

# A little car runs on electricity and caring

## Arlington sixth-graders build vehicles for young kids with special needs

BY HARRISON SMITH

Middle-schoolers don't usually play with toy cars. But in a classroom in Arlington, a group of sixth-graders gather around a plastic Lightning McQueen car, ready to rev it up.

The students not here to play with it, exactly, but to figure out how it works — and prepare the car for a driver who needs it.

Eight students from Gunston Middle School are rewiring the battery-powered car as part of GoBabyGo, a worldwide effort to help kids with disabilities move and play. The project helps kids around age 3 who have trouble moving on their own and who wouldn't be able to drive the cars otherwise, whether because they can't hit the accelerator or can't sit securely.

"Other kids on the playground can say, 'That's a cool car; that's not a wheelchair!'" says Skye Donovan, chairwoman of the physical therapy department at Marymount University. Donovan is teaching the students how to rewire electrical circuits with the help of their science teacher, Luzdary Chamorro.

Cole Galloway, a physical therapy professor at the University of Delaware and a friend of Donovan's, co-founded GoBabyGo in 2006. He has provided instructional materials and students make these to help teachers and students make these cars so that kids around the world can feel what it's like to move quickly on their own.

The Gunston students are modifying

tion, a pre-kindergarten program for Arlington students with disabilities.

Gunston parents donated money to buy the cars, which cost about \$200 each, including modifications.

"There's a little button on the steering wheel that's really hard to push," says Donovan, referring to the car's accelerator. "We can replace it with this big red button that can go anywhere. If the child's had a stroke and can only move their arm a certain way, we'll put it [in a place where they can reach it]."

The students also add a kill switch, or emergency stopping device, to the back of the car for parents to use, along with a brace that keeps the driver from falling out.

"It's a cool way to help kids with disabilities get around," says Kylie Wilson, 11, who uses a drill to attach a brace made of plastic pipes to the back of the second car. "And it's a cool way to get involved with your friends."

It takes about 2½ hours to do the first car, but Donovan says that once students learn the process they can finish a car in about an hour. Next week, they'll teach other Gunston students how it's done as part of an after-school science club.

For now, though, they're stuck trying to figure out the wiring of the first McQueen car Parker Friedl, 11, diagrams its red and black wires in a pencil drawing to try and figure out what wire goes where.

"We got it!" she yells as the car lurches into motion. It turns out one of the connections was loose.

But there's just one problem: The car moves only backward. Friedl and her crew let out a groan before getting back to work. It'll take just a simple fix — more tweaking with the wires on the car's big red "go" button — but soon the car will be ready for an Integration Station student



BEN STANSALL/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE VIA GETTY IMAGES

### From left, the United States' Madison Kocian, Russia's Daria Spiridonova and Viktoria Komova and China's Fan Yilin show medals.

## A four-way tie for first in gymnastics

Four gymnasts made history Saturday at the world championships, tying for gold in the uneven bars when the judges awarded each the same score.

China's Fan Yilin, Russia's Viktoria Komova and Daria Spiridonova, and Madison Kocian of the United States shared the top of the podium at the awards ceremony in Glasgow, Scotland. "Guess they couldn't decide which routine was the best," Kocian said with a laugh. "I don't know."

There are no tiebreakers during world meets. Organizers were forced to improvise during the ceremony, with the flags of all three countries being walked onto the floor rather than being raised to the rafters because the rigging couldn't accommodate four flags at the same height.

The Chinese, Russian and U.S. national anthems were played one after the other, with the athletes kind of giggling in a moment that was weird, awkward and memorable.

"I've never seen that before," said Olympic champion Gabby Douglas, who finished just outside the tie. "I was just like, really judges? Come on now!"



PHOTOS BY HARRISON SMITH/THE WASHINGTON POST

TOP: Eleven-year-old Cooper Donovan attaches a brace to make Gunston Middle School's Lightning McQueen car safer for its future driver, a child with Down syndrome. ABOVE: Lella Greene and Abigail Herrada,