



CROTCHED MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Going the Extra Mile for Brett

A comprehensive plan makes transitioning to Crotched Mountain School possible for a boy with big challenges.

Brett Cox is an active 11-year old boy with significant challenges: autism that has left him unable to communicate his wants and needs verbally; difficulty relating to others socially; and life-threatening food and environmental allergies. Brett's medical condition is so serious that isolating him or restricting his activities to keep him safe was the solution most often presented to Brett's parents, Linda and Tim Cox. "We knew there had to be a better answer," remembers Linda. So she began an intensive search to find the right special education school for Brett, one that could keep him safe while providing a healthy, active lifestyle and socialization along with his education. She found it at Crotched Mountain School.

Transitioning to the Mountain

Brett's transition to Crotched Mountain School was an eight-month, intensive process facilitated by admissions coordinator, Melissa Lambert. "There were a lot of people at the table," recalls Linda. "At various times we had the school principal, psychologist, student service coordinator, speech, occupational and physical therapists, an ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) specialist along with teaching and residential staff. These folks are experts in their fields. Where others see challenges, they see opportunities."

Addressing Allergies, Ensuring Access

Brett's food allergies are significant. He's allergic to tree nuts, peanuts and eggs, to name a few. For Kim DeTour, Director of Nutrition Services, this presented a unique set of challenges. "Many of our students have complex dietary needs," says Kim. "But Brett's significant allergies meant becoming creative in our approach. We developed accommodations that keep him safe while ensuring full access to classroom and school-wide experiences."

With input from Linda, Kim created a diet that mirrors Brett's previously all-organic and natural diet as closely as possible. In addition, Kim, Brett's classroom teacher Ellen Banning and the rest of the team set up Brett's classroom and residence with separate refrigerators and appropriate, yet integrated, working, eating and living spaces.



Brett and classroom teacher, Ellen Banning use Brett's iPad to illustrate the sequence of actions involved in preparing lunch. Due to Brett's life-threatening allergies, Brett uses a personal refrigerator to ensure his food is not contaminated by allergens.

Even the teachers in Brett's enrichment classes – like art – ensured Brett's access to activities. "Brett created his first painting in Bill Corwin's art class," exclaims Linda. "Before coming here, people were so afraid of Brett's allergies that he was never allowed these important growth experiences. But here, Bill knows Brett's allergies and takes proper precautions. Multiply that by the number of students Bill sees on a daily basis and you realize how special this is."



Brett and Ellen use the iPad to communicate.

The Medical Piece of the Puzzle

Dr. Chris McCartie, pediatrician at Crotched Mountain, is responsible for overseeing Brett's medical care. As part of Brett's transition to Crotched Mountain, this meant getting an accurate picture of Brett's condition, consulting with Brett's allergist, creating a long-range health care plan, and ensuring that Brett's staff members were fully trained in responding to Brett's health needs. It was a thoroughgoing process that included teachers, therapists, medical staff and others, going the extra mile.

Gentle Teaching Addresses Whole Student

The cornerstone to Brett's education—and all teaching at Crotched Mountain—is Gentle Teaching. This method focuses on building relationships of trust, taking into account the student's personality, learning style, and environmental factors. It's a patient, holistic approach that results in improved behavior and fuller participation in the activities designed to meet IEP goals.

“Combining Gentle Teaching with the ABA principles that Brett is accustomed to has helped Brett open up to new experiences,” says his teacher Ellen Banning. To prepare for Brett's transition to a new classroom, Ellen observed Brett at his previous school and helped develop a classroom setup that keeps him safe while allowing him to interact with other students.

Academically, Brett is learning money skills and using a program on his iPad® called STEPS to follow directions for activities of daily living, such as preparing and cleaning up after lunch. And socially, Brett is improving too. “Brett likes to explore and he brings a level of playfulness to a roomful of teenagers that is contagious,” explains Ellen.

Free to Be Brett

Today Brett is thriving. His sense of humor is apparent in the boyish pranks he plays in his classroom and residence. For example, at the end of the day he and Ellen compete to say the last “bye” before he goes. And Brett stays very active as well. He can often be found skiing, swimming, bowling, hiking on the accessible trail system, playing games, and going on field trips.

According to Linda, Crotched Mountain has been a real blessing to their family. “Thanks to Crotched Mountain's dedicated, caring staff, Brett is able to enjoy a measure of freedom he didn't have before,” she said. “We're lucky to have a place where he can learn, grow and thrive like any boy his age.”

To hear an in-depth interview with Linda Cox, go to www.cmf.org/brett.



Brett is laughing as he races down the slopes for the first time in three years. His mom, Linda took him skiing when he was young and is happy that he can experience this thrill again through Crotched Mountain School.

Contact us to learn how our services can help children with autism to learn and thrive.



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