

PRESS RELEASE



SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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Councilmember José Huizar, Office of Supervisor Gloria Molina, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority recognize outstanding students' effort, and dedicate new neighborhood greening effort in Boyle Heights

*Health Initiative by Hollenbeck Middle School Students results
In the Boyle Heights Green Corridor Project*

Boyle Heights, California—At an event held today at the bottom of a well-used City stairwell, Los Angeles City Councilmember José Huizar joined the staffs of Supervisor Gloria Molina and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to recognize four stupendous teachers and more than 200 of their students for a innovative health education program. The students' effort resulted in a neighborhood greening initiative that will improve the Boyle Heights area near their school for years to come.

Eighth grade teacher Julie Maharaj and her teaching partners Bernie Carrasco, Gardenia Gonzalez, and Christine Rosser received a grant from the NEA Foundation to implement a multidisciplinary project to teach students about health issues and concerns in their local community. After collaborating with the City's health department and researching the most prevalent health problems, students developed strategies to address these concerns. This included a plan to renovate and beautify the City staircase at the end of 6th Street to provide recreational and exercise opportunities for

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the more than 2,800 students of nearby Hollenbeck Middle School, where there is a documented propensity for diabetes, asthma, and heart disease.

The teachers and students approached then-LAUSD School Board Member José Huizar, who enlisted the assistance of the MRCA to develop the project that is located on a City right-of-way at the end of East 6th Street. Supervisor Gloria Molina committed more than \$200,000 in Proposition A funds to assist the MRCA with the project. As a City Councilmember, Huizar will commit more funds and staff resources to the effort.

“The MRCA strives to connect students and all residents to their natural environment,” said Michael Berger, Chairman of the MRCA, and himself a lifelong educator. “We are delighted that it was the students themselves that came up with the idea.”

The collaborative effort between the students, Supervisor Molina, Councilmember Huizar and MRCA will bring recreational improvements and native ecology to the densely populated Boyle Heights neighborhood. A series of improvement projects are contemplated, ranging from street greening, stormwater management, and installation of recreational park amenities.

The project will transform the neglected right-of-way area associated with the Blueberry Hill stairs into a green and usable space. A vista point near the top of the stairs will be developed with an interpretive panel, benches, and a drinking fountain. Native vegetation will be planted on the slope adjacent to the stairs. Green Corridor amenities will include walking paths, benches and interpretive wayside displays. Additionally, the stairway and lower retaining wall can provide opportunities for school art, area enhancement, and exercise. This project will not only enhance the area but will also provide educational opportunities focusing on health and fitness issues explored by the students of the school

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy was established by the California State Legislature in 1980. Since that time, it has helped to preserve over 55,000 acres of parkland in both wilderness and urban settings, and has improved more than 114 public recreational facilities throughout Southern California.

The MRCA is a local government public entity established in 1985 pursuant to the Joint Powers Act between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District.

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