



# News Release

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## **OCDE, City of Westminster partner on curriculum for Mendez Historic Trail and Monument Project**

WESTMINSTER, Calif. — The Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) is pleased to announce that it is partnering with the City of Westminster to create content and curriculum to accompany the Mendez Historic Freedom Trail and Monument (MHFTM), promoting a greater awareness and understanding of the ground-breaking civil rights achievement.

Construction of the monument commemorating the historic Mendez v. Westminster case that led to the desegregation of California's public schools is being supported by contributions from individuals and organizations, including the not-for-profit College Board, but the city needs to raise an additional \$80,000 to reach its goal. Individuals and organizations can contribute at [www.MendezTribute.com](http://www.MendezTribute.com).

Mendez v. Westminster was initiated in 1945 by Orange County families who argued that the segregation of schools violated their rights as American citizens. At the time, Mexican-American children were directed to separate, uniformly inferior schools. That policy was ultimately found to be unconstitutional by the federal courts, laying the groundwork for the desegregation of all California schools and, eventually, the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision, which struck down school segregation nationwide. Despite its importance, the Mendez case is not widely known, nor is it required as part of school curriculum.

The Mendez Historic Freedom Trail and Monument project will include a monument to Mendez v. Westminster created by famed artist, muralist and sculptor Ignacio Gomez, providing educational and cultural enrichment. In addition, curriculum and content will be developed for the children, teens and adults who visit the trail.

OCDE envisions a core learning experience for those who walk or bike along Hoover Avenue onto Westminster Avenue toward the monument. Participants will be able to read interpretive panels, see themes captured on banners hung from historic light poles, read messages embedded in the sidewalks, and access audio and internet content on their smartphones. The

curriculum will be mirrored on a website, which will include further interpretive activities and lesson plans for teachers who bring their students to the trail and monument. The curriculum will highlight the ways in which the Mendez family and other Orange County families worked against great odds to help their community and the nation put the principles of the Declaration of Independence into practice, most notably the affirmation that “all men are created equal.”

“This case is one that belongs in California history books, and I’m proud to work with city and school officials to help expand its legacy and show children today what we fought for not so long ago,” said Sylvia Mendez, who was in elementary school when her parents, Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, filed suit against the Westminster school district after their children were denied enrollment in 1943.

Said County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Al Mijares, “Visitors and residents of Westminster will be able to review the events leading up to the Mendez case, immerse themselves in that period of local history, and explore the ways the case has impacted our lives today. We are pleased to coordinate with the Westminster Heritage Memorial Committee to make this experience a memorable and educational one for all participants.”

“Mendez v. Westminster marks a powerful moment in our nation’s history, and the College Board is honored to contribute to supporting its legacy,” said Scott Hill, College Board Vice President for the Western Region. “This monument not only pays tribute to our past, but also helps set the stage for a brighter future.”

“It is so important to remind people that the pursuit of equality does not always come easily, but it is essential to building a society where people can succeed based on their merits and character, not their skin tone or country of origin,” said Westminster Heritage Monument Founder and Westminster City Councilman Sergio Contreras. “Once completed, this project will successfully make Westminster a destination for all students throughout Orange County to visit, discover its history, and learn that ordinary people can do the extraordinary.”

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