

English proficiency and
the pandemic:
How Texas English learner
students fared during the
COVID-19 pandemic



Study background

- Emergent bilingual students make up 10 percent of public school students in the United States and 20 percent in Texas (more than 1 million students).
- English language development relies on opportunities to use English in both oral and written modes.
- The pandemic disrupted education, particularly for emergent bilingual students, who may have had fewer opportunities to practice conversational and academic English.
- In partnership with the Texas Education Agency, REL Southwest sought to understand how emergent bilingual students' English proficiency may have been influenced by pandemic-induced learning disruptions.



Texas context

Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS): Texas' statewide annual English proficiency assessment measures four domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

COVID-19 pandemic: In March 2020, most school buildings closed for the remainder of the school year. By fall 2020, 54 percent of all Texas students received in-school instruction, and 46 percent received remote instruction.

Assessment disruptions: TELPAS was disrupted in the 2019/20 school year. In the 2020/21 school year, 90 percent of emergent bilingual students in Texas participated in at least one TELPAS domain.



Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

Research questions

- What are the **rates of reclassification** of Texas emergent bilingual students and the **characteristics** of reclassified students in the years spanning the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (2017/18–2020/21)?
- To what extent do the **English proficiency scores** of Texas emergent bilingual students in 2020/21 differ from scores of similar students in 2018/19, prior to the pandemic?



Data, sample, method, and limitations

Data and sample

- Student demographic and TELPAS data from the Texas Education Agency, through the Texas Education Research Center.
- Current and reclassified emergent bilingual grade 3–12 students, 2017/18–2020/21.
- Publicly available school and district characteristics.

Method

- Descriptive analysis of student characteristics.
- Quasi-experimental propensity score matching analysis to estimate differences in TELPAS performance of emergent bilingual students in 2018/19 and 2020/21.

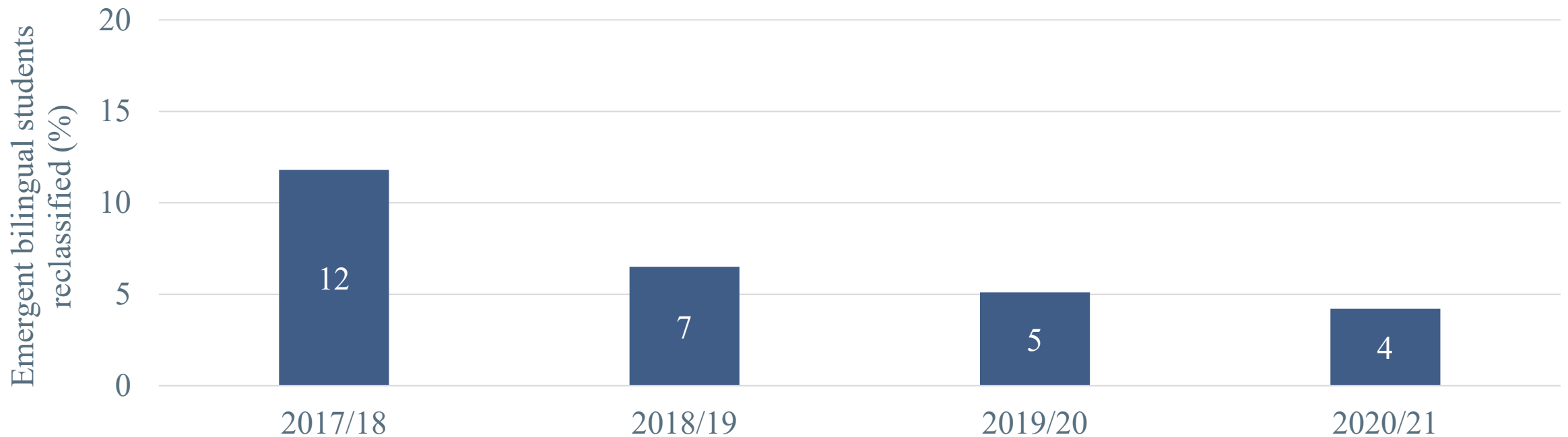
Limitations

- Results should not be interpreted as causal, and changes in TELPAS performance between the 2018/19 and 2020/21 cohorts could be caused by factors other than the pandemic.
- Missing data limited the domains and the number of students in analyses.

