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LAUSD CUTS THE RIBBON ON FELICITAS &
GONZALO MENDEZ LEARNING CENTER

First new high school in Boyle Heights in 85 years is a model of reform

(Los Angeles, CA) -- Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board President Mónica García joined Los Angeles City Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Los Angeles City Councilmember José Huizar, California State Senator Gloria Romero and special guests today to cut the ribbon on the Felicitas and Gonzalo Méndez Learning Center (Méndez LC). The campus, which opened to more than 1,000 students on September 9, 2009, features two small schools focused on Engineering & Technology and Math & Science and has enabled Roosevelt High School to return to a traditional, 180-day academic calendar for the first time in 15 years.

"Méndez Learning Center is a wonderful example of the educational reform and key partnerships that are moving LAUSD into a new era of innovation and success for all our students," said Board President Mónica García. "Mendez's two small schools will deliver a focused and personalized academic experience in an environment where teachers and administrators have more opportunity to encourage and inspire their students - run with the support of a valuable partner directly invested in its success, the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools."

Méndez LC is LAUSD's first new school project to fully implement the reform model of Small Schools, as mandated by a resolution passed by the Board of Education in June 2008. The campus consists of two schools, each serving approximately 500 students and each featuring its own dedicated classroom building, academic program and administration. One school focuses on math and science, and features courses in biology, chemistry, and environmental science. Instruction at the second school has a technology and engineering focus and offers courses in computer science, robotics and architectural drafting.

Méndez LC is also one of LAUSD's premier iDesign Schools. The iDesign Schools Division works in partnership with LAUSD's Network Partners - one of five established civic and academic institutions with knowledge and resources - to improve student achievement. With the help of Network Partners, iDesign Schools have increased decision-making authority over issues of curriculum, instructional strategies, professional development, hiring, school budgets, school schedule and school programs. In the case of Méndez LC, the school operates with the support of the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools established by Los Angeles City Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

"This is an exciting time for the families of East Los Angeles as we celebrate the opening of the first new school in this community in over 80 years," Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said. "With its innovative composition and dedicated teachers and administrators, I am thrilled that the Méndez Learning Center is one of my Partnership Schools and am confident that it will prepare its students for college and beyond."

"The Méndez Learning Center is more than a school, it is the realization of a dream that I had and the community shared," said Councilmember José Huizar, who championed the building of a new Boyle Heights high school with a focus on math and science as president of the school board. "Today that dream is just beginning. Thousands of children will soon discover limitless possibilities on this state-of-the-art campus with the kind of academic focus that will have a profound effect on their lives and the lives of their families. Today is a proud day for Boyle Heights."

The campus is named after two Mexican American civil rights leaders, Felicitas and Gonzalo Méndez, whose children were denied entry into 17th Street School in Westminster, California because they were Mexican American. The Méndez v. Westminster School District is a landmark desegregation case that successfully ended segregation in California and is a precursor to later court cases including Brown v. Board of Education.

"It is inspiring and encouraging to know that there are still so many people like my grandparents who are persistent and will not give up and who have a vision and hope for all children to receive endless opportunities in education and to inspire them to pursue their dreams in life," said Johanna Mendez, granddaughter of Felicitas and Gonzalo Méndez. "The students who enter the Méndez Learning Center can be proud when they walk into their new school knowing all the history that lies behind the name and the history that lies behind it being built."

"Today's dedication proudly enshrines the Méndez name as American heroes and pioneers in recognizing that education is the civil rights issue of our time," said California State Senator Gloria Romero, Chair of the Senate Education Committee. "Their long fight for educational equality and justice inspires us to continue that quest on behalf of over six million California students today. Sí se puede!"

The two small schools share core facilities including: a library, a multipurpose room, food service, a parent center, competition gymnasium, outdoor physical education facilities and underground parking. Buildings and spaces are arranged to permit after-hours access to certain areas, such as the gym and athletic field. A joint use agreement is currently in place with CalSouth Soccer for organized youth development and activities during after school hours.

"This new neighborhood high school means Roosevelt High School returned to a single track calendar with a full 180 days of instruction this school year," said LAUSD Chief Facilities Executive Guy Mehula. "Our building program has ended involuntary busing of elementary school students and reduced involuntary busing of secondary school students by more than 80 percent. Nearly 140 schools have returned to operating on a traditional calendar. We are delivering on our commitment to the community."

Méndez LC is one of 80 new schools completed as part of LAUSD's \$20.1 Billion New School Construction and Modernization Program to end involuntary busing and year round calendars, and to provide every student a seat in a safe and healthy neighborhood school. For more information, please visit www.laschools.org.

For more information on LAUSD's iDesign Schools and LAUSD Network Partners, please visit:
www.idesignschools.org.