A higher percentage of affluent African-American students passed the reading assessment (76.2%) than economically disadvantaged African-American students (65.3%). Affluent students classified as Others had a higher passing rate than (92.0%) their economically disadvantaged peers (69.6%).

Table 4.19

Descriptive Statistics for Reading STAAR Performance Levels

Socioeconomic Background	Race/Ethnicity	n	Pass	Fail
Affluent	White	1254	1217	37
	Hispanic/Latino	154	143	11
	African-American	43	32	11
	Other	100	92	8
Economically Disadvantaged	White	47	38	9
	Hispanic/Latino	82	53	29
	African-American	72	47	25
	Other	23	16	7

Research question 2a. *Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status?*

Table 4.20 shows the descriptive statistics for the reading scale scores by grade level and socioeconomic background. The mean scale score of the reading assessment

was 1606.31 with a standard deviation of 200.756. According to the results, as the grade level increased, mean scale scores increased (see Table 4.20). There were differences between the means for affluent and economically disadvantaged students when moderated by grade level. The difference between means for socioeconomic background in fourth grade ($MD = 198.16$) was smaller than the difference between means in fifth grade ($MD = 241.71$). The difference between means in sixth grade was the smallest ($MD = 197.98$).

Table 4.20

Descriptive Statistics for Reading STAAR Scale Scores by Grade Level and Socioeconomic Background

Grade Level	Socioeconomic Background	Mean	Standard Deviation
4th Grade	Affluent	1570.05	157.198
	Economically Disadvantaged	1371.89	308.908
5th Grade	Affluent	1640.29	153.661
	Economically Disadvantaged	1398.58	345.038
6th Grade	Affluent	1696.53	159.229
	Economically Disadvantaged	1498.55	239.756

The descriptive statistics for the Reading STAAR performance levels by grade level and socioeconomic background are presented in Table 4.21. Overall, the passing rate for the Reading STAAR was 92.3%. In fourth grade, the passing rate for the reading assessment was 93.2%. The fifth grade passing rate was 90.7%. In sixth grade, 93.0% of

students passed the assessment. The passing rate decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but then increased from fifth grade to sixth grade.

In regard to socioeconomic status and grade level, there were differences in the passing rates between student groups. The passing rate for affluent fourth grade students was higher (95.8%) than the passing rate for economically disadvantaged fourth grade students (69.4%). Affluent fifth grade students had a higher passing rate (94.5%) than economically disadvantaged fifth grade students (68.2%). The passing rate for affluent sixth grade students was higher (96.7%) than their economically disadvantaged counterparts (68.8%). The passing rate for both affluent and economically disadvantaged students decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but the passing rate increased from fifth grade to sixth grade. The gap in the passing rate between affluent and economically disadvantaged students slightly decreased from fourth grade (26.4%) to fifth grade (26.3%) and increased from fifth grade to sixth grade (27.9%).

Table 4.21

Descriptive Statistics for Reading STAAR Performance Levels by Grade Level and Socioeconomic Background

Grade Level	Socioeconomic Background	n	Pass	Fail
4th Grade	Affluent	567	543	24
	Economically Disadvantaged	62	43	19
5th Grade	Affluent	493	466	27
	Economically Disadvantaged	85	58	27
6th Grade	Affluent	491	475	16
	Economically Disadvantaged	77	53	24

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore possible associations between student socioeconomic status and academic achievement in North Texas affluent schools. Student achievement in mathematics and reading on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) for the 2019 spring administration was analyzed. The null hypothesis was that there was no association between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement on the basis of mathematics and reading in affluent schools. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and multivariate linear and logistic regressions were conducted to compare mathematics and reading achievement between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students. The analyses presented results that showed there was a significant association between SES and academic achievement. Descriptive statistics showed that economically disadvantaged students scored lower than affluent students on the mathematics and reading assessment. To analyze the results further, economically disadvantaged students and affluent students were compared within their race/ethnic group. The results between low-SES students and high-SES students were the same when compared within their race/ethnic group, meaning economically disadvantaged students in one race/ethnic group scored lower on the mathematics and reading assessments than affluent students in the same race/ethnic group.

