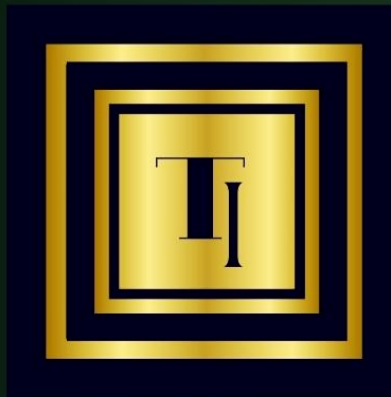


JUNE, 2025

TETELESTAI

INTERNATIONAL

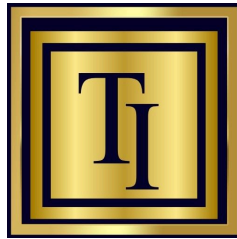
VOLUME I
REPORT #002



EMPOWERING CITIZENS THROUGH PRIVATE
SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

SUPPORTING EDUCATION INITIATIVES:
UNDERSTANDING ILLITERACY RATES
IN AMERICA

Caroline Bena Kuno, Ph.D.
Olufunlola A. Arowolo, Ph.D.



©Tetelestai International 2025

<https://tetelestai.services/>

CONTENTS

ABOUT US.....	5
ISSUE IDENTIFICATION.....	7
1. Illiteracy Rates Among U.S. Adults.....	7
2. Illiteracy Rates Among U.S. Children.....	9
3. Illiteracy Rates Among Adults in Texas.....	11
4. Illiteracy Rates Among Children in Texas.....	12
OUR SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY SERVICE.....	16
OUR EDUCATION INITIATIVE.....	16

Recommended citation:

Kuno, B. C. & Arowolo, O. A. (2025). Supporting education initiatives:
Understanding illiteracy rates in America. Volume I, Report No. 002.
Tetelestai International.

References made to institutional, commercial and or trade names
does not imply approval or constitute endorsement by Tetelestai
International.



ABOUT US



OUR MISSION

Tetelestai International is a philanthropic organization tasked with a mission to support vitality by delivering life-saving resources, in partnership with our community stakeholders. Tetelestai International's operational objectives are structured to yield transformational impact, based the following four-fold approach to community service: i) food assistance for low-income individuals, ii) new clothes for the homeless, iii) neonatal kits for new (and veteran) moms, iv) support for educational initiatives. We are purpose-driven to serve the under-resourced. Our vision is to continue to expand our operations, both locally and internationally. Tetelestai International is a registered 501(c)(3) that relies on selfless volunteers; generous donors; and partnerships with angel investors to fulfill its organizational mandate.

OUR TEAM

Our team is made up of dedicated professionals whose industry backgrounds range from government, to private sector, and non-profit fields. We are passionate about providing vital support to undergird the social wellbeing of the communities we serve.

OUR PARTNERS

We work to partner with individual donors, a variety of organizations, and businesses in our community to provide philanthropic services to the members of the local communities we serve.

EMPOWERING CITIZENS
THROUGH PRIVATE SECTOR
ENGAGEMENT

Tetelestai International is dedicated to empowering citizens through initiatives fueled by the private sector and generous angel investors.

EDUCATION INITIATIVE

This report spotlights our education initiative, which is centered on supporting child and adult literacy programmes.



EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Our education initiative is structured to increase access to educational materials, which would otherwise be inaccessible to low-income citizens, due to cost restrictions.

We aim to provide educational materials and resources to support existing literacy directives in our communities. One empowered mind can spearhead innovation that energizes and positively impacts a community, the nation, and the world.



ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

1. Illiteracy Rates Among U.S. Adults

According to a report issued in 2024 by the National Literacy Institute, an estimated 79% of U.S. adults are literate, whilst 21% are illiterate¹. In addition, and regarding literacy rates, 54% of U.S. adults have a literacy level below the 6th-grade, with 20% registering a literacy level below the 5th-grade.²

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) study was conducted in the years 2011-12 and 2013-14 to assess literacy proficiency, as well as numeracy and digital problem solving among working-age adults (ages 16 to 65) in the USA (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2019)³.

