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Arrests rattle kids, administrators

RAID AFTERMATH: EFFECT ON SCHOOLS

One teen says paranoia has gripped Marshalltown's Hispanics since relatives and friends were taken away.

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Marshalltown, Ia. - Disturbing memories followed many students to Marshalltown High School on Wednesday.

Watching busloads of arrested relatives and friends roll through the city after federal immigration agents raided the Swift & Co. meatpacking plant will be a watershed moment in their lives, they said.

"When 9/11 came along, everyone remembered it," said Isis Diaz, a 14-year-old freshman. "I think everyone will remember this."

School administrators, meanwhile, worried about the future of a district in which more than 30 percent of the 5,000 students are Hispanic.

"There are a lot of concerns about this," Associate Superintendent Patrick Kremer said. "We know there is a possibility some students who left yesterday may never be back. We're invested in these children."

By the end of the day Tuesday, the student population shrinkage was significant. For example, about 25 percent of the 1,572 students who attend the high school were reported absent, district officials said.

"It's quite possible this action could have a long-term effect on enrollment," Kremer said. "Our Hispanic population is important not only to the life of the schools but the life of the community."

In recent years, the number of Hispanic students in Marshalltown schools has increased by 100 to 150 annually, while white students' numbers have declined by a similar amount.

Many students arrived at school Wednesday talking quietly with friends. Some simply kept their heads down, with their hands stuffed in their pockets.

Diaz said some students left school early Tuesday to gather documentation for parents who were detained. Other people she knows have already left the state and are headed back to Mexico.

"A whole bunch of kids didn't come to school today," she said.

Aaron Murillo, 15, said he knows more than 20 people affected by the arrests Tuesday. His uncle was hiding from federal authorities at Swift Tuesday and wasn't caught, he said.

Rafael Ramirez, 17, said he was most worried about young children from families in which both parents were arrested. He said he hoped such children could stay in the United States, where the quality of education is better and going to school is required.

"I don't know what they are going to do in Mexico," he said. "They don't have the same chances."

Paranoia has swept through the local Hispanic community, Diaz said.

"My mom wouldn't let us go outside, because she thinks something is going to happen to us," she said shortly before leaving the school parking lot and walking into the school.

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