Findings

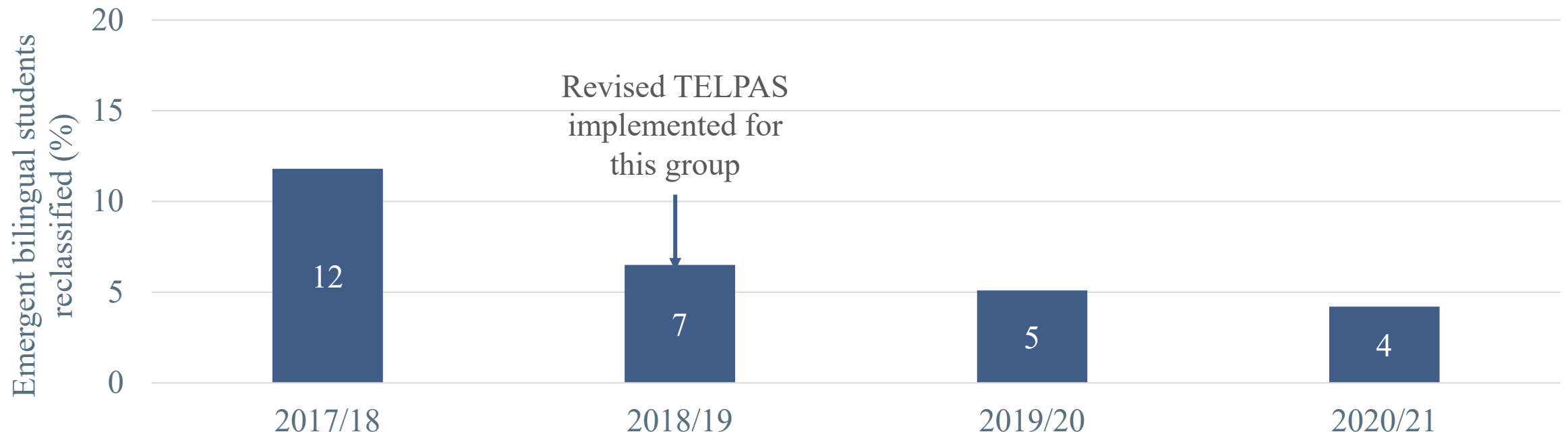
Reclassification

The proportion of emergent bilingual students in grades 3–12 who were reclassified as English proficient declined 8 percentage points from 2017/18 to 2020/21



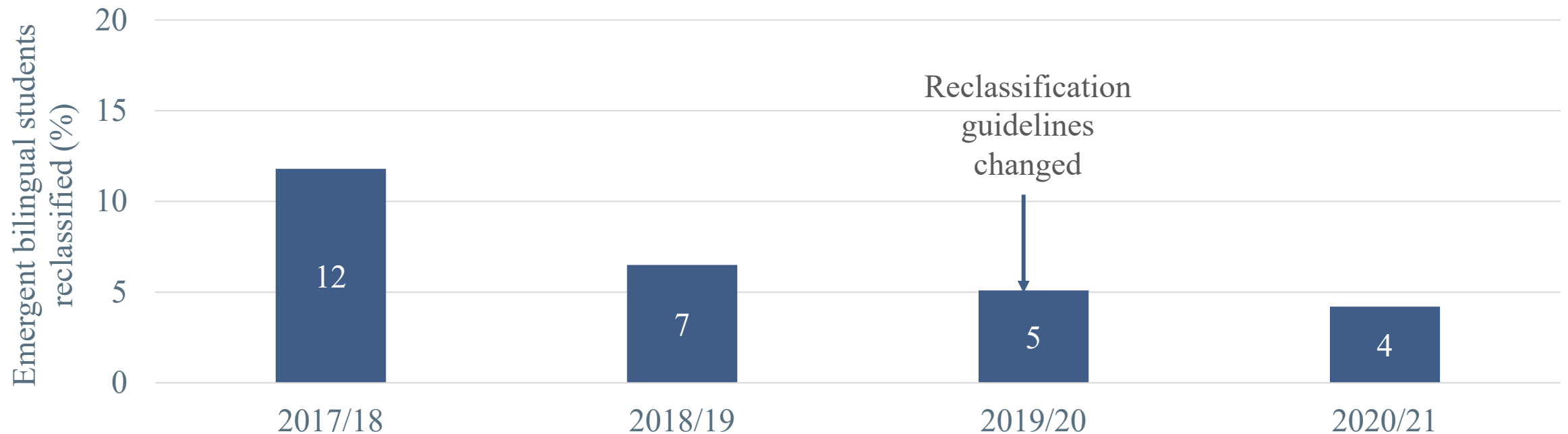
Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

