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Cover Page Footnote

Cady Landa is now at the Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This research was supported in part by an American Dissertation Fellowship grant from the American Association of University Women.

Differential Access of Young Children of Immigrants to Special Education in Massachusetts

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Plain Language Summary

This study asks if the special education program in Massachusetts is equal for young children of immigrants. The study looks at how often grade K-5 students in Massachusetts receive special education and where they are placed. It finds that young children of immigrants do not receive special education as often as children with parents born in the U.S. The study also found that the children of immigrants who get special education are less often in classes with students who do not have disabilities. They are more often in separate classrooms. A case study of one Massachusetts public elementary school seeks to understand why. It looks at experiences of immigrant parents trying to help their children at school, how school staff work with each other and with parents, and at public policies that affect education and immigrants. Results suggest ways to make special education more equal for young children of immigrants with special needs.

Abstract

Accessing services for children with special needs is complex and challenging for even U.S.-born parents. Is it even more difficult for immigrant parents, and what are the consequences for their children? This article reports on a mixed methods approach to examining the access of immigrants' children to special education and inclusive placement. A multivariate analysis of Massachusetts education data finds that children of immigrants are significantly less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to participate in special education. It also finds that among children who do participate in special education, children of immigrants are more likely to be in substantially separate settings, and less likely to be in inclusive settings, than are children of U.S.-born parents. A companion case study of a Massachusetts elementary school seeks to understand these results in ways that suggest policies and practices to address these inequities and improve schools' response to children with special needs.

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Introduction

This article describes a mixed methods approach to examining the access of young children of immigrants to special education. One study uses Massachusetts state administrative education data on all K-5 students in Massachusetts to compare the special education participation and placement of students with and without immigrant parents. A companion case study of a Massachusetts elementary school is designed to explore the mechanisms that produce the inequities that emerge in the quantitative study.

Several realities combine to create a systemic risk that young children of immigrants will not have special individual needs met by their school with timeliness. In the U.S., services for children with special needs are fragmented and accessing them is complex. Parents have the primary responsibility to ensure their children's needs are met, and parent advocacy can be key to meeting children's special individual needs at school. Immigrant parents, who grew up in another country, are even less likely than U.S.-born parents to have knowledge of our complex state, local, public, and private systems serving children and families. They may also, as newcomers, lack English fluency, knowledge of acceptable parent interaction with school personnel, and the social networks they may need to effectively advocate for their child (Kalyanpur et al., 2000). Further, our immigrant integration policies are ambivalent and weak, leaving us without an infrastructure to ensure that immigrant parents can access services for themselves and their children (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2012; Fix, 2007; Jones-Correa & de Graauw, 2013). In addition to these risk factors, the predominant organizational structure of public schools focuses educators on groups of students, rather than individual children, and treats the parent as peripherally supportive to education practice, rather than as a critical partner in the education of individual students.

The studies are informed by several theories. Both studies rely on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development to understand the influences affecting the developmental context of young children of immigrants at school. The case study uses three additional theories to structure exploration of aspects of the child's immediate developmental context: (1) the school, (2) the child's parents, and (3) how they interact. Two theories help explain the work of school staff and their relationship with parents: relational coordination (Gittell, 2006) and relational bureaucracy (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). A third theory helps explain the behavior and experience of immigrant parents as they navigate for their children (Alba & Nee, 2003). These theories are described below. The quantitative study uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development to create hypotheses that are tested. The case study uses theory to shape data collection and analysis.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model portrays the development of the individual as consisting of interactions between the individual and their immediate environments within four nested systems. From most proximal to distal, they include the microsystem (the child's immediate settings), the mesosystem (interrelations among the child's immediate settings), the exosystem (social structures not directly affecting the child but affecting features of the child's immediate settings), and the macrosystem (consisting of the socioeconomic, historical, and

cultural contexts and public policies that influence all other levels).

Relational coordination theory holds that effective coordination in a work process—in this case, educating students — is carried out through relationships characterized by shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect that are reinforced by frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication. The theory hypothesizes that the contribution of relational coordination to work-related outcomes positively correlates with the degree to which the work requires (or benefits from) interdependence, there is uncertainty, and there are time constraints (Gittell, 2006). Relational bureaucracy theory extends relational coordination theory to propose that organizational structures can encourage reciprocity across work roles based on shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect among staff, between staff and leaders, and between staff and clients (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). Relational bureaucracy is a hybrid organizational form, merging aspects of relational and bureaucratic forms, to make more horizontal problem-solving work that is focused on individuals, scalable, replicable, and sustainable. Relational bureaucracy theory hypothesizes that reciprocal interactions in these three types of relationships foster attentiveness to the situation and one another and allow for an integration of perspectives that can produce caring, timely, and knowledgeable responses to the particular individuals who are served. The case study uses this framework to examine relationships among school staff and between staff and parents with relation to students with immigrant parents.

Use of Alba and Nee's (2003) assimilation theory allows the study to approach the parents' process of navigating school for their children within the context of the parents' process of adaptation to the U.S. The theory models adaptation as the unintended and contingent result of individuals' purposive actions, informed by their networks, knowledge and experience, and institutional incentives and constraints.

Methods

Quantitative Study

Research questions for the quantitative study examine children of immigrants' access to two entitlements embedded in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Child Find and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE; IDEA, 2004). The Child Find provision of IDEA requires states to ensure that all eligible children are identified, located, and evaluated subject to parental consent. The LRE provision requires that students are educated in the least restrictive or most inclusive setting that is best for them and that separation from students without disabilities occurs only when learning in regular classes cannot be satisfactorily achieved with supplementary aids and services. Two research questions guide the study.

