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Jongyeon Ee

Loyola Marymount University, joy.ee@lmu.edu

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U.S. Immigration Enforcement Policy and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning in the Nation's Schools

Patricia Gándara & Jongyeon Ee
Civil Rights Project, UCLA

A great deal has been written recently on the topics of immigration, immigration enforcement, and its impact on families and communities. Reporters tend to focus on the human interest stories about children terrified about being ripped from their parents, parents concerned about what will happen to their children and other family members, and the great sense of anxiety with which they live day to day. One story in particular that was published in the *Los Angeles Times* in July of 2017 and reprinted in local papers and on national television, sent shock waves in immigrant communities across the country.¹ In this case, a man who had lived in the Los Angeles area for more than 20 years, raised his US born children there, and had just dropped his daughter off at school, was arrested and told he would be deported. Until the Trump administration, deportations had been largely focused on people with police records or those crossing illegally at the border. Now, the administration was signaling that apprehensions and deportations would affect long established residents with no or minor infractions, and parents of U.S. born children as they went about their daily business. More recently, the targeting of hundreds of undocumented persons in California in several raids was widely perceived as “payback” for the state’s sanctuary policies and one senator was quoted as saying it was “pure malice.”² Many people are left anxious and afraid to even go to work. Children cry in their classrooms for fear their parents will either lose their jobs or not be home when they return from school.³

Noticeably absent from most of the reporting, however, has been the impact that these policies are having on the nation’s schools. Some have rightly noted that children who are anxious and stressed about their home situation are hardly optimal learners.⁴ And some children worry about being apprehended while at school, which would certainly make it difficult to concentrate on studies. At least

¹ Castillo, A. 2017. LA father detained after dropping daughter off at school may be deported, *Los Angeles Times*, July 17. <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-romulo-avelica-deportation-20170731-story.html>

² Vives, R. & Castillo, A. 2018. “California, Trump going toe-to-toe. Administration officials target state, in part because it’s the heart of ‘sanctuary’ movement, *Los Angeles Times*, January 21. Pages B1,5.

³ Jones, C. (2017). Immigration crackdown taking heavy toll on California students, *Edsource*, September 28. <https://edsource.org/2017/immigration-crackdown-taking-heavy-toll-on-california-students/588027>

⁴ Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). Education Deans’ Statement on DACA, January 18, 2018. <http://www.ajcunet.edu/press-releases-blog/2018/1/18/ajcu-conference-of-education-deans-statement-on-daca>

indirectly, some reports have suggested that the children of immigration are affected in their learning by these seemingly random immigration raids. In fact, psychologists have found negative effects on cognitive development and educational progress among school age children with unauthorized parents, even where the children are U.S. citizens.⁵ But we have had no idea of how extensive these effects are, or how they are being experienced by our nation's schools. Moreover, what about the student who comes from a home untouched by these concerns but whose best friend at school is worried and anxious? And, what about the teacher who must teach to a class that is distracted by one or more students who are having an anxiety attack? What about the counselors and administrators who must intervene, sometimes several times a day, with students who are acting out or decompensating in class? Or the administrator who meets with the parents who are seeking reassurance that the school will not turn them in to immigration agents? In sum, nearly everyone in the school can be affected, especially if there are large numbers of students at risk. How do teachers, counselors, administrators and other school personnel experience the effects of the new immigration enforcement regime? Is it impacting the school or the classroom as a whole? Are teachers feeling stressed by this? Is this taking a toll on the nation's schools? In the worst cases, can this be thwarting our efforts to improve learning and/or retain strong teachers and administrators in our schools?

It is important to note that public schools in the U.S. have been under enormous pressure in recent years to close the yawning achievement gaps between poor and non-poor students, and between White and Asian students on the one hand and Black and Latino students on the other. No Child Left Behind, the 2000's version of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), used both sticks and carrots, but most educators would say it employed many more sticks than carrots, and there is wide consensus that the approach did not work. The newest version of the ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), has taken a more hands-off approach and relies much more on states to come up with more localized solutions to these gaps. It is in this context of challenging the schools to close achievement gaps that stepped up immigration enforcement is being experienced by the schools. And, importantly, the schools that serve the poorest children are most likely to enroll immigrant students, and these are precisely the schools that have struggled most to narrow the gaps. Some would argue that the immigration enforcement regime places an unreasonable additional burden on these schools. Given the research that shows that children of undocumented parents, on average, perform more poorly in school, have higher absenteeism, and graduate high school

⁵ Brabeck, K., Sibley, E., Taubin, P., & Murcia, A. (2015). The influence of immigrant parent legal status on U.S.-born children's academic abilities: the moderating effects of social service use. *Applied Developmental Science*, 41-1-13.

at lower rates, it can be impossible for these schools to achieve significant improvements in students' achievement.⁶

It is also important to note that these "immigrant" students are a significant population at risk. Although referred to as "immigrant students," it is estimated that 88% of the children of immigrants are, in fact, born in the U.S. and have U.S. citizenship.⁷ Moreover, the small percentage of students who are foreign born also have the right to a free and equal public education through high school, guaranteed by the *Plyler v Doe* Supreme Court decision in 1982. Yet current immigration policies have made many of these students feel unwelcome and thrust them into the center of an excruciatingly difficult situation.

As of 2017 there were an estimated 600,000 children and youth under the age of 18 who are undocumented.⁸ However, an additional 4.5 million children are U.S. citizens with at least one parent who is unauthorized. Thus more than 5 million children are at risk for being directly affected by immigration enforcement policies. Unauthorized immigrants are of all nationalities, but the majority is Latino who have been the focus of apprehensions and deportations.⁹ Whereas once the Latino population was concentrated in a few areas of the U.S., today the greatest growth in the Latino population is in Georgia, North Carolina, Arkansas and some Midwestern states, where they live alongside immigrants and refugees from all over the world.¹⁰ Thus when we decided to study the impact of immigration enforcement on the nation's schools we considered it important to assess the impact on all major regions of the U.S.

The Study

In order to answer the questions posed, we designed a survey that could quickly assess teachers', counselors', administrators' and other school personnel's *perception* of the impact of these immigration policies on the teaching and learning in their schools. Of course, as these are educators' perceptions, we cannot know with certainty if they are accurate in all cases, but the fact that educators who spend

⁶ Yoshikawa, H., Suárez-Orozco, C. & Gonzales, R. (2016). Unauthorized status and youth development in the United States: Consensus statement of the Society for Research on Adolescence, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 27, 4-19.