Independent t-tests showed that affluent students achieved at higher levels than economically disadvantaged students in both mathematics and reading. The mathematics and reading scores for affluent students were significantly different compared to

economically disadvantaged students. Multivariate linear regressions were conducted to assess the association between student scale scores on the Mathematics and Reading STAAR and student socioeconomic background. The analyses showed that race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status were significant predictors for student scales scores on the Mathematics STAAR, and race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and grade level were significant predictors for Reading STAAR. Multivariate logistic regressions were performed to determine the individual impact that each variable had on student performance level (pass/fail) on the STAAR in mathematics and reading. The analyses revealed that race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status were significant predictors of STAAR performance level in mathematics and reading.

In summary, to answer research question one as presented, *Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?*, analyses were performed between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students on the mathematics assessment. Affluent students performed better on the Mathematics STAAR. To directly answer research question one A, *Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status?*, descriptive statistics analysis was conducted between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students. As the grade level increased, mean scale scores for both student groups increased in mathematics. The achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students widened from fourth grade to fifth grade but slightly decreased from fifth grade to sixth grade. Therefore, there was no consistent answer.

To answer research question two as presented, *Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?*, analyses were conducted between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students on the reading assessment. Affluent students performed better on the Reading STAAR. To most directly answer research question two A, *Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status?*, descriptive statistics analysis was performed between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students. As the grade level increased, mean scale scores for both student groups increased in reading. The achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students slightly decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but the gap widened from fifth grade to sixth grade. There was no consistent answer to this research question.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed associations between student socioeconomic status (SES) and student academic achievement for the 2018-2019 school year. The study focused on fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students enrolled in affluent schools in a North Texas school district. There were 1,776 participants in the study. Affluent schools were identified as schools that had less than 20 percent of their student population eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Students were classified into two categories: economically disadvantaged or affluent. Students were identified as economically disadvantaged if they qualified for free or reduced-price meals as determined by the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition program. Academic achievement was based on student performance in mathematics and reading on state-mandated standardized tests, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Data were gathered from the 2019 spring administration of the STAAR. Performance on the STAAR was analyzed and comparisons were made between student groups classified by socioeconomic status and grade level.

The purpose of the study was to examine the association, if any, between student socioeconomic status and academic achievement based on student performance on the STAAR in mathematics and reading. The STAAR is administered in every Texas public school each year under the direction of the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The tests are given either on paper or online, depending on student accommodations, in a controlled environment. The STAAR was developed by TEA and is based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and measures standards in mathematics and reading. The

items included on the tests assess skills at high levels of depth and cognitive complexity, and the items also measure growth (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Standardized STAAR mathematics and reading scale scores are used to examine academic achievement of students in the study population. Students in grades four, five, and six from low-SES backgrounds and high-SES backgrounds from the 2018-2019 school year formed the two groups used in the comparison. Students who did not take the 2019 spring administration of STAAR in mathematics or reading were not included in the study.

The students' academic achievement in mathematics and reading, measured as individual scale scores and performance levels on the STAAR, are the study's dependent variables, while the independent variable is student socioeconomic status. An independent samples t-test was used to compare the STAAR mathematics and reading scores to establish the mean scale scores between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students. The data indicated that economically disadvantaged students did not perform as well as affluent students.

In this chapter, the findings are discussed as they relate to the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

- 1a. Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status?

2. Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background?

2a: Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status?

This chapter is a discussion of the implications of the results from the study. Chapter Five has six major sections: (a) interpretation of the findings, (b) theoretical implications, (c) implications for practice, (d) limitations, (e) recommendations for future research, and (f) summary. The implications are those which are theoretical and practical from this study of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and their performance on state-mandated standardized assessments in mathematics and reading. In addition, recommendations for future research are discussed.

