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2014

### Advocacy Address: “The Battle for Mexican American Studies (MAS) and the National Movement for Protecting Public Education”

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## LEAD Original Programming

### **“The Battle for Mexican American Studies (MAS) and the National Movement for Protecting Public Education” (2014)**

*START – 00:00:00*

[ Music ]

>> Bienvenidos and welcome to the next installment of LEAD Media Programming, from Studio 54 Campus of California State University San Bernardino, the digital media platform for inspired educators leaders and community activists and advocates, taking our message directly to the people, to the gente. Thank you for sharing our common interest in the analysis, discussion, critique dissemination and commitment to the educational issues that impact Latinos. I'm your host, Dr. Enrique Murillo, and this episode is a syndicated replay from season five of LEAD Summit 2014. The theme that year was Latino male crisis in the educational pipeline and the questions as to why and how are Latino males banishing from America's colleges is highly complex. This advocacy address was entitled The battle for Mexican American Studies, MAS, in the national movement for protecting public education. At the time, Tucson, Arizona, had been Ground Zero in the national movement for preserving ethnic studies and protecting public education. Sean Arce, the former director of Arizona's Tucson Unified School Districts outlawed Mexican-American studies program, spoke about the battle for the MAS program and the next phases of this struggle to save ethnic studies. Continue and enjoy the full value and complexity of this episode. We extend our appreciation to all our lead sponsors and partners, planners, volunteers, speakers and panelists, production team affiliates and Town Hall chapters and commend them all for lifting their voice and uplifting the plight of Latinos and education. Thank you. Gracias. Tlazocamati [phonetic].

>> Ok. Gracias. That was incredible. What a frenzy we just experienced. Thank you. Okay. We're back. We're off track a little bit, but always -- This happens every year. I don't know why we don't work it in. We just know it. It always happens every year. Okay. So now we want -- We have Iveth Diaz to introduce our next speaker. First of all, let me say that this presentation is made possible through a working partnership with the Ethnic Studies Student Organization, ESSO -- Not essay, ESSO -- ESSO. ESSO. The Sociology Club, the Centre for Indigenous Peoples and the Native American Indigenous Student Association, with funding provided by the CSUSB ASI Club allocation budget and the University Diversity Committee. Iveth Diaz is chair of the Ethnic Studies Student Organization, here at Cal State San Bernardino. All yours, Iveth.

>> Hello. So, Martin Sean Arce is an educator, scholar, activist, as well as co-founder and former director of the renowned and the successful Mexican-American Studies, the MAS program, outlawed by Arizona's Tucson Unified School District. The May 2013

ruling that upheld the constitutionality of HB2281, the legislation that makes MAS illegal, set the stage across the country for legal challenges to Ethnic Studies Programs at every level of education. We have seen one such challenge already in Texas. Tucson continues to be ground zero in the national movement for preserving Ethnic Studies and protecting public education, as Arce will speak about the battles for MAS and the next phase of this struggle to save Ethnic Studies. Arce continues to carry on the legacy of MAS based on the concept of In Lak Ech, the Mayan philosophy of interpersonal responsibility. As a result, the Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing, XITO, has been created with support from faculty at Arizona's Prescott College. XITO is the evolution of the struggle to promote Mexican American studies in school districts around the country. It is my honor to introduce today Mr. Martin Sean Arce. Gracias.

>> This is better. I'm not as restricted as sitting down. So, yeah. Gracias a todos. It's great to be here. Great to see the intergenerational mix here. The students, it's always an honor to share with you, to learn with you, learn from you. Again, my name is Sean Arce. I'm a 20-year Public School educator in Tucson, Arizona, and I was fortunate enough to be involved in a MECHA, at the University of Arizona. From there, we pretty much worked off the foundation of the veteranos in Tucson, the veteranas, in envisioning something that had been long overdue and that is a responsive educational program in the form of Chicano Studies, a K through 12 Chicano studies. I believe, in our research, Tucson is the only K through 12 Chicano studies in the nation and we were able to realize that dream through community organizing, through working with you, through working with our elders who had been engaged in the struggle to implement and institute a k through 12 culture-responsive, community responsive educational program. Because, as we all know, the public schools have not been responsive to the educational needs, the cultural needs, the social needs, the emotional needs of our students and that is a crisis. That is an educational crisis that we are experiencing with the second highest dropout rate, which we term a pushout rate, next to our native brothers and sisters. The lowest educational attainment out of any racial or ethnic group in the United States. So we all should be, no matter what community that we come from, we all should be alarmed and all should be working toward providing and demanding of our school districts equitable educational opportunities for our students. So with that, a little history of the program, we talked about it, you know, young people Mechistas [phonetic] mentoring high school students, middle school students. And then we come full circle with the Chicano movement and we have people like Jose Ángel Gutierrez, founder of the La Raza Unida Party, who actually came into Tucson and filed a lawsuit in federal court to help us push through the first K through 12 Chicano Studies Department in the country. So with that, we really created a program, created a curriculum, created a pedagogy, if you will, the way we teach with the foundation that our students come to the classroom every day with strengths. And, unfortunately, our public education system has traditionally, and still to this day, sees the Mexican American Chicano population as deficient, sees us as culturally deficient, sees us as lacking. So, our framework, we utilized one based on acknowledging our strengths. The cultural wealth that our students bring into the classroom, the wealth of our students being able to navigate multiple worlds, the wealth of our students speaking multiple languages and the wealth of that history of resistance in fighting inequalities

