Immigration Enforcement and Absenteeism in a California School District

J. Jacob Kirksey
Gevirtz Graduate School of Education
June 26, 2019
Problem
The Ripple Effects of Immigration Enforcement
ICE launches new immigration sweep in L.A. area; at least 100 detained so far

ICE Agents Detain Undocumented Immigrants In Several Cities
February 25, 2018 at 7:42 pm

ICE begins deportation raids in Northern California, as federal officials blame Oakland mayor

Immigrant arrested by ICE after dropping daughter off at school, sending shockwaves through neighborhood

Does ICE Pressure Schools for Student Info?
While the agency says no, families and education officials take steps to safeguard the undocumented.
# Policy Context

## Obama Administration
- Increased deportations, primarily under Homeland Security Investigations
- Issued first memo on “Sensitive Locations” (still not law)
- Focus on individuals with felony convictions
- Large increases to funding for ICE

## Changes starting in 2016-17
- Increased deportations, especially under Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO)
- Renewed “Secure Communities”
- No longer a focus on criminal records
- Ignoring “Sensitive Locations” Guideline
- Harsh rhetoric toward immigrants
School Districts Within 100 Miles of Deportations: 2009-2016

- Deportation activity within 25 miles
- Deportation activity within 51 to 75 miles
- Deportation activity within 26 to 50 miles
- Deportation activity within 76 to 100 miles

From Kirksey, Sattin-Bajaj, Gottfried, Freeman, & Salem (under review)
Conceptual Guide

Family Dissolution

US-Citizen Children Cannot Reside in US

Long Term: Economic instability
Emotional distress of separation

Short Term: Economic instability
Changes in daily routines
Emotional distress

Fears about Family Stability:
For both self and for family members

Misunderstandings about Immigration:
Associating immigration with illegality regardless of legal status
Denials of immigrant heritage

Source: Dreby 2012, 831.
Ripple Effects

Deportation

- Immigrants or children of immigrants
- Peers, friends, and schools
- Community climate
How far does this triangle extend?
Who is being affected?
How?
AFTER AN IMMIGRATION RAID, A CITY’S STUDENTS VANISH

By Jonathan Blitzer  March 23, 2017
# Why Absences Matter

## Educators
- Students who are not in class miss out on opportunities to learn the material that enables them to succeed later in school.
- Test scores (Goodman, 2014; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017), GPA (Kirksey, in press), and probability of dropping out (Kirksey, in press; Rumberger, 2000) are negatively impacted due because of chronic absenteeism.

## Policymakers
- Attendance is tied to funding for districts.
- *In School + On Track* in California has raised the stakes for schools and districts.
- California and 36 other states have adopted chronic absenteeism as one indicator of school quality under the Every Student Succeeds Act.
  - Chronic absenteeism is defined in California as missing 10% or more of the school year.
Study
## Current Study

### Research Questions

1. Does the number of incidents of immigration arrests link to absenteeism in secondary grades?
2. Do these effects differ based on student characteristics?
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1. Does the number of incidents of immigration arrests link to absenteeism in secondary grades?

2. Do these effects differ based on student characteristics?
# District Demographics

## City
- Population: 100,000-150,000
- Over 70% Latino/a
- Over 30% employed in agriculture
- 1.5 million agricultural workers in CA are undocumented

## Schools: 2013-2017
- Over 75% of students are considered to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- District is slightly below average on state accountability measures
- Elementary/middle school district is autonomous from high school district
Single, urban school district

Demographics

- Latino/a: 79%
- White: 11%
- Asian: 5%
- Other race: 4%
- Black: 1%

- 15% of students were considered migrant
- Defined by parents' occupation

Migrant status

- EL Status: 23%
- Non-EL: 77%

Disability Status

- Disability: 10%
- No Disability: 90%

Coursework

- Average GPA of 2.79
- Average of 1 course failure
Single, urban school district

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- Non-EL: 63%

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Outcomes
Students are required to attend 7 class periods a day.

Average number of absences each year was 75 (~10 full days)
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Average number of absences each year was 75 (~10 full days)

Missing 10% or more of the school year
Student must have been enrolled 30 or more days
15% of students in district were considered chronically absent on average each year
# Measuring Immigration Enforcement

## Data from ICE
- Limited data that is published annually
- Aggregated data not conducive to understanding the role of deportations on outcomes in a particular school district
- Some success in FOIA requests over time (e.g. used in Kirksey et al., under review)

## This study: Local reporting
- Logged reported ICE activities using English and Spanish local newspapers
- Created variable for number of unique incidents involving arrests each month
- Also logged information on number of articles and any mention of schools
### Controlling for Confounding Bias

#### Time
- Education reforms like ESSA or school/district level changes in absence policies
- District trends in absences over time

#### Student Characteristics
- Gender, race/ethnicity, discipline, English learner, disability, coursework, academic achievement, grade level
- Household qualities, parent education, parental expectations

#### School Characteristics
- More/less engaging administrators
- Size
- Peer characteristics

#### Month and Day of Week
- Absenteeism tends to be greater on Mondays and Fridays
- Absenteeism tends to be greater around the holidays
Results
Descriptive Findings
Figure 1: Absences in District in September-October 2015

- District-level absences
- Days connected to Labor Day weekend
- Incident of ICE arrest(s)
- Minimum Days - Staff professional development
Findings from statistical models

OLS Regression with time-varying controls and student, school, year, grade, month, and weekday fixed effects
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~50,000 whole days missed by students over the four years

Effect on absences was concentrated in two weeks following raids

Change in rates of chronic absenteeism is 27%

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## Cost Implications

### Main effects
- Each ICE incident related to an additional 1.75 cuts on average
  - Mostly in the form of unexcused absences
- This translates to ~ 350,000 cuts caused by ICE activity over the four years

### Economic impact
- California pays ~$29 per student per day attended to schools
- At the high school level, 350,000 class periods equals 50,000 school days
- 50,000 missed school days over the four years due to ICE raids cost this specific district over $1,450,000 in attendance funding alone
- Each ICE raid costs this small school district over $53,000 in attendance funding
Researchers have identified a good measure of immigration enforcement that adds rare consistency to prior literature on the effects of immigration enforcement on absences (Dee & Murphy, 2018; Kirksey et al., 2019; Sattin-Bajaj & Kirksey, 2019). How are schools and school leaders responding?
- 37 states + D.C. use chronic absenteeism as accountability indicator under ESSA
- Think broadly about school climate and how outside factors might influence
- What policies and decisions (within their control) can help mitigate consequences?
- Identify relevant sources of support:
  - Teachers
  - School leaders
  - Nonprofit organizations
  - City government
- Target school-level responses to students most impacted
- What’s the theory of change for providing holistic support for school or district’s students?
  - District’s response: Ethnic studies classes
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Contact:
jjkirksey@ucsb.edu

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