1. Are children of immigrants less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to participate in special education?
2. Among children who participate in special education, are children of immigrants less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to be in inclusive settings and more likely to be in substantially separate settings?

Hypotheses

The study uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory to form the hypotheses that children of immigrants will be less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to participate in special education; and if participating, less likely to be in inclusive settings and more likely to be in substantially separate settings.

Macrosystem for children of immigrants. The IDEA and Massachusetts special education law give parents key roles in both Child Find and placement. Parents can request an initial evaluation of their child's eligibility for special education from their school district, are entitled to have input into which evaluations are given to their child, can request independent evaluations, and in Massachusetts, can request physicians and psychologists as evaluators. Weak standards governing special education evaluations place the onus on parents to make sure evaluations are of a high quality. Access to high-quality evaluations can be particularly critical for children who are dual language learners for whom the use of instruments that are not appropriately normed can be a problem (Figueroa, 2000) and distinguishing language learning from disability is challenging (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). Parents are required to be members of the team that discusses evaluation results, determines eligibility for special education, and creates Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Parents can challenge the eligibility decision, reject the placement that is recommended by the school, and request mediation or a due process hearing if they are not in agreement with the school regarding eligibility or placement. They can appeal the result of the due-process hearing.

Ambivalent and weak immigrant integration policy results in immigrant parents not having the infrastructure to help them access IDEA entitlements for their children. Not providing the necessary systems knowledge to newcomers reduces the likelihood that parents will know there is an entitlement to special education, what it is, the eligibility criteria, parents' right to request and guide an initial and independent evaluation, the child's right to an LEA, the parent's role in determining placement, that there is a right to request and receive a mediation or hearing; or that schools are required to provide information in the parents' language. There is only weak implementation of federal policy requiring schools to communicate with parents with limited English in parents' languages (U.S. Attorney General, 2011; U.S. Department of Justice, 2015).

Constrained education and special education funding may discourage Child Find and lower or constrict the quality and comprehensiveness of evaluations and services. In federal fiscal year 2014, the year examined in the quantitative study, the national average federal rate of reimbursement to states for special education was only 16%. In Massachusetts, school districts have primary responsibility for funding special education, and the state's formula to aid school districts is designed to avoid a financial incentive to over-diagnose students with disabilities (Schuster, 2011).

Public policies that limit the access of immigrants' children to health and early childhood education (ECE) programs may also play a role in depressing their access to special education. Health care providers can refer children under 3 to IDEA's Early Intervention (EI) program, which can help parents access public pre-K programs when their children turn 3 and alert school districts

of the need to monitor for their eligibility for special education. ECE providers, who see children daily for extended periods of time in social contexts and performing a wide array of activities, can pick up developmental delays that may not be apparent to health care providers in clinical settings. Research shows that children of immigrants have reduced access to ECE and health services as a result of parents' lack of systems knowledge, failure to provide language access, concerns about the impact of using public benefits on citizenship, and eligibility policies that purposefully exclude some children of immigrants (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Ku & Jewers, 2013). In the case of ECE, noncitizen children who are legal, permanent residents are ineligible for TANF-related subsidies and prioritization during their first 5 years in the U.S., and undocumented children are not eligible for any federal subsidies for ECE. In 2013, the calendar year examined in the quantitative study, Massachusetts was one of 32 states that had opted to provide Medicaid or SCHIP coverage to immigrant children in their first 5 years in the U.S. (National Immigration Law Center, n.d.). During 2013, undocumented children in Massachusetts were not eligible for insurance subsidies, SCHIP, or the standard Medicaid program, but they could become income eligible for emergency Medicaid, primary preventive care, or care in community health centers if their family's income was within 150%, 200%, or 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL), respectively. Although Massachusetts had state-level policies that provided, relative to other states, a high level of health care coverage for children of immigrants, statistics suggest that children of immigrants in Massachusetts were still less likely to have health coverage than children of U.S.-born parents in the state.

Microsystem for children of immigrants. Immigrant parents are less likely than U.S.-born parents to have the systems knowledge or cultural capital needed to request or guide a special education evaluation or to provide the advocacy that may be needed to obtain an inclusive placement. Further, these parents' communication with school staff and their ability to acquire systems knowledge is more likely to be constricted by language difference. In Massachusetts, in 2013, 32.6% of children of immigrants did not have an English-proficient parent (Urban Institute, n.d.). Parents' social networks are less likely to contain other parents knowledgeable about navigating special education. Among immigrant parents, those who are undocumented are likely to experience additional barriers to pursuing special education entitlements for their children. Among Massachusetts' children of immigrants, 14.9% had an undocumented parent during 2009-2013 (Capps et al., 2016). Research has shown that undocumented parents experience fear, isolation, and instability (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011; Yoshikawa & Kholoptseva, 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2016; Zhao & Yoshikawa, 2013). Undocumented parents have been unable to obtain a Massachusetts driver's license, making it difficult for them to access transportation to attend to their child's needs.

Constrained school and special education funding reduce the likelihood that schools will allocate tight resources to provide systems knowledge and language access to immigrant parents. Limited funding can also result in school administrator preference for a segregated setting (Hehir & Katzman, 2012). A review conducted in 2015 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) found that 113 school districts in Massachusetts failed to meet federal and state mandates to provide language interpretation and translation to students' parents with limited English (Padres Latinos de las Escuelas de Springfield y Holyoke [PLESH] v.

MA DESE, 2017). In addition, up until 2017, state law required English-only education of students, perhaps making it more difficult for educators and parents to understand the source of difficulties experienced by young children whose first language is not English.

