

Statesman

Austin schools report more student absences as immigrants stay home in protest

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10:15 a.m. update: On a day when social activists have encouraged Austin-area immigrants to stay home and show their power in numbers, teachers across Central Texas are reporting an uptick in student absences, particularly in schools with large numbers of Latino students.

In Austin and Manor, several teachers on Thursday morning are reporting just a handful of students attending some classes.



On a day when social activists have encouraged Austin-area immigrants to stay home and show their power in numbers, teachers across Central Texas are reporting an uptick in student absences, particularly in schools with large numbers of Latino students. Deborah Cannon/American-Statesman Staff

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At one school, a staff member said classes are being combined because attendance is so low, with as few as five students in a couple of them. Middle and high school classes with typically 30 or so students have about half of the students in them, and one teacher said 22 students didn't show to class.

At Eastside Memorial, one teacher said only five of the 25 students in a first period class were in attendance.

Most teachers at Eastside Memorial are seeing less than half of their students in class today, one employee said. Teachers also have been asked to take accurate attendance so the cafeteria staff doesn't prep too much food for lunch.

At Hart Elementary, teachers are reporting having only half of the students on campus. There are as few as two or three students in some classrooms.

Campus principals in Manor spoke to students and parents this week about the importance of coming to school, the district spokesman said.

Some secondary teachers said some of their older students told them they'd be out in support of classmates or family members who are undocumented immigrants.

The situation among Central Texas colleges and universities was less certain.

Texas State University spokesman Matt Flores says officials there aren't aware of any protests or walkouts. As for absences, he said that might take a while to ascertain.

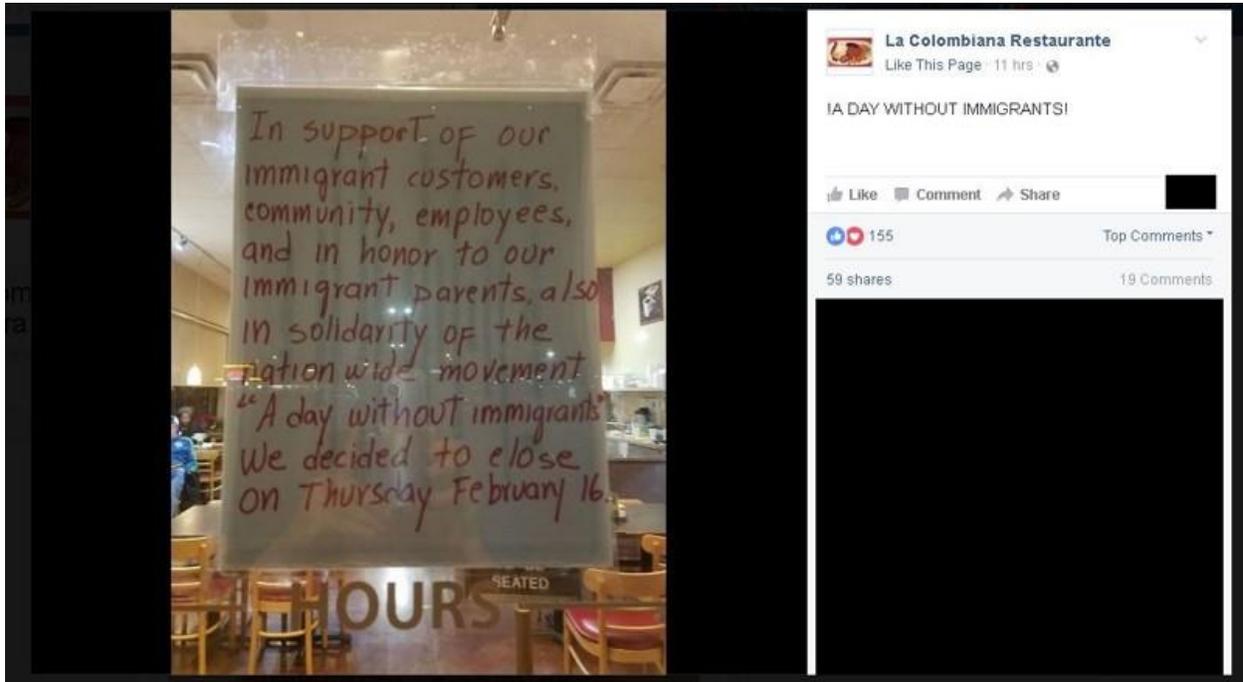
The University of Texas and St. Edward's University did not immediately respond when asked about the matter.

In recent days, some immigrant parents [withheld their children from Austin district schools out of fear](#) that they, their children or family members may be detained by immigration officials after hearing last week that an enforcement operation has been underway in Austin.

Earlier: Members of Austin's immigrant community are shutting down their businesses, stepping away from their jobs and refusing to patronize stores and restaurants on Thursday to highlight their roles in the United States.

More than 20 local restaurants have confirmed they will shut down on Thursday in solidarity with the community, and others, including Torchy's Tacos on South Lamar Boulevard, announced closures because of low staffing levels.

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More than 500 people have also signed up to attend a peaceful protest at the Austin City Hall at 10 a.m.

“If your parents are undocumented please do not be afraid to protest for them, not by adding violence, but by speaking up for ourselves and our family,” organizers wrote in an [event page on Facebook](#). “Come out and support your people and stand for what you believe in. Our voices have to be heard, anyone who wants to stand in solidarity with your fellow immigrant brothers and sisters are welcome to attend as well!!!!”

Similar protests are planned Thursday across the country in cities including Houston, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Chicago.

The protest comes on the heels of a recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement effort to detain undocumented immigrants in Austin and several other cities. While authorities have said they focused on picking up “criminal aliens,” detentions sparked widespread outrage and fear.

Mayor Steve Adler on Valentine’s Day had voiced his support for Thursday’s day of protest.

“This is a country of immigrants and a city of immigrants, and I love it when we stick up for each other here,” Adler told the American-Statesman.