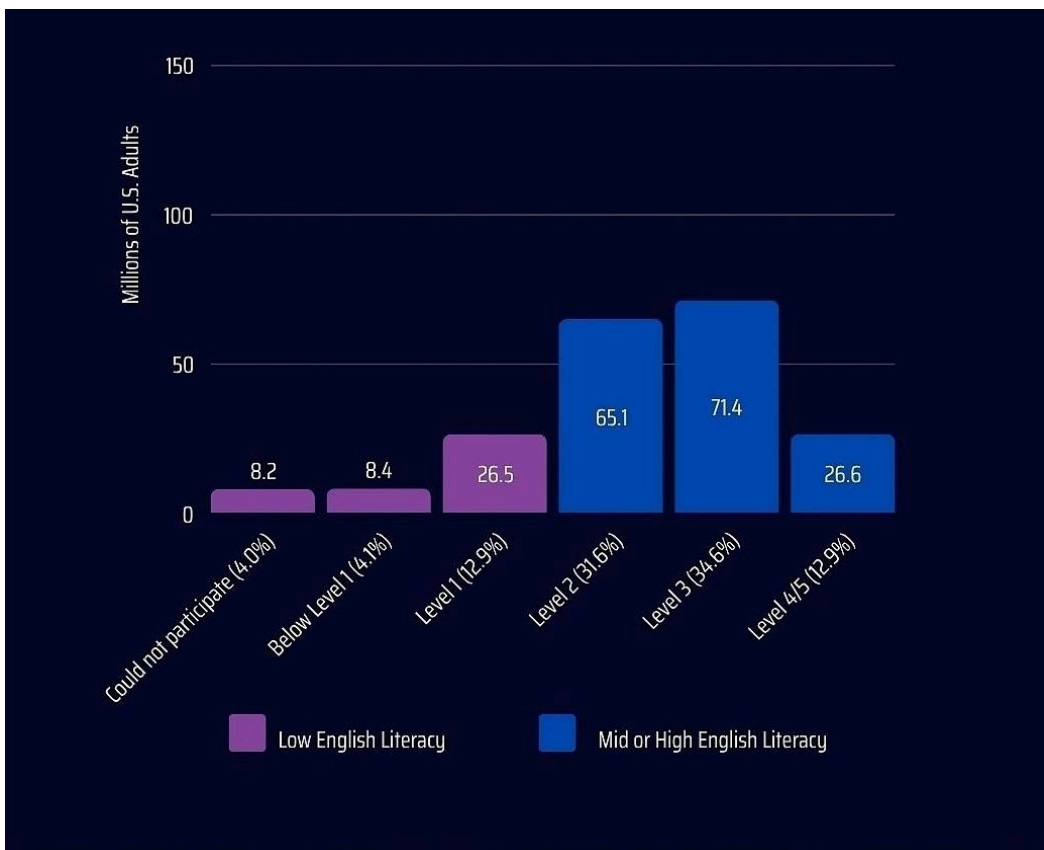


Figure 1. Literacy assessment of U.S. adult, aged 16 to 65, at varying levels of proficiency (and based on participation), using the PIAAC literacy scale (2012 and 2014)

Note: Proficiency levels on the PIAAC literacy scale are shown in parentheses, alongside the corresponding percentages for U.S. adults, aged 16 to 65⁴. Adults performing at the PIAAC literacy level

of 1 are assigned to the "Low English Literacy" category. The Low English category also includes adults who could not participate due to either a language barrier or a cognitive physical inability to be interviewed. The "Mid or High English Literacy" label is assigned to adults classified as having a PIAAC literacy proficiency level of 2 or greater.

DATA: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), U.S. PIAAC 2012/2014.

¹ National Literacy Center (2024). Literacy Statistics 2024-2025 (Where we are now). Retrieved from <https://www.thenationalliteracyinstitute.com/post/literacy-statistics-2024-2025-where-we-are-now>.

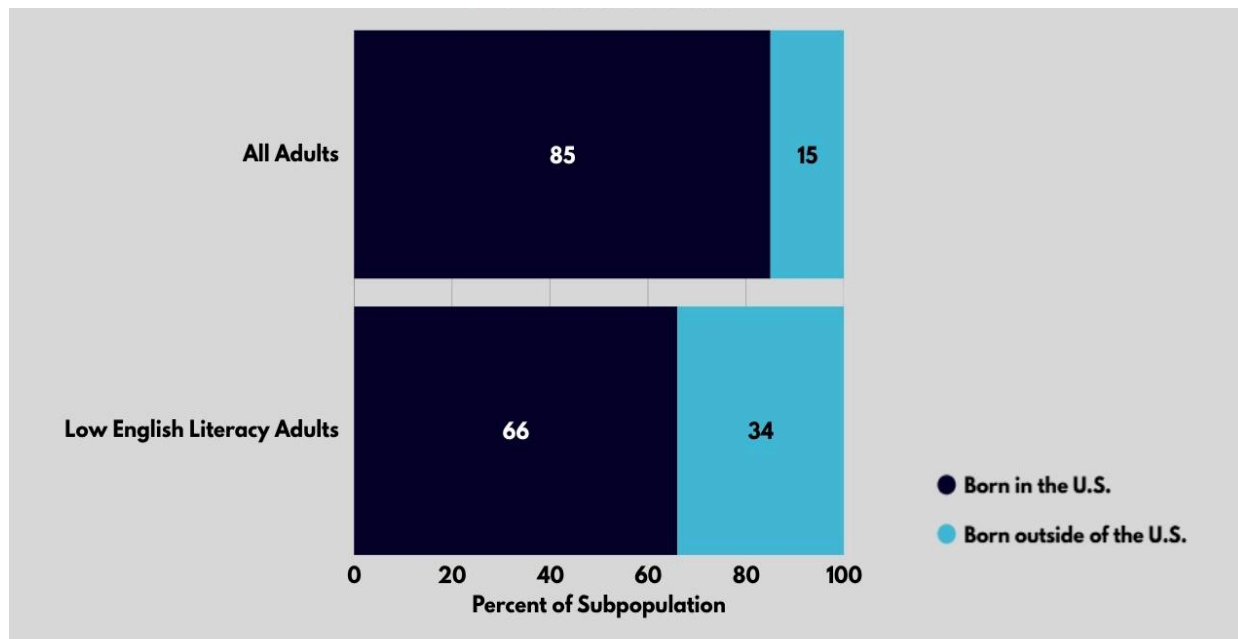
² Ibid. 1.