Research indicates that poor school-level implementation of IDEA mandates for parent participation in IEP development leaves immigrant parents in a weak position to secure full inclusion for their children. Studies show that immigrant parents participating in IEP meetings, where placement is decided, are not equipped by their school with knowledge of special education law and their child's rights, the purpose of the IEP meeting, their role in developing the IEP, or a full sense of the options available for their child. Research shows that schools do not consistently provide translation of documents or language interpreters to support immigrant parents' participation in special education meetings (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Cummings & Hardin, 2017; Jegatheesan, 2009; Y.-J Lee & Park, 2016; Lo, 2008; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Park et al., 2001; Salas, 2004; Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002; Zechella & Raval, 2016).

Mesosystem for children of immigrants. Research indicates that immigrant parents are more likely than U.S.-born parents to experience a range of substantial barriers in connecting with the staff of their children's schools (Carreón et al., 2005; Crosnoe, 2013; Cross et al., 2019; Doucet, 2011; Isik-Ercan, 2018; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Lee et al., 2016; Li & Wang, 2013; Petrone, 2016; Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012; Poza et al., 2014; Qin & Han, 2014; Ramirez, 2003; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Smith, 2012; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009; Wang, 2008).

Exosystem for children of immigrants. Despite the barriers immigrants face in navigating for their children, the U.S. Department of Education does not require states to specifically monitor for discrimination by parent nativity in the administration of IDEA. As required by the federal government, the Massachusetts DESE collects schools' statistics on students by gender, low income, race/ethnicity, and limited English proficiency (LEP) for special education participation, placement, and postsecondary outcomes. The nativity of students' parents is not included in these statistics.

Parent workplace may also play a role in reducing immigrant parents' ability to navigate for their children. In Massachusetts, immigrants were more likely than U.S.-born adults to work in occupations that may be less flexible in providing leave to parents, such as service and production, transportation, and material moving occupations (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.).

Data

This study uses the October 2013 file of the Massachusetts DESE Student Information Management System (SIMS), which contains student-level data on all children attending public school in Massachusetts. The study uses data from October 2013 in order to have an appropriate measure of students' low-income status. Because low family income has been correlated with special education participation and placement, using a good measure of student low income is important to clarifying the impact of having an immigrant parent on children's special education

participation and placement.

In 2014, Massachusetts DESE stopped using participation in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) program to indicate low income status and switched to using participation in SNAP, TANF, foster care, or Medicaid. This new measure of low-income status is problematic for this study because income-eligible students who are children of immigrants are less likely to participate in SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid than are children of U.S.-born parents. The measure used prior to 2014 is better for this study because any income-eligible student can participate in the FRPL, which, unlike SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid, does not require a social security number, additional contact with another public agency, or information on citizenship status.

Samples

This study draws two samples from the October 2013 SIMS: one for analysis of Child Find or participation in special education and the other for analysis of placement. The sample for analysis of special education participation includes all K-5 students in the state coded as enrolled by their reporting district on October 1, 2013 ($N = 425,538$). The sample for placement includes students in the first sample who received special education on October 1, 2013 and were at least 6 years old ($N = 57,075$).

Variables

Each of the dependent variables is dichotomous, reflecting whether or not the student participated in special education on October 1, 2013; whether or not the student was in an inclusive placement (receiving special education in a general education setting at least 80% of the time); and whether or not the student was in a substantially separate setting (receiving special education outside of the general education classroom more than 60% of the time).

Because SIMS does not contain information on students' parents' nativity, the study uses the first language of the student as a proxy, coding students as having an immigrant parent if their first language was other than English or Spanish. Students with Spanish as a first language were not coded as having an immigrant parent because there is a large Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican population in Massachusetts that has full U.S. citizenship and would have some likelihood of familiarity with the U.S. special education program, which is also administered in Puerto Rico. Use of this proxy is likely to achieve a conservative finding because it would result in more children of immigrants being considered children of U.S.-born parents than the converse. Use of the proxy also attenuates the difference between the comparison groups, making it more difficult to disprove the null hypotheses of no difference in outcomes between the two groups.

Control variables include the student-level characteristics present in SIMS that are likely or have been shown to be correlated with special education participation and placement. They include gender, low income, race/ethnicity, LEP of student, having a Section 504 plan, grade level, and (for placement only) type of disability (Artiles et al., 2004; Child Trends, 2015; Child Trends Data Bank, 2012; Hehir et al., 2012, 2014; Morgan et al., 2015; Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Analysis

The study uses Stata (Version 14.0) to estimate mixed effects logistic regression equations with random effects for school districts for each of the dependent variables. Random effects for school districts are used because Massachusetts policy tolerated a degree of variation among school districts in administering special education, and studies of special education in Massachusetts (Hehir et al., 2012, 2014) found significant differences among districts in rates of student participation in special education, attribution of disability type, and inclusiveness of student placement. The intercorrelation coefficients for placement in the SIMS sample indicated that district contributed significantly (23.7% and 16.2%) to variation in substantially separate and inclusive placement.

The Case Study

A case study provides opportunity for in-depth how and why understanding of phenomena in the contexts in which they occur (Yin, 2009). In this case study, the unit of analysis is the school. Explanatory mechanisms are explored through in-depth examination of the approach of school staff to 11 children of immigrants who were, from their parents' perspectives, experiencing difficulty in school. The full case study looks broadly at how school staff responded to the needs of the study students and does not focus solely on the special education program. However, only those facets of the study that pertain to the special education program are included in this article. Research questions for the case study include the following.

1. How do school organizational structure and public policies influence the way in which school staff respond to children of immigrants with low income who are having difficulty in school?
2. What are the patterns of parent experience navigating the school on behalf of their children?