Interpretation of the Findings

The objective of the study was to add to the body of literature regarding academic success of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds who attend affluent schools. Overall findings indicated that student socioeconomic status was associated with student academic achievement. Findings showed that students who were identified as economically disadvantaged achieved lower mathematics and reading scores, as opposed to affluent students. This finding could indicate that there were other factors that contributed to the academic gap in scores as well.

Research question 1. Is student academic achievement in mathematics for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background? Results from research question one indicated that there were statistically significant differences between student academic achievement on the Mathematics STAAR between students identified as economically disadvantaged and affluent students. This finding

meant that low-SES students scored significantly lower than their high-SES peers in mathematics.

Due to the initial analysis resulting in high-SES students scoring higher in mathematics than low-SES students, further analysis was performed to evaluate whether the same results were reached when compared within race/ethnicity student groups. This analysis resulted in the finding that, within their race/ethnicity group, high-SES students achieved higher scores in mathematics than low-SES students. For example, high-SES Hispanic/Latino students scored higher in mathematics than low-SES Hispanic/Latino students. This finding was the same for each race/ethnicity student group.

Research question 1a. Does the grade level moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status? Findings from the analyses were inconsistent. There were inconsistencies in the mean scale scores. The difference between the means for affluent and economically disadvantaged students in fourth grade was smaller than the difference between the means in fifth grade, suggesting that the academic gap increased from fourth to fifth grade. The difference between the means in sixth grade was smaller than both difference of means in fourth and fifth grade. There were also inconsistencies in the passing rates. The passing rate for economically disadvantaged students decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but increased from fifth grade to sixth grade. These findings revealed that grade level does not moderate the association of mathematics achievement and socioeconomic status.

Research question 2. Is student academic achievement in reading for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students associated with student socioeconomic background? Findings indicated statistically significant differences on reading scores when comparing

low-SES students and high-SES students. Low-SES students scored significantly lower than high-SES students on the Reading STAAR. This finding showed that there was an association between student socioeconomic status and reading achievement.

Further analysis was performed to test the association between the reading scores of economically disadvantaged students and affluent students, controlled for race/ethnicity. The results showed that high socioeconomic status was a positive predictor of Reading STAAR scores compared to low socioeconomic status within race/ethnicity student groups. For instance, high-SES African-American students achieved higher reading scores than low-SES African-American students. This finding was true for all race/ethnic student groups.

Research question 2a. Does the grade level moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status? The findings from the analyses were inconsistent. There were inconsistencies in the difference between means. The difference between the means for low-SES and high-SES students in fourth grade was smaller than the difference between the means in fifth grade, signifying that the academic gap increased from fourth to fifth grade. The difference between the means in sixth grade was the smallest compared to the other grade levels. Analyses on performance levels showed inconsistencies in passing rates. The gap in the passing rate between affluent and economically disadvantaged students slightly decreased from fourth grade to fifth grade, but the gap increased from fifth grade to sixth grade. The findings showed that grade level does not moderate the association of reading achievement and socioeconomic status.

Summary of the findings. The computed p-value for research questions one and two was lower than the significance level $p < .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis for both mathematics and reading scores was accepted. The findings from the hypotheses revealed that there was a statistically significant gap in mathematics and reading test scores between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students enrolled in North Texas affluent schools.

Chapter One presented that while educational policy has attempted to close the academic gap between low-SES and high-SES students, the gap continues to widen. This study adds to the literature by helping school administrators and educators who work in affluent schools acknowledge the gaps between economically disadvantaged and affluent students on their campus. This study has demonstrated that students who come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are performing at lower levels than students who do not come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Chapter Two provided a review of the current literature related to the structure of the education system, individuals identified as economically disadvantaged, and affluent schools. The impact of school reforms was reviewed, along with schools and society, classroom practices, deficit thinking, and the power structure in affluent schools. This study contributes to the current literature through its examination of the academic gap between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students who attend affluent schools.

