

# Engagement and Attainment: The Longer-Term Effects of Ethnic Studies

Emily K. Penner, UC Irvine

Sade Bonilla, UMass-Amherst  
Thomas S. Dee, Stanford GSE & NBER

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- Please do not share publicly, work currently under peer review
- Working paper out soon!
  
- Add clarifying questions to the chat!

# Significance

- Districts looking for ways to unlock potential of marginalized students through:
  - Opportunities for students to critically engage with issues of racism, intersecting social identities, structural inequality, and systems of oppression
  - Culturally responsive pedagogy and curricula
  - Engaging with local political and social issues
  - Sustaining rich, diverse community knowledge and cultural practices

# Significance

- Ethnic studies (ES) programs are expanding in K-12 schools in CA and across the country
  - In some places ES programs have been controversial (e.g., Tucson, TX)
  - In others they are being offered widely or adopted as a graduation requirement (e.g., VT, IN)
- Extensive theoretical grounding and qualitative evidence of ES impacts
- Limited large-scale or causal evidence of impacts, particularly longer-term impacts

# Relevance for ES Policy in California

- Long history of teacher-initiated ES courses (e.g., LAUSD, ERUSD, SFUSD, BUSD)
- Many districts developing new ES courses, expanding offerings, or adopting grad requirements (SAUSD, OUHSD, ERUSD, MUSD, SBUSD)
- Model ES curricula under development, but contested (AB 2016)
- Legislative efforts to create state-wide ES graduation requirements (AB 331, AB 2772)
- ES grad requirement at CSUs (AB 1460), UCs considering changing admissions requirement to include ES (as CSUs have done)

# Present study

- Longer-term evidence on the causal effects of SFUSD's ethnic studies course
  - Pre-registered confirmatory and exploratory outcomes
  - Research design based on a unique student-assignment mechanism
  - Outcomes include educational attainment and persistence measures

# Roadmap of today's talk

- Background on ES
- Review of ES in SFUSD
- Recap of prior work
- Longer-term outcomes study



# Background





# What is Ethnic Studies?

- Units of study, courses, or programs that are centered on the knowledge and perspectives of one or more ethnic or racial groups and draw on the intellectual scholarship of individuals of color (Sleeter 2011).
- ES curricula exist because students of color demanded an education that is relevant, meaningful, and affirming of their identities. (Sleeter 2011)
- The objective of ES is “systematically examining and dismantling racism.” (Hu-DeHart, 2004; p. 874)

# Ethnic Studies Hallmarks

- **Curriculum as counter narrative** – Curriculum from perspectives of people of color
- **Students as intellectuals** – Respecting and fostering students' curiosity and thinking
- **Culturally Responsive and Mediated Pedagogy** – Drawing upon students' lived experiences and sociocultural environments
- **Criticality** – Structural analysis of racism and colonialism that works toward dismantling multiple forms of oppression
- **Reclaiming cultural identities** – Deep knowledge of where students come from and the historical contributions of their communities
- **Intersectionality and multiplicity** – Attending to students' multiple social identities
- **Community Engagement** – Pedagogies and practices that bridge classrooms to communities and social movements

(Summarized from Christine Sleeter & Miguel Zavala, 2020)

# Existing Research Evidence

- Qualitative & case-study evidence of ES impacts
  - Increases communalism, motivation, school connectedness, ethnic identity, sense of empowerment, self concept, critical thinking, achievement ( Lewis, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2006; Lewis et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2008; Belgrave et al., 2000; Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2017; Halagao, 2004; 2010, Vasquez; 2005)
- Tucson Mexican American Studies (MAS) course associated with to large increase in graduation rates among students who took MAS courses (Cabrera et al.; 2014)
  - “Our results may suffer from omitted variable bias and should not be considered true causal effects.”

# Official Start to Ethnic Studies in SFUSD

On February 23, 2010, the SFUSD Board of Education adopted resolution No. 101-26A1 in support of an ethnic studies program.