⁷ Zong, Batalova & Halleck (2018). Frequently requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States. Washington DC: MPI
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>

⁸ Personal communication, Jeffrey Passel, Pew Research Center, August 2017.

⁹ Yoshikawa, Suarez-Orozco & Gonzales, 2016

¹⁰ Gándara, P. & Mordechay, K. (2017). Demographic change and the new (and not so new) challenges for Latino education, *The Educational Forum*, 81,148-159.

their days with these students perceive these things is arguably as important as their accuracy. In separate interviews we also asked a subset of these individuals about the impact immigration enforcement is having on their own wellbeing and job satisfaction.

The survey

The survey design was based largely on reports from media across the country about the impact of immigration enforcement on children and families, and was piloted with a half dozen educators prior to being finalized. It was administered between late October 2017 and mid-January 2018, online through Qualtrics. It was anonymous and designed to be short with just 14 substantive questions and one open-ended opportunity to comment. For most questions respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they viewed the observed behavior as a problem – on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “a little” and 5 being “extensive.” The survey was intentionally brief to help ensure that respondents completed it and that it was not viewed as being overly burdensome on school personnel who, as many people told us, were asked to complete surveys much too often. At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to provide contact information if they wished to be interviewed and provide more information.

The Sample

Forty-seven (47) districts were invited to participate in the study, representing the U.S. Census’ four regional designations: West, Midwest, Northeast and South. Districts were selected to participate based on region and where we either had contacts in the district or had colleagues who would introduce us. Of this larger number, more than 730 schools in 24 districts, in 12 states, agreed to participate.

Table 1. Numbers and Percentages of Respondents by State

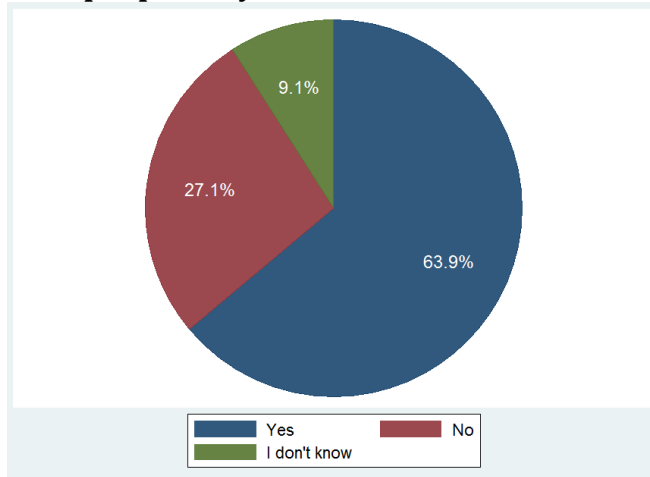
State	Freq.	Percent
Arizona	573	10.54
California	2,412	44.35
Florida	80	1.47
Georgia	31	0.57
Indiana	368	6.77
Maryland	374	6.88
Massachusetts	123	2.26
Nebraska	213	3.92
New Jersey	237	4.36
Oregon	362	6.66
Tennessee	328	6.03
Texas	337	6.2
Total	5,438	100

Reasons for not participating appeared to be mostly bureaucratic – too much burden on the district to facilitate the process of data collection. Some may have also thought the research was too sensitive, but no one indicated this directly. While some districts required months of bureaucratic procedures to allow the survey, there was an especially great interest in participating in the West. Some district personnel contacted us when they heard about the survey, and many made huge efforts to encourage educators to respond. Thus, we ended up with considerably larger numbers of respondents in the West. Of course, the West is also disproportionately the home of immigrant families and the site of greatest pro-immigrant activity, including sanctuary or “safe haven” districts; the state has claimed itself a “sanctuary” state. Thus there is a high consciousness of immigration issues.

All participating districts disseminated the survey to teachers, and most, but not all districts sent it to school site administrators, counselors and other staff as well. Districts, as one might expect, differed in their level of effort to help ensure the surveys were widely disseminated and viewed as important. At the close of data collection 5,438 persons responded to the survey. The first question on the survey asked if the respondents had observed any impact of immigration enforcement at their school or in their classroom. If respondent answered “no”, we ended the survey but counted the response in order to get a reading on the percent of individuals who believed there was an impact versus those that did not. Of the total respondents 27.1% indicated that they had not observed any impact at their school and so ended the survey, leaving approximately 3,800 respondents (73%) who indicated they had or might have observed an impact. Not all respondents,

however, completed the survey, leaving complete responses from about 3,500 individuals.

Figure 1. Have you observed any students in your classroom or your school who are concerned about immigration issues that may be affecting them, their families, or people they know?



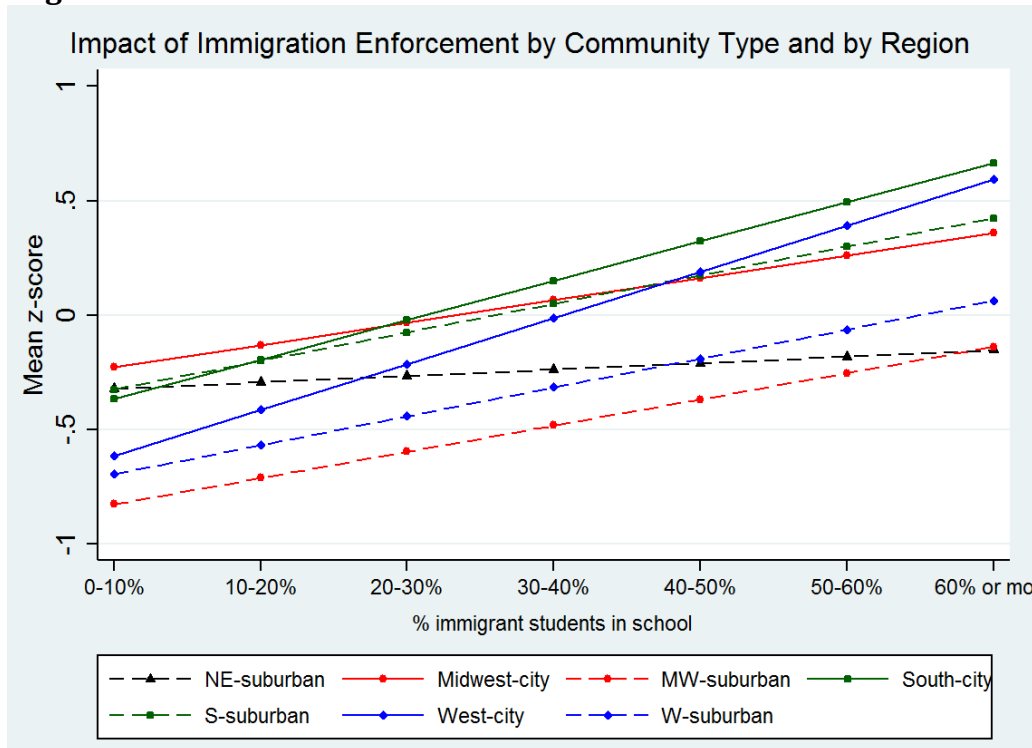
Most respondents were teachers (72.4%), with principals/school site administrators comprising 8% of the sample, and counselors and other certificated personnel representing 8.8%. The balance of the respondents (10.9%) were paraprofessionals and other school staff. This is a reasonably representative sampling of educators at school sites, suggesting that most schools distributed the survey to all relevant personnel.

