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Mr. Determination

Bill Porter is a young man of 14 years who is just entering his first year of high school at Bayfield High School.  Being not too familiar with the disability, Cerebral Palsy, I had one summer to find out as much as possible before working with Bill and helping him get the most out of his high school education and experience.  Because Bill’s previous special education teachers have worked with him for the past few years, I set up Skype interviews and talked with them first.  I was able to gain some background knowledge on his personality, his strengths and weaknesses as a student and as a person, his likes and dislikes, goals that he has attained, his social skills, and his participation in education.  I also discussed the types of instructional strategies that were tried and found to work as well as any kind of barriers that were insurmountable.  After speaking with his special education teacher, I spoke with all of his regular education teachers on an individual basis to ask similar questions.  Often times, different teachers try various strategies and it may be that one strategy works for one teacher but does not work for another.  Understanding different teaching personalities is also important in setting up the most successful educational day for Bill.

After speaking with his previous teachers, I set up a meeting to meet with Bill’s mother, Mrs. Porter, in the special education room that Bill will soon become familiar with.  I think that it’s important to understand his mother’s expectations of Bill’s education as well as her expectations of Bill after high school.  Parents are a key ingredient when trying to learn about a student, their disability, and their expectations in education.  This allowed me to get a better picture of how Bill is as a whole person rather than just learning who he is as a student.  Bill’s capabilities, interests, and limitations may be different or seen differently at home compared to at school.  Mrs. Porter shared some resources with me that she has found useful in pertaining to Bill’s development throughout the years.  One website she recommended that was extremely helpful was cerebralpalsyworld.com as it shares information on everything from the history of Cerebral Palsy to independent living and economic Impact.

Once meeting with Bill’s mother, I invited Bill to meet with us before heading into the rest of the school for a tour.  What better way to learn about a student than to ask the student himself?  In talking with Bill, I made the meeting less formal but still asked him about his likes and dislikes, what he feels comfortable doing inside and outside of the classroom, and goals that he would like to set for himself.  In the short time that we shared together, I learned that Bill is very similar to students his age.  Like others, Bill showed excitement when we looked at the different classrooms as I mentioned the classes he would be attending.  When we headed into the Business Room, Bill’s eyes lit up and he looked around in awe and wonder.

Because Bill has physical limitations and goals related to his physical handicap, I talked with his previous physical therapy and occupational therapy team to get a better understanding of any barriers that he has overcome, his limitations and capabilities, and goals that they are currently working on.  Bill also sees a speech therapist.  I gathered information with his speech therapist and again, talk about his goals, barriers, and limitations in speech.

After meeting with Bill’s support team, I did research on the disability, Cerebral Palsy.  Because Bill is my first student that has this disability, I do not know much about it, let alone know the best strategies to use when working with a student with Cerebral Palsy.  After talking with his previous team and his mother, I knew that Bill did not have any cognitive limitations and focused my attention on strategies that helped with Bill’s physical and communication barriers.

   In my short time as an educator, it has been my experience that staff members glance at files/documents/emails rather than reading them intently.  Therefore, the best way to relay information to members of Bill’s educational plan (all teachers that could potentially have Bill in their classroom) is to provide a presentation on Cerebral Palsy, how it affects Bill, his positive influence in the regular education environment, and how we can accommodate Bill in the least restrictive environment.  Included in the presentation were short video clips on what Cerebral Palsy is as well as success stories (in video format) on those who have CP from the website, <https://www.cerebralpalsyguide.com/>.  In addition, we discussed Bill’s present level of performance in all subject areas and described what Bill is able to accomplish.  I emphasized the fact that Bill has normal intelligence when compared to his own age group and that his teachers should expect age level rigor from Bill.  I also gave a brief presentation on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the Multiple Intelligence Model (MI) that would remove instruction barriers to achieve academic success for Bill.  This included a brief claymation video found here: [https://www.icloud.com/attachment/?u=https%3A%2F%2Fcvws.icloud-content.com%2FB%2FAc5TopqtPQm7x5Nb1\_7p7YJIz77CAXVBOpdDq6dUDs\_SmhltkScklJwH%2F%24{f}%3Fo%3DAlb1LVf3aHxE-8BT0FvzUwVSGvSS9YeAgIH\_7o2t1q\_j%26v%3D1%26x%3D3%26a%3DBUG\_9L9hpLq8A9QNOgEA\_wHIAP94rng1%26e%3D1490581641%26k%3D%24{uk}%26fl%3D%26r%3D575283CB-9A73-4DA1-B984-E7FBFA44965C-1%26ckc%3Dcom.apple.largeattachment%26ckz%3DB978ADF7-FE52-42BC-96B6-1F11FE3326F2%26p%3D54%26s%3DnwWVqmygYu8EyC4a\_tcg\_LTpMuE&uk=Q\_FWE2Ti26BS62HiCPSUsw&f=Ms\_Viterbo\_learns\_UDL.mov&sz=30342778](https://www.icloud.com/attachment/?u=https%3A%2F%2Fcvws.icloud-content.com%2FB%2FAc5TopqtPQm7x5Nb1_7p7YJIz77CAXVBOpdDq6dUDs_SmhltkScklJwH%2F%24%7bf%7d%3Fo%3DAlb1LVf3aHxE-8BT0FvzUwVSGvSS9YeAgIH_7o2t1q_j%26v%3D1%26x%3D3%26a%3DBUG_9L9hpLq8A9QNOgEA_wHIAP94rng1%26e%3D1490581641%26k%3D%24%7buk%7d%26fl%3D%26r%3D575283CB-9A73-4DA1-B984-E7FBFA44965C-1%26ckc%3Dcom.apple.largeattachment%26ckz%3DB978ADF7-FE52-42BC-96B6-1F11FE3326F2%26p%3D54%26s%3DnwWVqmygYu8EyC4a_tcg_LTpMuE&uk=Q_FWE2Ti26BS62HiCPSUsw&f=Ms_Viterbo_learns_UDL.mov&sz=30342778).

