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## Jeff High's Latino graduates celebrate their achievements

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When Angela Hernandez came to the United States four years ago, she didn't speak any English.

"Now I can speak English and hold a conversation," the Jefferson High School senior said. "I get good grades, and that was difficult for me. That's why I feel proud."

Hernandez was one of 48 Hispanic graduating seniors honored Thursday evening during a ceremony at Jeff. The Latino Leaders of the Future celebration recognized the extreme effort and, for many, adversity that students such as Hernandez have gone through to graduate.

During the ceremony, Principal Glade Montgomery said it was the students' dedication that helped them reach the milestone of graduation.

"Many of them came into a school that was very large and strange to them," he said, "and coupled with a language barrier, it's just tremendous" what they've accomplished.

Javier Magallanes, a class of 2000 Jefferson graduate and current director of development for the Purdue University Department of Computer Science, spoke to the students and their families about the important role they will play -- and are playing -- in shaping the America of the future.

He said when he was growing up in California he never would have dreamed of the opportunities he would have, not as the son of an immigrant coming to the United States to make a better life for his children.

"It's important you seniors understand, Jefferson High School did not lower its bar for you to graduate," Magallanes said. "You earned it."

Magallanes then challenged the students to keep working hard, avoid mediocrity and pursue academic excellence even after they cross the stage as high school graduates next month.

Those words, especially the hard work part, also resonated in senior Giovanni Cancino's speech to his classmates.

Cancino has pushed himself throughout high school, taking advanced placement courses and being involved in the classroom and outside, and it has paid off with a grade point average topping 4.0. But he told his peers that each of them, including himself, could have worked harder and will need to do so in the future. "Hard work always pays off."

"Don't go thinking that just because you didn't achieve (what you worked toward) your hard work was wasted," he said.

The senior plans to attend Ball State University and study architecture. Cancino knows it won't be easy, but he said you have to "strive for what you want regardless of what people think or say."

And, as he encouraged his peers during the speech, "Always be proud of who you are and what you represent. Never let anyone bring you down."

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