

'HE HAS BEEN adamant about **KEEPING UP** with everybody'

CLASS IN SESSION



Cody Wood, a 12-year-old sixth grader from Raisinville Elementary School, received a double lung transplant earlier this year. He has been using Zoom to remain in contact with his teacher and classmates as he recovers from his operation.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Monroe student uses distance learning as he recovers from lung transplant

Tyler Eagle The Monroe News
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As school kicked off earlier this year, a Monroe Public Schools' student and his family were dealt devastating news.

Cody Wood, a 12-year-old sixth grader at Raisinville Elementary School, was diagnosed with interstitial lung disease, a condition that causes irreversible damage to the lungs that impairs the ability to breathe.

In Cody's case, both of the teen's lungs were affected. And he would require a double transplant. Complicating matters even further was the fact that the nearest hospital able to take Cody's case was Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

Determined to care for their son, Shannon, 34, and Michael, a 38-year-

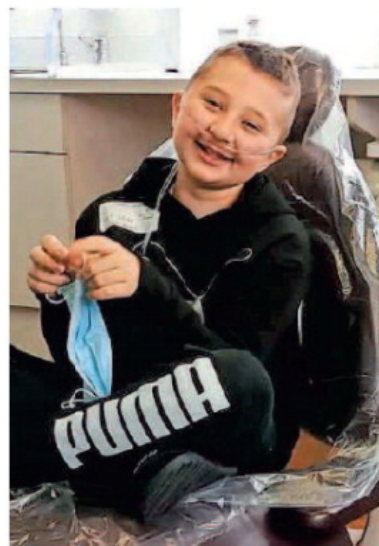
old carpenter, have found a way to keep Cody connected to his classmates, friends and family in Michigan as the family operates from two bases.

"If it wasn't for distance learning, I would have had to have pulled him from school," Shannon said.

In Texas, Cody partakes in distance learning under the supervision of Shannon as he recovers from his transplant. In Michigan, the Woods' other children are cared for by Shannon and Michael's mothers, accompanying their father once a month as he travels back and forth.

While thankful to have received the transplant, the Woods have been equally grateful that Cody has been able to remain in class, even as he receives care

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When not in class, Cody Wood works with a physical therapist and an occupational therapist as part of his recovery from his transplant surgery.

Student

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more than 1,200 miles away from his life and home.

“He has been able to communicate with his classmates and keep up with his school work,” Shannon. “Sixth grade is a big year — next year he will be transitioning to middle school. He has been adamant about keeping up with everybody.”

Coming up with a plan

Because of the complexity of his condition, the hospital in Houston was Cody’s only chance at receiving a transplant.

But even as they navigated the complicated healthcare plan needed to address his case, Cody and the Woods wanted to maintain as normal a life as possible. And that meant staying on pace with his classmates as best he could.

With school already on remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Woods were able to rely on Cody’s Chromebook and online learning lessons as he and Shannon traveled back and forth to Houston for preoperative testings and screenings.

Shannon and Michael were told that the wait for a double lung transplant of someone Cody’s age could be long. And once he was on the list, he would need to be close to the hospital for the actual surgery and the months-long recovery and rehabilitation process.

The Woods knew at some point in-person classes would resume, though. And Cody didn’t want to miss out on learning, which he loves, according to Shannon.

So in December, the Woods approached the district about whether it would be possible to keep Cody in his class even when students returned to campus and he could not.

The pandemic is extremely concerning, Shannon said. Even if he was home and schools were back in session, Cody wouldn’t be able to sit in a classroom.

“He will forever have to wear a mask and be cautious in public,” she added.

Shannon said the district, Cody’s teacher, Denise Wilson, and Supt. Julie Everly quickly worked with her family to get a plan in place.

“Raisinville and the staff and the district have been a complete blessing — they’re a godsend,” Shannon said. “They have been very supportive.”

Everly said the Woods’ story is a reminder of the importance of educators’ work over the last year.

“Their story of faith, loyalty, love and strength truly brings pause and puts our entire pandemic experience into an important and new perspective,” she said.

Getting the call

In January, Michael and Shannon traveled to Houston with Cody. Michael went with the intent to get his wife and son settled while they awaited a donation. Finding a residence about an hour from the hospital, Cody began physical therapy and screenings in preparation for the day when he would be a compatible match for a donor.

And while he settled into his new environment, he remained in class, taking part in exercises and conversing with Wilson and his friends back home in Michigan.

During a pre-op physical therapy appointment days after arriving in Texas, though, Cody had trouble breathing and was later admitted to the hospital.

Once Cody was stable, Michael returned home to care for Hayden, a freshman at Monroe High School, and Megan, a fifth grader, and Shelby, who is in the third grade. Shannon said it had been two days since Michael had been back in Michigan when he called to let her and Cody know they would have to take the family’s cat to the vet.

Cody loves the cat fiercely, Shannon said, and was anxious about being so far away from him.

Sitting in Cody's hospital room, Shannon's phone rang minutes after getting off a call with Michael. She assumed he was calling back to offer another update on the family pet.

It was a doctor. A pair of lungs matching Cody's profile were available and were en route to the hospital.

Through her tears, Shannon turned to Cody to let him know the news.

"Thank God — I thought you were about to tell me something was wrong with the cat," he said to Shannon.

The transplant took place February 1, making Cody the first double lung transplant in the U.S. this year. After the 16-hour operation, Cody remained in the hospital through March 12. He was later readmitted April 2 due to a buildup of fluid in his lungs. He continues to receive outpatient care. He will remain in Texas until this summer.

In class

A typical day for Cody and his mom consists of doctor appointments, lab tests, therapy and school.

They're staying about an hour from the hospital in Houston and wake up early many days to travel for meetings with members of Cody's transplant team.

Several days a week, he works with a physical therapist and an occupational therapist.

The rest of his day is spent taking classes like the rest of his peers. He logs into Zoom and interacts with classmates or his teacher.

"I am so proud of him — he takes charge of his lessons and is very motivated,"

Wilson said. "I told him I want him to do what he can. Any chance he gets to do work, he takes advantage of those opportunities."

Cody's favorite subject is writing. He also enjoys anything that lets him be creative, he said.

"Ms. Wilson knows I still go to the hospital most days, so she understands when I'm not in Zoom," Cody said. "But if I ever need her help, she is always around to help me with things I might have missed."

He completes his homework and follows along online just like everyone else, Shannon said.

"We were worried about it would emotionally affect him," Shannon said. "To be able to see his classmates and have a learning experience — it helps him feel like a normal kid."

The ability to connect is especially important as Cody and Shannon are away from home.

In Michigan, Cody is used to sharing a space with five other people. Being in Texas can feel isolating, Shannon said.

"We were worried about how he would handle being away. At home — it's loud and crazy. (In Texas), it can be quiet and lonely," Shannon said. "But then he logs and he can see his friends. It gives him a normal routine in a crazy time and situation."

Distance learning has also been helpful for when Cody's siblings come to visit.

They too are able to bring their Chromebooks and complete their assignments while seeing their brother and mother.

"My kids are able to bring their technology and still be able to attend school," Shannon said. "It's been positive — for my kids at and away from home. ... It's been helpful for our family."



Cody Wood will remain in Texas for several months as he recovers from his surgery. COURTESY PHOTOS



When not in class, Cody Wood works with a physical therapist and an occupational therapist as part of his recovery from his transplant surgery.