Hello Everyone!

We are the parents of Finn McGrath, who is a 2nd Grade Student at \_\_\_ Elementary School and are very excited about the start of this school year!

Finn is a happy, bright boy who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy many years ago. He is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair in the classroom.  Through Finn’s previous school experience, we have found that it is helpful to open a line of communication with the other parents in the classroom, because having a child who is a little different might invite questions, and sometimes concerns or fears, by the kids he interacts with.  This is totally normal! We wanted to give you a little background on Finn so you could be prepared for any of these questions if they arise at home. We have also found that it is so helpful for parents to have a conversation with their kids about Finn so that they are not uncomfortable or confronted with a possibly unfamiliar situation in the classroom.

During Finn’s birth, his umbilical cord became compressed (or “pinched”) over his shoulder and he was without enough oxygen for a period of time before delivery.  While this caused injuries to most of his organs at birth, all recovered except for an injury to his brain in the specific area that controls bodily movements.  This is why he has cerebral palsy, which is an umbrella term for neuromuscular issues which originate in the brain. Finn’s type of cerebral palsy is called “athetoid cerebral palsy” which is a rarer form; he kicks his legs and moves his arms all the time, but not in a coordinated way, so he doesn’t have much ability to move his body functionally.  At the current time, Finn is not able to sit independently, talk, crawl or walk, but Finn is a happy, sweet boy regardless!

Because of the muscle weakness in his mouth and throat, he has difficulty breathing without effort, so when he was 18 months old he had a tracheostomy, or a small tube inserted in his throat, which he uses to breathe more easily.  He also has trouble coordinating his swallow so he eats through a port in his stomach called a g-tube or feeding tube.  We feed him “smoothies” or a blend of fruits and vegetables, juices and milk.  We have explained his tracheostomy to children by telling them that Finn wears a special device that’s like a tube in his throat that helps him breathe and that he eats from a port in his stomach because the muscles in his mouth don’t work well and he can’t chew or swallow food. We like to remind kids that everyone eats through a tube (your esophagus)- Finn’s tube is just a little different than theirs!

Because of Finn’s physical challenges, he uses a wheelchair in the classroom, and at home we have devices that he can use to help him stand and take steps.  He has a lot of physical therapy when he’s not in school, but sometimes we may take him out of school for special physical therapy sessions. We are hopeful that he will be able to move independently one day (assisted by a motorized wheelchair or other equipment).

Finn is interested in most things that eight year-olds like: all kinds books (especially Harry Potter!), movies, American Ninja Warrior, the Voice, music/songs, riding on his bike (although it’s a special bike designed just for him), and swimming.  He understands what we say to him, but he can’t control the muscles in his mouth well enough to form words, so he is non-verbal at this point.  Just because he can’t talk doesn’t mean that he doesn’t have lots of opinions and thoughts and he loves to communicate by vocalization and facial expressions. We find that when Finn first meets new people he can be pretty shy and quiet, but once he gets comfortable in a new environment, he laughs and smiles all the time (and lets us know when he is not happy about something!). He can be very vocal when he is excited. Finn also uses a special computer that he controls with his eyes to communicate (called a Tobii).  We have been working a lot over the past few years a lot on his classroom participation and communicating with the other kids or the teachers to show his thoughts and preferences.

When Finn is meeting other children for the first time, we have found it helpful to explain that Finn’s muscles got hurt when he was a baby and so he can’t walk or talk like they can.  We have explained that he can’t move the muscles in his mouth very well, so he can’t form words to talk to them, but that he understands what they were saying.  And we emphasized that Finn liked a lot of the same things they liked, so even though he’s a little different in some ways, he’s really a lot like them in other ways. We also like to make sure that kids understand that they can’t get sick or hurt in any way by playing with Finn. We have found that children are often very curious and ask lots of great questions. We love getting these questions because the kids are obviously interested in knowing more! No question is silly or in any way offensive to us or Finn!   Because of Finn’s special needs, he has a nurse who accompanies him to school every day.  These are young women who are like family to us and help us care for Finn. Your children are also welcome to ask Finn’s nurse questions as well.

Finn loves it when kids (and adults) around him talk to him and laugh with him.  If kids want to interact with Finn, they can talk to him (understanding that he can’t talk back) and can hold his hand or squeeze his arm, show him what they’re working on (it’s best if you hold things up at his eye level), read to him, or help to push his wheelchair. Hugs are welcome too!  Every year since Finn has been in school we have been so touched at how the children enjoy and include Finn and don’t seem to focus much on his challenges.  I have included some pictures of Finn (below) for you and your children to see.

Please don’t hesitate to email or call us if you or your children have any questions about Finn or just want to reach out!! We are not offended or burdened by talking about anything and there’s no question that you could ask us that we haven’t heard before!

All our best,

[Insert Parent Names, cell numbers and email address]