Ethnic Studies curriculum could help to:

- Promote a culturally relevant curriculum\*
- Reduce truancy\*
- Reduce dropout rates\*
- Reduce incarceration rates
- Increase graduation rates\*
- Close the achievement gap\*
- Earn students up to 6 units of college credit through SFSU



**SFUSD** SAN FRANCISCO  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# SFUSD's Ethnic Studies Course

- Created by a “Collective” of 10 SFUSD history teachers beginning in 2007
- Course development supported by summer PD, bi-weekly meetings, classroom observations, support from SFSU faculty
- Budget support from the district

# SFUSD's Ethnic Studies Course

- Year-long course sequence targeted to 9<sup>th</sup> graders
- Example units:
  - Unit 3: My Stereotypes: Where stereotypes come from and how they shape my world
  - Unit 5: Community-based social movements in the 1950s and 1960s

# SFUSD's Ethnic Studies Course

- Theory of change?
  - Elements of an intensive, sustained social psychological intervention across the whole school year during developmentally sensitive 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition
  - A “stereotype threat” (ST) buffer
  - Targeted like an ST buffer (e.g., beginning of HS transition)
  - Contains active ingredients of ST buffers (e.g., forewarning and external attribution)

# Short Term Effects of ES

- Large positive effects on 9<sup>th</sup> grade:
  - GPA (excluding ES, social studies & PE)
  - Credits earned
  - Attendance

Dee & Penner (2017)



# Long(er) Term Effects of ES

- Follow ES pilot cohort students through the end of high school & beyond
- Examine effects of ES on:
  - **High school persistence:** SFUSD enrollment, attendance, and credits earned 2, 3, & 4 years after taking ES
  - **High school completion:** HS grad within 5 years of taking ES
  - **Post-secondary enrollment:** post-secondary enrollment within 5 & 6 years of taking ES

# Research Questions

Confirmatory:

- Do students who enrolled in SFUSD's pilot Ethnic Studies course as 9<sup>th</sup> graders have a higher probability of HS graduation?

Exploratory:

- Does enrollment in the pilot Ethnic Studies course increase:
  - high school engagement (i.e., enrollment in SFUSD, attendance, credits earned)?
  - educational attainment (i.e., post-secondary enrollment)?