The case study is designed to generalize to theory in ways relevant to public policy and school practice.

Selection of School

Selection of the school was purposeful (Maxwell, 2013) and designed to maximize the chances of recruiting a sufficient number of participants meeting the study criteria. Criteria for selecting the school included that it be in one of 20 cities in Massachusetts with the highest number of foreign-born unnaturalized people with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line. The school was required to have a higher-than-statewide proportion of students whose first language was not English, and a higher-than-statewide proportion of students classified as low income or economically disadvantaged.

The elementary school that was chosen for the study had, in 2016-17, the school year in which the case study was implemented, 457 students in grades preK-5. All teachers were licensed

and considered to be highly qualified in their area of teaching. The school was in the 44th percentile for statewide standardized test performance and had a per-pupil expenditure 130% of the state average. Almost half the students were Hispanic, and over a third were White. A little over half the students had a first language other than English—mostly Spanish and 19 other languages. Approximately one quarter of the students were classified as English language learners (ELLs). Parents of 37% of the students requested school communications in Spanish. An additional 13 students had parents who requested communications in nine other non-English languages. Approximately a quarter of the students were categorized as economically disadvantaged. Almost a quarter of the students received special education. The school's special education rate was higher than the district's (18%) because of the presence of a district-wide autism program in this school, to which all elementary school students in the district thought to have autism were referred regardless of address (Massachusetts DESE, n.d.).

Selection of Students and Parents

Criteria for selecting parents included that they had immigrated to the U.S. after age 16; had concern about their child's academic or social performance at school; and their child was eligible for FRPL, which meant family income was within 185% of the federal poverty line. The study school distributed fliers about the study to parents in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese. The study was also presented to parents at a Special Education Parent Advisory Council meeting that was facilitated by a chair bilingual in English and Spanish. Informational meetings were held with 13 interested parents who were assisted by bilingual interpreters and translated documents in parents' first languages. Parents were informed that they would not be asked questions about legal status. Parents were offered language interpretation and \$20 gift cards to a local supermarket for each hour of interview. The parents of 11 students consented to participate in the study.

All of the students who became the focus of the study were born in the U.S. Five were girls and six were boys. They spanned all grades in the school. Five students received special education—four within the school's autism program. Six of the students were not receiving special education. Ten students had Spanish as a first language. One student was reported by the school to have English as a first language, but his parent's first language was a low incidence language, and the parent struggled greatly with English. Nine of the students' parents had requested all school communications in Spanish. All students were covered by Medicaid. Eight students had been in pre-K programs, and four had received EI. Six of the students were categorized as ELL students, and the parents and the school staff who worked with the students had concerns about the English language skills of three of the other students not categorized as ELL.

The father and mother were interviewed for three of the students but only the mother was interviewed for eight of the students. Four of the parents were single mothers. The parents were from six different countries. None of the parents had English as a first language. Eleven parents requested an interpreter for study interviews. The parent who spoke the low-incidence language did not request an interpreter but had great difficulty communicating in English. The

education of the parents varied. One had no school, three had some elementary school, three had some high school, five were high school graduates or equivalent, one had some college, and one was a college graduate. Three had lived in the U.S. 7-9 years; eight for 10-15 years; and three for 16-20 years.

Data Collection

The study uses data collected through semistructured in-depth interviews with the school principal, parents, and school staff, and from documents. The plan was to interview the school principal, the parent(s) of each student, and all the school staff who worked with each of the students. Interviews began in March 2017, allowing students' current educators to reflect on the 2016-17 academic year. Interview topics were derived from the research questions and the theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Parents of nine students requested a bilingual interpreter. Interpreters were trained on the study and ethical standards. Each signed a confidentiality agreement in the presence of the parent. They were asked to translate the parent's exact words as much as possible, rather than summarizing. All interviews were audiotaped except for those conducted with one parent, who requested notes be taken by hand.

The principal terminated the study before all staff had been interviewed.^a I was able to interview some of the staff who worked with nine of the students, including six general education teachers, three special education and one ELL teacher, a math specialist, and a paraprofessional. Some of the staff were shared by several students.

Data Analysis

I transcribed audio recordings and uploaded transcripts and notes to Atlas.ti, version 8, a qualitative analysis software. I grouped documents by student. My coding was primarily deductive with initial codes derived from interview questions and theories. I developed inductive codes when new themes emerged. I refined and collapsed codes as I used the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to check codes and attached data for conceptual consistency, making sure properties and dimensions were consistent across incidents for each code. I wrote memoranda as I coded. I ran query reports for each student pertaining to each of 14 categories: parent/staff concerns about student, actions taken by school staff in response to student needs, how staff worked together and with parents for each student (including subcategories for mutual respect, shared goals, shared knowledge, frequency of communication, timeliness of communication, accuracy of communication, problem-solving nature of communication), influential organizational structure, influential policy, level of school resources, parent purposive actions on behalf of child, and institutional constraints experienced by parents in meeting their child's school needs. I used pattern matching (Yin, 2009) to compare the data

^a The principal explained they terminated data collection prior to completion because I had shared the contact information for the local federally designated Parent Information and Training Center with one of the parents participating in the study.

with the organizational and immigrant adaptation theories.

Results

Results indicate that public policy and school organizational structure contribute to inequitable administration of the IDEA to young children of immigrants in Massachusetts.

Quantitative Study

The analysis shows that, in Massachusetts, children of immigrants are significantly less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to participate in special education. The odds that a child of immigrant parents participated in special education are 62% that of children of U.S.-born parents (see Table 1).