³ National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2019). Adult Literacy in the United States. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019179/index.asp>.

⁴ Standard error tables are accessible via: <https://nces.ed.gov/national-center-education-statistics-nces/products>.

PIAAC (Rampey et al. 2016) results indicate that approximately 21% of U.S. adults (about 43 million individuals) demonstrate low English literacy skills⁵ (see Figure 1). The study reports higher illiteracy rates among adults born outside the USA, when compared with U.S.-born adults (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Low English literacy percentages in adults age 16 to 65, based on birthplace: 2012 and 2014



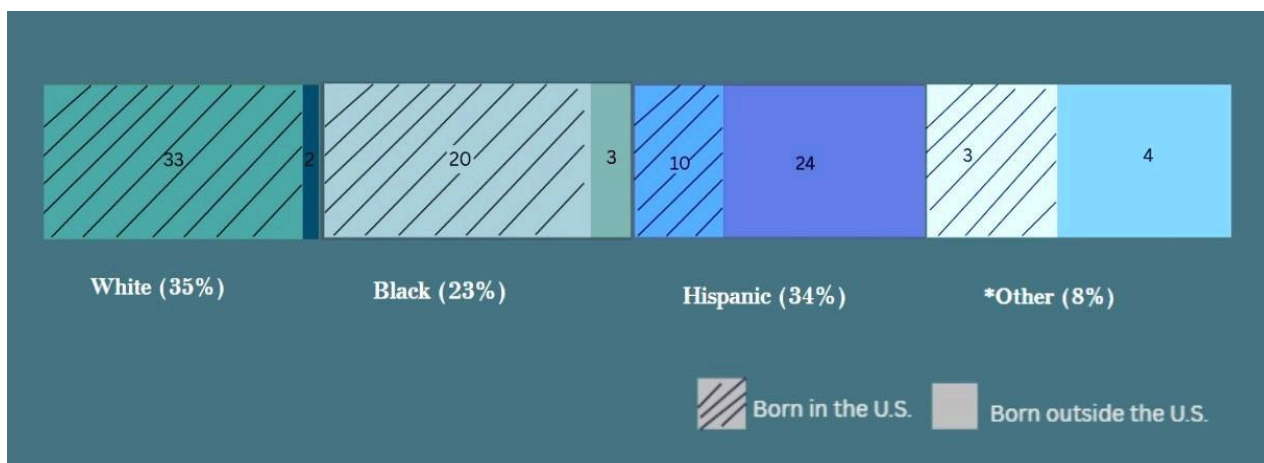
NOTE: Standard error tables are accessible via <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019179>. Adults categorized as having "Low English Literacy" registered performances at the PIAAC literacy proficiency level 1 or below. Adults who were unable to participate were not included.

DATA: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), U.S. PIAAC 2012/2014.

Among U.S. adults with low levels of English literacy, White and Hispanic adults recorded higher English literacy percentages (see Figure 3). Specifically, White U.S.-born adults and non-U.S.-born Hispanic adults comprised the majority of adults with high English literacy levels (see Figure 3).

⁵ Rampey, B.D., Finnegan, R., Goodman, M., Mohadjer, L., Krenzke, T., Hogan, J., and Provasnik, S. (2016). *Skills of U.S. Unemployed, Young, and Older Adults in Sharper Focus: Results From the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2012/2014: First Look* (NCES 2016-039rev). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

Figure 3: Low English literacy percentages in adults age 16 to 65, based on birthplace and race/ethnicity: 2012 and 2014



NOTES: *Visualization data may not sum to total due to rounding.

Standard error tables are accessible via

<https://nces.ed.gov/use-work/resource-library/report/data-point/adult-literacy-united-states?pubid=2019179>. Adults categorized as having "Low English Literacy" registered performances at the PIAAC literacy proficiency level 1 or below. Adults who were unable to participate were not included.

DATA: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), U.S. PIAAC 2012/2014.

2. Illiteracy Rates Among U.S. Children

In 1969, the U.S. Congress mandated the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a project administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education. The NAEP is the most comprehensive, ongoing, and nationally representative knowledge and capabilities assessment of U.S. students, based on select subjects⁶. To gauge reading ability, the NAEP reading assessment employs literary and informational texts to assess reading comprehension skills among students.

