Health Disparities in the Medi-Cal Population
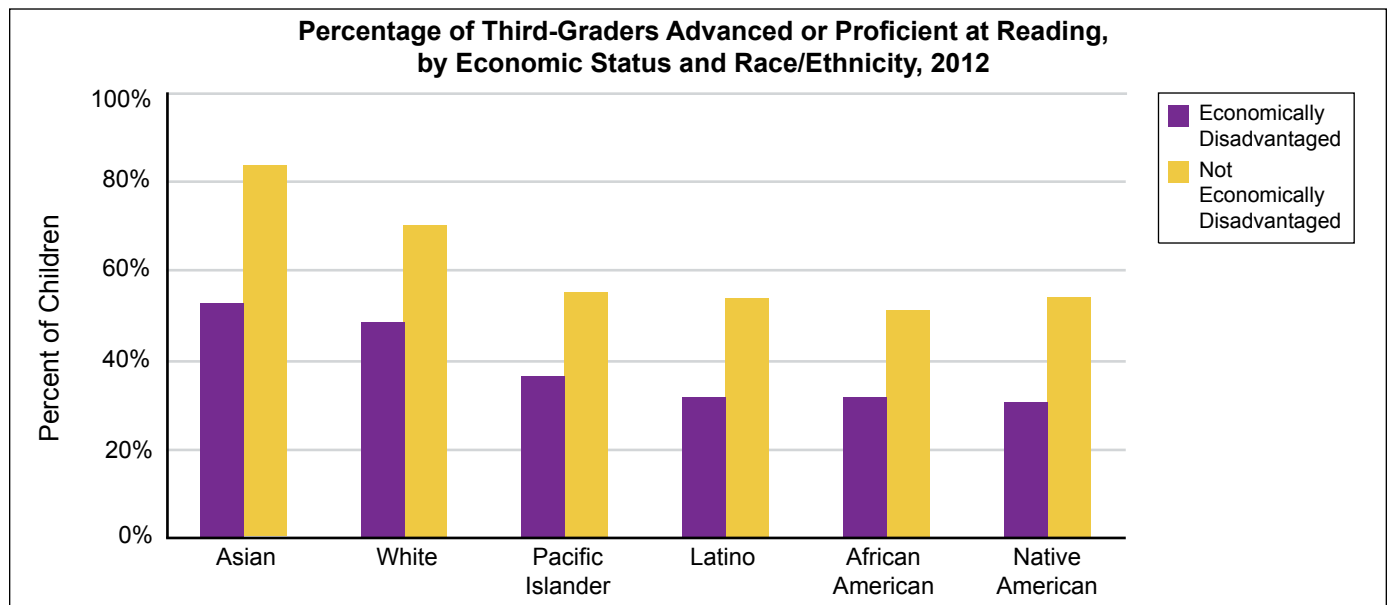
Reading Proficiency

Education in general is likely to be associated with health outcomes later in life. A recent meta-analysis found a clear association between education and health that cannot be explained by income, employment, or family background.[1] Educational achievement in turn may be related to early success with reading. For example, reading proficiency at the end of third grade is associated with high school graduation.[2]

Third grade may be a transition point when kids start to use reading as a tool for learning, and students with less proficiency may have a difficult time performing well across academic subjects.[2]

In 2012, 48% of third graders were reading at an advanced or proficient level (boys 45%; girls 50%). Education data were not specific to the Medi-Cal population, but reports from the Standardized Testing and Reporting system were available for "economically disadvantaged" and "not economically disadvantaged" as well as by race/ethnicity.[3] The California Department of Education classifies children as economically disadvantaged if they participate in the free or reduced price meal program, or if their parents' education level was coded as "not high school graduate." All economically disadvantaged third graders, regardless of race/ethnicity, experienced much lower reading proficiency rates as compared to those who were not economically disadvantaged (see Figure). Asians had the highest proficiency rates, followed by Whites.

Figure

Source: California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting DataQuest, 2012.

1. Cutler DM, Lleras-Muney A. Education and Health. Policy Brief# 9. National Poverty Center, University of Michigan. 2007.
2. Reading Proficiency in California. Lucile Packard Foundation. http://www.kidsdata.org/export/pdf?ind=127. Accessed June 11, 2013.
3. California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR), http://star.cde.ca.gov/ (July 2012). DataQuest.

Link to Data Sources and Methods