We were also interested in knowing in which types of schools – elementary versus secondary—and with what percent immigrant students the respondents came from. We thus provided a stratified school sampling plan for districts. Most districts followed the plan offered, but many wanted to include schools that they felt were most heavily impacted by immigration. About half of the districts used our suggested sampling, and about half chose to sample from the schools that they thought would be of greatest interest. This resulted in a heavy representation from Title I (low-income) schools (82.5%). We received responses from a broad representation of schools: 37.4% of the respondents were from elementary schools; 11.3% from Pre-K-8 or K-12; and 50.3% from secondary schools, which included both middle and high schools.

The findings

Respondents from the South were most likely to report having observed problems overall (70%), though Southern cities (as opposed to suburbs) were hardest hit and especially so as the percent of immigrants rose in the schools. Respondents from the Northeast were less likely to report having observed problems (61%); they also showed much less effect for the percent immigrants in the schools. About 43% of respondents reported being in schools that enrolled 50% or more immigrants (by their own estimations).

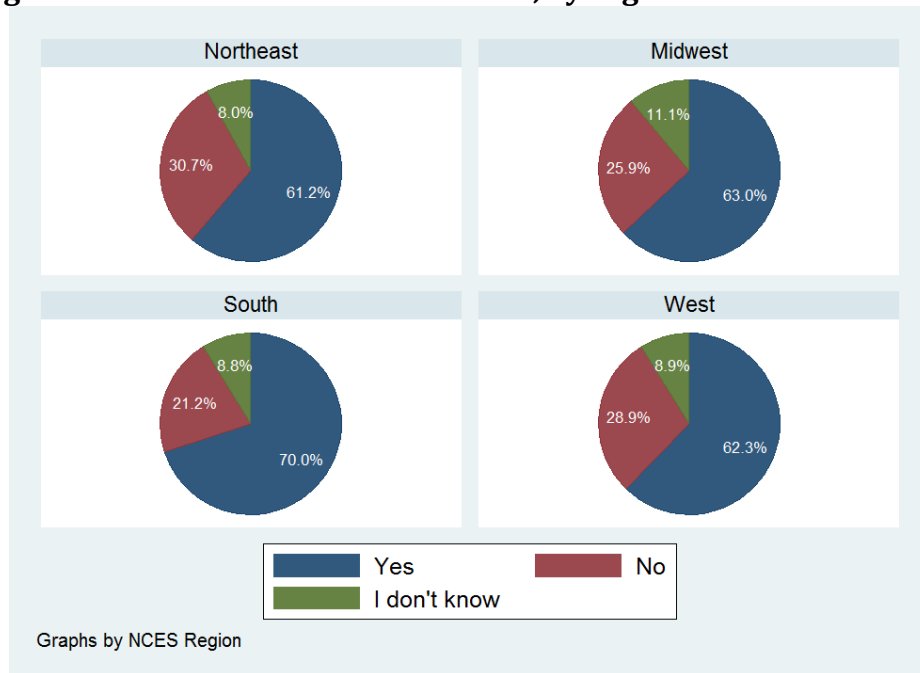
Figure 2. Impact of Immigration Enforcement by Community Type and by Region



Literally thousands of respondents told us that their immigrant students (whether they were US born or not) were terrified that their families and friends, and occasionally that they themselves might be picked up by ICE. *Fear* was the most common word used by respondents, *separation* (from family) was the second most common. They also spoke of anxiety, worry, stress, and depression. Respondents describe the students' worst fear as going home and finding that their parents, siblings, or grandparents are no longer there. They worried that they would be left alone or left to care for their younger siblings and didn't know how they would survive. How would they get money for food? Would they be left homeless? Teachers note how difficult it is to teach children who are having "breakdowns

during class.” Many respondents reported that family members of their students had been deported and that these incidents were well known to the whole class or the school community, reinforcing fears many students held about their own situations or those of their friends. Some educators also reported students suffering deprivation because one or both parents had been deported, or had lost their jobs due to their immigration status, and there was not enough money to buy food or meet basic needs.

Figure 3. Percent responding Yes, No, Don't Know to observable impact of Immigration enforcement on their school, by region.