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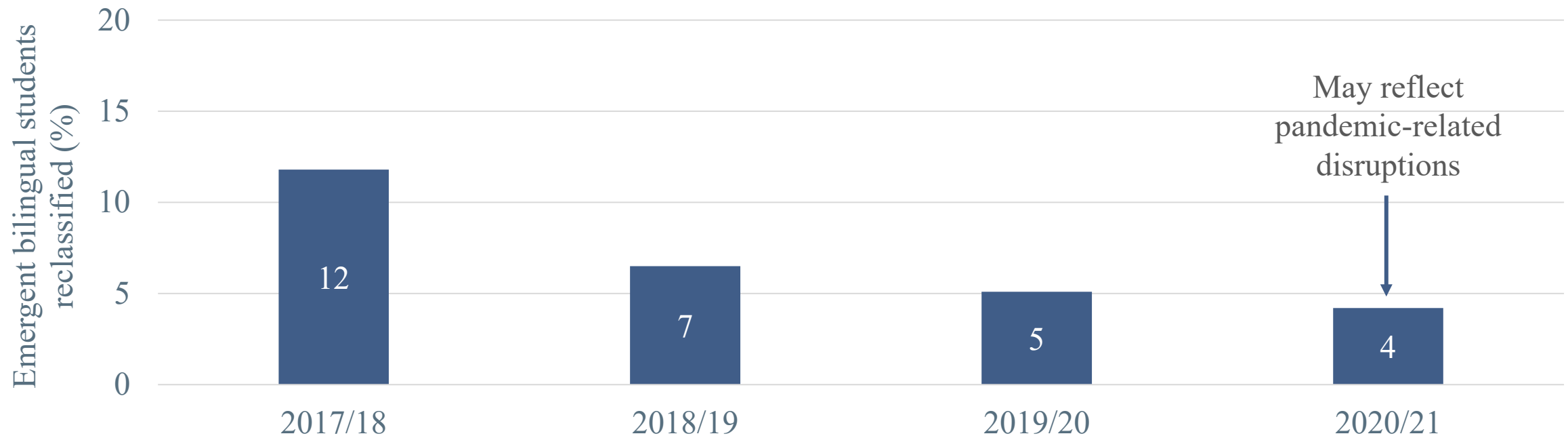
Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

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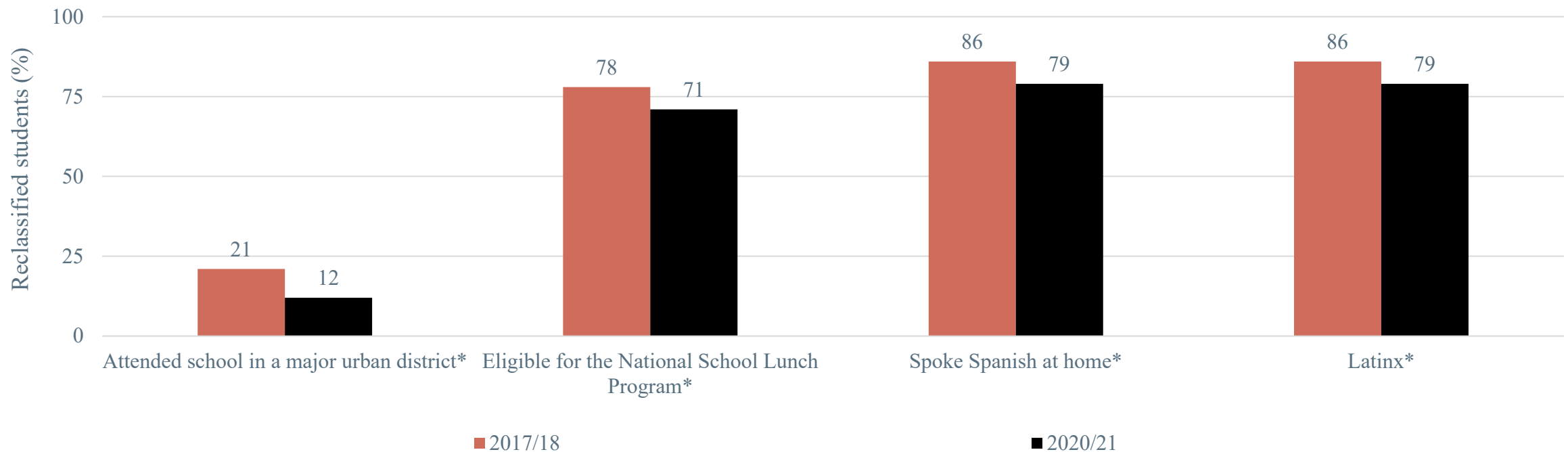
Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

