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# Day of Silence creates flap at Hoover High

By Naush Boghossian, Staff Writer  
 Article Last Updated: 04/25/2008 12:09:51 AM PDT

**GLENDALE** - Hoover High School teacher Nareg Keshishian didn't expect to have to give a speech on tolerance to the school's senior class this week - at the same time students were busy planning events marking the 93rd anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

But Keshishian said he felt he had no choice when teachers heard growing buzz that dozens of students might skip school today to protest an event designed to spread a message of tolerance toward students with different sexual orientations.

Hate and fear toward gay, lesbian and transgender people, Keshishian cautioned students, is no different than feelings that have led to deadly persecution around the world throughout history.

"The first step toward genocide is the dehumanization of the victim. When you dehumanize any group, you're guilty of aiding in that first step," Keshishian said.

"I'm disappointed that students wouldn't make that connection on their own, but when you're talking about the gay community, people don't see them as a minority, sadly."

The flap at Hoover High began after some local cable- access shows implied that by attending school on the "National **Day of Silence**" today, students would be supporting a "homosexual agenda."

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Students at Miguel Contreras Learning Complex sit in the... (John McCoy/Staff Photographer)

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But the issues at the **Glendale** school are just a microcosm of an aggressive national campaign to protest the 12th annual event. Coalitions including the American Family Association are urging parents not to send their

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students to school on what they are calling a "pro-homosexual **day of silence**."

AFA officials could not be reached for comment Thursday. But some local parents said they think schools aren't the place for airing such views on homosexuality.

While Naira Khachatrian said her children will attend school today, she's also called the district to complain.

She also spoke at the **Glendale** Unified board meeting Thursday

night to share her concerns, including the passing out of fliers promoting the event on **Glendale** High's campus.

"I am a parent and I have rights and I am responsible for what happens at the school. It's not a national **day of silence**, it's a gay and lesbian **day of silence**," she said.

**Glendale** Unified sent e-mails and called about 10,000 parents Tuesday to note that while the district didn't endorse the event, it also doesn't tolerate name-calling, bullying or harassment at its schools.

Los Angeles Unified schools also are holding events to mark the **day**, but officials said they had not heard of any plans to urge an organized student boycott of school today.

The heated opposition to the event has surprised some organizers, particularly coming after the fatal shooting earlier this year of Lawrence King, a 15-year-old gay student in Oxnard. Police said King was shot and killed at school by a 14-year-old classmate in a premeditated hate crime.

"It's very unbelievable. You wonder how they can come up with some of the things they're coming up with because it's a **day** about bullying and they're trying to turn it into something no one understands," said Daryl Presgraves, spokesman for the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the national sponsor of the **Day of Silence**.

Still, hundreds of thousands of students at more than 6,500 schools across the country are expected to participate in the day's events, Presgraves said.

Lidia Castillo, a senior at Miguel Contreras Learning Center, organized the school's **Day of Silence** events and encouraged more than 900 students to participate - more than 60 percent of the student body.

But other students said they don't support the event.

Hoover High senior Jano Boghossian said that while he supports Yellow Ribbon week - which promotes nonviolence - he doesn't believe in the National **Day of Silence**.

"Leaving school on Friday to make the point that you're against it is giving the (gay and lesbian) club too much power and influence, and putting my education on hold for a **day** just to protest this is not worth it," the 17-year-old said.

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Psychologist Elizabeth A. Say said opposition to such an event may be rooted primarily in fear.

"Here's the sadness. They are convinced that they are doing what's morally right, and in their perspective ... they believe the responsible thing to do is not to show tolerance," said Say, dean of the college of humanities at California State University, Northridge.

"It is this kind of reactionary position that says the only way to respond is to actively organize against it."

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