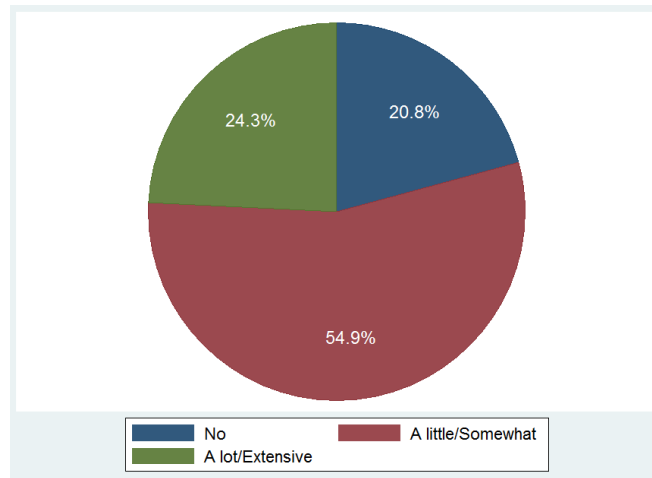


Ten questions were posed to respondents completing the survey with respect to what they had observed at their schools and in their classrooms regarding reactions to immigration enforcement activities. The respondents who were most likely to report having observed the impact of immigration enforcement policies overall were administrators. Teachers were more variable in their responses, no doubt reflecting the fact that they were likely seeing the situation from the perspective of their own classrooms, whereas the administrators had a broader view of the whole campus. Certificated personnel (counselors, psychologists, nurses, etc.), who tend to see students individually and often those most in need or with specific problems, observed declines in achievement, concerns about immigration issues, and behavioral and emotional problems substantially more frequent and extensive than either teachers or administrators. Administrators were more attuned than others to decline in parent participation and school wide issues like bullying.

- **Behavioral or emotional problems**

Almost 80% of respondents indicated that they had observed behavioral or emotional problems and one in four (24.3%) indicated that this was a very big problem.

Figure 4. Have you noticed any behavioral and/or emotional problems with any of your students that appear to be related to concerns about immigration enforcement?



Consistent with overall findings, **more than 80%** of respondents from the South reported that behavioral or emotional problems were a problem, and nearly one-third (28.9%) believed they were a very big problem. Across the country, **nearly 90% of administrators** reported observing these problems compared to about 78% of teachers and 86% of other certificated staff. These behavioral problems were usually described as crying, refusing to speak, being distracted and acting anxious or depressed. For example, one Southern administrator described the situation in the following way,

“Several students have arrived at school crying, withdrawn and refusing to eat lunch because they have witnessed deportation of a family member. Some students show anxiety symptoms All of this impacts their ability to focus and complete work, which further affects them academically.”

An art teacher from Texas explained other ways that students express their emotional state: “As an art teacher I saw many students drew and colored images of their parents and themselves being separated, or about people stalking/hunting their family.”

One Maryland teacher described the desperate situation of a student whose mother was deported: “We have one student who had attempted to slit her wrists because her family has been separated and she wants to be with her mother. She literally didn't want to live without her mother.”

Occasionally, fears are relieved when the worst doesn't happen, but even very young children live with near constant fear. One California second grade teacher recounted what had happened to one of her students,

“Her father [was] taken by ICE and [she] was terrified to speak during class. After he was allowed to return the mom told us what had happened and I saw a total change in the student. She participated more, smiled more, and her academic performance improved. It was clear she was carrying a big secret and didn't know how to deal with it.”

And sometimes the worst does happen unexpectedly, and it is this fear, that students have no control over their circumstances, that can be devastating. Teachers are left to try to understand their students' behavior. A California high school teacher explained,

“I had one student who came back the day after prom and would not eat or talk to anyone. I finally found out from one of her friends that she came home from prom to find her mom deported and never had the chance to say good-bye or anything. She was suffering but did not know what to do.”

Finally, it can be especially troubling to teachers to see their best students so emotionally distraught that they are unable to perform. After a raid in a nearby community, one teacher from the Midwest described the reaction of the students,

“I noticed those students behaving so differently. They don't sit or stand tall. They do not want to participate in presentations. They do not want to be called. They seem disconnected or uninterested now. In my community's school, it has been almost too sad to describe the change of countenance of these students. I serve in an academically advanced setting where students are selected and good performers.”

In all of the incidents that educators write about one hears the anguish and frustration they feel as they see the very human toll before them: Children, who through no fault of their own, are thrust into emotionally wrenching situations. And the school is perhaps the only safe place for them. This puts an enormous burden on the educators to not only teach, but also console their students and reassure

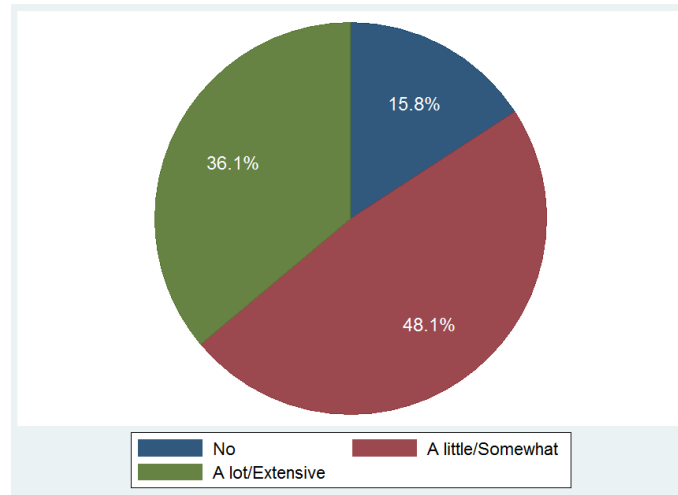
parents of their children’s safety. Two administrators wrote that they were investigating foster parenting in case they needed to take students home with them. As one teacher put it, “I want to tell them that things will be all right, to make them feel better, but I know I cannot truthfully say this. Things may *not* be all right.”

- **Students expressing concerns about immigration issues at school**

It is one thing to observe students’ behavior and infer what they may be experiencing, it is another to have students express their concerns either openly in class in some cases, or with a counselor or teacher whom they trust. In the cases where students feel a need to express their fears and concerns, educators must address them on the spot. It can be difficult to know what to say.

Overall, **84 percent of educators noted that they had experienced students expressing concern about immigration enforcement, and more than one-third (36.1%) indicated that this was a lot or extensive.** Almost every respondent to the survey could recount ways in which students in their school or classroom felt nearly overwhelmed by fear and worry. Among the concerns that they voiced most frequently were: fear of parents being taken away, especially while they were at school; fear of never seeing their parents again; fear of parents losing their jobs. Even very young children bear a huge burden of worry. One little second grade girl concerned that her father had lost his job because of immigration issues asked her teacher, “How will we eat?”

Figure 5. Have any of your students expressed any concerns or fears about immigration enforcement?



As another teacher noted, even young children “are worried that their parents will be taken away. They are afraid that they don’t know how to care for

their younger siblings.” A fourth grade teacher in the Northeast recounted what one of her students had told her: “[she] told me that her mom is teaching her how to make food and feed her baby sister in case the mom is taken away.”

