



# NORWALK-LA MIRADA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## PRESS RELEASE

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## **Norwalk High Students Launch \$97,000 Project to Help Disabled Classmates Navigate Mobility Challenges**

Norwalk High School students are embarking on an ambitious project to design and build equipment that will allow disabled classmates to more easily navigate their campus and transition into classroom settings thanks to a \$97,000 grant received this month from the State Farm Youth Advisory Board.

Dubbed Inspired Inventions, the project will be run through the school's auto repair program and involve more than 400 students over the course of the year, said Southeast ROP instructor Ken Cook, who teaches automotive repair at Norwalk High and who applied for the grant after students expressed a need.

About 12.7 percent of Norwalk High School's student population is disabled, a figure that jumps to a third of the students enrolled in Cook's auto repair class.

"We want to create fun equipment for our schools and local playgrounds, devices that would allow disabled people to be active with fewer barriers," Cook said. "Our goal is for our devices to be everywhere and, more importantly, to inspire ideas for new ones."

Creating customized and flexible mobility apparatus like wheelchairs, bicycles and walking aids will not only provide smoother access for Norwalk-La Mirada Unified students, but also give auto repair students the benefit of taking part in a rewarding service-learning project, Cook said.

Those ideas captured the imagination of State Farm's Youth Advisory Board.

"Inspired Inventions stood out as innovative, with the ability to touch a lot of students' lives," said Kelsey West, State Farm YAB coordinator. "We are so excited to see how it works this year and to follow the progress, and hope to see it inspire a lot of other schools to do similar things."

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As part of the project, Cook's students surveyed the campus community to identify needs and look for opportunities to enhance their educational experience. Many disabled students voiced the need for a device that would allow them to transition from wheelchair to desk, and to obtain better access to portable ramps on campus.

The students established goals and compiled a list of needed tools and materials required for the project. Inspired Inventions was born.

"Inspired Inventions encompasses the District ideals of collaborative learning, utilizing technology and applying critical thinking to overcome real world obstacles," NLMUSD Superintendent Dr. Hasmik J. Danielian said. "Mr. Cook has an amazing way of connecting with and motivating his students. A heartfelt thank you to the State Farm Youth Advisory Board for supporting our student project."

Over the course of the year, students will acquire equipment, develop prototypes, conduct community outreach, confer with District and Norwalk city officials, take a field trip to the 2016 Ability Expo in Los Angeles and launch an aggressive social media campaign.

Cook plans to explore ways of maintaining long term sustainability for the project, using the grant funds to create initial designs and the infrastructure to produce them.

"Our goal is to create a million dollars' worth of opportunity," Cook said.

The automotive courses Cook teaches are made possible through the District's partnership with Southeast ROP, which employs Cook at Norwalk High and Cerritos College.

Many of Cook's students are members of SkillsUSA, a nationally recognized Career Technical Student Organization. Additionally, Inspired Inventions will receive support from community groups, including the Collision Repair Education Foundation and deputies from LASD Motorsports.

"Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District is particularly sensitive to the needs of our community, and we greatly encourage our students to seek solutions that can have a positive impact," NLMUSD Board of Education President Jesse Urquidi said. "Inspired Inventions is a student-driven project that is both pioneering and innovative. Congratulations to the students and Mr. Cook, who worked so hard to get this project started."

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