In 2024, NCES administered the NAEP reading assessment to sample groups representative of the nation's population of fourth- and eighth-grade students⁷. The sample also included student representation from the District of Columbia, Department of Defense schools, and 26 participating large urban districts. Along with a reading assessment, which was used to assess students' reading comprehension skills, students also submitted responses to survey questions concerning opportunities made available to them to learn and participate in reading activities both in and outside of school. According to the 2024 NAEP reading assessment results, among fourth and eighth-graders, a decline in the average reading scores was observed⁸.

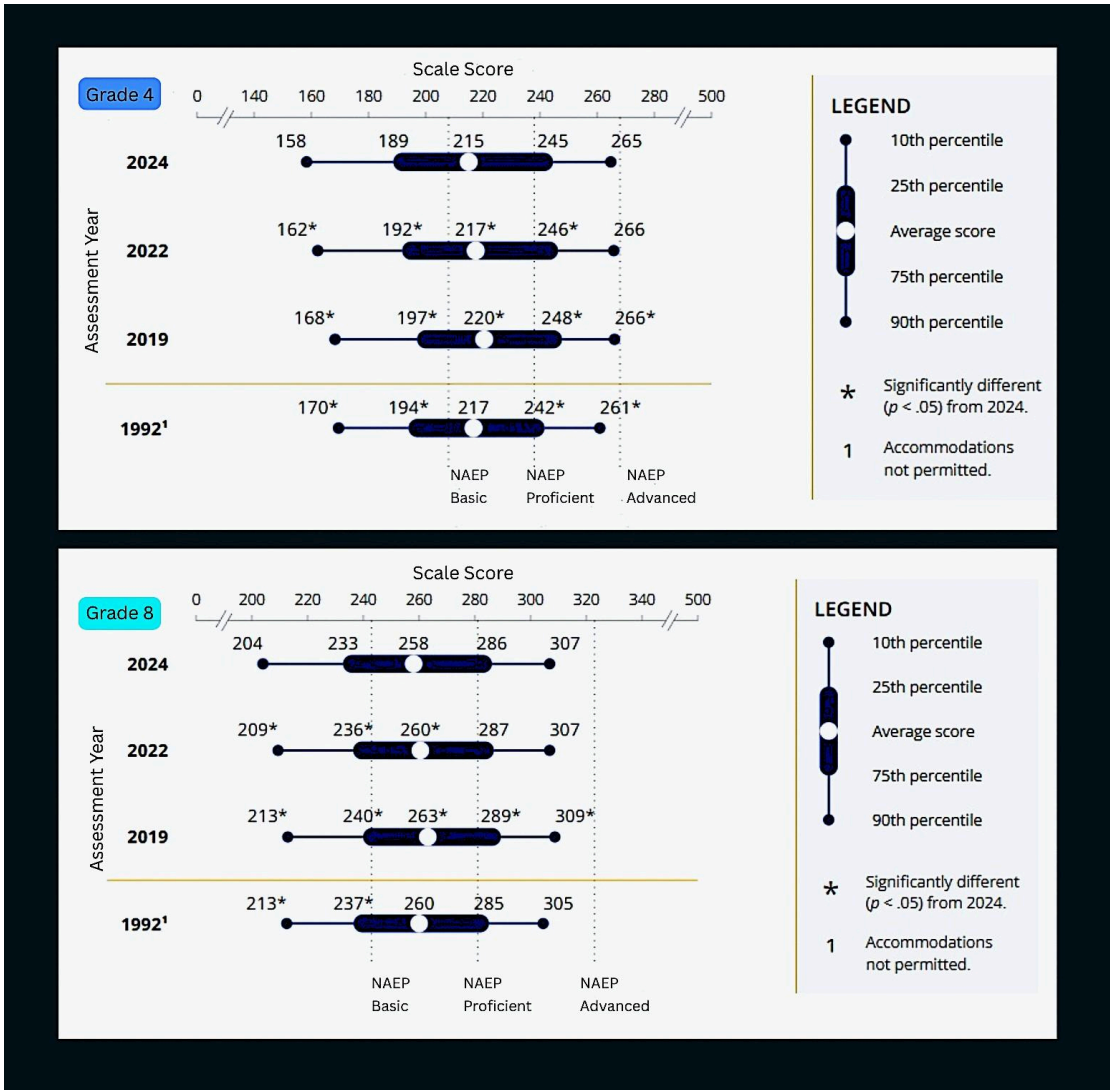
⁶ NAEP Report Card (2024). About the NAEP Reading Assessment. Retrieved from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4_8/about/framework/?grade=4

⁷ NAEP Report Card (2024). Explore Results for the 2024 NAEP Reading Assessment. Retrieved from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reports/reading/2024/g4_8/?grade=4.