The findings of the study show that economically disadvantaged students enrolled in an affluent school did not perform as well academically compared to affluent students. This study demonstrates that additional research needs to be conducted in order to

determine the factors involved in the difference between academic achievement of the student groups.

The findings in this study were not surprising. As an educator who has worked in an affluent school, I have attended grade-level data meetings where low-income students were compared to their high-income peers. Campus administrators and teachers would commonly refer to low-income students as ‘apartment kids’ and complain that low-income students were underperforming compared to their affluent peers. In my classroom, I did not notice a difference between the academic performance of low-income and high-income students, but other teachers obviously saw the difference in their classrooms.

Theoretical Implications

The foundation of this study was based on critical and social theories: social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), critical theory (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008), and cultural and social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1973). Social constructionism explains how we construct meaning of the world through social interactions. Critical theory focuses on the class structure in society. Cultural and social reproduction theory critiques how schools reproduce class structure. The issue that prompted this study was the perceived growing academic gap between the rich and the poor and the lack of research on this topic regarding affluent schools. Overall, the data showed that economically disadvantaged students on affluent campuses did not perform as well as their affluent peers on the STAAR in mathematics and reading. Students may have shown growth during the year, but the STAAR scale scores and performance levels only reveal student academic achievement, not student growth.

According to the theory of social constructionism, humans construct their thinking, learning, and self-identity through interactions with others (Lucey, 2010). In this study, students identified as economically disadvantaged may have been subject to negative perceptions and deficit thinking from their teachers and peers. These social constructs affect student learning and self-identity. If economically disadvantaged students are treated as if they are less than affluent students, then they will begin to believe that these false notions are true (Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018). This self-fulfilling prophecy has an effect on student learning.

Critical theory, grounded in the work of Karl Marx, explores the organization of social classes. Class is a social structure that maintains the status quo of economic differences in society (Bates, 2017). Marx and Engels (1848/2008) suggest that society is composed of two groups: the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletarians (working class). The bourgeoisie holds the power in society and influences the dominant culture. This class structure is mirrored in schools. Based on their socioeconomic background, students are given and made aware of their place in the classroom. The data in the study supports Marx's critical theory. Compared to their affluent peers, students identified as economically disadvantaged achieved at lower levels on the Mathematics and Reading STAAR.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1973) theory of cultural and social reproduction theory examines the class structure and how it contributes to the dispersal of social capital to the classes. Bourdieu's theory suggests that society is divided into three classes: lower class, middle class, and upper class. Classes are separated by capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Cultural capital is passed from parents to children (Bourdieu,

1973, 1986; Jaeger & Breen, 2016), and children then convert their cultural capital into academic performance. Teachers have higher perceptions of students who turn their cultural capital into academic success, meaning those students receive more attention from the teacher, which then leads to better grades and a better learning environment (Jaeger & Breen, 2016). The higher the cultural capital at home, the higher the child's academic success in school. The issue is that schools value the dominant class' (upper class) cultural capital over others. For example, students whose families expose them to fine arts, books, and trips are more likely to be successful in school (Bourdieu, 1973). This theory, in part, explains the data in the study which shows that there is unequal academic achievement between students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and affluent students.

Implications for Practice

This study has clear implications for practice that could help close the academic gap between economically disadvantaged students and affluent students on affluent elementary campuses. Many of the same implications that apply to students of color, students with disabilities, and English Learners also applies to students identified as economically disadvantaged who attend affluent schools. These implications are summarized in the following sections.

Community-building. There is a perception that economically disadvantaged families are not involved in their child's education as much as affluent parents (Gorski, 2016). Many low-income families have parents who work more than one job in order to support their family. Therefore, they may be unable to attend after-school functions and help volunteer on campus during the day. There may also be a cultural disconnect

between families and the school (Orr & Rogers, 2011), such as language barriers that keep families from coming into the school for fear that they will be unable to communicate with school personnel or cultural differences in understanding what parental engagement entails. Parents might have also had negative experiences with schools when they were students, which can impact their connections. Schools have the ability to bridge the gap between these affected families and the school (Shirley, 2011). School administrators should make resources more accessible to all families, not just affluent ones. School leaders can also reach out to the community to find community leaders to help facilitate the relationship between affluent schools and families.

