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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mendez Learning Center – Where One Dream Ends, New Ones Begin

Councilmember José Huizar joins Mayor, LAUSD Board President and others at ribbon-cutting ceremony for Mendez Learning Center – school Huizar built while on School Board

LOS ANGELES (Sept. 24, 2009) – The Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez Learning Center, the first high school built in Boyle Heights in more than 80 years, had its official ribbon cutting ceremony today as Los Angeles City Councilmember José Huizar, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, LAUSD Board President Mónica García, students, parents and faculty celebrated a historic day for the Eastside community.

As the former Board President for LAUSD, Councilmember Huizar spearheaded the effort to build the school with the goal that the campus be focused on math and science to enable students in the working class community to one day pursue lucrative careers in high-tech industries. As Councilmember, Huizar worked with LAUSD, HENAAC, the Mayor's Partnership for L.A. Schools and others to enable the campus to host two small learning academies: one focused on math and science and the other on engineering and technology.

"This beautiful campus is the realization of a lot of hard work," Councilmember Huizar said, thanking the Mayor and LAUSD President García, his former chief-of-staff when he worked at the school board. "Getting this school built is a great achievement and something I am very proud of, but the true task is now upon us. The students at Mendez are just learning to dream and it is up to us to give them all the support and tools they need to turn their dreams into realities. I know we will do that."

Councilmember Huizar would like to see a solid internship program established at Mendez, so that young people can take advantage of all the great industries located right over the First Street Bridge separating Boyle Heights from downtown.

"These young people need to see what's available to them out in the real world," Councilmember Huizar said. "That bridge is a short ride from Boyle Heights to downtown, but for some of these kids, it could represent the kind of life-changing experience that inspires them to achieve more."

(more)

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The Councilmember also advocated for amenities at the school. When he learned that Mendez would not have enough space for a regulation-sized soccer field – which would have forced students to play their games elsewhere – he went to the Los Angeles City Housing Authority (HACLA) for help.

As LAUSD Board President, Huizar negotiated with HACLA a 75-year, \$1 per-year lease for the land the school was built on. This time around he asked for more land for the field and HACLA came through.

“While we want our kids to study hard and excel academically, we also want them to have fun and this soccer field will allow them to do that,” Huizar said.

The Mendez Learning Center is named after Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez, parents who successfully challenged school segregation in Santa Ana during the 1940s, which paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The Mendez Learning Center will also significantly help reduce overcrowding at nearby Roosevelt High School, which at one point was the most over-populated campus west of the Mississippi. Both high schools will be part of the Mayor’s Partnership for Los Angeles Schools and will be on a traditional school-year calendar.

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