

classmate returns to school, via vide

mia has kept D.J. Carlinio at home much of the time. Thanks to videoconferencing, he's back.

Christopher Merrill

UTHER SUBURBAN STAFF

MARLBOROUGH — It is unwise conventional third-grade classroom with a pastel-colored carpet of the alphabet, and a man and blue octagonal table with 11 tin cans of crayons and a television monitor. The first and third grade students are sitting on the floor, and the teacher is standing at the front of the room. The students are looking at the television monitor. The teacher is talking to the students about the alphabet and the octagonal table.

"It's just the most wonderful thing," said Heather Carlino, who has two other children. "I'm sure people will be banging down the door for this, not just oncological kids, but those with ... anything that keeps them out of school."

For D.J., it started with a huge lymph node and a high fever in October 1997; a day later, he was diagnosed and missed the rest of first grade.

He returned for second grade, but a relapse last summer forced him back into chemotherapy, radiation and, ultimately, a bone marrow transplant, forcing him to sit out this school year as well.

Though he was thankful to be released from the hospital in time for the holidays, his weakened immune system prevents much contact with the outside world.

"It was torture," he said, sitting on his back porch in East Marlborough Township, buried deeply in a hooded sweatshirt and knit cap, battling chills related to the transplant, "because it was close to Christmas and we couldn't go to the stores to see what was out there."

Not only was he sequestered in his home, he also can have only a few occasional visitors. And those who do come over have to wear surgical masks, including his daily tutor.

"He misses all the interaction with his friends, learning from other kids, group projects," Heather Carlino said. "It's very boring, just worksheets upon worksheets."

She said one of the social workers at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia mentioned the work the Seidmans were doing.

On a recent afternoon, Heather Carlino exhibited the spirited resilience that is largely responsible for bringing this technology to her son. "This is just the most wonderful thing," said Heather Carlino, who has two other children. "I'm sure people will be banging down the door for this, not just oncological kids, but those with ... anything that keeps them out of school."

For D.J., it started with a huge lymph node and a high fever in October 1997; a day later, he was diagnosed and missed the rest of first grade.

He returned for second grade, but a relapse last summer forced him back into chemotherapy, radiation and, ultimately, a bone marrow transplant, forcing him to sit out this school year as well.

Though he was thankful to be released from the hospital in time for the holidays, his weakened immune system prevents much contact with the outside world.

"It was torture," he said, sitting on his back porch in East Marlborough Township, buried deeply in a hooded sweatshirt and knit cap, battling chills related to the transplant, "because it was close to Christmas and we couldn't go to the stores to see what was out there."

Not only was he sequestered in his home, he also can have only a few occasional visitors. And those who do come over have to wear surgical masks, including his daily tutor.

"He misses all the interaction with his friends, learning from other kids, group projects," Heather Carlino said. "It's very boring, just worksheets upon worksheets."

She said one of the social workers at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia mentioned the work the Seidmans were doing.

Seidman said the idea came to him while thinking about starting a charter school and about ways to



A CHILD'S WORLD

Education/Child Care Centers 949-88



JOHN SLAVIN / INQUIRER Staff

Ron and Andrea Seidman created the foundation that provides the equipment. They lost their 7-year-old daughter to brain cancer.

have children attend it from around the country. "It occurred to me: Why not have sick kids conferred into their schools?"

During the experimental phase with the Carlinos, the foundation is loaning the equipment to both the school and the Carlinio family.

"We're hoping the districts will provide the equipment for the schools and then we can focus on the families," he said. "The schools can use the equipment for a host of other learning applications, communicating with other districts, other cultures."

The equipment costs about \$27,000, but districts could lease it for about \$1,000 a month, Seidman said. School officials said they pay \$35 per hour for home tutoring (about \$700 a month); the cost varies per district.

Still, several education, health and distance learning experts say few families are making use of the technology for this purpose.

"It's a pretty novel idea," said Jim Bradshaw, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Education. "...Most distance learning occurs in a classroom to classroom, but not home to classroom."

time thinking about his distraught mother said, "which is tant for the pain, the itcha sea ... whatever."

In Seidman's assessment of family, school is a child's one priority.

And pediatric health care professionals agree that more is than maintaining academic

According to Anne Kazak, director of psychology at Children's Hospital, resuming regular activities is a significant part of recovery, especially for children.

"One of the most important things is getting the child back to school. They're doing things at different ages, cognitively, socially, with emotions, identifying strengths," she said. "An emphasis goes on in the context of going back to school."

Though most ill children and encouraged to return to school as soon as possible, Kazak says as many as D.J.'s are well suited to this technology.

"Bone marrow transplant is the more intensive treatment she said. "That [video conferencing] would be a good exam way to keep a child like t