

"Fit" desks keep students moving, learning

By Karen Ann Cullotta, Chicago Tribune

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ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, Ill. — For years, students were told to “sit still and stop fidgeting,” but that has changed with the addition of elliptical machines to classrooms at an elementary school here.

On a recent morning in Christina Philo’s fifth-grade classroom, at Windsor Elementary School, Adam Boesen, 10, hopped aboard, not during his P.E. class, but while participating in silent reading time.

“It helps me concentrate,” said Adam, who kept up a brisk pace on the elliptical, while engrossed in a book by Louis Sachar.

I got my homework done early the other day,” added classmate Joshua Grzesiak, 10, who said the array of so-called fit workstations also helps him to stay focused.

“When I’m on the elliptical, I feel the opposite of distracted ... I’m more connected with what I’m learning than when I’m just sitting,” Joshua said.

Welcome to Windsor’s new fit classrooms, where after researching various educational methods intended to engage students in active learning, Principal Shelley Fabrizio has encouraged her staff of kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers to allow students to bike, bounce and even pedal while learning.

“We all know that kids love to move, so we didn’t want to have our students sitting all day long,” said Fabrizio, who partnered with Assistant Principal Virginia Hiltz to create a program with standing desks, stationary bike and elliptical desks and a seemingly Willy Wonka-esque, rainbow-hued stool called an Ergo chair.

Hiltz said the collection of roughly \$3,635 fit workstations were rotated throughout the school’s classrooms last spring to allow every student the opportunity to experiment with at least one piece of equipment. Students were then surveyed so teachers could learn which particular work stations were most popular.

“Some of the pieces were a huge hit, and others weren’t as popular,” Hiltz said. “But the bottom line is that students loved the chance to test them out. Many even said they were able to concentrate and focus more on academics while using the equipment, and that’s what we were after.”

With the survey results showing that the Ergo chairs were a favorite of a majority of students, officials used funding from the school’s PTA to purchase six additional chairs, all of which appeared to be happily occupied during a recent visit to several classrooms.

“So many kids have attention needs, and they all have different approaches to learning,” Hiltz said, adding that students can choose whether to use a fit workstation or stay seated at a traditional table or desk.

“I started out with standing desks, one per classroom,” Hiltz said, “and the kids and teachers just loved them ... the teachers wanted some for themselves. And the program just morphed from there.”

Philo said that when the new fit workstations first arrived in her classroom, she was not surprised that her students reacted enthusiastically.

“I knew the kids would be excited and wild, and they all ran over to the elliptical,” Philo said. “So I created a schedule for each piece of equipment that lists all of my students’ names, and when everyone has had a turn, it starts over again.

“For my more active students, being able to stand while they learn is especially important,” Philo said. “Before, they would be wandering the room and not as focused, but now, these new desks let them work where they want to work.”

On the back of this article:

- **Give three (3) pieces of evidence from the text that demonstrate “fit workstations” can help students concentrate.**
- **Using evidence from the text, as well as your own background knowledge and experience, argue for or against Springville High School adding “fit workstations” to your classrooms.**