



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Orange County community leaders to host virtual groundbreaking of park and monument honoring historic Mendez v. Westminster case

WESTMINSTER, Calif. — The City of Westminster, in partnership with the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE), will present a virtual groundbreaking of a new park and monument to honor the legacy of the historic Mendez v. Westminster case, which famously led to the desegregation of California's public schools.

Produced by OCDE, the online event will debut at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 13 on both the [City of Westminster](#) and [OCDE's](#) respective Facebook pages, as well as the [OCDE Newsroom](#).

Featuring reflections and remarks from city and county leaders, community members and local students, the virtual presentation not only serves as the official physically-distanced groundbreaking for the park and memorial but provides an opportunity for the community to come together – from neighborhoods near and far – to celebrate the landmark case that brought transformative change to Orange County and paved the way for the desegregation of schools across the nation.

“The desegregation of America’s schools started right here in Westminster, but for decades there has been no public space to commemorate the Mendez family and all of those who had the courage to stand up for equality,” said Westminster Council Member Sergio Contreras. “Through years of hard work and support from the community, we are now one step closer to making Westminster a destination where the public can discover our important civil rights history, and learn that ordinary people can do extraordinary things.”

Located along Westminster Boulevard at Olive Street, the park will feature statues depicting Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez, who in the 1940s took legal action after their children were denied entry to Westminster’s 17th Street School, known then as “the white school.” Surrounding the statues, a large textbook monument and interpretive panels will provide additional insight on the case, the historical figures involved and its sweeping impact on civil rights.

Funding for the project is provided through a California State Parks grant acquired by the City of Westminster. Awarded in February 2020, the City of Westminster received \$1.29 million for the construction of the park.

The park is set to be part of the Mendez Freedom Trail and Tribute Monument project that will also include four interactive stations spanning a walking path along Hoover Street. OCDE has partnered with the City of Westminster to develop content and curriculum for all of the installations.

“Throughout our country’s history, everyday Americans have worked, fought and challenged the status quo to create a better life for future generations,” Orange County Superintendent Dr. Al Mijares said. “The case of Mendez v. Westminster broke new ground not just for Orange County, but for our entire nation. My hope is that this park and monument can serve as a unifying public space and a reminder that we all have the potential to affect change for the betterment of others.”

Once the Mendez Freedom Trail and Tribute Monument projects are completed, visitors will be able to view interpretive panels, read messages embedded in the sidewalks and access audio, video and augmented reality content on their smartphones.

Construction on the park and moment is scheduled to begin in October 2020 with projected completion in 2021.

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