⁸ Ibid. 6.

The NAEP-Proficient level is a rubric representing academic performance for each NAEP assessment. Students at the NAEP-Proficient level have shown evidence of competency with difficult topics, including subject-matter knowledge, knowledge application to real world scenarios, and analytical skills relevant to the topic area being assessed.

Figure 4: Trends in fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP reading averages, and related percentile scores



NOTES: Assessment Year: The main NAEP assessments are conducted biennially, during winter months (late January to early March). **Scale Score:** Summarizes the overall performance achieved by students, and is based on student responses to survey items. NAEP generates summary statistics based on scale scores assigned to student groupings. Reading, Mathematics, U.S history, and geography are usually assigned subject-area scale scores ranging from 0 to 500. **NAEP Basic:** Achievement level with a minimum score of 208. A fourth-grader achieving at this level has the ability to reference sections of literary text, and provide contextual support for a related plot or characters. **NAEP Proficient:** Achievement level with a minimum score of 238. A fourth-grader achieving at this level has the ability to identify key events relevant to the main idea, and develop complex inferences about protagonists using available evidence. **NAEP Advanced:** Achievement level with a minimum score of 268. A fourth-grader achieving at this level has the ability to identify key details relevant to the protagonist of a literary text, detailing character development from the beginning of the text to its end. **Data:** NAEP Report Card (2024).



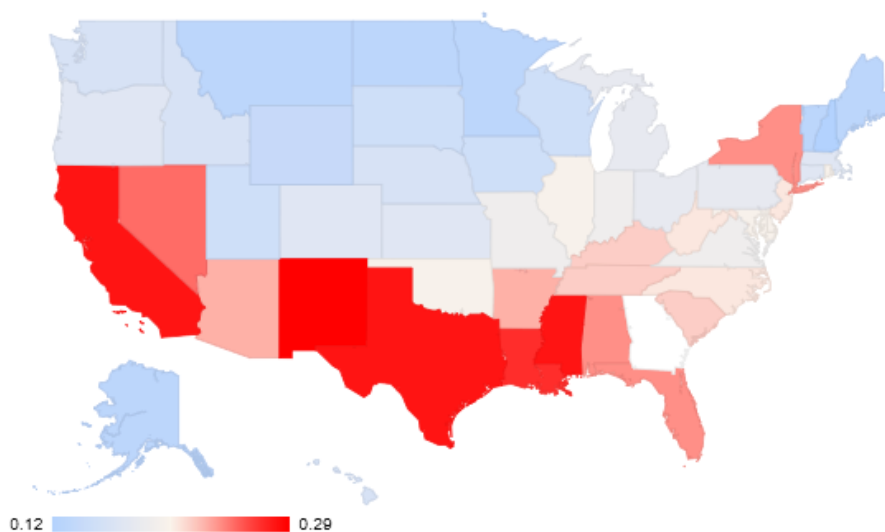
Overall, when assessing the literacy skills of U.S. fourth and eighth-grade students, the 2024 NAEP assessment revealed that the average national reading score was lower than in 2019; and, when compared to the first reading assessment performed in 1992, the average score in 2024 was not significantly different (see Figure 4).

3. Illiteracy Rates Among Adults in Texas

A report issued in 2003 by the NCES estimates that approximately **19% of adults in Texas (about 3 million people)** are functionally illiterate (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003)⁹. Texas ranks among the top-five U.S. states with the highest number of adults lacking basic literacy skills; and, according to the NCES, Texas' literacy average is lower than the national literacy average. A high concentration of the very lowest adult literacy performance scores mostly originate from southern states (see Figure 5). The 10 counties identified as having the highest percentage of their populations at or below Level 1 literacy are located in Texas.¹⁰

Further, the 10 counties in the United States identified as having the highest percentage of their populations at or below Level 1 literacy are located in Texas.¹¹

Figure 5. States with Citizens at or Below Level 1 Literacy



Data: APM Research Lab, via Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's [OECD] (2023). Survey of adult skills (PIAAC).

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2003). 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy. Retrieved <https://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/stateestimates.aspx>.

