

The Courier-News Schools

1. [Subscribe](#)
2. [Submit News](#)
3. [Subscribe to Newsletter](#)

4. **Suzanne Baker**
5. subaker@tribpub.com
6. Jan. 20, 2015 2:59 p.m.

Share:

Desk tools help kids focus in the classroom



The FootFidget allows fidgety students to swing their feet while concentrating on their schoolwork. I Submitted

1.



The Standing Desk Conversion Desk gives schools the option to switch existing desks into a standing desk. It is one of the tools sold by Classroom Seating Solutions to help students focus. Another piece, the FootFidget, gives fidgety students to chance to swing their feet while concentrating on their schoolwork. I Submitted

2.



The FootFidget allows fidgety students to swing their feet while concentrating on their schoolwork. I Submitted

3.



The FootFidget allows fidgety students to swing their feet while concentrating on their schoolwork. I Submitted

4.



The Standing Desk Conversion Desk gives schools the option to switch existing desks into a standing desk. It is one of the tools sold by Classroom Seating Solutions to help students focus. Another piece, the FootFidget, gives fidgety students to chance to swing their feet while concentrating on their schoolwork. I Submitted

Suzanne Baker

subaker@tribpub.com
Jan. 20 2:59 p.m.

The opportunity to run around outside and burn energy during the winter can be limited for elementary students. Without a few outlets, pupils often find it difficult to sit still in a classroom and concentrate on learning.

For fidgety kids, sitting still can be even more challenging. So many teachers are turning to tools such as standing desks and fidget bands that allow kids to burn energy without disrupting the class.

In Carmela Balice's fifth and sixth-grade dual language class at Otter Creek Elementary in Elgin, sometimes just standing up for a while during the school day can help a student refocus. She has a standing desk at the back of her classroom for all her students to use.

"All of my students benefit from it," Balice said.

"I leave it in the back of my room," she said. "At the beginning of the year, I go over rules and safety of using the desk, and then it stays there for the rest of year.

"Students are more than welcome to use the standing desk whenever they feel they need to refocus or just need a change of scenery. I thought it would cause issues among students, have to share the desk, but I have never had any students argue about using it.

"We discuss what's an appropriate amount of time to use the desk and why we use it. I feel they have learned more about self-monitoring and have gained control of their learning. It helps many students refocus throughout the day."

In Naperville, students who can't sit still in Naper Elementary can choose an adjustable-height desk that allows them to decide how they want to learn. They can stand, sit on a stool, or balance and move their feet on a swinging FootFidget.

Three standing desks in the back of a classroom are rotated between the more active students.

People who worked standing

Otter Creek Elementary and Naper Elementary are just two of the schools across the country embracing a mindset that allows students the freedom to move in a fidget-friendly environment without detracting from learning.

Tools like standing desks and fidget bands are nothing new.

For more than a decade, educators have used yoga balls and rocking stools as tools as a means to help students, particularly those with special needs, focus in the classroom.

A study published in 2003 in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy concluded that students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHA) showed improved behavior and could write more words clearly when they sat on therapy balls.

Standing desks themselves have been around for hundreds of years.

Leonardo DaVinci, Ernest Hemingway, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Winston Churchill were known for their preference to stand while working.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, standing desks were considered as a sign of prestige and wealth. The same can be said of today in the Silicon Valley where standing while working is popular with tech startups.

And technology that improves the workplace often trickles down to the classroom.

With prices for standing desk running between \$300 and \$500, the cost often deters teachers from giving the desks a try in their classrooms. The other problem is that standing desks often look different from the other desks in the classroom.

That's why former Barrington School District 220 physical therapists Kathy Spinabella and Robin Singer came up with a plan to create a kit that can extend the height of existing desks. Not only is the price less because existing furniture is used, the standing desks looks like a taller version of the other desks in the classroom.

Always looking for ways to help special needs students who weren't able to sit still, the two women noticed how students' concentration improved just by letting kids stand or move their feet to release extra energy.

Spinabella said with the help of her engineer husband, she was able to build a kit that could be added to any standard desk to make it tall enough for students to stand behind.

In addition to that, the women also developed the Foot Fidget, a device that straps to the four legs of a desk and allows kids to rock their feet. While similar devices desk pedals can be noisy, Spinabella said her Foot Fidget is quiet and less invasive.

She said it was critical her products would not disrupt learning in the classroom and the cost was low enough for schools on tight budgets, like those in Elgin, Round Lake and North Chicago, to afford them.

The Standing Desk Conversion Kit and the FootFidget Foot Rest cost \$104.99.

Research, anecdotal evidence

So far, studies related to standing desks have focused on reducing childhood obesity and the amount of time kids were actively engaged in learning. Those studies showed students burned more energy and were able to stay on task longer.

Now researchers from Texas A&M University are expanding their studies to see if standing improves student knowledge through test scores.

At the University of Puget Sound, researchers studied Spinabella's products used in a classroom of fourth-graders. That study found that both the standing desk and FootFidget provided positive classroom behaviors in children with sensory processing difficulties and were an effective method of increasing attention in the average student.

Spinabella said while she's still waiting for empirical data to prove student attention is better or test scores are higher, she knows teachers love the devices from the stories she's heard.

Beyond the traditional classroom, Spinabella said her tools are being used in gifted classrooms and as work stations in autism rooms.

"I love the standing desk, so many students use it during the school day. It is available to anyone who needs a break or movement," said Mary Kay Hoch, a sixth-grade teacher at Otter Creek.

Spinabella urges parents look at the tools available to students, particularly those with special needs. "These things exist. There are minimal things than can be done to help students," she said.