

**TABE RAW FOOTAGE 2003**  
**Ángel Noé González**

Interviewer: First tell me your name and spell it.

Gonzalez: Ángel Noé González, and what else?

Interviewer: Spell it.

Gonzalez: A-n-g-e-l N-o-e G-o-n-z-a-l-e-z

Interviewer: And the accent marks?

Gonzalez: On the first "a" of Gonzalez. That's it.

Interviewer: Can you tell me, what was your position at Crystal City (unclear)?

Gonzalez: I was super intendant of schools, in charge of all educational programs for that community.

Interviewer: What was the feeling you had at that time, when the students participated in the Walk out? (Difficult to hear him)

Gonzalez: Well I came there after the walk out. I really wasn't there during the walk out. I had left education and had been in Mexico City working there for a year and uh, I returned and they recruited me to go in there as superintendent.

Interviewer: So, after you became the superintendent why did they (unclear)

Gonzalez: I was one of very few Mexican American's at that time who had a certificate in the area of Superintendency. And I was recommended by two friends of mine and they then came and interviewed me in San Antonio. At the time, I did not know where Crystal City was, and had to get a map to go visit there. I really did not accept the job until after I arrived there and saw what the situation was, and knew that something had to be done and somebody had to do it and I felt that I could do it, and I told them I would stay.

Interviewer: What was the situation there?

Gonzalez: Well the situation was very divided between the Anglos, who made up about 10% of the population and the Mexican-American's who made up 90% of the student population. And so there was a lot of bitterness, a lot of in-fighting for control. The board had just turned 4-3 in favor of the Mexican-American's for the first time in the history of Crystal City, and it was very traumatic for the Anglos, to not be able to dictate to the people and the students what they had to do. So it was a big change and there was a lot of turmoil. A lot of people who now had

control, who had never had a say-so in the education of their children. I'm talking about more than the school board. The parents felt that they had control of the education system, and they did.

Interviewer: Now, all the turmoil suggests that (hard to hear)

Gonzalez: Well, it was something that was desperately needed, not only in that community but in many communities around the country. It so happens that Crystal City was the first one where the students decided and the parents, with their permission, decided to walk out and bring about change. And they did it. They had a lot of help from a lot of people. By the same token, they also had a lot of opposition from many, many agencies, including the Texas Rangers and the department of Public Safety, Highway Patrolmen, the corporation that was there, Del Monte, was very against the take over- which wasn't a take-over, it was democracy in action. And so, it was quite different from anything that I had experienced and of course my feeling as you asked before, was that I was very nervous, and wondering whether it was a job that I could handle. As it turned out, I now feel and look back and say, it was a job that I did and did well. And it was very satisfying to me. Now because I see the many, many people that I helped, me and my staff, also the changes that have come about- not only in the educational system, but in the leadership as it has changed throughout the country, where Mexican-Americans who were not ever in control are now in very good positions to make good decisions for their people.

Interviewer: With the change, in Administration and coming into Crystal City, did you see, were you there long enough to see the progress (hard to hear him)

Gonzalez: There is no question, that yes we did. At the time that I got there, they had about a, I did a study right away, the first thing I did was look at the dropout rate, and I found that 91% of the students, Hispanic Students, dropped out before graduation. They never made it to graduation. That meant that only about 9.5% that started in first grade ever graduated. We started graduating many, many more students. We started sending many, many more to college, on scholarships. We started looking out at the different colleges and universities looking for grants, or money for them to go to school, to continue their education. There were a lot of changes that occurred. We had one program that was federally funded that trained people to be teachers. We had 50 who had not gone to college, some who had just started, but all 50 graduated and came back to Crystal City to teach. A lot of the teachers who were there left, after a year, the first year, and moved to other areas. Teacher organizations, the classroom teachers of Texas, advised teachers nationally not to go to Crystal City. So recruiting became a big job of ours, and finding teachers willing to go to Crystal City and work with these children. Fortunately we were able to get a lot of help from a lot of people who saw this as a positive step, and did go to Crystal City and did pitch in, and did do a big job. I was able to put together what I consider a very outstanding staff to help, to run the district, while I did major fundraising through the federal government and foundation grants to help us to do the things we wanted to. We were able to pass a bond issue, it wasn't big but built a new high school and new

elementary. When I got there we still had students who went to the old schools, made of wood, that were made for the Japanese internment camp that had been established there in 1941. So it was a very difficult period, but one where many, many changes came about and new schools were built. Teachers started to care about the students, students started to care about school. So it was a great experience, one that I think that everybody has to go through, because it is easy to go to Highland Park for example, and be the super intendant where you have money and everything that you need and want, and top students, as opposed to going to a school district to be super intendant where you start looking for pennies to try to meet your budget requirements. So it was a great experience for me, and an experience that will live with me the rest of my life.

Interviewer: Of those students back then can you remember any of them, any students who stick out in your mind (unclear)

Gonzalez: Well one of the students I mention all the time is Roberto Alonzo, who is an attorney, here in Dallas and a state representative continuing to fight and to represent the people of his community. And not only them but everybody. I think Roberto's doing a tremendous job of representing everybody, but in particular for those who have not been able to get into the system. Roberto Alonzo, by the way was a sophomore during the walk out. And he was elected by the student body to serve on the School Board the first year that I was there as a student representative. He didn't have a vote but he had a voice in what occurred there for the students. He's one. We have another attorney here who was a school board president there, Jose Angel Gutierrez who is a, has his doctorate from the University of Texas, a professor at UT Arlington. But there are a lot of students. There's another one that works in the legal department, here in the DISD, who went to school and was part of the walk out there. Serna, Diana Serna. There are people that I run into from speaking engagements around the country that went to school in Crystal City, or they worked in Crystal City, or they pitched in and helped in Crystal City, because this was more than just a Crystal City effort. There were many people from all over who came to teach these students during the walk out, many people who came to help us set up the curriculum, and set up the kind of school we wanted for these children.

