

Newsday

Boy allergic to all foods attends school with robot's help

Eight-year-old Gabriel Dispenziere attends fourth grade at Aqueboque Elementary School in Riverhead through the VGo system, a robot that takes his place in the classroom. Gabriel has eosinophilic esophagitis, or EoE, a rare condition in which allergic reactions to food cause inflammation of the esophagus.

While he sleeps, a machine beside his bed pumps an amino acid formula into his stomach. Gabriel, who is allergic to all food proteins, has eosinophilic esophagitis, or EoE, a rare condition in which allergic reactions to food cause inflammation of the esophagus.



(Credit: Newsday / Alejandra Villa)

Gabriel celebrates the end of his first school production, a spring chorus performance where he introduced his class and sang along with the help of a VGo, a robot that takes his place in the classroom.



Gabriel looks out from inside his mother's beauty salon. Gabriel, who has a rare condition that renders him allergic to all food, attends school from a room in the salon via a system that uses a robot.

With the efforts of his mom and his teacher he now attends school through a robotic system that takes his place in the classroom.

“It’s such a difference for him to be able to turn and move,” said Raquel Dispenziere, Gabriel’s mother. “Trying to watch class from a stationary point, when he was only looking through the iPad, he couldn’t look around the room. Now, he can drive around the class, he can turn the screen so he can see the kid next to him – it’s little things like that that make all the difference.”



(Credit: Newsday/ Alejandra Villa)

“Mr. Shilling wanted to surprise him,” Dispenziere said. “So we installed an app on Gabriel’s iPad where he can control the vGo. And that morning, I walked to his room with his iPad, and I told him that we wouldn’t be able to video call with the class anymore.

“I really thought he was going to cry,” she said. “He was so sad.”

But after Gabriel opened his iPad and saw the words “vGo,” she said, his face completely lit up.

“I cried all day long,” she said. “He was so thrilled. He was just so excited.”



(Credit: Randee Daddona)

Gabriel introduces the first song for the spring concert at the Aquebogue Elementary School by use of the VGo robot system, center, with general music teacher Roy Buccola and fourth-grade teacher Robert Shilling, June 1, 2015.