Connecting with the community should also be a part of the campus improvement plan (CIP). There should be specific goals with action steps, as well as dates indicating when different parts of the plan will be completed. The campus should assign a team of staff members to ensure that the action plan is carried out. One idea that campuses could add to their action plan is a Community Learning Exchange (CLE). A CLE is a community meeting that is based on five axioms: learning as leadership in action, assets and hope, crossing borders, local knowledge and action, and conversation and dialogue (Guajardo et al., 2016). A CLE is usually held on campus and parents are invited to come to speak about a topic chosen by the CLE facilitator. CLEs are typically held on the weekends or at night so that more families, especially families who work during the day, are able to attend. During the CLE, participants are encouraged to join in the conversation about their past experiences and share how their experiences influence their views on the selected topic. Sometimes students are asked to join CLEs as well in order to get a student perspective on the topic.

Another way that affluent schools can connect with the community is by school leaders and staff going out into the community and personally connecting with families. Many times, administrators and teachers only reach out to parents when they have a concern about a student. Educators should make a conscious effort to reach out to parents when students are doing well so that they can build a positive relationship with the parents. Then, if students are having issues in school such as frequent absences/tardies, struggling in class, or behavior, school leaders and staff will already have a positive relationship with the families. In turn, families will be more willing to work with school leaders and staff as a team to help alleviate the issue. And when it proves difficult for educators or school administrators to reach parents, they should go to students' residences to contact the family.

Finally, if there is a language barrier that keeps families from coming to the school, campus leaders should create opportunities for families to receive helpful information in a way that they can understand. School leaders can also provide resources for parents who want to learn English. For example, campuses could send notes/flyers home in different languages or, if the budget provides, they can provide free language classes at night for families. Also, Parent-Teacher Association/Organization meetings could be held both in English and in another language that is prominent on the campus. Parents should be given the option to attend school meetings via video conferencing or schools should provide a recording that parents can watch at a later time. Resources need to be accessible to everyone, and affluent schools must try to ensure that all families have access.

Classroom practices. Students enter school with cultural capital, and they are successful in school when they can turn their cultural capital into academic performance (Bourdieu, 1973). Lareau (2011) suggests that there are two types of upbringing: *concerted cultivation and natural growth* (p. 32). Concerted cultivation (structured activities) is associated with upper socioeconomic classes and natural growth (unstructured activities) is associated with lower socioeconomic classes. When students bring their cultural capital into the schools, concerted cultivation is valued over natural growth, which puts low-income students at a disadvantage as soon as they enter school (Lareau, 2011). School educators can change the narrative by creating a classroom environment that is conducive to all students, regardless of socioeconomic background. One way that teachers can achieve this is by creating a community culture in their classroom. Rather than focusing on independence, educators should encourage students to be interdependent. Educators can encourage community-type learning where students learn from each other. Building a positive classroom community should start at the beginning of the school year. Teachers should spend time building the community in their classroom from the first day of school. Students should feel that their classroom is a safe space for them to share their opinions and use their voice. Taking the time to build the foundation of community at the beginning of the year helps both the teacher and the student. Students would then feel that they have a voice and their voice is being heard, and teachers are able to connect with students on a deeper level and use that connection to help them throughout the year. Building community also allows for students to better understand their classmates and interact with peers that they might not have interacted with outside of school, due to different socioeconomic social circles. There are many

ways that teachers can build community in their classrooms, from class meetings to meaningful partner activities and discussions. Some school districts require campuses to have a dedicated social-emotional learning (SEL) time in their schedule in order to facilitate classroom community.

