

JESSICA WAGNER

Brown University
164 Angell St
Providence, RI 02906

(973) 699-6111
jessica_wagner@brown.edu
<https://sites.google.com/view/jessicawagner>

Academic Appointments and Affiliations:

Postdoctoral Research Associate, Annenberg Institute, Brown University, 2022-Present
Forward Society Lab, University of Toronto, 2022-Present

Education:

Ph.D. Economics, University of Toronto, 2022
M.A. Economics, University of Toronto, 2016
B.A. Economics, McMaster University, 2013

Research Fields:

Labor and Public Economics, Economics of Education, Economics of Crime

Publications:

“Understanding the STEM Path through High School and Into University Programs”
with Martin Dooley, Abigail Payne, and Mitch Steffler
Canadian Public Policy, 2015

Working Papers:

“Student Exposure to Proactive Policing: Heterogeneous Effects of Los Angeles Gang Injunctions”
“The Effects of School Consolidations on Students and Teachers: Evidence from an Underperforming System” with Gustavo Bobonis and Orlando Sotomayor
“The Effects Open Enrollment under ‘No Child Left Behind’”

Work in Progress:

“Improving and Sustaining Management Practices in Public Schools: Evidence from Puerto Rico” with Gustavo Bobonis, Marco Gonzalez-Navarro, and Daniela Scur
“Community Youth Gang Interventions and Education Outcomes”

Teaching Experience:

Human Capital and Education Economics TA, Fall 2020, Fall 2021
Program Evaluation for Public Policy (Graduate Level) TA, Winter 2018, 2019, 2021
Executive MBA Economics I and II (Graduate Level) TA, Summer 2020, Fall 2020
Labour Economics TA, Fall 2017, 2019
Quantitative Methods in Economics TA, Summer 2018
Topics in Public Policy TA, Fall 2018
Principles of Microeconomics TA, Fall 2016, Summer 2017, Fall 2020 (Head TA)
Principles of Macroeconomics TA, Winter 2017, Summer 2017

Other Employment:

Research Assistant to Gustavo J. Bobonis, 2017-2021
Research Assistant to Kory Kroft, 2017
Research Assistant to Elizabeth Dhuey, 2015-2016
Senior Research Specialist, Industrial Relations Section, Princeton University, 2014-2015
Research Analyst, Public Economics Data Analysis Lab, McMaster University, 2014

Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships:

Graduate Completion Award, 2022
Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021
University of Toronto Research Trainee Fellowship 2018
University of Toronto Graduate Fellowship 2016 – 2021
McMaster University Undergraduate Student Research Award 2013
Denton Prize in Economics 2013
A. A. Payne Summer Research Fellowship 2012

Professional Activities***Research Presentations:***

Puerto Rico Department of Education Symposium on Educational Research, 2022
Southern Economic Association Conference, 2021
Annual Conference of the Canadian Economics Association, 2021
Graduate Students in Economics of Education Zoom Seminars, 2021
Empirical Microeconomics Seminar, University of Toronto, 2018, 2021
Association for Education Finance Policy Conference, 2016
Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Policy Research Symposium, 2015

Academic Service:

Doctoral Student Mentor, 2018 – 2021
Executive of the Women in Economics at UofT Graduate Student Group, 2018 – 2020

References:

Robert McMillan (robert.mcmillan@utoronto.ca)
Gustavo Bobonis (gustavo.bobonis@utoronto.ca)
Elizabeth Dhuey (elizabeth.dhuey@utoronto.ca)

Abstracts

Student Exposure to Proactive Policing: Heterogeneous Effects of Los Angeles Gang Injunctions

While more police have been found to reduce crime, growing evidence indicates that policies to increase police presence and authority place a heavy burden on targeted communities. How that burden is borne by children remains an open question. In this paper, I estimate the causal effects of a proactive policing program in Los Angeles on the education outcomes of children in kindergarten to grade eight. I leverage the staggered and plausibly exogenous timing of civil gang injunctions and a panel of student administrative data to estimate the effects of new gang injunctions on academic and behavioural outcomes using an event study approach. I document substantial heterogeneity in the effects of the policy, which enhanced police authority to arrest suspected gang members inside 'safety zones'. Four years after gang-injunction implementation, female English-learner students – likely first- or second-generation immigrants – see academic gains of 0.14 standard deviations in math and 0.12 standard deviations in English test scores compared to never exposed students. In stark contrast, male non-English-learner students suffer declines of 0.11 standard deviations in math and 0.13 standard deviations in English test scores, along with sharp increases in suspensions. Reductions in reported crime, which reduce Hispanic female victimization, are a key mechanism driving the gains for female English-learner students, based on a variance decomposition exercise. Overall, although the targeted policing strategy was effective in reducing crime and improving academic progress for many, the analysis draws attention to collateral damage inflicted on some at-risk children that ongoing and future policing initiatives could seek to mitigate.

The Effects of School Consolidations on Students and Teachers: Evidence from an Underperforming System, with Gustavo Bobonis and Orlando Sotomayor

In recent years, a number of states and school districts in the US have engaged in large scale school consolidation reforms driven by infrastructure underutilization and the objective of reallocating scarce resources across schools. We investigate the determinants of this type of school consolidations, their effects on student enrollment and achievement, as well as the consequences for teachers, using data from over 400 consolidations of public elementary and middle schools across Puerto Rico during the period 2010-18. We document that the school closures are orthogonal to students' academic performance at baseline; the strongest predictors of school closure are low aggregate enrollment levels and small average class sizes. We find that school closures cause a 1.2 percentage point decline in enrollment that rebounds within two years after displacement. Using a matched event study design that controls for students' enrollment histories, we observe no persistent negative effects on students' achievement in mathematics or language standardized tests, consistent with the existing literature. Moreover, students displaced from underperforming schools experience large achievement gains relative to their non-displaced peers. These positive effects coincide with accessing teachers with higher baseline value added, and are much larger in magnitude compared to estimates from higher-performance school districts. We find no evidence of spillovers from student and teacher displacement on receiving schools. Altogether, the results indicate that cost-saving consolidations can be made without harm to achievement when schools are closed in the vicinity of adequate alternatives, and under ideal circumstances are highly advantageous.

The Effects Open Enrollment under 'No Child Left Behind'

This paper assesses whether expansion of school choice through the open enrollment provision of 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) was effective in shifting students away from low performing schools in California. Under NCLB, schools failing to make 'Adequate Yearly Progress' (AYP) for two or more years were forced to offer students the option to transfer to AYP-passing schools. Using the discontinuous assignment to treatment based on a school achievement threshold, I identify the causal effect of being sanctioned with open enrollment on subsequent enrollment growth. I uncover small and statistically insignificant enrollment declines for schools that marginally failed to make AYP and were sanctioned with school choice for one year, and statistically significant declines in enrolment growth of 2.7 percentage points for schools that had school choice for a second year. Evaluation of heterogeneous treatment effects, and a case study of a large urban district, suggest that due to supply constraints transfer take-up was low even in the presence of high-performing nearby schools. The results highlight the limitations of top-down school choice policies that fail to expand access to quality schooling options.