

KICKER - Barrington physical therapists develop standing desk kit, foot rest for students

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“Students, please be seated” may soon be an outdated phrase.

Former Barrington School District 220 physical therapists Kathy Spinabella and Robin Singer are certainly making it feel that way — they’ve come up with the Standing Desk Conversion Kit and FootFidget Foot Rest for students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and those who are antsy in general.

Functioning just as its name suggests, the first patent pending product converts a standard classroom desk into a standing desk for those students who have difficulty sitting still or for those who seem to “melt” in their chair.

The FootFidget Foot Rest, which is now patented, is attached or laid at the bottom of a standing or sitting desk for students to push on as they learn, offering them a sort of release that they might otherwise be getting from walking or moving around.

Spinabella estimates that their products are used in hundreds of school districts around the country and overseas.

“So many students are constantly being reprimanded by their teachers to stop fidgeting,” Spinabella said. “While standing won’t stop the whole problem, it’s going to make things much better.”

Researchers at the University of Puget Sound studied the impact of the Standing Desk Conversion Kit and the FootFidget Foot Rest on a classroom of fourth graders and found the tools “significantly increased the student’s engagement in their school work.”

Singer said the standing desks and FootFidget keeps students in the classroom, too.

“Kids intuitively know that they need to get up and move, and the only way they can do that without getting in trouble for being mobile in the classroom is to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water,” Singer said.

By the time these students get back to the classroom and settle down, they have a hard time catching up, they can become frustrated and might spend the rest of their class time daydreaming or doing something else, Singer said.

“When we put the kids in the standing desks, they didn’t have to leave the room as much to do that,” she said.

The genesis of their idea came after Connie Simon, District 220’s assistant superintendent for special services, emailed them a link to an article about a class using standing desks as part of an

obesity study.

“She asked us what we thought, and the minute we saw it, we knew it was going to be fantastic for kids who had trouble sitting still,” Spinabella said. “She let us buy a few, and they were super successful.”

The only problem was the cost at about \$300-\$500 each.

Spinabella’s husband, an engineer, helped her and Singer design a kit that would transform students’ regular desks at a more reasonable price, about \$105 with FootFidget included.

The new problem: Getting more teachers and schools on board with standing desks.

“It’s not just trying to provide a product — it’s trying to teach and educate, especially teachers, as well as occupational therapists, about standing and fidgeting, and I think that’s been the biggest challenge,” Singer said. “You are really trying to teach people about a whole new concept of classroom positioning.”

Spinabella and Singer say that they understand some parents’ reservations. Maybe they are worried about how the desk or fidget device might cause their student to stand out in an undesirable way.

But Singer said they should consider weighing the pros with the cons — if it’s between helping their child get more out of class time and looking different at a standing desk, perhaps they should give the desks a try.

Spinabella noted that the standing desks aren’t usually teachers’ first course of action with antsy students.

“They try various other things that aren’t as obvious, first,” Spinabella said. “This is just another intervention that they can try along the way.”

Some teachers at District 220 give a particular student a standing desk and a sitting desk right next to each other, in case they want to switch back and forth.

Other teachers will place a few standing desks in the back of a classroom. They allow any student to use them at their leisure.

Bernadette Kroll, a special education teacher at Arnett C. Lines Elementary School, said that two of her four students use standing desks and FootFidgets.

“If they want, they can choose to move standing up or they can sit on a stool at the desk and fidget,” Kroll said. “It’s just allowed them to have some movement, which has allowed them to concentrate — they are getting their work done.”

Even when she was a resource teacher at another school in the district, Kroll said that the

standing desks served the whole classroom.

“We’d have them in the back of the room for kids that needed them, or we’d give the kids a choice of which desk they wanted to work on, so they could choose which desk they needed to learn best,” Kroll said.

The benefits of standing and fidgeting while working aren’t limited to students.

Spinabella said that while their product was slow to gain traction at first, its become more popular over the past year-and-a-half as the benefits of standing desks and fidgets for one’s feet have become more accepted in mainstream educational communities and among working adults.

More adults are, in fact, catching on. News outlets have approached the topic recently, sharing how people are either doing standing desks “all wrong,” how to make one’s own standing desk, how it can help one’s posture and fight obesity.

Treadmill desks are now a thing, too.

Spinabella and Singer said that they are working on getting into the market for adults too, but right now, their focus is classrooms.

For more information, go to www.classroomseatingsolutions.com.

- **Caption:** Kathy Spinabella and Robin Singer | Provided Standing Desk Conversion Kit with FootFidget. There is a regular classroom desk with longer legs and the FootFidget at the bottom. | Provided
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