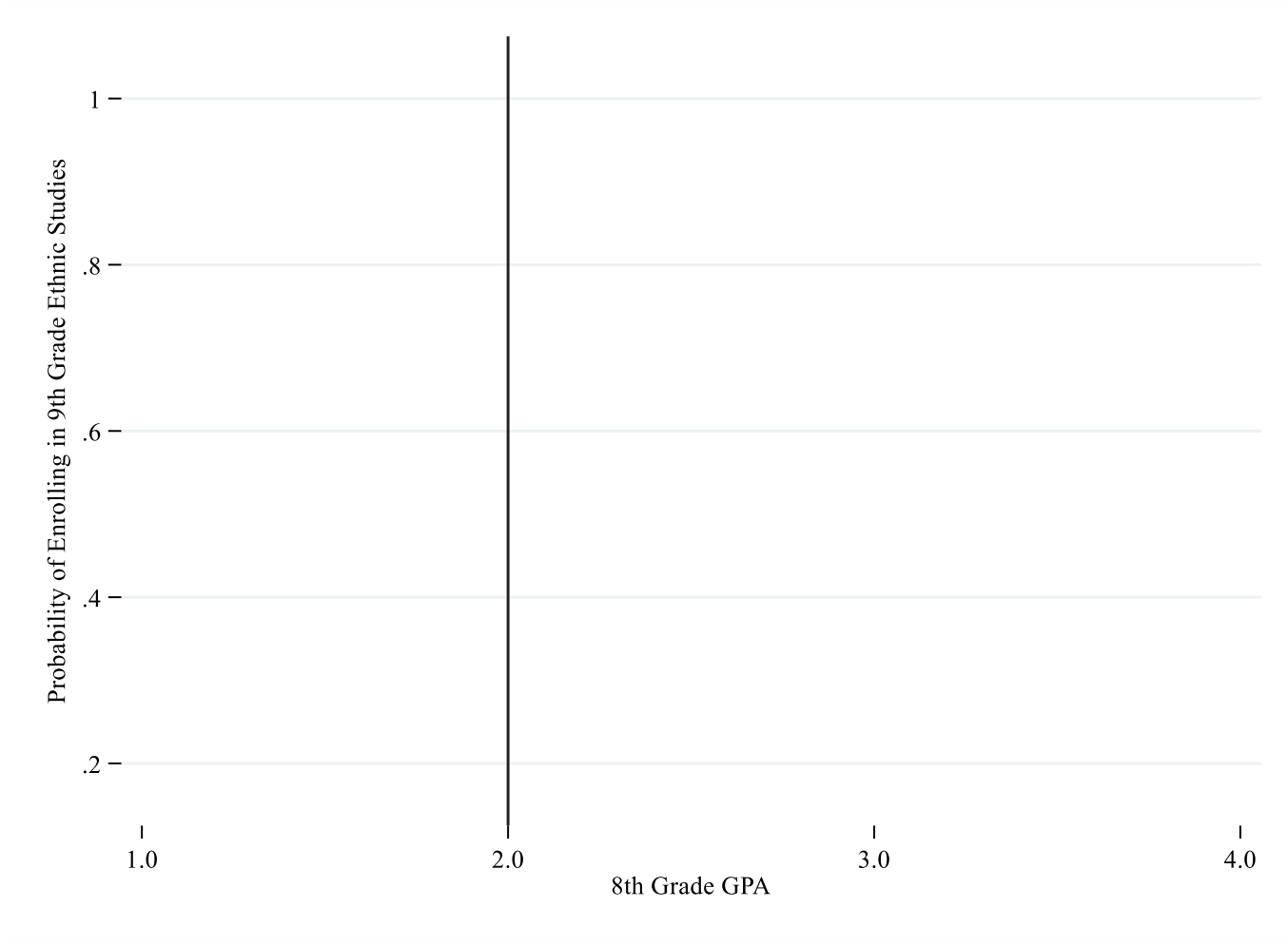
# Data Sources & Issues

- Student-level data from n=1,405 entering 9<sup>th</sup> graders in SFUSD
  - 5 unique school-year cohorts
  - One HS in AY 2011/12 through AY 2013/14; two other HS in AY 2011-12 only
- SFUSD student admin records
  - CALPADS
  - National Student Clearinghouse
- Imputation of HS graduation triangulating across sources