Many high school teachers wrote that their students were especially worried about being able to go to college when they finished high school. This was a pervasive concern across the country. Teachers reported students saying, “Why bother to try hard if I can’t graduate or go to college anyway?” Many of the students had high aspirations for college and careers knowing that the US offered an opportunity their parents had not had and keenly wanted for them. Teachers wrote about outstanding students who were shoo-ins for competitive universities giving up because they didn’t see the point anymore if they might just be whisked away. One teacher noted, they “fear that even though they have worked hard all of their school careers that they will be unable to attend or pay for college.” An Oregon teacher added, “I have students who were college-bound now questioning if it’s worth it, because they don’t believe that they could get a job in their field after graduating. They’re worried about financial aid. This is most heartbreaking for students who want to go into public service, and now are thinking about just working to protect their families.”

The fear of ICE coming to the school or catching them as they walked between home and school (even US citizen students), and fear of school personnel turning them in, are also mentioned by educators. Many educators cited students worrying about someone at the school cooperating with immigration authorities to seize them or their parents when the parents came to pick them up. Even though most of the school districts we sampled had claimed themselves “safe havens” or “sanctuary” sites, students were so frightened they dared not trust school personnel. It is also notable that districts in the South, where we observed the greatest concerns, were disproportionately not sanctuary sites, and so greater confusion reigned over what the actual position of the schools was with respect to cooperating with ICE. As one Oregon administrator noted, “Students are more wary of adults they do not recognize in the building, making it difficult for volunteers and substitutes to develop healthy relationships with students.”

Another Arizona administrator summed up the general climate of the school: “Our school has focused on being a place of safety, but it’s clear that our students walk in our doors carrying the weight of uncertainty over their futures and the futures of their loved ones.”

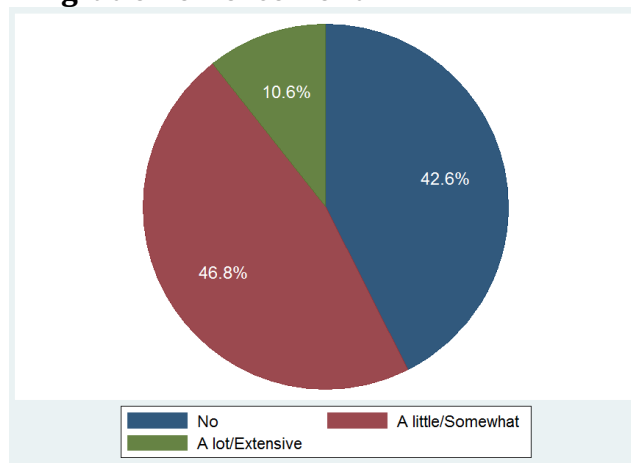
- **Increased absenteeism**

If students do not come to school they cannot learn. If they are absent for days or weeks at a time, they fall so far behind they often cannot catch up, become demoralized and often quit. Absences also affect the schools in many ways. They

lose funding, they find it impossible to improve their test scores and narrow achievement gaps, teacher assignments are disrupted, teachers can lose their job when a class becomes too small to sustain, and the empty seats are a reminder to everyone in the class that some of their classmates are missing. It is clear that both teachers and students experience grief as though a classmate has died, when all of a sudden the student is no longer there and no one knows what has happened to him or her.

With respect to *increased absences* from school due to concerns about immigration enforcement, **the majority of respondents, 57.4% indicated that this was a problem**, with 10.6% considering it to be large problem (a lot/extensive). **Respondents from the South were significantly more likely to report absenteeism as a problem** than respondents from other regions; **two-thirds found this to be a problem, and more than 15% reported it to be a big problem**. Administrators are also most likely to report absenteeism as a problem, with 68% across regions reporting this. This is likely to be a more accurate representation of the situation in schools since the administrators would be taking the whole school into account versus specific classrooms, or individual students who are seen by pupil personnel staff (e.g., counselors, psychologists, nurses). There is a strong association between absenteeism and low academic achievement and this is a problem that particularly plagues low performing schools.¹¹

Figure 6. Have you noticed any increase in absences that may be related to concerns about immigration enforcement?



¹¹ Berliner, D. (2006). Our impoverished view of educational reform, *Teachers College Record*, 108, 949-995.

Students fail to come to school for a variety of reasons. As one New Jersey administrator reports, “The kids are scared and sometimes they hide for days when there are immigration raids in the area. Some of the students have no food or place to live because the parents do not have a job and they go day by day.” Since school may often be the source of the only meal students will have that day, missing school represents more than just missing class; they must feel extraordinary fear to stay at home and forego eating.

An Arizona teacher confirms these fears and how the students are missed: “I’ve personally lost 2 students to this fear. They were good kids who were missed by classmates and myself. “

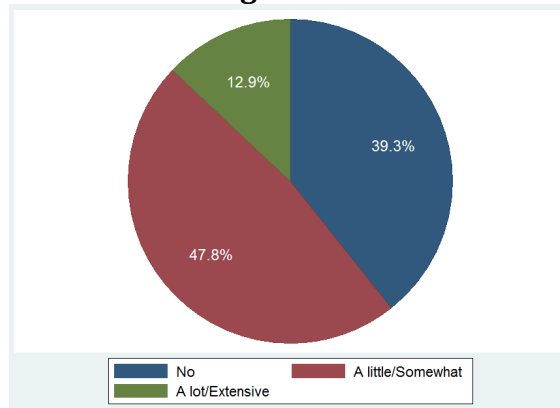
An administrator from Southern California expressed why some students do not come to school and how this wears on them:

“I have already had several students who have parents who have been deported to Mexico and India. One of our students skipped school for 3 weeks when a teacher brought up the topic of immigration in class. Last year I had students missing class to attend their parent's immigration court hearings. All of this is wearing on my students and is causing anxiety and depression.”

- **Impact on academic performance**

We were also interested in gauging how resilient students were in the face of these immigration concerns. In this regard, we asked if respondents had observed a decline in *academic performance*. More than 60% of all respondents indicated they had seen some decline in academic performance on the part of some of their students. Only 12.9% indicated that this was extensive. It appears that most students were perceived as relatively resilient with respect to their academic performance. Nonetheless, **one of every 8 respondents had observed extensive impact on academic performance**. Moreover, while many educators did not rate this as a big problem, many of the same educators commented on it with stories of how their students were affected.