Interviewer: (unclear)...The fight that the students had, is that still going on today, would you say?

Gonzalez: It's not going on in Crystal City. We just had a walk out here in North Dallas in high school of about 200 students that marched down to the administration building because they were unhappy with what the principle was dictating. And certainly I feel very strongly that these students had a right to go down to the administration and to be heard as to what their concerns were, because the principle refused to listen to them. I think they should be settled first at the school. But when there's no response, or the response gets to where it is more negative, then other action has to be taken and I honor these students for what they have done

here in Dallas. But we've had walk-outs in Houston, and other schools, in Edcouch, there must have been 30-40 walk outs during this period of time early during the 70's, and most of them were very effective and changes have come about because students and parents decided that they were fed up, they wanted a better education for their children, they wanted them to stay in school, wanted them to go to school. I have never seen or met a parent who didn't care about the education of their children. They all do. But a lot of times, some of us in education say the parents don't care. Well that's not true. I have not met parents that don't care for the education of their children, and I would say to those parents from Crystal City, or Edcouch-Elsa, or any place else, Good Going. A lot of changes have made the educational system go from 10% graduation to 50%. Still not good enough, but that's a lot better than 10% that are graduating from our high schools.

Interviewer: How do you see, you've been definitely impacted with parent involvement in education, how do you see the future of fighting the way it is? Is it gonna be the way it exists now or is it gonna be something that fades away with change? (kind of hard to hear some parts)

Gonzalez: I think these changes are gonna have to be brought about. We have a lot of needs in bilingual education and one of them is a critical shortage of teachers, and until we go to Austin, and I've marched on Austin, We marched to get the first 2 million dollars for bilingual education. We brought busloads of people from Crystal City and marched down Congress Avenue and we got their attention, and we got 2 million dollars. That wasn't very much, compared to the 100 million we now have, but that was the beginning. Had we not marched we might still be fighting or trying to get 2 million. And now it's up to over 100 million for the education of children. The unfortunate part is that over 50% of the children, who need bilingual education, are not receiving it because they don't have a bilingual teacher. Our fight today and tomorrow and during this legislative session is gonna be getting the legislature to fund teacher education programs so that every child who needs bilingual education will have a certified bilingual teacher until he or she can transition into an all English program, and that's going to take a big effort and a lot of money. Our neglect has occurred because no body's been willing to go and stand up and say we need teacher education, we need teachers, we need bilingual teachers. And until they do, the legislatures gonna say that everything is fine, bilingual education is failing. They don't realize or understand that we don't have bilingual teachers and any program that doesn't have the people to teach that particular content area, or that program, it's gonna be a failure. So our failure is our inability to organize our parents and to organize ourselves as educators and march down to Austin. I think it's that time.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that, relating to the video or the production or anything that's important, anything that we've left out?

Gonzalez: Well you know, I haven't seen the final version, I'm sure it's going to be a good video because I know y'all have communicated with a lot of great people. I think that the final product is going to tell us a lot about what happened. Eventually we'll get a video that might relate more

to the development of our present rules and regulations of our history beginning in the early 60s, of the hearings that Senator Ralph Yarborough had, of the things that senator Juan did, that senator Bernard did. A lot more on the court decisions, where Dr. Jose Angel Cardenas has testified and demanded that these children be served. And there are a lot of great people who sacrificed a lot of their time and their effort and their energies to ensure that we got to where we are today. But we have a long way to go. And I say to those young people, to the new directors, the young people that are our leaders, that they have to take over, and they have to take a hard look at what they're doing, and ensure that every child has an equal educational opportunity.

Interviewer: Okay. You brought up something about the teachers, of our bilingual educators, how important is it for them to hear about Yarborough, Cardenas, Alberto, and any others that people like yourself... I don't know anything about them. And I doubt... (unclear)

Gonzalez: It's very, very important for them to know about the struggle. We don't forget about Martin Luther King, we don't forget about the Rowe decision. We have to be reminded of the struggles, it didn't come by itself. It wasn't easy for a person, a super intendant like me, or an assistant super intendant to go and testify, in behalf of US vs. Texas. You know, because your school district has a grip on you, you just have to make up your mind that you're gonna do it, because it's the best thing to do for the children, and if you don't do it, then you're being very irresponsible.

Interviewer: Well I think I might have, you may have touched on everything. Is there anything that you, anything about Crystal City or anything...(unclear)

Gonzalez: Well, my only... Most of what's been written about Crystal City has been the political aspects of it. Very little has been written and documented on the changes in education that have come about because of that walk-out, which for me, were very important. The political, is fine, because we were able to prove that we as Hispanics were the balance of power in the state of Texas, and that we can determine whether the democrats are in control or whether the republicans are in control. And this is where we have a very, very powerful hand, we just have to play that hand, and we seem to be holding back and dividing ourselves. But I think La Raza Unida, proved heavily that the Mexican American can determine the political outcomes of this state.

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