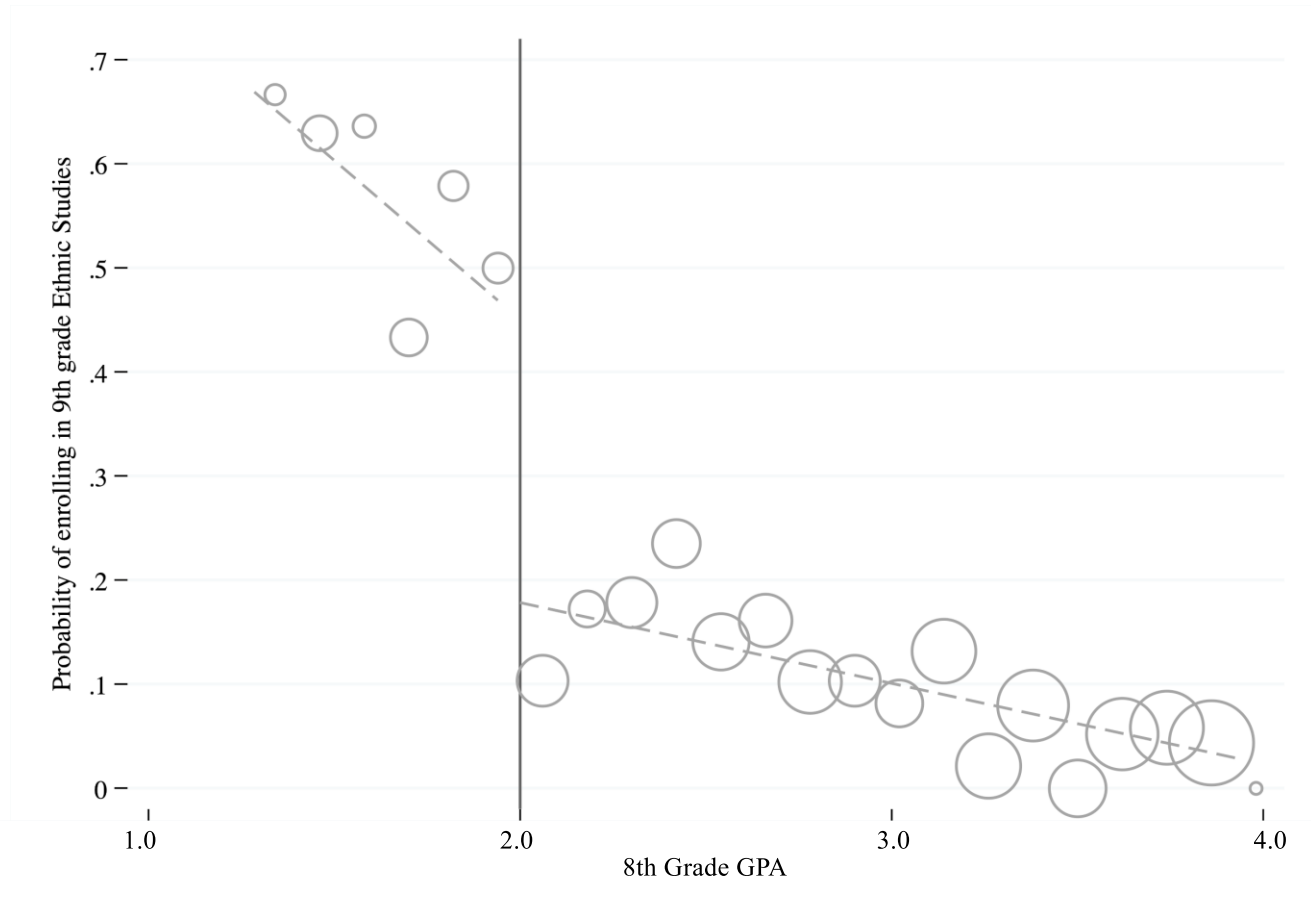
# Analytic Strategy

- Entering 9<sup>th</sup> graders encouraged to take Ethnic Studies if flagged by an early-warning indicator: 8<sup>th</sup> grade GPA < 2.0
- “Regression discontinuity” (RD) design
  - Effectively compares students just below (“treatment”) and just above (“control”) 2.0 GPA threshold
  - A well-functioning RD is “as good as random assignment” (Lee and Lemieux 2010)