Figure 7. Have you noticed a decline in student academic performance that may be related to concerns about immigration issues?



Again, decline in academic performance appeared to be a bigger problem **in the South** where two-thirds of respondents noted academic decline due to immigration concerns, and 16.4% said this was a major issue. Overall, across all regions, **about 70% of both administrators and certificated staff reported academic decline**, and in this case counselors (and other certificated personnel) were the most likely to report this as **a major concern (17.1%)**. This of course speaks directly to the issue of school improvement and the extent to which schools with immigrant students are being further challenged in their ability to raise test scores and close achievement gaps. Educator after educator questioned how children could possibly focus on school when they were terrified that their parents or other family members would no longer be home when they returned from school. As one California teacher recounted,

“One student's father was deported after 24 years in the country. His children were born here in the U.S., but now their breadwinner is gone. Her grades plummeted after that happened. Students are anxious and worried about stories like this one happening to them.”

Another teacher reported that a parent came to explain that her child was doing poorly in school because he was so frightened that he could not sleep at night, resulting in declining grades.

A high school administrator from Tennessee emphasized how concern about family distracts students from paying attention to school,

“They are not thinking about college, or the test next week, or what is being taught in the classroom today. They are thinking about their family and whether they will still be a family; whether their family will remain intact.”

A Southern California counselor, in an area that has experienced recent immigration raids, described how a sense of hopelessness can also lead to declining grades:

“I have been meeting with various students who feel there is no hope for them and are letting their grades slip because they are under so much stress and unsure about the future. I struggle with encouraging them to have faith when I am unsure myself. I don't like misleading my students and I honestly feel because I don't know what will happen I could be giving them false hope. They are unsure that Government will help and assist them and feel they are second-class citizens. It just breaks my heart.”

Another reason that students miss school, or don't apply themselves in school, resulting in declining grades is their need to help support their families. The immigration enforcement regime has affected many parents' ability to work. Parents are let go from their jobs because employers are afraid to get caught up in the raids; parents don't go to work because of fear or need to hide, or the breadwinner is deported leaving the family with no income. Children have to leave school or cut back on studying to find work to help support the family. One administrator from the South reported, “Some have expressed having to work because mom can't afford to take care of them with her income which is affecting their grades.”

Or, as another teacher from the Northwest noted,

“Many students are legal residents, because they were born here, but their parents are still on immigrant status, so there have been several students having to get jobs or stay at home and take care of younger siblings. This has led to an increase in concern about keeping up with grades.”

A teacher from California added that some immigrant students are disadvantaged because they cannot participate in many of the school activities that support student engagement and achievement because of fear of immigration authorities. They are “unable to participate in any after school programs and parents want the students to only go from home to school. No access to extracurricular activities.”

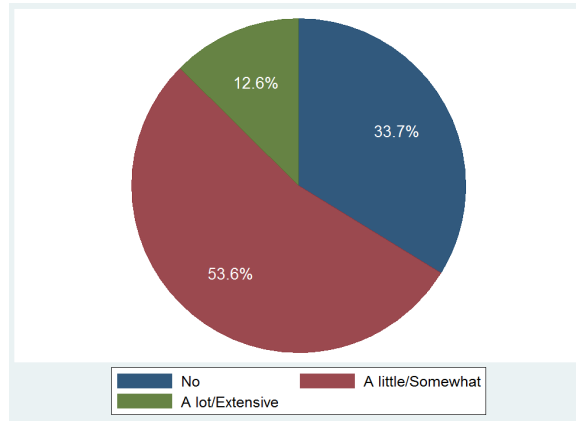
- **Indirect effects on students**

We considered it very important to know if *students who attended school with immigrant students were indirectly affected* by immigration enforcement concerns. That is, were students whose families were not directly targets of enforcement affected either because of the impact on campus climate or because of more personal concerns like students' concerns for their classmates? Concern for

classmates was reported to be more impactful than response to the general campus climate. **Two thirds of educators reported that students were affected indirectly and more than 12% reported that students at their school were affected a lot or extensively by concerns about their classmates.** In Southern schools 70% of educators reported this impact, with 15% judging it to be extensive. That is, immigration enforcement concerns affect many more students than those who could be considered targets of enforcement. More than one of seven educators in the South, and one in eight nationwide, reported that students’ learning was being affected *a lot* due to concerns for classmates. Thus for many the ecology of the classroom was being disrupted by these policies. One Northern California counselor commented on how the fears of immigration raids had stressed *her* out:

“I don’t know if it is stressing them [the students] out, but I feel stressed out about how the San Francisco Chronicle reported possible raids in California. It is a scare tactic which frightens not only undocumented immigrants, but those who are around them.”

Figure 8. Are concerns about immigration enforcement affecting any of your students INDIRECTLY because of their concern for fellow students?



Educators also wrote about how this concern manifested itself in the classroom. One story was especially compelling as it evoked the image of a missing person. A teacher from Tennessee described such a situation in the following way:

“One of my students . . . was picked up . . . and held by ICE for a total of 49 days (interrupting his schooling, separating him from his family, etc.) until the community raised \$8,500 bond to bring him home. This is despite him already having filed an asylum case and receiving his work permit, as well as having multiple glowing letters of recommendation This understandably had an immense

impact on the rest of my students, as well, as his empty seat in the classroom confirmed the reality of their fears every day.”

Missing or detained classmates are a constant confirmation of the fear that many students live with—both fear for themselves and fear for their friends and their friends’ families. As one Southern California secondary teacher recounted, “After the election, one student expressed concern about her friends’ human rights in general, and also immigrant safety specifically. It was very general feeling of despair about their future.”