The second half of the presentation included Bill’s teachers and those who will have contact with Bill throughout the course of a normal day discussing modifications and accommodations that will help Bill be successful.

  Some of these members included Bill’s OT and PT team, Custodian Staff, Kitchen Staff, Speech Team, Special Educators, Administration and Regular Educators.  Although Bill’s movement on his feet is quite well, all staff members were retrained in the use of the EVAC Chairs in the case that Bill fell and needed to be physically removed from the school.  The OT and PT team included short presentations on how CP affects muscle tone and control which makes it difficult for communication, swallowing, chewing, and control over the mouth (including salivating).  They also  showed a brief 2 minute video clip of how to use a specific software called ‘Dragon Voice to Text’ so that all of his teachers understood the program (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImlKOA1MhlI>).

There are a few barriers to consider when including Bill in the regular education setting.  Although Bill has made progress in his speech, communication including expressive language and articulation continue to be a struggle for Bill.  Due to a lack of muscle tone and control in Bill’s face and tongue, Bill’s verbal skills function at 60%.  His previous teachers and his mother both commented that the more time spent with Bill, the better you are at understanding him.  Bill has also lost most muscle tone and control in his right hand and arm, which makes communication through writing difficult as well.

Patience is a barrier for some teachers when it comes to including students with Cerebral Palsy like Bill into the regular education environment.  Because Cerebral Palsy is not a common disability, many teachers have not had the opportunity to work with students with CP.  Regular educators may need to modify the pace of instruction, acclimate to minor disruptions, and allow for extra response time from Bill.  Regular educators may need to have patience regarding minor disruptions that may occur as well.  Since Bill has some difficulty with physical movement, he may be a tad disrupting while accessing assistive technology tools or adjusting himself for comfort purposes.  Educators must also have patience and flexibility when it comes to response time and allowing for Bill’s demonstration of knowledge.

Physical space and accessibility to and within the classroom allowing for movement and mobility is another barrier that should be considered when developing Bill’s education plan.  Although Bill is able to walk quite well, he has virtually no movement in his right hand and arm.  Doors and doorknobs to all of Bill’s classrooms should be Bill-friendly.  Bill’s lack of mobility in his right hand makes for writing and typing to be difficult.  With assistive technology, Bill can be as successful as his peers in the regular education environment.

 There are a variety of assistive technology tools that have been suggested by Bill’s OT team and his previous special education teacher to help Bill be successful in the classroom.  The program that was used the most for Bill in the past was the text typing software program called ‘Co:Writer Universal.’  Co:Writer Universal is designed to use with Google Chrome as an extension but is compatible with other devices like iPads and desktops as well.  It uses grammar and vocabulary smart word prediction to help students better express their ideas in writing across devices (<http://donjohnston.com/cowriter/>).  This program has a learning component built into it as well so that it gets more accurate the more Bill uses it.  Another software tool that was suggested by the OT team is the program ‘Dragon Voice to Text.’ This is a voice recognition software program that types text into a word document while Bill speaks.  Even though Bill has trouble with his articulation, the OT team believes that this software will pick up most of what Bill says and will help him with his goal of better articulation.  They had also suggested to use this software with a microphone so that it will pick up less background noise while zeroing in on Bill’s voice.  Bill’s OT team had also suggested using a Slant Board and a Weighted Glove for writing.  Although Bill is limited with his writing abilities, these two devices make it less frustrating for drawing pictures as well as practicing writing.  The Slant Board is elevated on one side and slants down on the other side.  This writing board is easily carried from one classroom to another.  The Weighted Glove assists Bill in stabilizing his hand when he needs to use it, specifically for drawing and writing.  Bill especially uses these two tools in his art class.