# Regression Discontinuity Design



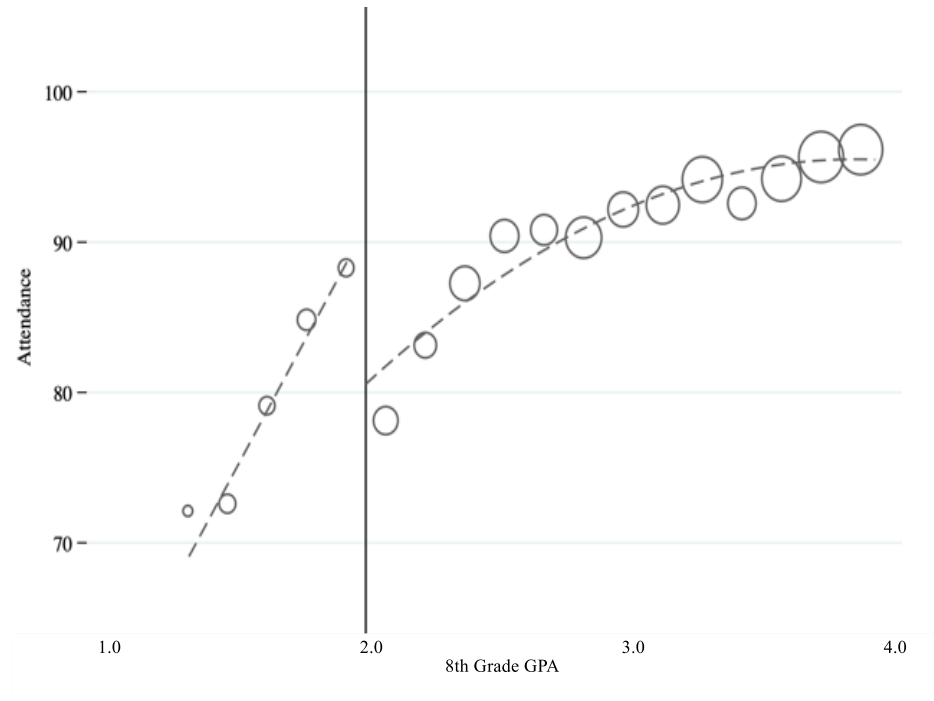
# Did nudge to take ES translate into ES enrollment?



## Results: High School Persistence

### Take-away:

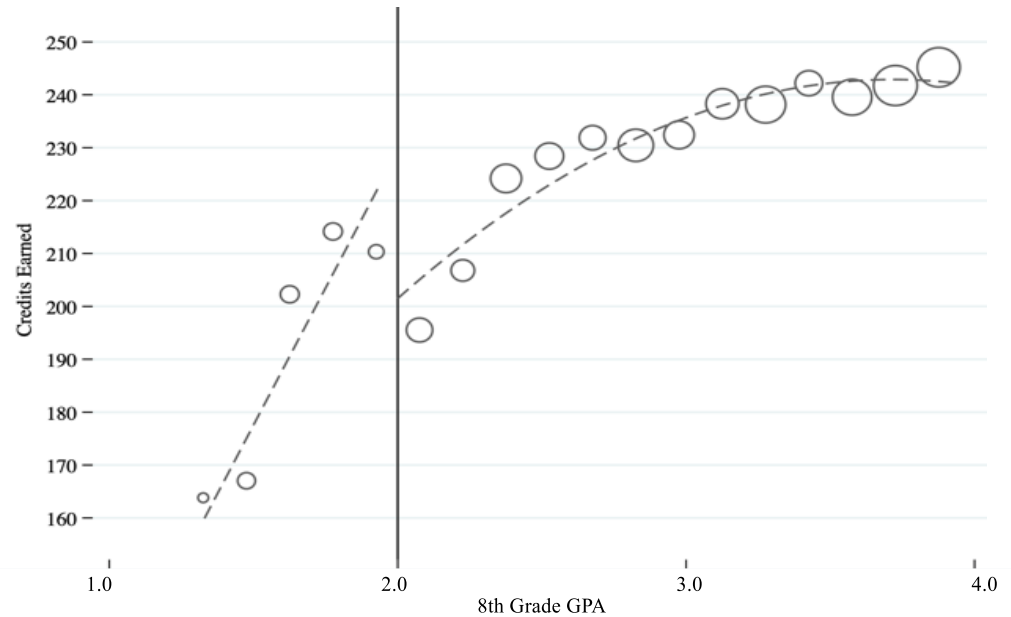
Effect on attendance (year 4) is slightly larger than the effect at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade



# Results: High School Persistence

## Take-away:

Effect on credits accumulated (year 4) is slightly larger than the effect at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade