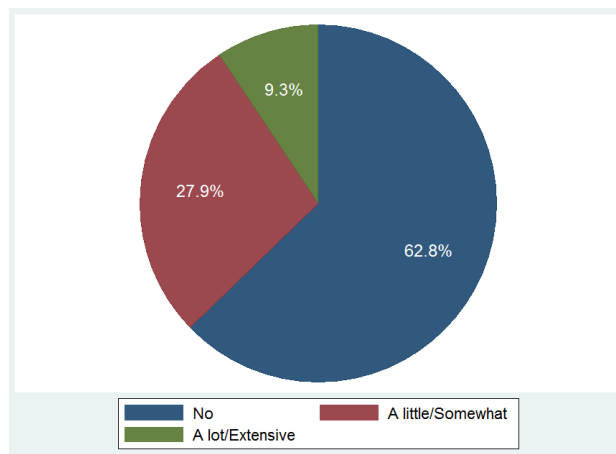
Added a teacher in the Northeast, “Students in my class have expressed concern about their immigrant peers and their families. They’ve expressed concern about whether or not they will be deported.”

And another teacher in Southern California stated, “Students are very concerned for their classmates’ future and circumstances. What’s going to happen with “so-n-so?”

- **Bullying**

We had read a fair amount about increased bullying in this era of stepped up immigration enforcement and racist rhetoric since the presidential campaign of 2016. This, of course, can deeply affect school climate and students’ attachment to school. Therefore we asked educators if they had witnessed any increase in bullying in their schools. This turned out not to be as pervasive as we might have thought, though still more than 37% of respondents noted that they had observed this across regions, although it was reported to be somewhat more acute in the West (10.3% reporting it to be a lot).

Figure 9. Have you noticed any increase in bullying (verbal or physical) related to the perceived immigration status of students or their parents over the last year?



An administrator from a Southern California district described the way in which immigrant students were experiencing bullying on that campus:

“They are worried and scared about the climate of increasing intolerance and bigotry. There has also been an increase in racist graffiti, vandalism, and racial tensions and language on our school campus. I wonder where all this hate comes from?”

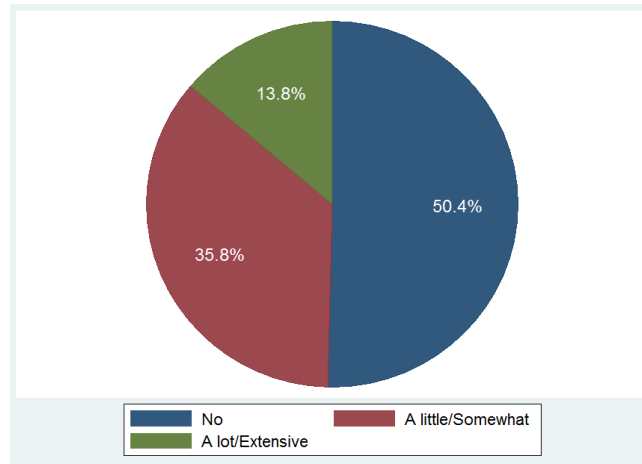
An educator from the Northwest described the situation as follows: “Bullying has arisen that frequently uses immigration status as a target, “You’ll never see your parents again,” “I’m gonna call so they take you away,” and a sharp increase in slurs targeted towards students of color, regardless of their immigration status.”

One educator attempted to explain the source of the increased bullying not just as a product of immigration enforcement, but as a more pervasive phenomenon in an era in which racist language has become tolerated. This educator from the Northeast opined, “The general climate of acceptable racism in the national media and politics has had a serious effect on my students’ feelings of security and confidence in the country.” An administrator from the other side of the country confirmed this perspective, “In January, immediately following the election, we saw an increase in racial bullying, even between young children, taunting each other that ‘Trump will send you back to your country!’ even if the family members are citizens, the child was born here, etc.”

- **Parents expressing concerns**

Parent concerns are usually reported to be in the form of seeking reassurances about the safety of their children at school or asking for information related to immigration enforcement. Here there are large differences in who parents talk to. While approximately half of all respondents answered that they had not had such contacts with parents, **78% of administrators did report this kind of contact**. Parents evidently go to the administration to voice their concerns or ask for help much more often than to either teachers (44%) or counselors (59%). More than one in 5 (21.2%) administrators considered this to be a big issue. At the same time, it also suggests that schools are bearing a considerable weight in providing support for these families. It would seem that this is an added burden on schools that could well affect their regular routines and distribution of time.

Figure 10. Have any PARENTS of students expressed any concerns to you about immigration issues or enforcement?

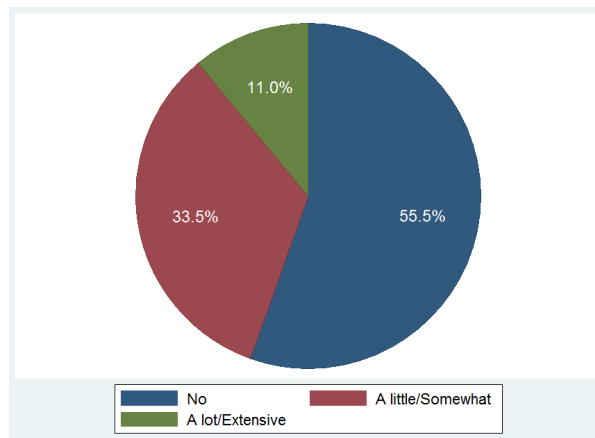


There was not a great deal of difference reported by region with the exception that significantly fewer Midwestern respondents considered this to be an issue. Knowing something about the districts that were sampled this MAY be because those districts had been particularly pro-active in getting information to parents.

- **Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement is closely tied to student success, and to the success of a school in meeting its students' needs. There is extensive research that points to much lower parent involvement in schools that serve poor and immigrant students. Thus it is important to know if the level of parent involvement is affected by immigration enforcement activity, which can exacerbate the challenges already faced by schools in attempting to communicate with immigrant parents. Overall, most respondents did not view decline in participation as an important issue. Perhaps because parent involvement was already low? Less than half of respondents (44.5%) indicated that they had seen a decline in parent participation, but with 11% indicating this was a big problem. However the situation was significantly different **in the South where 53% of respondents viewed this as a problem, and almost 16% saw it as a big problem.** Again, administrators were most likely to report this as a problem, with 58% citing it as something they had observed, and more than 16% saying it was a big problem.

Figure 11. Have you noticed any decline in PARENT involvement in your school that appears to be related to concerns about immigration enforcement?



