

# Dim Reality, Bright Hope

**San Bernardino students tell officials of violence, racism**

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**By CHRIS RICHARD**  
**The Press-Enterprise**

Leaders of a student organization called on San Bernardino city and school officials Thursday to offer more job training, address campus racial tensions and pervasive violence and start funding youth programs with revenue from a voter-approved tax increase.

Speaking for the Youth Organizing Project of Inland Congregations United for Change in a meeting hall at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in San Bernardino, 15-year-old Yvette Aguayo called such steps essential for a city plagued by violent crime.

"We discovered a dim reality with deep problems, inadequate solutions and poor communication between the people involved," she said.

"We learned that for many people, there seems to be little light, and some have given up hope."

But addressing an audience that event organizers estimated at 600, Mayor Pat Morris called Thursday's gathering a reason for optimism.

In November, San Bernardino voters approved a quarter-cent increase in the city sales tax to pay for hiring for more police -- a prime concern among city voters worried about violent crime -- and for other public safety needs.

Among those other needs, the mayor has proposed gang-diversion and youth-athletics programs. But City Council members have directed almost all of the first \$1.6 million installment of the new revenue to law enforcement.

On Thursday, Morris urged the audience to speak up for the programs the students requested at a City Council meeting Tuesday.

"This advocacy that we have witnessed tonight must not end here," he said

The Youth Organizing Project's presentation marked the culmination of a yearlong effort

in which members interviewed city officials, school administrators and parents throughout the city. During the first week of this month, they surveyed 7,613 students at San Bernardino's seven public high schools.

Project members said their research pointed to widespread violence and racial tension, with nearly eight out of 10 students surveyed saying they have experienced violence on campus. A similar proportion questioned the service of school security officers. More than half said they have suffered racial harassment at school.

Through meetings with researchers at Claremont Graduate University, Youth Organizing Project members learned how such an atmosphere can contribute to a cycle of violence, Yvette said.

Parent Gaudencio Guzmán said he's already seeing that at Pacific High School, where his 15-year-old daughter is a junior. He says he's told her repeatedly that when a fight breaks out, she should withdraw.

"But she worries that some day, a situation will start and she won't be able to get out of it," he said. Lately, Guzmán said, his daughter's grades have been falling.

"The fear is far worse than it used to be," he said. "But finally, people are speaking out. Thanks be to God."

During the meeting, audience members lined up to describe the personal effects of the violence pervading the community. One speaker, Marcia Reyes, told how, on Wednesday night, robbers terrorized her daughter at the family's beauty salon.

Her voice choked with tears, Reyes turned to the table where Morris and schools Superintendent Arturo Delgado sat.

"I am here to beg these very important people," she said. "Please, help us."

Later, Delgado said the San Bernardino City Unified School District already is spending \$7 million on intervention programs, many similar to those the student leaders requested.

In an interview, Councilman Tobin Brinker said he believes the new tax funds should go only for law enforcement.

Brinker said he'd support more than doubling the mayor's \$114,000 in proposed spending on intervention and prevention programs -- but only if the money comes from

the city's general fund.

"The discussion we should be having is not whether we should spend the money," Brinker said. "The discussion should be, are these the best programs?"

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