



PLYMOUTH COAST

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COLTON McGRATH, 9, plays with his dog, Checkers, in the bedroom of his Abington home. Colton, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, has produced a video that he has shown to his classmates at Woodsdale Elementary School to help raise awareness of his condition.

'I'M A REGULAR KID INSIDE'

An Abington boy with cerebral palsy makes a video to explain his condition to his peers

ABINGTON — Like thousands of other American youth, 9-year-old Colton McGrath struggles with speech problems and other disabilities of cerebral palsy.

Unlike the rest, Colton is talking about what it's like — in his own video.

With the help of a classmate and his mom, Kerriane McGrath, he has produced a 15-minute, question-and-answer-style video in which he describes his condition and how it affects his everyday activities.

He and his mom have screened it for two classes at Woodsdale Elementary School, Colton's third-grade class and a group of sixth-graders. Kerriane McGrath says the school may show it to other Woodsdale classes in the coming months.

"I want people to know that I'm a regular kid inside," Colton said. "I might talk a little different, and I don't keep up with other kids at recess, but I like to do all the stuff that other kids like to do." While he likes to talk face to face to other students, "This time I wanted to try a video and see what happens," he said.

Cerebral palsy is neither a contagious disease nor a genetic disorder. It includes a variety of chronic disorders that impair brain's ability to control walking, speech, hearing and other development.

It has a range of causes, from pregnancy complications to birth injuries like the ones Colton suffered. The resulting



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COLTON McGRATH created a video with his friend, Julia Coombs, 11, that was shown to his third-grade class and a group of sixth-graders at Woodsale Elementary, that explains how his affliction with cerebral palsy is not a barrier to being a friend.

brain damage isn't curable, though effects can now be better managed or minimized.

An estimated 5,000 infants and toddlers are diagnosed with cerebral palsy every year. About 500,000 Americans of all ages have mild to severe degrees of the condition.

Colton's disabilities were caused by a fractured skull and other trauma from his delivery, which left him clinging to life in intensive care. His cerebral palsy was diagnosed

when he was 6 months old.

Academically bright, he labors to speak clearly and has trouble walking and running, despite years of corrective surgery and physical therapy. He also suffers recurrent seizures. He does most of his homework on the computer.

Colton and his mom have matter-of-factly discussed his condition with classmates since Colton was in kindergarten. In early December, she and one of Colton's friends, Julia Coombs,

sat down on-camera to pose questions that Colton has already answered countless times: What makes it difficult to have cerebral palsy? How does that make him different from other kids? What kinds of cerebral palsy are there? Colton said he decided to make a video in part because he was taunted on the school playground a few times at the beginning of the school year.

Colton's teacher, Megan Roberts, showed it to the class shortly before Christmas vacation, and she said all her students watched with deep interest.

"They're all aware of Colton's cerebral palsy," Roberts said. "What the video did do was make it more real for them." She said this is the first such video she's ever seen created by a student so young.

"He was very brave to do this," she said. "It's a lot for a 9-year-old to do." Kerriane McGrath hopes her son will continue to speak out about his condition as he grows older. She said they've already talked about preparing videos or other material that could be used by the entire school system.

"We've been blessed," McGrath said. "He's lucky, so we would like to see him be a voice for all the other kids with cerebral palsy." If there's a chance to do that, Colton says he's ready.

"I want people to ask me questions," he said.

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