Table 1

Logistic Regression Analysis of Participation in Special Education, October 2013

Variable	Model 1 ^c		Model 2 ^c	
	Odds ratio	95% CI	Odds ratio	95% CI
Immigrant parents ^a (yes vs. No)	0.62***	[0.60, 0.65]		
Low income (yes vs. No)	1.82***	[1.78, 1.87]	1.80***	[1.76, 1.84]
Gender (male vs. Female)	2.29***	[2.25, 2.34]	2.29***	[1.76, 1.84]
Race/ethnicity ^b				
Hispanic (any race)	1.00	[0.97, 1.03]	1.06***	[1.03, 1.09]
Black (non-Hispanic)	1.06**	[1.02, 1.10]	1.02	[0.98, 1.05]
Asian (non-Hispanic)	0.58***	[0.56, 0.61]	0.49***	[0.46, 0.51]
Multiracial (non-Hispanic)	0.92**	[0.88, 0.97]	0.93**	[0.89, 0.98]
Native American (non-Hispanic)	1.09	[0.92, 1.30]	1.05	[0.89, 1.25]
Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)	0.88	[0.66, 1.17]	0.83	[0.63, 1.10]
Limited English proficiency (yes vs. no)	0.99	[0.95, 1.02]	0.83***	[0.81, 0.86]
Grade level	1.15***	[1.14, 1.15]	1.14***	[1.14, 1.15]
Section 504 (yes vs. no)	0.49***	[0.46, 0.52]	0.49***	[0.46, 0.52]

^a Students whose first language is other than English or Spanish are identified as children of immigrants.

^b The reference group for race/ethnicity is white (non-Hispanic)

^c Model 1 includes a variable for having immigrant parents; model 2 does not.

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$.

The analysis also shows that among students receiving special education, children of immigrants are significantly more likely than children of U.S.-born parents to be educated in substantially separate settings. The odds that children of immigrants are in a substantially separate setting are 125% the odds for children of U.S.-born parents (see Table 2). Among

students receiving special education, children of immigrants are also significantly less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to be educated in general education settings at least 80% of the time. The odds that children of immigrants are included in general classes at least 80% of the time are 77% that of children of U.S.-born parents (see Table 3).

Table 2

Logistic Regression Analysis of Special Education Students Placed in Substantially Separate Settings, October 2013

Variable	Model 1 ^d		Model 2 ^d	
	Odds ratio	95% CI	Odds ratio	95% CI
Immigrant parents ^a (yes vs. No)	1.25**	[1.10, 1.41]		
Low income (yes vs. No)	1.63***	[1.52, 1.75]	1.64***	[1.53, 1.76]
Gender (male vs. Female)	1.12***	[1.05, 1.19]	1.12***	[1.06, 1.19]
Race/ethnicity ^b				
Hispanic (any race)	1.45***	[1.33, 1.57]	1.42***	[1.30, 1.54]
Black (non-Hispanic)	1.52***	[1.38, 1.68]	1.55***	[1.41, 1.71]
Asian (non-Hispanic)	1.57***	[1.33, 1.85]	1.73***	[1.49, 2.02]
Multiracial (non-Hispanic)	1.07	[0.93, 1.25]	1.08	[0.93, 1.25]
Native American (non-Hispanic)	1.74*	[1.04, 2.90]	1.76*	[1.05, 2.94]
Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)	2.58*	[1.17, 5.69]	2.66*	[1.21, 5.82]
Limited English Proficiency (Yes vs. No)	0.74***	[0.67, 0.81]	0.78***	[0.71, 0.86]
Grade Level (K-5)	1.02	[1.0, 1.04]	1.02	[1.00, 1.04]
Section 504	0.59***	[0.46, 0.75]	0.59***	[0.46, 0.75]
Primary disability ^c				
Communication	1.15*	[1.02, 1.29]	1.15*	[1.02, 1.29]
Developmental delay	3.32***	[2.97, 3.73]	3.33***	[3.00, 3.73]
Autism	13.79***	[12.34, 15.42]	13.81***	[12.35, 15.44]
Health	1.76***	[1.53, 2.02]	1.75***	[1.52, 2.02]
Emotional	8.40***	[7.43, 9.50]	8.38***	[7.41, 9.48]
Neurological	5.09***	[4.36, 5.95]	5.09***	[4.36, 5.95]
Intellectual	26.97***	[23.44, 31.03]	27.05***	[23.51, 31.12]
Multiple	11.27***	[9.52, 13.35]	11.28***	[9.52, 13.53]
Physical	1.23	[0.90, 1.68]	1.23	[0.90, 1.69]
Deaf	2.06***	[1.46, 2.93]	2.11***	[1.49, 2.98]
Blind	1.69	[1.0, 2.84]	1.70*	[1.01, 2.86]
Deaf and blind	5.24***	[2.59, 10.58]	5.42***	[2.69, 10.93]

^aStudents whose first language is other than English or Spanish are identified as children of immigrants.

^bThe reference group for race/ethnicity is White (non-Hispanic).

^cThe reference group for primary disability is specific learning disability. In this sample, students with specific learning disability have the lowest rate of substantially separate placement.

^dModel 1 includes a variable for having immigrant parents; model 2 does not.

