

Published: 05.13.2006

## Silent protest by students greets state official's speech

By Jeff Commings

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Principal Abel Morado stood in front of a full auditorium at Tucson High Magnet School on Friday and told students he was proud of their "respect and courtesy."

Arizona Deputy Education Superintendent Margaret Garcia Dugan, the day's guest speaker, talked of the importance of individual expression and independent thinking.

Then about 50 students silently stood during her speech, some with tape over their mouths, using the moment to demonstrate their strong belief that lawmakers are unfairly targeting minorities.

Dugan's speech was arranged to put an end to the contentious debate that began after labor activist Dolores Huerta last month told Tucson High students that "Republicans hate Latinos."

Upset that a school assembly apparently was used to push a political agenda, a state legislative committee had a hearing on the matter, summoning local educators to Phoenix. Fox News' Bill O'Reilly devoted a segment of his show to the issue.

Finally, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne decided Dugan would come to Tucson High and present another view.

But many students had a message of their own on Friday.

Most of the protesting students were part of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), or the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán, an organization of mostly students concentrated in the Southwest that promotes awareness of Chicano history. They stood during the final eight minutes of Dugan's 15-minute speech, some going so far as to put blue duct tape over their mouths.

Others wore white T-shirts decorated with slogans such as: "You can silence my voice but never my spirit."

Dugan, a Republican, addressed Huerta's comments early in her speech, saying Huerta's criticism of Republicans "is nothing more than a political statement designed to incite an emotional response." She urged students not to accept such statements as truth, and said she was not there to push any political agenda.

Dugan also touched on the importance of individuality, strong values and the need for English-language learners to take the AIMS test. She mentioned the strong values her father taught her and the sacrifices her family made to give her and her siblings a good education.

The students who stood said they wanted to show Dugan that those in her party are attempting to silence minorities, particularly "Chicanos, Hispanics and Latinos," through unbalanced legislation. They also said they should have had the chance to ask Huerta questions after her April 3 speech and during the press conference before Dugan's speech Friday.

### Online extra:

[Read the full text of Dugan's speech.](#)

[Click here to listen to Dugan's speech and Dolores Huerta's speech on April 3.](#)

"I believe that we did get our message through, that these bills are focused on us," said Liz Hernandez, 18, a Tucson High senior and a member of MEChA. She said the protest was aimed at "individuals who think that we don't know what we're talking about."

At the end of Dugan's talk, some students chose not to applaud, though others gave her a standing ovation. More than 100 began to file out of the auditorium and silently return to their classrooms, though Morado asked them to stay. Some of the MEChA students chose not to comment as they walked through the halls, saying that they wanted their silence to speak for itself.

Members of MEChA did not speak with Horne or Dugan after the speech. And though Huerta's speech was not made available to district officials before she spoke, Dugan made her speech public on Friday, and the Tucson Unified School District's Web site had it available.

Those who stayed listened to Morado express his disappointment that the protesters didn't tell him their plans beforehand. Before he introduced Dugan, he told the students that "there should be respect and courtesy shown for whomever comes to speak to us, because that's the kind of school we have."

Hernandez said the protest was planned that morning, and they did not have time to inform the administration.

While he respected the students for expressing themselves, Morado pointed out that no student stood in protest during Huerta's speech or walked out immediately after.

"I expected the same today," he said.

During Huerta's speech, students were told they could go to the library if they did not want to hear the labor activist speak. But the library was locked then, the result of miscommunication. On Friday, the library was open for students to opt out of the speech, said TUSD spokeswoman Estella Zavala, but she didn't know whether any student went.

As students made their way to their final class, they gossiped about the protest, saying they were shocked classmates decided to "interrupt" the speech.

"They took a stand, and that was good," said Yvette De La Rosa, a 17-year-old junior.

Her classmate, 17-year-old Laura Flores, said it was disrespectful, though, when they ignored Morado's request to sit down after Dugan's speech.

Flores said the speech was good because Dugan "was more open to different points of view" than Huerta.

Horne and Dugan took vacation days to travel for the speech. He stressed afterward that the message was to urge independent thinking, not to instantly accept one party's view.

"Those kids will encounter those (statements) as adults and in their college lives," he said. "It's important they know how to spot those generalizations."

Horne said the speech shouldn't be undermined by the actions of a "small minority."

Based on the conversations echoing down the Tucson High halls after the speech, it's clear many students were reflecting on Dugan's words.

"It was great to hear what she said and I respected her," Flores said.

On StarNet Read the full text of Dugan's speech and find a link to TUSD's audio archive of it at [azstarnet.com/education](http://azstarnet.com/education)

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