Teachers could look at the practices they use every day in the classroom and evaluate them for equity. Students should be encouraged to ask questions, even if those questions challenge the status quo or spark difficult conversations. Educators should ask students open-ended questions that require them to think on a higher level. Educators should evaluate their student grouping practices. Student groups should be heterogenous, not ability-based, unless the teacher is working with a small group during guided math or guided reading. When creating student groups and partner groups, teachers could consider different elements including gender, socioeconomic background, and academic achievement. Groups can be assigned in a way that students are able to interact with others who may not look, act, or come from the same background as them.

Educators could also self-evaluate their role in the classroom. A teacher's role is to give students the tools that they need to be successful and facilitating the use of those tools to learn and achieve and at high levels, rather than just absorbing information (Dewey, 1897/2019; Papert, 1991). Teachers should give students the tools, show them how to use the tools, and then send the students to build a house, metaphorically speaking. Teachers should be seen as facilitators, not keepers of knowledge.

Curriculum. The curriculum in schools is mandated by the state and then the district. In order to streamline what is taught across campuses, schools must follow the given curriculum. This curriculum aligns with the dominant culture (Bourdieu &

Passeron, 1990) and often does not include marginal voices. School districts and school leaders should give teachers the autonomy to modify the curriculum to fit the needs of the students in the classroom, without eliminating required standards. Curriculum should be inclusive of all student backgrounds and experiences. Curriculum should focus on all of the voices from our past and present, not just the ones from the dominant culture. For example, instead of learning about the oppression and struggle of African-Americans during Black History Month, students should learn about their accomplishments and contributions to American history throughout the school year. In order for this to happen, administrators must support teachers in their endeavors to deliver a more inclusive, culturally responsive curriculum to their students. For example, an effective strategy that can be used in a culturally responsive classroom is critical literacy (Soares & Wood, 2010). According to Soares and Wood, critical literacy focuses on the importance of student experiences in instruction. Students are encouraged to examine characters and messages they see in literature, which leads to a discussion about voices of privilege in literature and in school. This strategy can ignite powerful dialogue in the classroom and empower students to want to take a stand against injustice. Gay (2010) suggested that teachers need to be aware of and use cultural characteristics and experiences of ethnically diverse students to teach their students. She found that there is a mismatch between home and school culture, and it often leads to achievement inequities. It is imperative for curriculum to be culturally responsive and for every student to see themselves in the curriculum (Gordon, 2016).

Deficit thinking. As mentioned in social constructionism theory, people make sense of their world through interactions with others (Lucey, 2010). Deficit thinking

occurs in classrooms when the teacher focuses on student deficits rather than student assets (Harris & Williams, 2012). Deficit thinking has an effect on the way that students perceive themselves (Martin, Smith, & Williams, 2018), and, in turn, on the way that they learn in the classroom. Students begin to believe the deficit beliefs held by educators as truth (Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014). School administrators can combat deficit thinking by holding professional development sessions for the staff. Before educators can understand the effects that deficit thinking has on their students, educators must first realize that they hold deficit beliefs which might be transferred into the classroom. Professional development for both teachers and supervisors should be focused on self-reflection and uncovering one's platform, or praxis (Jacobs & Casciola, 2016). Teachers and supervisors must self-reflect on their experiences with race, social class, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, and sexual orientation (Marshall & Olivia, 2010). Self-reflection and dialogue will help the participants identify their biases. There are several resources available to schools that cover the topic of deficit thinking. Once teachers are aware of their own deficit thinking and are able to shift their mindset about their students, then training can begin on how to change classroom practices to reflect the new learning.

Affluent schools. In affluent schools, high-income parents have a sense of power and entitlement (Reeves, 2017). They hoard opportunities for their children without regard for the consequences of their actions. By hoarding opportunities for their child, parents might have taken the opportunity away from another student (Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015) who is just as or even more deserving. For example, when their child does not get accepted into an accelerated program, affluent parents might use their voice and

wield their power to get the decision overturned or have their child retested (Landeros, 2011; Reeves, 2017). On some affluent campuses, parents also have the power to choose their child's teacher or move their child out of a teacher's classroom. High-income parents are more likely to make these requests than low-income parents, and this is fueled by school administrators who grant the requests (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Landeros, 2011). The power in affluent schools needs to be shifted away from high-income parents and distributed among all school stakeholders. Low-income parents should have as much voice in making decisions as high-income parents. School administrators can start by limiting the amount of parent requests. There needs to be clear rules and boundaries that are set with the families and faculty in the school. Parents should not be allowed to choose their child's teacher, demand that their child be in an accelerated program, or hoard opportunities for their child.