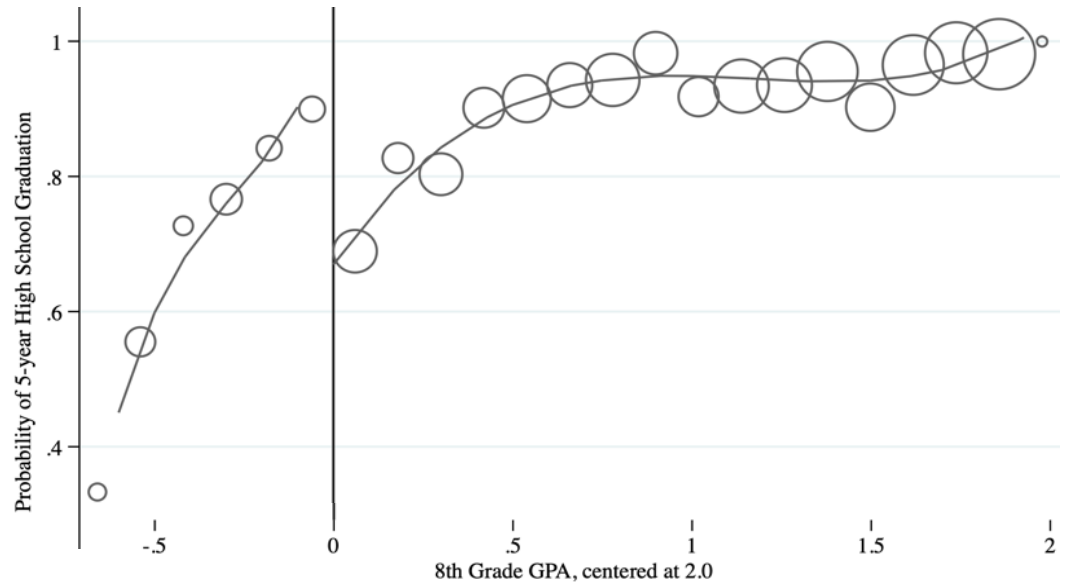




# Results: High School Completion

## Take-away:

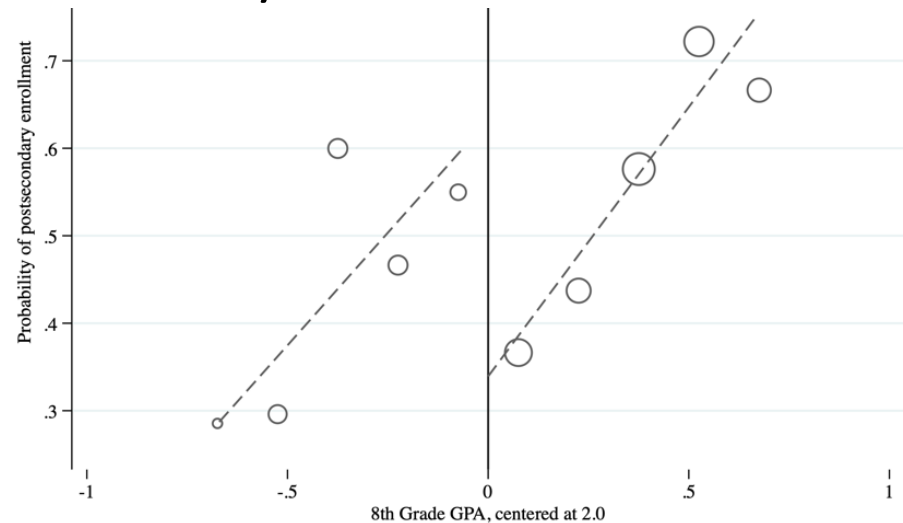
The gains in high school persistence translate into higher high school graduation rates 5 years after enrolling in Ethnic Studies.