within our schools. It is too often that our public school system and our teachers and our administrators -- -- see a lack, view our children in terms of a pathology, if you will. And state "Well, their parents do not value education. Their community does not value education." And that is why it is so important to have Chicano and Chicano Studies in our schools. Because then, we can begin to acknowledge that we have a very strong history of fighting for educational equity. We are honored here today. Sylvia Mendez, from the landmark infamous Mendez v. Westminster case, which demonstrates and illustrates that we have a long history of fighting for educational equality. We have folks here from the 1969 Los Angeles walkouts, the student walkouts, which further demonstrates that Chicanos, Mexican Americans, value education. But they value education so much, we value education so much, that we're willing to place our very bodies, to place our reputations, to place everything on the line to obtain an equitable education. We have stories of current -- Contemporary stories of students in Tucson, Arizona, where we had a law that was passed -- -- in the form of HB2281 which stated -- -- "Programs of study cannot attempt to overthrow the United States government." Which is one of the provisions. And there was some truth to that. We weren't trying to overthrow the United States government, but we were working to transform our public education system in Tucson, a 60,000 plus student District, over 80% Mexicanos Chicanos children that have been neglected throughout History. So, yes. We were attempting to overthrow something. We're attempting to overthrow the very system that have neglected us and then have not been responsive to our educational needs, a system that did not allow for us to see ourselves in the curriculum, that did not allow for us to acknowledge our lived experiences, that did not have high expectations of our students, that pushed our students out at over a 50% rate year after year. The other provision within this law stated that "Courses of study cannot promote the resentment against a class or group of people." And the other provision stated "Classes cannot be geared, or formed, or created for one particular ethnic group." So you see these provisions, it is based on fear, much like the Racial Profiling Law 1070, which attacked our very presence in the state of Arizona, attacked our very being, our very bodies and makes it illegal to -- It makes racial profiling -- Racial profiling legal within the State of Arizona. So that wasn't an attack on our very presence, but HB2281, I think, took it a step further. It took it a step further in the sense that we have a course of study about the history, their cultura, the literature, our lived experiences, our arte, it made it illegal for the fastest growing population, and that is based on fear. That is based on a fear of the demographics. In California you all have already experienced, Latinos, Mexicanos, here in California are now the majority population of public schools. But in Arizona, there was this fear and they perceived it as a threat, not only a demographic shift but a demographic threat. The State lawmakers do not want to see panaderias on every corner, right? Heaven forbid we're going to have, you know, a panadería on every corner or -- Right? So this fear, you know, there is not a fear of a growing population if a growing population is undereducated. There is not a fear of a growing population where we have -- Where we send more of our young brothers to prison than we do to institutions of higher learning. So our very program, because we're able to reflect our lived experiences, our history, our cultura within the curriculum, and it was effective. It was effective in the sense that -- -- students in our courses, over a 14-year period from 1998 to 2012, outperformed their peers who did not take the courses, these Chicano