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Table 3

Logistic Regression Analysis of Special Education Students in General Classroom at Least 80% of the Time, October 2013

Variable	Model 1 ^d		Model 2 ^d	
	Odds ratio	95% CI	Odds ratio	95% CI
Immigrant parents ^a (yes vs. No)	0.77***	[0.70, 0.85]		
Low income (yes vs. No)	0.74***	[0.70, 0.78]	0.74***	[0.70, 0.78]
Gender (male vs. Female)	0.96	[0.92, 1.01]	0.96	[0.92, 1.01]
Race/ethnicity ^b				
Hispanic (any race)	0.70***	[0.66, 0.75]	0.72***	[0.67, 0.77]
Black (non-Hispanic)	0.68***	[0.62, 0.73]	0.66***	[0.61, 0.72]
Asian (non-Hispanic)	0.76***	[0.67, 0.86]	0.68***	[0.61, 0.77]
Multiracial (non-Hispanic)	0.87*	[0.78, 0.98]	0.87*	[0.78, 0.98]
Native American (non-Hispanic)	0.69	[0.47, 1.01]	0.68*	[0.46, 1.00]
Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)	0.52*	[0.27, 0.99]	0.51*	[0.26, 0.97]
Limited English Proficiency (Yes vs. No)	1.19***	[1.10, 1.29]	1.11**	[1.03, 1.19]
Grade Level (K-5)	0.89***	[0.88, 0.91]	0.89***	[0.88, 0.91]
Section 504	1.77***	[1.49, 2.11]	1.77***	[1.49, 2.11]
Primary disability ^c				
Communication	0.67**	[0.53, 0.85]	0.68**	[0.54, 0.85]
Specific Learning Disability	0.54***	[0.43, 0.68]	0.55***	[0.43, 0.69]
Developmental Delay	0.29***	[0.23, 0.36]	0.29***	[0.23, 0.36]
Autism	0.09***	[0.07, 0.12]	0.09***	[0.07, 0.12]
Health	0.50***	[0.39, 0.63]	0.50***	[0.39, 0.64]
Emotional	0.10***	[0.08, 0.14]	0.11***	[0.08, 0.14]
Neurological	0.22***	[0.17, 0.28]	0.22***	[0.17, 0.29]
Intellectual	0.04***	[0.03, 0.05]	0.04***	[0.03, 0.05]
Multiple	0.09***	[0.07, 0.11]	0.09***	[0.07, 0.12]
Deaf	0.13***	[0.09, 0.17]	0.12***	[0.09, 0.17]
Blind	0.31***	[0.21, 0.46]	0.31***	[0.21, 0.46]
Deaf and Blind	0.83***	[0.05, 0.14]	0.08***	[0.46, 0.14]

^aStudents whose first language is other than English or Spanish are identified as children of immigrants.

^bThe reference group for race/ethnicity is White (non-Hispanic).

^cThe reference group for primary disability is physical disability. In this sample, students with physical disability have the highest rate of participation in general classrooms.

^dModel 1 includes a variable for having immigrant parents; model 2 does not.

* $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$.

The Case Study

Data from the case study were examined to understand how parents' experience navigating for their children, school organizational structure, and public policies contributed to the findings of the quantitative study on special education participation and placement.

Parents' Experience Navigating School on Behalf of Their Children

The study parents described that the schools they knew in their countries of origin were very different from their child's school. One of the study parents had never attended a school in her country of origin. None of the parents had previous familiarity with a program like U.S. special education that provides education to children with disabilities as a matter of right. None of the parents spoke English as a first language. One of the parents spoke a very low-incidence language for which she never requested and the school district had not provided language interpretation or translation. Parents were unsure of appropriate behavior on the part of the parent interacting with school staff. None of the parents had someone in their social network who had experience securing supports from school such as those needed by their child. All parents took purposive actions to help their children that were motivated by deep emotional commitment to their child and a high value placed on education and school success. They varied with respect to the amount of systems knowledge they had acquired and the degree to which they were taking on a proactive, assertive role with the school instead of waiting and cooperating.

The parents of the four students in the autism program knew of the special education program, but the parents of one student who was receiving special education outside of the autism program, and the parents of the six students who were not receiving special education, did not know of the special education program or that they could request a special education evaluation of their child. The parents who knew their children were receiving special education in most cases lacked the knowledge necessary to provide the informed consent and participation in planning and due-process protection required by law. None of the parents whose children were receiving special education knew of their child's right to a least restrictive placement. Some of these parents were not aware that they could partially accept or reject an IEP.

The parents were perseverant and learning from experience as they navigated for their children. However, none of the parents received any special orientation or supports to build the knowledge they needed as newcomers to navigate for their child. This lack of attention to their informational needs as well as the institutional constraints detailed below, resulted in years-long delays in obtaining appropriate special education services and supports for their children. Parents were left to acquire knowledge independently although their children required timely intervention to prevent accumulated school failure and sub-optimal experience at school.

Influence of School Organizational Structure

In this article, I narrow the study's findings on the influence of school organizational structure to ways in which school structures for intra-staff coordination and staff-parent coordination affected Child Find and special education placement for the study students.

Structure connecting staff on behalf of individual children. As is typical of many U.S. public elementary schools, this school provided only very limited opportunities for staff to collaborate on behalf of individual students. Educators were most often asked to focus on serving groups of students and had little time to devote attention to individual students. In addition,

general, special education, and ELL educators were largely departmentalized within vertical district structures. The only formal structures in which the various staff working with the same students came together to discuss individual students included a child study team, special education eligibility and annual IEP meetings, and for consultations specifically required by special education IEPs.

School staff recommendations for special education evaluation had to go through, and could only be made by, the school's child study team. This team met once a week for 90 minutes to discuss students brought to the team by teachers who were concerned about their progress. To bring a student to the team, teachers submitted required paperwork on the student. The team would discuss the student and recommend an intervention. The teacher would implement the intervention and return to the group in 6-8 weeks to report on the student's progress. A student could not be referred for a special education evaluation until the team had met three times on the student, and the student had failed to progress with prescribed interventions. The teachers who were interviewed for the study reported concern about the timeliness of this process. They explained that preparation of extensive required paperwork to initiate discussion of the student took a great deal of time that was difficult to find, and then, because of long student queues, 3-4 months would elapse between submission of the paperwork and the initial team discussion of the students. This process was problematic for four of the study students, because its operation contributed to substantial (over a year's) delay of their referral for special education evaluation. The parents of these students were unaware of the teachers' concerns about their children, and they did not know of the special education program or that they could request a special education evaluation of their child. Parents were never invited to the child study team, and there was no requirement to notify parents if their child was referred to or discussed by the team. None of the study parents whose students had been brought to the child study team knew this had happened.