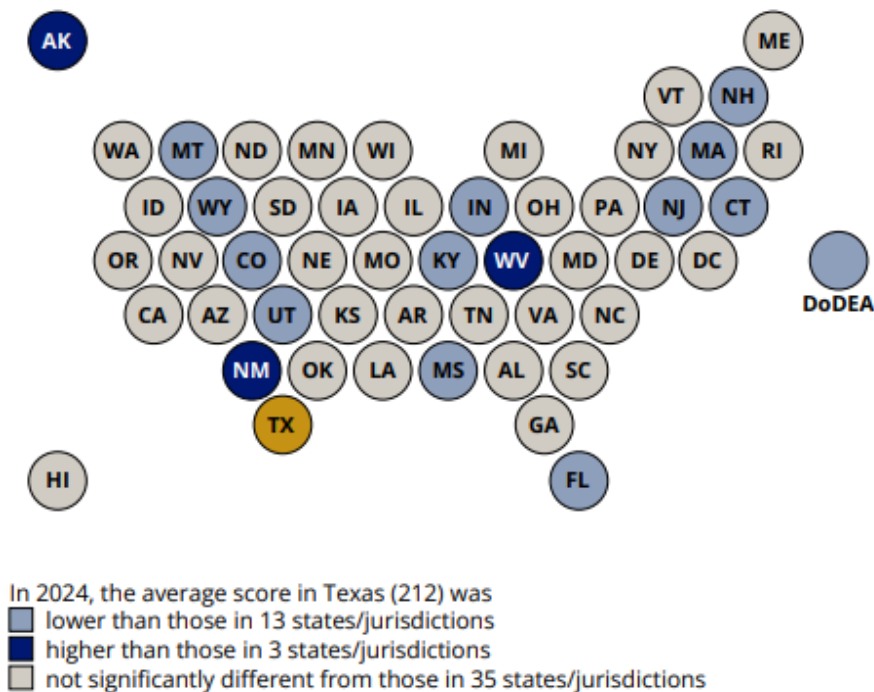
¹⁰ Schmidt, E. (2022). Reading the Numbers: 130 Million American Adults Have Low Literacy Skills, but Funding Differs Drastically by State. APM Research Lab. <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/10x-adult-literacy>.

¹¹ Ibid. 10.

4. Illiteracy Rates Among Children in Texas

In 2014, Texas fourth-grade students recorded an average literacy score of 212, as compared with the national average of 214 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2024)¹². The percentage of adults with literacy skills at or below level 1 in Texas was 28% for the years 2102, 2014, and 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2024)¹³. The average reading score of Texas for fourth graders was lower than that of 13 states; higher than the average reading scores in 3 states; and, not significantly different from the average reading scores in 35 states (see Figure 6)¹⁴.

Figure 6: A comparison of fourth-grade state-average reading scores: Texas vs. other states and jurisdictions, 2024



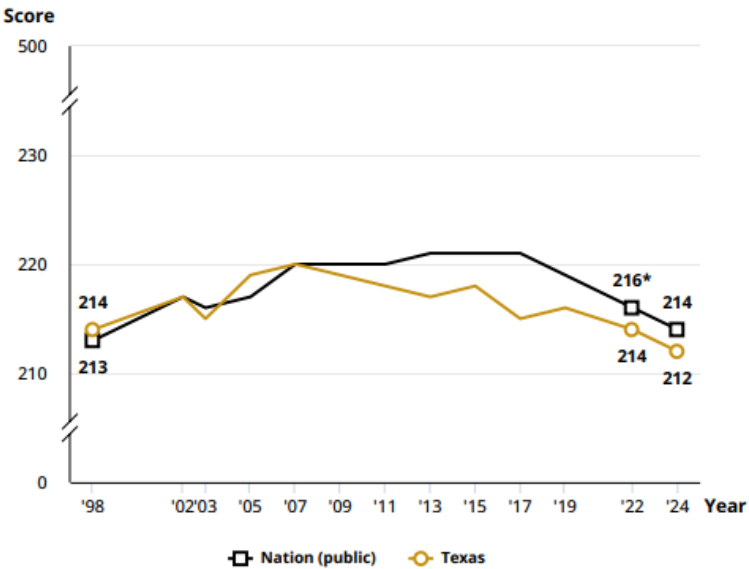
Note: DoDEA represents the Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools).

¹² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998–2024 Reading Assessments. The Nation's Report Card: 2024 Reading Snapshot Report for Texas Grade 4. Retrieved 06/13/2025 from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2024/pdf/2024220TX4.pdf>.

¹³ See footnote 9.

¹⁴ Ibid. 9.

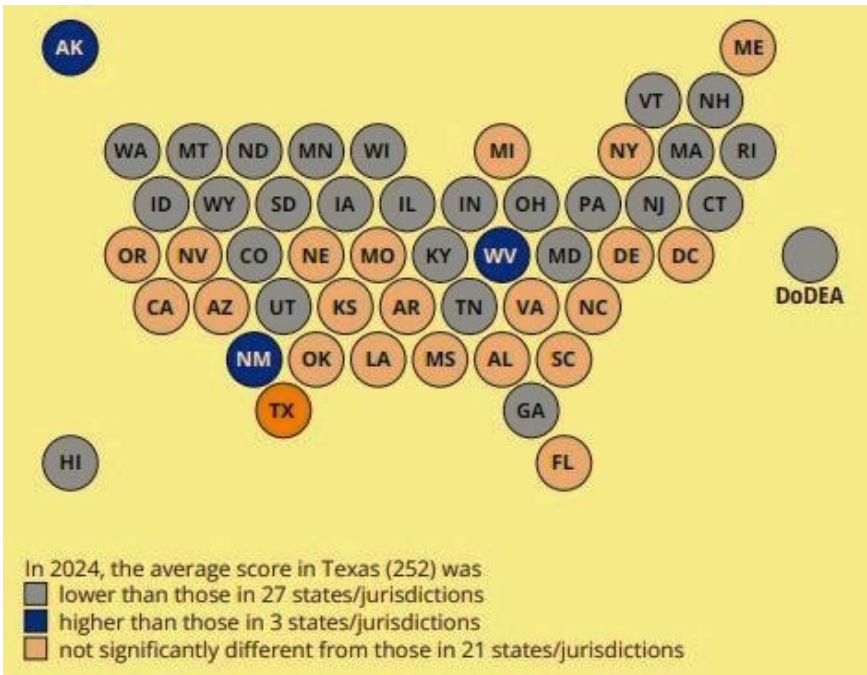
Figure 7: An assessment of fourth-grade state-average reading scores: Texas vs. the nation (public), 2024¹⁵