Many respondents mentioned that parents were refusing to sign any forms presented to them, in order for students to go on field trips, or to qualify for free lunch, due to worry that this documentation could somehow be used against them. One school psychologist also noted that parents would not come to IEP meetings (to discuss special services for students) or sign papers for special services. Many high school teachers and counselors noted that parents were refusing to turn in FAFSA forms so that their children could qualify for financial aid, and that this was curtailing many students' opportunities to attend college. A Southern California educator attempted to explain this behavior, "They are afraid to hear someone knocking at their doors. The whole neighborhood is in high alert. Parents are afraid to attend meetings where they can receive information about DACA and AB540."

Because many parents are literally in hiding and do not want to be located, one administrator in the South contended, "Teachers have had trouble contacting parents for academic conferences because all contact numbers on file are incorrect."

It is likely that more educators did not note that decline in parent involvement as a major concern (even though many pointed out the extreme fear that the parents were living in) because, given the conditions in which so many undocumented parents are living, parent involvement in attending meetings, helping out at school, chaperoning field trips—the most common types of parent involvement—are simply not things these parents are able to do. Nonetheless, breaking off communication with the schools, and resistance to signing papers for services and aid for which students qualify, has obvious negative effects on students' schooling. But who could blame them?

- **What do educators think should be done?**

Finally, we were interested in knowing what educators thought should be done – if anything—about the situation in which they find themselves. A large majority **(88.1%) of respondents indicated that they thought it was necessary for the schools to provide forums for school-community communication** about these concerns. This appeared to result from the respondents’ belief that both students and parents heard rumors that might or might not be true, had a lack of clear information about who was at risk and what the policies of the school were, and what the school would do to protect both students and family members while at school. There was also a lack of clear information among school personnel who talked about needing to better understand immigration law. Many educators also appeared to be confused about DACA, who qualified and who did not, and who actually needed DACA protection (e.g., not students born in the US), and what the status of DACA is.

However, in spite of the fact that so many respondents felt the schools should be responding proactively to the families’ concerns with open communication and information, a minority of respondents had actually broached the topic with students and/or parents (38.1%). A similar number of respondents (40.7%) said their schools had actually been pro-active in this regard, though this number fell far short of what educators thought was necessary.

What’s to be done?

While Americans often describe themselves as being a “nation of immigrants,” with all the grit and ingenuity that moniker evokes, we are actually very ambivalent about our immigrant origins. Historically, we have treated each new wave of immigrants pretty badly, convinced that this new group couldn’t possibly assimilate into the American family because it was simply too different from the rest of us. But each group has assimilated, and brought with it new features that have enriched the society. But when immigration rises to very noticeable levels, the backlash is even greater. We are in such a moment, although more the result of ugly rhetoric than reality, as immigration at our Southern border is actually at net zero. And those that do come across the border, disproportionately Central Americans, not Mexicans, are mostly fleeing the horror of violence that puts their very survival at risk. Yet, we reject giving them the status of refugees.

The real truth is that each wave of immigrants to this country has brought not only a desire to work hard, play by the rules, and contribute, but represents another thread woven into the incredibly rich fabric that is the American nation. Most of us also know that had it not been for our own ancestors’ migration to the United States, we would not enjoy the benefits we take for granted in a free and wealthy nation. And, to those who say, “Yes, but my ancestors came legally,” the

only response is that almost everyone who came before 1924 came legally because the U.S. had not yet barred the doors, except to the Chinese.¹² And to those who say, “The immigrants are a drag on the economy and steal jobs from *real* Americans,” this refrain has been repeated over and over across time and the research simply does not bear this out.¹³ These children of immigration are our future, as the U.S. native population no longer reproduces itself, and economic stability and growth are dependent on immigrants to fill the jobs and pay the taxes that will support the retiring generation. Take away the immigrants and we put the American economy at risk.¹⁴ So, what to do?

Educators told us they need more information about immigration law and about what they can do to support and defend their students. They feel very strongly about schools and districts providing safe, open forums where critical information can be dispensed to parents and students. Many also requested legal help at their schools for those students and families who come to school with legal questions. Schools that lack basic materials however, are not likely to find the resources to pay immigration lawyers, even though research has shown that immigrants with legal support are much less likely to be deported. Working with local law schools and other NGOs may be a source of this legal help. A number of school districts and organizations have put together “kits” that include basic information and cards to carry in wallets that can be handed to an immigration officer instead of speaking with them and potentially divulging too much information. Will Pérez, a professor at the Claremont Graduate Institute in Southern California has developed a curriculum to train teachers how to support immigrant students. Some schools have also created telephone trees to alert parents of imminent raids and to tell them not to pick up their children until receiving an “all clear” if the children are in school.

¹² Jennings, K. (2018). “Yes, your ancestors probably did come here legally — because ‘illegal’ immigration is less than a century old,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 2018. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-jennings-legal-illegal-immigration-20180114-story.html>

¹³ Chassamboulli, A. & Peri, G. (2015). The labor market effects of reducing the number of illegal immigrants, *Review of Economic Dynamics*, Elsevier for the Society for Economic Dynamics, vol. 18, 792-821

¹⁴ Immigrants boost America’s birthrate. *The Economist*, August 30, 2017. Online, <https://www.economist.com>
<https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/08/daily-chart-20>

We also heard from a surprising number of educators about their DACA students and how their dreams of going to college were being dashed by the elimination of the DACA program. Certainly, the Congress must be able to find a way to restore rights to these students, who have the overwhelming support of American voters. What is too often missed, however, is that there are as many students who were DACA eligible but did not apply out of fear of divulging family information or lack of money to pay for the application (\$495), and still others who barely missed eligibility because they were months too old, or came to the US months too late. Including these individuals in a restoration of DACA seems only fair. All of these things can be helpful, but they don't change policy and they don't end the reign of terror that is having such a profoundly negative effect on the nation's most vulnerable schools.

It is painfully evident that as long the parents and family members of immigrant students are losing their jobs and living in fear, the students and their schools will continue to bear the brunt of these policies. The students, the great majority who are U.S. citizens, will continue to be distracted in class, miss school when there are fears of raids or a parent is deported, and even give up on their educations, seeing few possibilities for their future. Many will also be distracted by hunger or lack of sleep because there is no money for food or housing. And their schools and teachers will be branded as failures, because in the face of this they have been unable to raise students' test scores. This is the result of unintended consequences of an immigration enforcement policy that did not consider how it might affect the nation's most vulnerable schools.