Structures connecting school staff and parents. As is typical of many U.S. public schools, the structures connecting parents and staff in this school generally placed parents in a subordinate role regarding the education of their children, as opposed to the partnership proposed by relational bureaucracy theory, in which parents participate as co-producers of their child's education.

The school district's elementary handbook, which was printed in English and two of the district's most frequently spoken non-English languages, had a brief section on special education referencing LRE and collaborative, individualized decision-making on IEPs for students. However, the handbook had a very high readability level, varying from a 12th to graduate school reading level on the SMOG readability index. Further, the handbook did not state that parents could request a special education evaluation for their child. The school did not provide any other informational supports to immigrant parents on how special education could be accessed for their children.

Both study parents and staff expressed that there was insufficient opportunity for them to meet with one another and that their meetings were often not timely. The school required general education teachers to be available for one teacher-parent conference per student per

year and gave them three early release days in which to schedule these meetings. Additional staff-parent meetings for students receiving special education included one annual IEP/eligibility meeting with the teacher and other members of the IEP team. Although the district's Parent Information Center was responsible for providing language interpreters and translation, there were long delays associated with obtaining interpreters and translated documents, interpreters often appeared to parents and staff not to be adequately trained to support effective communication, and there were important errors on translated documents, including IEPs given to study parents. No interpreter or translated document was ever provided for the parent with the low-incidence language, whose son was in the autism program. This parent did not understand the degree to which her son was taught in a substantially separate classroom or integrated with other students. He was, in fact, to be moved without his mother's knowledge from an integrated grade 3 classroom to a substantially separate fourth grade classroom, although his teachers strongly recommended that he remain in an integrated setting.

Several parents shared stories of poor or no language interpretation or translation of IEP meetings and documents. One of the study parents attended her daughter's special education eligibility meeting without understanding what it was. When she saw nine professionals at the table, "I was so nervous...I was there by myself with so many people. I turned to the interpreter and said, 'I don't think this is a meeting where I should be by myself.'" She reported that the interpreter did not relay what she said to the staff on the IEP team, and that the interpreter advised her to let the meeting proceed. The parent reported feeling overwhelmed. She stayed for the entire eligibility/IEP meeting but did not understand that at this meeting she had been told for the first time that her daughter had a learning disability and that she had been found eligible for special education. The mother did not know what the proposed IEP contained in terms of goals, services, accommodations, and placement, or that she and her husband needed to decide whether to accept the proposed IEP wholly or partially.

Influence of Public Policies

The public policies that were found to particularly affect Child Find and placement of the children of immigrants included immigrant integration policy, federal policy on language interpretation and translation for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP), English-only instruction, and a maladministration of the IDEA that went unchecked. Massachusetts Medicaid and EI emerged as policies that supported the school in identifying students eligible for special education.

The lack of policy to integrate immigrants was evident in this study. Parents lacked critical information on their children's educational rights, how their school district and school were organized, and on the services and programs in their schools and communities that could be leveraged to help their children succeed in school. This created significant risk for students because it severely challenged parents' ability to navigate and advocate on behalf of their children at school.

Language interpretation and translation for parents emerged as critical to the frequency,

timeliness and accuracy of communication and knowledge sharing between staff and parents. Current federal policy, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Equal Education Opportunity Act, and a joint U.S. Department of Justice/U.S. Department of Education 2015 guidance require that parents with limited English receive all school information in their language, and this is amplified by state and federal special education law for parents whose children receive special education. However, it was only inconsistently and not always capably provided to the parents in this school.

Massachusetts English-only instruction law, which was in effect at the time of data collection, made it difficult for parents and staff to understand the source of children's school difficulty when children were beginning to learn English. There was, in addition, a troubling level of misunderstanding of Child Find for ELL students that clearly affected four of the study students. The study school had a policy of waiting for further language development on the part of students who might have a disability before deciding on whether to administer a special education evaluation. This policy resulted in significant delays in evaluating study students whose teachers thought they might have a disability. Three of these students were, years later, found to be eligible for special education (and one had not yet been evaluated). One of these study students was retained in kindergarten, where he failed for a second year, before being evaluated for special education. He was taunted by the students who advanced to the first grade for being left behind in kindergarten. Another student's parent wept when she learned that for 3 years her daughter's teachers had been questioning whether her daughter had disabilities but had never told the mother or explained that she could have elected to have her daughter evaluated. Her daughter had become very anxious about school and required mental health counseling. The schools' delay of special education evaluation of these and other study students was, in fact, discriminatory behavior that violates the IDEA and several other federal civil rights laws. The IDEA requires states to identify students who are eligible and ensure that evaluation instruments are not racially or culturally discriminatory, are in a child's native language, and administered in a way that will yield the most accurate results. A federal guidance from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice clearly states:

The Departments are aware that some school districts have a formal or informal policy of delaying disability evaluation of EL students for special education and related services for a specified period of time based on their EL status. These policies are impermissible under the IDEA and Federal Civil Rights laws. (Office for Civil Rights U.S. Department of Education & Civil Rights Division U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, pp. 24-25)

Unfortunately, the study parents were powerless to address the violative behavior of the school because they had no knowledge of these laws, let alone their interpretation, and they had no knowledge that an evaluation of their child was being delayed.

