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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Opening of Vista Hermosa Park Recalls Councilmember José Huizar's Successful Battle to Finish Belmont Learning Center

The former LAUSD school board president introduced the plan that eventually led to the completion of the former Belmont Learning Center

LOS ANGELES (July 18, 2008) – As community members and dignitaries prepare to celebrate the opening of the historic Vista Hermosa Park tomorrow, Councilmember José Huizar recalls the battle he and others fought to implement his plan to finish the former Belmont Learning Center and adjacent park.

In 2003, then-Los Angeles Unified School District Board Member Huizar devised an 11th-hour alternative plan that would redesign the troubled site, which had sat uncompleted for four years amid troubles with toxic gases and an earthquake fault.

Huizar's plan called for keeping some of the completed buildings while removing others from the fault line and adding a much-needed park for the surrounding Belmont community. With the help of City Councilman Ed Reyes and school board members, Huizar garnered the political and community support that eventually led to the school board's backing of a modified version of his plan that added a 500-seat academy and a parents' center.

Initially, Huizar's idea was not the plan of choice of the school board or then-LAUSD Superintendent Roy Romer, who favored another plan that did not include a park. Huizar acknowledges that he had a moment of indecision, unsure whether he should support the other more popular plan or forge through with his own.

"It was a really tough decision," Huizar said. "But, I knew in my heart-of-hearts that my plan would benefit this community the most and would be the quickest to complete. This community had waited far too long for this school to be completed. Their children were being bussed to other schools. I simply had to do the right thing, and that meant fighting for my plan."

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Councilmember Huizar Recalls Battle for Belmont Learning Center Alternative

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Vista Hermosa, or “Beautiful View,” a 10.5-acre park developed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, was named after Huizar’s staff walked the grounds with architect Mia Lehrer before it was constructed.

“As they looked out over the downtown skyline, Mia said, ‘What a beautiful view. Que vista hermosa,’” Huizar recalled. “And we came to an agreement that Vista Hermosa was the perfect name for this park.”

Far from being the effort of a single person, Huizar said the completion of the park and the soon-to-open Edward Roybal Learning Center was a collaborative effort that included the work of many politicians and governmental agencies, as well as the local community.

“We took something that had been offered up as an example of everything that is wrong with government and turned it into an example of everything that is right,” Huizar said.

The Boyle Heights resident, who lives in the neighborhood he grew up in, has made youth-related and educational issues a tenant of his administration. He chairs the Los Angeles Education Coordinating Council, created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to assist foster and probationary youth in their educational needs.

“I’m always looking for opportunities to create more resources for our young people,” Huizar said, who recently announced a \$200,000 award from The California Endowment to Legacy L.A., a fledging nonprofit in Boyle Heights planning to open a youth center at the former federal armory at Hazard Park.

While the councilman has his sights set on future opportunities for young people, tomorrow’s Vista Hermosa Park ceremony and the upcoming one this fall for the new high school will give him the opportunity to look back fondly on the battle it took to complete those meaningful projects.

“It taught me a great lesson,” Huizar said. “Sometimes you’ve got to fight for what you believe in regardless of the political implications.”

Councilman Huizar, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, LAUSD President Monica Garcia and other officials will gather at the park for a press conference and community picnic at 10 a.m., Saturday, July 19. Vista Hermosa Park is located at 100 N. Toluca Street, at the corner of First Street and Toluca, near downtown Los Angeles.

For more information about Councilmember Huizar and the 14th District, please visit cd14.lacity.org.