As shown in Figure 7, in 2024, the average reading score for fourth-grade students in Texas was 212. This score was not significantly different from the average score of 214—which was the average score reported in both 2022 and in 1998.

As shown in Figure 8, the average reading score for eighth-graders in Texas was lower than the national average in 2024 and both the national and state average reading scores in 1998.

Figure 8: A comparison of eighth-grade state-average reading scores: Texas vs. other states and jurisdictions, 2024¹⁶



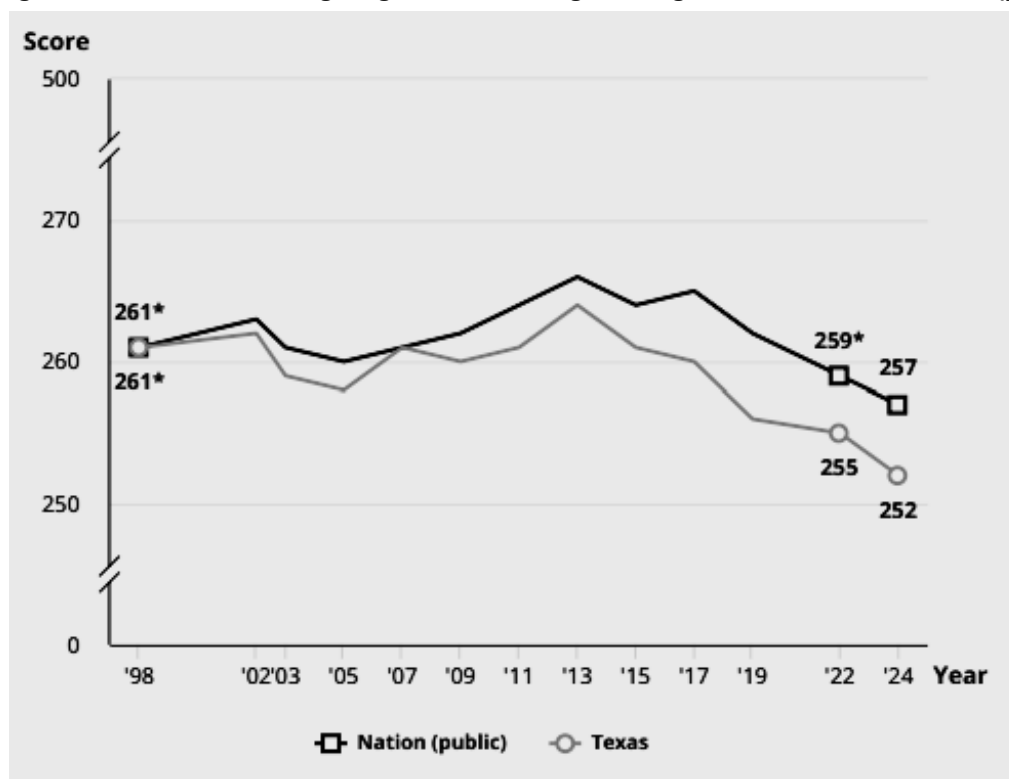
Note: DoDEA represents the Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools).

¹⁵ **Note:** *Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2024. Unrounded numbers were used in evaluating tests of significance.

¹⁶ Data: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES (see footnote 14).

Regarding eighth-grade reading scores, eighth graders in Texas had lower reading scores, when compared with eighth-grade reading averages in 27 other states (Figure 9)¹⁷. For both fourth and eighth graders, the 2024 average reading score was not statistically different from those in 2022 or 1998 (see Figures 7 and 9).

Figure 9: An assessment of eighth-grade state-average reading scores: Texas vs. the nation (public), 2024¹⁸



Asian and White fourth- and eighth-graders—when compared to Black and Hispanic fourth- and eighth-graders—had higher reading averages (see Tables 1A and 1B). Both female fourth- and eighth-graders—when compared to males in the same grades—had higher reading average scores. Fourth- and eighth-graders from economically disadvantaged backgrounds registered lower reading average scores, when compared to their counterparts from economically stable backgrounds (see Tables 1A and 1B)¹⁹.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998–2024 Reading Assessments. The Nation's Report Card: 2024 Reading Snapshot Report for Texas Grade 8. Retrieved 06/13/2025 from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2024/pdf/2024220TX8.pdf>.