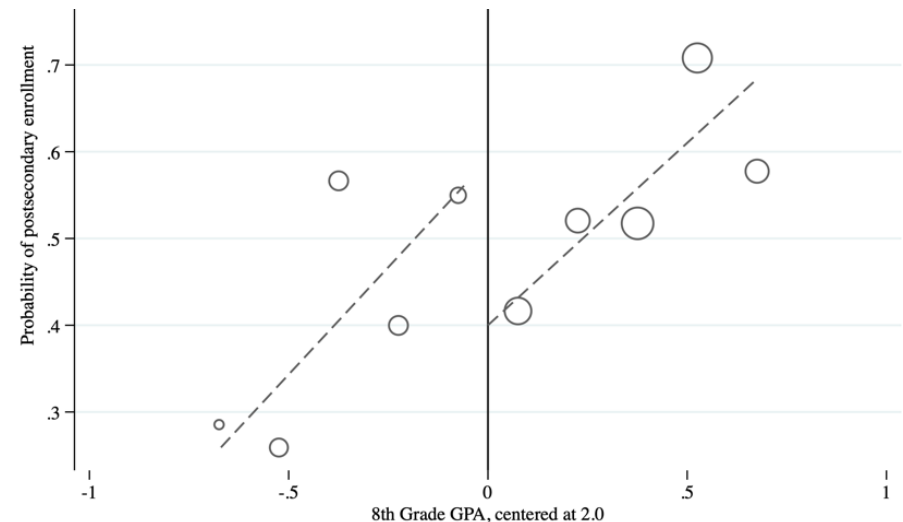
# Results: Post-Secondary Enrollment

## Take-away:

We find that the gains in high school graduation translate to increased enrollment in postsecondary 5 and 6 years later.



(a) Postsecondary enrollment year 5, Bandwidth +/- 1 SD



(b) Postsecondary enrollment year 6, Bandwidth +/- 1 SD

## Summary of subgroup results

**Take away:** We see broadly *similar effects* by *student sex* and *race/ethnicity*. There are fewer Hispanic/Latino students and not all estimates are statistically significant but are consistent with positive effects.

Subgroup	Attendance	Credits Earned	5-year high school graduation	5-year postsecondary enrollment	6-year postsecondary enrollment
Full sample	+	+	+	+	+
Male	+	+	+	+	+
Female	+	+	+	+	
Hispanic/Latino	+	+			
Asian	+		+	+	+

# Results by complier status

- Some students will always take ES if it's offered (i.e., always takers)
- Some will never take ES (never takers)
- Some will take ES if we encourage them to (i.e., compliers)
- Our results indicate that ES is *more effective* for those students who are compliers.

# Tests of Alternative Explanations

- Maybe it's the EWI, not ES?
  - No effect at 2.0 GPA threshold in non-ES schools
- Maybe it's driven by the large prevalence of whole/half integer grades (e.g, 2.0, 2.5)?
  - Effects the same when exclude these values
- Maybe teachers had some incentive to change students' grades to get them just above/below the 2.0 threshold
  - No evidence of large “heaps” of students on either side of 2.0
  - No evidence of discontinuities at other thresholds (e.g., 3.0)
- Maybe it's the ES teachers and not the course itself
  - Students in ES teachers' other courses not consistently better than outcomes for students in other social studies teachers' courses

# Recap of findings

- ES had a positive short- and longer-term impact on several measures of educational engagement, performance, and attainment
- Effects were broadly similar across demographic subgroups
- Effects larger for compliers (i.e., those who wouldn't have signed up voluntarily)

# Important Study Limitations

- Limited external validity to study based on 3 high schools and 4 teachers
- Our evidence of efficacy is based on *targeting* participation to academically at-risk kids (EWI)
  - The efficacy of ES courses among a broader cross-section of students is uncertain
- The possibly high-fidelity implementation in these schools was based on years of development, piloting, support
  - It is unlikely to scale up well if done quickly and indiscriminately

# Next Steps

- After 2014, SFUSD Board of Education passed a new resolution to expand ES offerings to all SFUSD high schools
  - What are the key elements of ES curriculum and practice?
  - Is ES practice similar across older and newer ES classrooms?
  - Who is taking and teaching ES?
  - How are new ES teachers identified/recruited and trained?



# Thank you!

[emily.penner@uci.edu](mailto:emily.penner@uci.edu)