School administrators need to look at their practices for how students are accepted into accelerated programs. Training can be provided to teachers on how to identify students that might qualify for advanced studies, regardless of student socioeconomic background. Administrators should look at the numbers and demographic makeup of students who are enrolled in accelerated programs to see if it is an accurate representation of the students in the school. School administrators should ask themselves: Are students identified as economically disadvantaged represented in our accelerated programs? If the answer is no, then they need to create an action plan to help identify low-income students that qualify for the programs.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the absence of voice, or qualitative data. This research establishes that there are significant differences in achievement associated with socioeconomic status, but it does not establish the causes of the differences. The absence of teacher and student voice leaves these questions undiscovered. For example, students might have approached the test differently than others. There might have been personal issues that affected their performance on the test. Some students might have prepared differently for the test than others. The absence of teacher voices is important to note as a limitation as well. Educators have different teaching styles, as well as varying years of experience and differing levels of education. Teachers might have been dealing with home, work, and/or personal issues throughout the school year or when they were preparing students to take the test. Therefore, the study would have been enhanced if qualitative data were included in the research.

Another limitation of the study is the depth of the quantitative analysis. The analysis in this study focused on group differences by socioeconomic status, and by race/ethnicity, gender, and grade level. It would have been beneficial to disaggregate the data even further such that the academic achievement of SES groups could have been analyzed by the number of years on the campus, the number of years in the district, teaching experience, and teacher education level.

A further limitation within the study is variance between participants. It would have been advantageous to narrow down the number of participants by years in the district or, even further, by years on the campus. For instance, participants in the study would have been students in grades four through six who took the Mathematics and

Reading STAAR that were enrolled on their campus for a certain amount of years, depending on current grade level, eliminating participants who moved from one school, district, or region to another. Students in fourth grade would have been enrolled for five years, fifth grade for six years, and sixth grade for seven years. This would have contributed to the study because all of the participants would have the same campus experience throughout their elementary academic career, giving participants a more level playing field.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research regarding the academic achievement of students identified as economically disadvantaged who attend affluent schools and the impact of their socioeconomic status on their achievement is warranted. The increased focus on accountability and high-stakes standardized testing at the federal and state levels should inspire more research on how to close the achievement gap between low-SES and high-SES students, including research-based programs and interventions at affluent schools.

Additional studies could also be conducted between affluent schools and non-affluent schools. STAAR scale scores and performance levels of economically disadvantaged students who attend affluent schools could be compared to the scores and performance levels of economically disadvantaged students in non-affluent schools. Research shows that low-SES students benefit academically by being surrounded by high-income, high performing peers (Boger, 2005; Harris, 2007). Low-income students who attend affluent schools have more opportunities and higher expectations (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Finally, qualitative research should be pursued on the experiences of families, students, and teachers in affluent schools. Interviews should be conducted on economically disadvantaged families' experiences in affluent schools. Teacher perceptions must also be explored. Teachers should be interviewed, surveyed, and observed in the classroom to get a better understanding of whether or not students who have an economic disadvantage are treated differently than their affluent peers. As an educator, I have seen first-hand how teachers have different expectations for different students. When I taught on a campus located in an affluent community, I witnessed teachers talking negatively about low-income students on the campus and how they were underperforming compared to high-income students. In my classroom, I never noticed a difference in the academic achievement between low-income and high-income students. But after hearing negative comments from teachers, I began to wonder if low-income students were actually scoring lower than their high-income peers which led to this study. Their comments also made me think about whether or not the negative perceptions that teachers held about low-income students had an effect on student learning. Qualitative research on whether or not teachers on affluent campuses treated students differently depending on socioeconomic status, as well as research on the effect of teacher perceptions on student learning and academic achievement would add to the body of literature on affluent schools. Adding the voices of families, students, and teachers would contribute to the knowledge of literature on economically disadvantaged students.