Bill requires modifications and accommodations in addition to assistive technology.  When talking with the kitchen staff about Bill’s soft food diet, the OT team offered the idea of a weighted spoon that helps in stabilizing, similar to his weighted glove.  It was emphasized that the kitchen staff keep an eye on Bill during lunch as he is prone to choking due to the lack of muscle control in his face and tongue.  It was also discussed that Bill and one friend get an extended amount of time for eating.

 Bill also requires a modified Physical Education program.  Because Bill’s gait is a physical barrier as he walks slightly slower and a with a slight hunch, the teacher should modify fast-paced activities and allow extra time for Bill to participate.  Bill will have an option to take either regular P.E. 9 or Low-Impact P.E. as his 9th grade physical education class.  Although he can manage simple self-care practices, Bill will use velcro tennis shoes and elastic waist band pants for gym class in order to be more self-sufficient while saving on time.

 In addition to his assistive technology tools, Bill will have a special education teacher with him during his time in his regular education classes.  Because he has communication challenges, Bill will be given additional time to complete his tests, quizzes, and homework assignments.  Other modifications include preferential seating, notes from teachers, and access to the special education resource room.

Bill is a very social person who enjoys the company of others and likes to be around other people.  Before Bill’s first day of school, the members of the high school student council congregated with the student council advisor and discussed ideas on introducing Bill to the various groups and clubs at Bayfield High School and the community.  A few members of the council decided that they would have lunch with Bill and help him with his transitions from each period.  They decided that conversation during lunch and transition periods would be the best way to inform Bill of the different social opportunities.  Because of his interest in business, the student council recognized that they were in need of a treasurer in which they would interview and potentially offer Bill the position.  They also discussed the fact that Bill took Spanish at his previous school and decided to take him to the next Spanish Club meeting if he was interested.  The student council advisor also told the members that Bill is a very determined, positive, and active person who enjoys work and staying busy.  They decided they would talk to him about the community’s Recreation Center in downtown Bayfield.  The Rec Center offers classes from swimming to martial arts and often hires students to help maintain schedules and maintenance.  In addition to these ideas, the council members also remembered that many of the sporting teams needed an additional person to help take statistics.  They thought that if Bill wanted to be part of a team but couldn’t because of physical limitations, this would be a good option for Bill.

In developing Bill’s post-high school transition plan, there are local agencies and organizations that are essential in helping Bill become as independent as possible.  The first agency that his IEP team decided to get in contact with and that will aide Bill throughout his high school experience is the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation or DVR.  DVR assists high schools students with disabilities by helping to provide employment services and opportunities, counseling, training programs to enable individuals to go to work, and technical assistance to employers regarding disability employment issues.  Upon admission to the agency, DVR develops an Individual Plan of Employment that is designed specifically for each participant.  Bill would greatly benefit from the training opportunities that DVR provides.  Another agency that is equally as important as DVR is Bayfield County Human Services Agency.  The human services department provides assistance in a variety of ways including but not limited to; in home care, adult protective services, benefit specialist services, family support program, transportation services, assistance and referral services.  Bill and his family would benefit from a case-worker that would be provided through the Bayfield County Human Services Agency to aide them with basic and long-term needs.

While in high school, Bill and his family will be participating in the Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative or WSPEI.  WSPEI is all about partnerships. Its goal is to help families and school districts find or create the resources that will help them build positive working relationships that lead to shared decision making and better outcomes for the student.  It supports increased sharing of information among families, schools, projects, organizations and agencies through networking meetings, conferences, person-to-person contact, and media. WSPEI also offers specialized trainings for families.  Bill would also benefit from a connection with the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Aging and Disability Resource Agency or ADRC.  The ADRC provides information on a broad range of programs and services, helps people understand the various long term care options available to them, helps people apply for programs and benefits, and serves as the access point for publicly-funded long term care.  Bill would benefit by assistance with multiple ADRC programs such as financial assistance, low-income housing assistance, transportation and long-term care.

 Additionally, the Community Care of Central Wisconsin (CCCW) coordinates quality, cost-effective, and individualized long-term care supports available through Wisconsin's Family Care program that support member strengths, needs, and the development of meaningful community connections that lead to full citizenship in their communities.  The North Country Independent Living, the regional Center for Independent Living (CIL) is a nonprofit agency designed and operated by individuals with disabilities to maximize their ability to live independently. Because Bill likes to be around other people, these organizations would be great additions for Bill to become involved with.

 With communication among staff members, cooperation among special and regular educators, and plans in place to ensure independence for Bill, he will be a successful student in the least restrictive school environment and an active member of the community after his time in high school.

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