



**BAY AREA REGIONAL OFFICE**  
1330 Broadway, Suite 500  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Tel: (510) 267-1200  
TTY: (800) 719-5798  
Toll Free: (800) 776-5746  
Fax: (510) 267-1201  
[www.disabilityrightsca.org](http://www.disabilityrightsca.org)

*California's protection and advocacy system*

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**July 6, 2009**  
**For Immediate Release**

**Contacts:**

**Disability Rights California: Fred Nisen, Esq. & Steve Rosenbaum, Esq.**  
**(510. 267. 1200)**

**North Monterey Unified School District: Superintendent Sergio Montenegro (831.633.3343)**

**Smoothing the Way for Students with Disabilities at North Monterey County High School**

By 2011, students who use wheelchairs or scooters or other devices for mobility will find it easier to get to classes and sporting events at the North Monterey County High School.

The North Monterey Unified School District has agreed with a recent graduate and Disability Rights California, a statewide legal advocacy organization, to improve the physical accessibility of the district's North Monterey County High School. "We are reducing the bumps in the road facing students with disabilities," said attorney Fred Nisen, "so they can concentrate more on graduating than getting to class."

The agreement, negotiated collaboratively without a lawsuit, was signed by the superintendent, a representative of the board of education, and Joseph Hayes, a wheelchair user and former student member of the board.

Terms of the agreement include architectural modifications to the high school and grounds located in Castroville, with most of the work to be completed in 2010. Many of the access problems were brought to the District's attention by

Hayes, who graduated last year. Hayes is establishing an annual award to "recognize a student leader who has overcome personal and physical obstacles to make a significant contribution" to North Monterey County High. "It's great that the District is going to make the high school more accessible so that future students with disabilities will face fewer barriers than I did," said Hayes.

Improvements are being made to the boys' locker room, access to the main entrance from the bus shelter and parking lot, the entrance and counter in the main office and handrails on the ramps to portable classrooms. The District will buy an accessible shuttle to transport spectators and athletes with disabilities to the high school football field.

Nisen and Stephen Rosenbaum, attorneys for Disability Rights California, represented Hayes in the negotiations. School District Superintendent Sergio Montenegro confirmed that, "North Monterey County Unified recognizes this agreement as a win-win opportunity to continue to meet the needs of all of our students."

Alma Almanza, of the Central Coast Center for Independent Living, specialist in youth and disability issues, added: "This commitment by North Monterey sends a signal to other districts serving the central coast, to take the concrete steps necessary to welcome and accommodate *all* students, staff and parents-- including those with disabilities."

Disability Rights California, founded in 1978, provides free legal and advocacy services to Californians with disabilities. <http://www.disabilityrightsca.org>