studies, these Mexican American studies courses. So one of the only programs in the history of public education where we're able to close the academic achievement gap, which is so pervasive in our public schools. It is a problem in all urban areas where we have Latino and Black students. So this is a program that was able to do that. This is a program that virtually eliminated the dropout or the pushout rate. This is a program that sent over 70% of its students to four year colleges and universities. And these were external studies. These are studies conducted by the State of Arizona. The State of Arizona issued a study and paid over \$170,000 to audit our program. And these very findings came back. And our state superintendent of instruction, John Huppenthal, when the findings came back, he withheld the findings for about six weeks and then he came out with his own findings and he stated -- -- that we were in violation of those very provisions that I spoke to you about. So we questioned him. We said "How can you eliminate a course of study, a program, a K through 12 comprehensive Chicano -- Chicano studies program, despite the fact that we've eliminated the achievement gap? That we sent students to college at higher rates than students who did not take these courses at unprecedented rates." That we actually eliminated the pushout rate. He says "Well, this law is not about academic achievement. Our State Superintendent of Public Instruction stated that. He said "These are about American values." So we questioned "When did academic achievement or reducing the dropout rate -- When did that ever become, not become an American value?" He says "Well, these are about American values and you all are teaching anti-American values. So, thus I will declare my position that you are all in violation." So since then, the teachers within this program, 11 of them, not all of the teachers, filed in federal court and unfortunately we lost. In the State of Arizona, the federal court in the state of Arizona held that these four provisions were indeed Constitutional, because the state has a legitimate quote-on-quote "Pedagogical interest -- -- in the overthrow of the United States government, or in promoting resentment." So that is up to the State, that is up to the citizens according to our federal state court -- Our federal court in the state of Arizona. So, since then, we have appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and this is -- One of the reasons why I'm so happy to be here is that we could spread this message and, you know, spread this knowledge and make everybody aware that this will be the first time that Chicano studies will be in the Ninth Circuit. Our very history, our very culture, our literature, our art, our very knowledge systems are being called into question. And with that, this will be a precedent-setting case because this will either open the floodgates to restrict ethnic studies, particularly Chicano Chicano studies in the state of Arizona. And so, we should all be alarmed. And we should all come informed with this very pressing and important issue. And for the youth, I really encourage you all to go out into our respective communities and assess your peers. Ask them what are our pressing educational needs? What are the needs of our community? Are our schools implementing a cultural responsive pedagogy, a cultural responsive curriculum? Or are our schools being responsive to all of the needs of our student population? The majority of which, here in California, is Chicano Latino. So I encourage you to organize, because education is our most important issue. Education is not our future, it is now. Our youth are just not our future, our youth are actually right here and right now. So again, I encourage you to take the initiative and take that upon your own responsibility, in your own selves, to organize within our communities. Enforce our school districts, enforce our public policy makers,

our assemblyman, our legislators, our Congress people, our representatives to implement this type of transformative educational program within our schools. Gracias.

>> Buenos días. Thank you, Sean. Thank you so much. We have some time for questions, if some of you have some and I'm sure you do. So we have -- We go out there in the audience with a microphone somewhere? Anybody has questions out there in the main part of the event center? And then, we also are taking questions on social media as well. So anybody got any questions out there? No? Ok. How about -- Erin [phonetic] do you have any on social media? Oh, you got one? Okay. It's hard for me to see. So there you go. Okay. Great. Thank you.

[ Inaudible ]

>> Yeah, let me promote the website first, then I can address the other questions. Go to [saveethnicstudies.org](http://saveethnicstudies.org), and it will give us the latest updates, the court proceedings, the court filings, that's where we can all inform ourselves and please, I encourage everybody to spread that. Post it on your social media, your Facebook, your emails, list service. Yes, the legal team initially started in Tucson with a private attorney by the name of Richard Martinez. Since then, well, fortunately, we've had some other folks jump in. The Seattle University Law School, specifically the Korematsu Center has jumped on board with the legal team of four or five legal scholars. And also Bingham McCutchen, out of San Francisco private -- private law firm has jumped on board to assist us in this very critical Ninth circuit appeal. So with that, [saveethnicstudies.org](http://saveethnicstudies.org), we can -- You can see how you can contribute to this. We're waiting right now. The Ninth Circuit has already accepted the appeal and now we're waiting actually on the scheduling, which we're expecting late summer, early fall of this year of 2014. So once we find out, I will definitely send it to Professor Murillo here and the folks here at the LEAD conference, and again, please, please look up [saveethnicstudies.org](http://saveethnicstudies.org) for the latest developments.

>> Thank you so much. Thank you again, Sean. Sean, here, please stand here up like next to me. With much gratitude, Sean, through accomplishments and service to our community, we would also like to award you our LEAD Education Advocacy Medallion of Honor. Okay. Here, thank you.

*END – 00:25:13*