Massachusetts Medicaid policy and federal EI policy emerged as supports to study parents and the school in identifying students with disabilities who could benefit from special education services. Medicaid gave study parents access to pediatricians for their children, who in turn connected the parents of four of the study students to EI. In all but one case, EI staff connected parents to public pre-K special education in the study school when the child turned 3.

Discussion

The studies indicate that there is a systemic discrimination in the administration of special education in Massachusetts that negatively impacts children of immigrants. The quantitative analysis of the Massachusetts population of K-5 public school students found that children of immigrants are significantly less likely than children of U.S.-born parents to participate in special education. It also found that among students participating in special education, children of immigrants were significantly more likely to be placed in substantially separate settings and significantly less likely to be placed in inclusive settings than were children of U.S.-born parents.

The case study found several explanatory mechanisms related to parent experience, school organizational structure, and public policy. Parents cared deeply for their children and were highly motivated to give them a positive school experience and support their success in school. None of the parents had familiarity with U.S. school systems or with a program like special education in which the education of children with disabilities is an entitlement with due process protections. All of the parents had a first language other than English. Parents were unsure of acceptable behavior on the part of the parent with school staff. Parents lacked people in their social networks who had experience securing educational services in the U.S. for children whose needs were similar to their child's. Parents took purposive actions to support their children's school experience, and accrued systems and cultural knowledge as they navigated for their children, but their learning process was not supported by programs to support their knowledge of the special education program and the role they could play in its administration to their child. The school's failure to provide this knowledge resulted in significant delays in securing special education evaluations and put placement decisions for those students receiving special education solely in the hands of the school principal with parents not understanding their child's placement, the LRE provision, and the parent's right to participate in decisions regarding placement.

Long delays in providing or failing to provide special education evaluations to children who staff thought might be eligible for special education resulted in part from organizational structures that did not provide enough opportunity for school staff to focus on and coordinate with one another and with parents on the needs of individual students. The school's child study team did not have the capacity to address student needs in a timely way, and parents were not included on the team. The very limited opportunity that staff and parents did have to communicate with one another regarding individual students was thwarted by failure to provide the competent language interpretation and systems information that were needed to support the participation of immigrant parents in their children's education.

Several public policies were found to also contribute to the inequitable administration of special education to children of immigrants. These include weak and ambivalent immigrant integration policies, English-only instruction, partial implementation of federal and state mandates for language translation and interpretation of school information for parents with limited English, and misinterpretation or violation of IDEA Child Find requirements for students whose first language is not English.

Implications for Public Policy, School Practice, and Research

The studies illustrate the need for immigration and immigrant integration policies that enable immigrant parents to access supports and services in schools and communities that may be needed for their children's optimal development, including special education. They demonstrate the importance of ensuring that children of immigrants have access to pediatric health and EI services with providers who are able to communicate with children's parents.

The case study suggests that schools should be resourced to provide structures that allow school staff who share common students to regularly, and without significant delays, coordinate among themselves and with students' parents about the progress and development of individual students. These structures should allow for communication and knowledge sharing between staff and parents and timely identification and response to student needs. The findings of the study indicate that these structures will not equitably benefit immigrant parents and their children if they are not supplemented by additional structures to ensure that immigrant parents have the language access, systems knowledge, and cultural capital they need to effectively participate with staff in their child's education and advocate for their child's needs.

Both studies indicate that special care must be taken to lawfully administer special education to children of immigrants. Parents must know of the special education program and that they can request a special education evaluation of their child. Schools must have the capacity to administer high quality special education evaluations to students from all cultures and languages represented in the school population. Care must be taken to bring about the parent understanding and participation required by the IDEA and due process protections.

Study results indicate a need for more quantitative studies of children of immigrants' access to special education entitlements with clear information on the nativity of parents, at different grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school), the nation as a whole, and in different states. They demonstrate a need for additional qualitative studies that identify mechanisms that produce inequities and provide insight into how a nondiscriminatory administration can be achieved for children of immigrants. The case study also shows there is a need for research to understand why federal mandates for language interpretation and translation for parents with limited English are not fully implemented and how capacity can be built for more successful implementation.

Limitations

Limitations of the quantitative analysis include use of the proxy for having an immigrant parent. In addition, this is a static observational study, which cannot rule out the possibility that there are omitted variables, confounded with the proxy, that could be responsible for producing the observed results.

Resources and time limited the case study to one school, but in-depth data collection and analysis for 11 students from different sources provided rich data and allowed triangulation. The recruitment of parents and students into the study was not sufficiently language diverse for this

school. This, and the fact that the parents who self-selected into the study were strongly motivated to help their child and improve the school, results in a positive bias. Parents speaking low-incidence languages are those most likely to face the greatest barriers in navigating and advocating for their children. Not being able to discuss citizenship/immigration status with parents was another limiting factor, as was not being able to interview all staff serving students, as originally planned.

Conclusion

Together, these studies indicate that there is systemic discrimination negatively impacting children of immigrants in Massachusetts' administration of special education. These inequities may be remedied by public policies and programs that operate outside of schools in wider communities, and within schools, to welcome, fully include, and ensure that immigrant parents are provided the systems knowledge, cultural and social capital, and linguistic access they need to secure and inform developmental, health, and educational services for their children, including special education. Schools must be resourced to competently understand and address the development of individual children from all backgrounds in the populations they serve, and coordinate with fully informed parents, through competent language interpretation and translation whenever necessary, so that their children have equitable access to school programs, including special education and inclusive placement.

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