Summary

The present study contributes to the existent literature by focusing on the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students compared to affluent

students at affluent schools. The relationship between race/ethnicity and academic achievement in affluent schools has been long discussed in the literature (Drake, 2017; Ispa-Landa, 2013; Matrevec, 2011; Rury & Rife, 2018). The purpose of this study was to determine if there was an association between student socioeconomic status and academic achievement in affluent schools. It was concluded that student socioeconomic status was associated with student academic achievement on the Mathematics and Reading STAAR.

This study was inspired by the hypothesis that, on average, economically disadvantaged students do not perform as well as affluent students on the Mathematics and Reading STAAR. Literature cited in this study supports this hypothesis and returns to the theories discussed in Chapter One: social constructionism, critical theory, and social and cultural reproduction theory. Social constructionism describes that students make meaning of their world through interactions with people (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which explains how interactions between low-income students and their teachers and high-income peers have an effect on their sense of belonging and impact their learning. Critical theory examines how class structure is mirrored in schools (Marx & Engels, 1848/2008); therefore, in order to preserve the inequality in society, there is inequality in the classroom resulting in lower achievement for low-income students. Cultural and social reproduction theory suggests that cultural capital is passed from parents to children (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986; Jaeger & Breen, 2016), and children convert the capital into academic performance. Students who possess cultural capital that aligns with the dominant culture have an advantage over students whose cultural capital does not align. Hence, high-income students have cultural capital that is valued more than

low-income students' cultural capital, which helps to explain the achievement gap between the two groups.

For many years, policy makers have attempted to close the achievement gap between low-income students and high-income students. The focus has been on surface level issues instead of pedagogy (Haberman, 2010), which in turn, ends up hurting children and failing to improve school. Since the early 1980s, state-wide standardized testing in Texas has been administered regularly to students from grades three to twelve. During this time, the academic gap between low-income students and high-income students has either widened or remained relatively unchanged.

The current system of accountability in Texas is broken, and the school system is failing students identified as economically disadvantaged. The system fails to close the achievement gap between low-income and high-income students and perpetuates a structure of inequity between the two student groups. It will take more than mandates focused on improved standardized tests, different measures of accountability, and higher standards to close the gap between low-income students and high-income students. School leaders need to focus on what can be done in the classrooms and on campus to narrow the divide between the two student groups in affluent schools. Educators must recognize their biases in order to move forward with the work and adjust their classroom practices accordingly. In conclusion, more research should be conducted to pinpoint the specific factors that affect the difference in achievement between low-income and high-income students at affluent schools accurately.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A

IRB Approval



May 12, 2020

Denae Lawson
Texas State University
San Marcos, TX 78666

Dear Denae:

Your IRB application 7260 titled, '*THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN CENTRAL TEXAS AFFLUENT SCHOOLS*', was reviewed by the Texas State University IRB. According to the application, the purpose of your study is to "investigate the relationship between student socioeconomic status and student academic performance in predominately White affluent schools" by analyzing secondary anonymous data.

The IRB concluded that the project is analyzing secondary data with no human subject intervention/interaction. This research was determined to not meet the criteria and definition of "human subjects" by OHRP, which defines human subjects as a "intervention or interaction with living human individuals or obtaining/ analyzing identifiable information." Therefore, your project does not require oversight from the Texas State IRB.

If the intent of your project changes in the future, please contact Research Integrity and Compliance to initiate an IRB assessment. The changes may have an effect on whether the study meets OHRP's criteria of "research".

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Regards,



Monica Gonzales
IRB Specialist
Research Integrity and Compliance
Texas State University

CC: Dr. Robert Reardon

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