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Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

Among reclassified students, the percentage who were from a major urban district, eligible for the National School Lunch Program, spoke primarily Spanish at home, and were Latinx decreased from 2017/18 to 2020/21

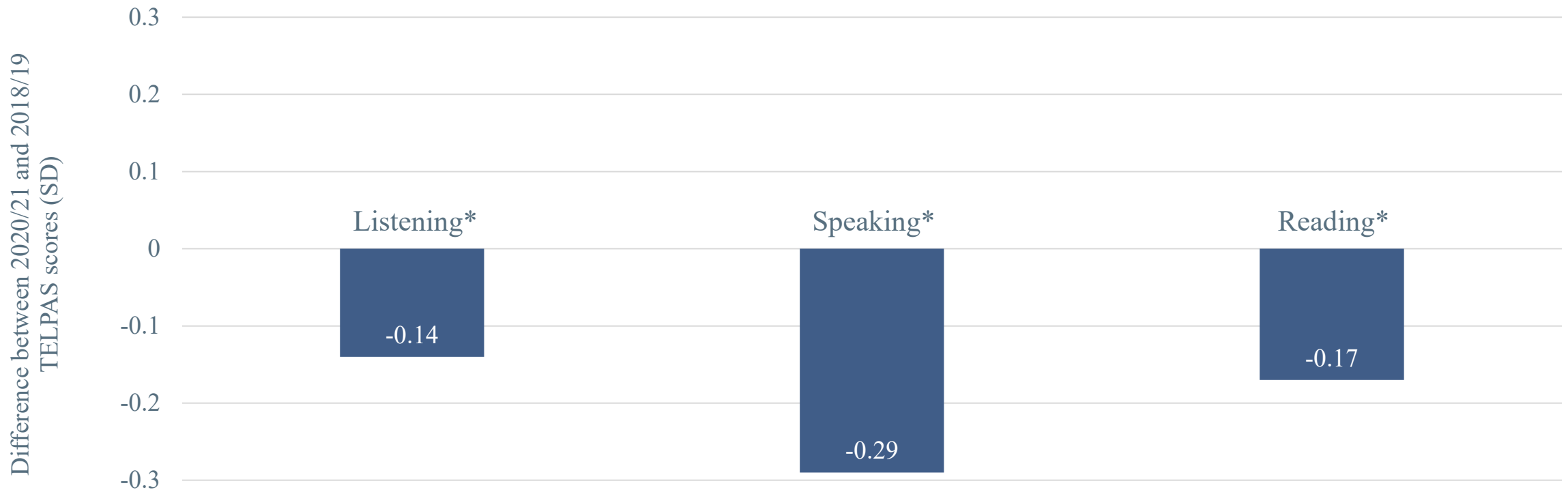


* There was a difference of 5 percentage points or greater between 2017/18 and 2020/21, which was considered meaningful.

Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

Differences in TELPAS performance before and during the pandemic

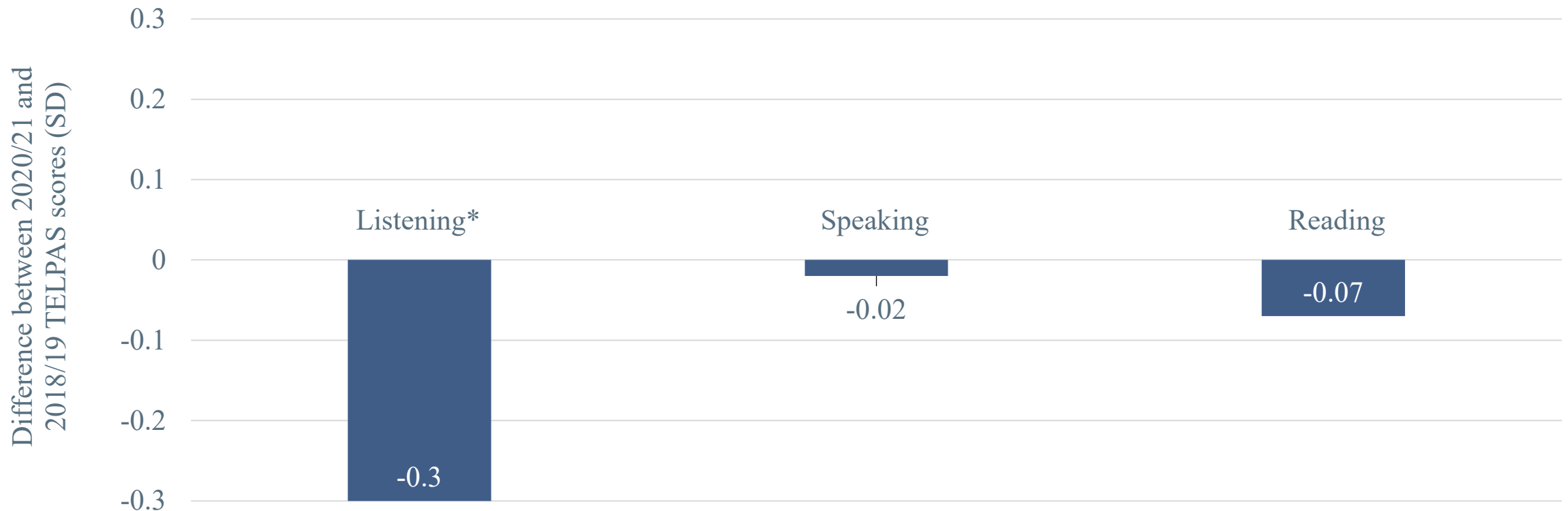
For grades 3–5, listening, speaking, and reading scores were lower in 2020/21 than those of similar students in 2018/19