¹⁸ **Data:** Ibid 14. **Note:** *Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2024. Unrounded numbers were used in evaluating tests of significance.

¹⁹ Ibid. 12 & 16.

Table 1: Average reading results for fourth-grade (A) and eighth-grade (B) students groups in Texas, 2024

Results for fourth-grade student groups in 2024

A	REPORTING GROUPS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS	AVG. SCORE	PERCENTAGE AT OR ABOVE NAEP		PERCENTAGE AT NAEP ADVANCED
				BASIC	PROFICIENT	
Race/ethnicity						
	American Indian/Alaska Native	#	‡	‡	‡	‡
	Asian	5	243	86	61	24
	Black	12	202	47	17	2
	Hispanic	53	204	49	20	4
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	#	‡	‡	‡	‡
	Two or More Races	3	216	59	29	11
	White	26	226	72	42	11
Gender						
	Male	50	207	52	25	5
	Female	50	217	62	30	8
Economically disadvantaged status						
	Economically disadvantaged	62	202	47	18	3
	Not economically disadvantaged	38	228	74	43	13

Results for eighth-grade student groups in 2024

B	REPORTING GROUPS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS	AVG. SCORE	PERCENTAGE AT OR ABOVE NAEP		PERCENTAGE AT NAEP ADVANCED
				BASIC	PROFICIENT	
	Race/ethnicity					
	American Indian/Alaska Native	#	‡	‡	‡	‡
	Asian	6	288	88	63	17
	Black	14	244	52	18	1
	Hispanic	51	242	52	16	1
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	#	‡	‡	‡	‡
	Two or More Races	2	261	73	36	2
	White	26	267	76	37	5
	Gender					
	Male	50	248	56	22	3
	Female	50	257	66	28	3
	Economically disadvantaged status					
	Economically disadvantaged	58	241	50	14	1
	Not economically disadvantaged	42	268	76	40	6

NOTES:

Rounds off to zero.

‡ Fell short of reporting standards.

Table details may not sum to totals owing to rounding approximations, and the "Information not available" category corresponding to the "Economically Disadvantaged Status" has been omitted. Black includes African American, and Hispanic includes Latino. Race categories do not include Hispanic origin.

Overall, in terms of assessing child literacy rates in Texas: In the fourth-grade category, 28% of Texas students registered strong performances at or above the NAEP Proficient level, in 2024. However, this percentage was not significantly different from the reading proficiency percentages recorded for the same student category in 2022 (30%) and in 1998 (28%).



Further, in the fourth-grade category, 57% of students in Texas performed at or above the NAEP Basic level in 2024. This performance percentage was not significantly different from the NAEP Basic level performance percentages recorded in 2022 (58 %) and in 1998 (59%).²⁰

In the eighth-grade category, 25% of Texas students registered strong performances at or above the NAEP Proficient level, in 2024. It is worth noting that this NAEP-Proficient percentage was not significantly different from the reading proficiency percentages recorded for eighth graders in 2022 (23%) and in 1998 (27%). Furthermore, in 2024, 61% of eighth-grade students in Texas performed at or above the NAEP Basic level in 2024. However, this performance percentage was less, when compared to the NAEP Basic level performance percentages recorded in 2022 (66 %) and in 1998 (74%).²¹

OUR SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY SERVICE

At Tetelestai International, our vision is to mobilize the power of community to connect under-resourced citizens with vital resources needed to achieve optimal well-being. We take a holistic approach to philanthropy, by providing practical, tangible solutions to meet immediate, pressing needs. We endeavor to ensure that low-income citizens can access vital resources. Through our program initiatives, we work to ensure that citizens in under-served, under-resourced communities have access to food, clothing, books, and neonatal kits.

OUR EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Empowering minds, one book at a time.

Tetelestai International's education initiative is structured to increase access to educational books, which would otherwise be inaccessible to low-income citizens, due to cost restrictions. We aim to provide educational materials and resources to support existing literacy directives in our communities. One empowered mind can spearhead innovation that energizes and positively impacts a community, the nation, and the world. Our strategic long-term goal is to partner with Title I public schools to organize book fairs that allow children to access books ranging in genre - from the creative arts to mathematical sciences. In addition to donating books to adult literacy centers, we are also working towards providing books to children in foster care. The impact a book can have on the curious mind is indeterminable. We are positioned to provide support for educational initiatives in the local communities we serve.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES (see footnotes 12 & 16).

²¹ Ibid. 12 & 16.





© TETELESTAI INTERNATIONAL 2025

WWW.TETELESTAI.SERVICES