* The difference score for this domain is greater than or equal to 0.1 standard deviation, which was considered meaningful.

Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

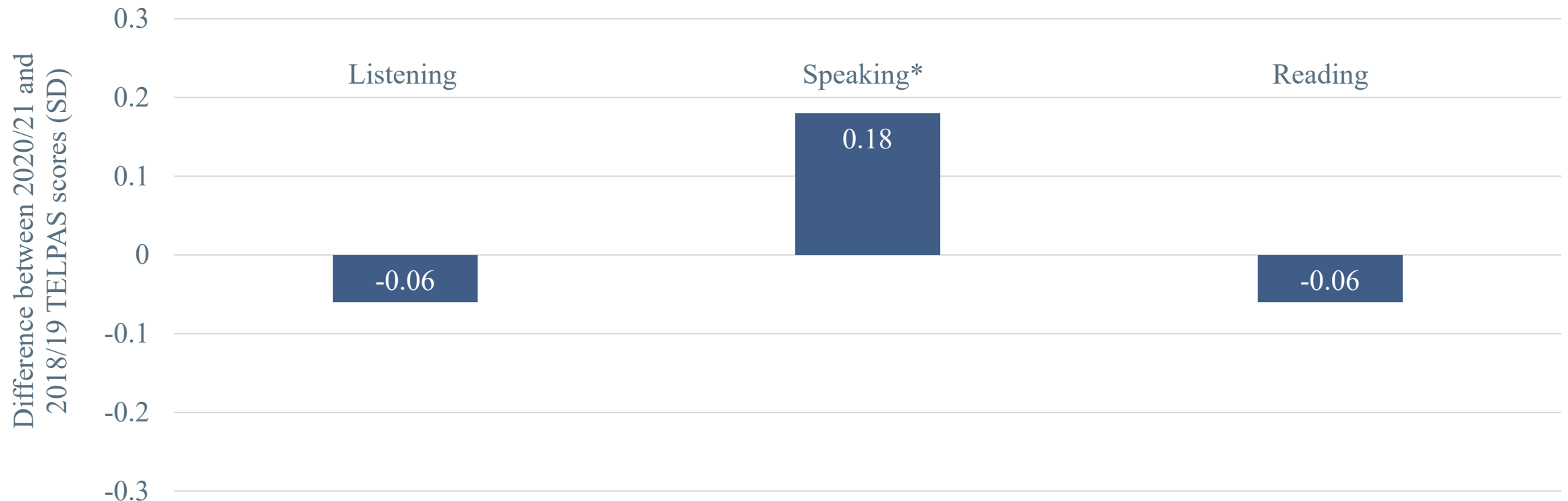
For grades 6–8, listening scores were lower in 2020/21 than those of similar students in 2018/19



* The difference score for this domain is greater than or equal to 0.1 standard deviation, which was considered meaningful.

Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

For grades 9–12, speaking scores were higher in 2020/21 than those of similar students in 2018/19



* The difference score for this domain is greater than or equal to 0.1 standard deviation, which was considered meaningful.

Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Texas Education Agency and the University of Texas Education Research Center.

Implications

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- Focus recovery efforts on students who were in **elementary** schools during the pandemic to help improve proficiency and support reclassification.
 - Identify and support strategies to cultivate those students' **speaking** proficiency.
- Continue to study the relationship among **reclassification**, changes in proficiency levels during the pandemic, changes in TELPAS scores, and reclassification criteria.