

News Update

A new twist on concentration: Standing while you work

Standing desks are now used in hundreds of schools nationwide

By:

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Using standing desks may help students burn more calories and pay more attention than using traditional desks, studies show.

A growing workplace health trend is moving to classrooms: More schools are adding standing desks as a tool to increase alertness and combat childhood obesity.

In 2012, more than one-third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "One of the main battles we fight today is technology-induced inactivity—we're able to just sit in front of a screen for most of our waking hours, and as a result people have become very sedentary compared to past decades," says Mark Benden, an associate professor at Texas A&M who researches classroom ergonomics and childhood obesity.

This is especially a problem for obese children, who have an 85 percent chance of being obese as adults, he adds. "The time to get people used to being more active and less sedentary is childhood," Benden says.

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Standing desks are now used in hundreds of schools nationwide. Benden's research team examined the impact of these desks in a 2011 study of four central Texas fourth grade classrooms. Two classes were randomly selected to receive standing desks and stools for the school year, while the other two used standard desks. Arm bands were used to monitor students' calories over 10 days.

Students in standing-desk classrooms chose to stand for most of the class time, and expended 11 more calories per hour and about 300 more calories per week than those in the control group. The difference was even larger among overweight students, who burned about 23 more calories per hour and 575 more per week than did their seated peers.

Teachers said the desks had a positive impact on student behavior and classroom performance, and that students were more focused on schoolwork.

Starting a trend

Benden—whose study was funded by United Way and the CDC and was published in the *American Journal of Public Health*—says he expects standing desks to be more common in classrooms in the next three to five years, and for prices to drop as more companies enter the market.

These desks typically cost 20 to 50 percent more than traditional desks, or roughly \$100 per student. Standing desks are available from Ergotron, Stand2Learn, Safco and several other companies.

Principal Christina Richardson of Bryan Collegiate High School, part of Bryan ISD, volunteered her school of 380 students to participate in one of Benden's CDC-funded studies this past January. All teachers were offered standing desks for their classrooms, and 13 accepted.

Most students chose to stand instead of using the stool, Richardson says. "Teachers felt the kids were more alert," she adds. "The kids who would normally be slouched down, half-asleep or fidgeting in their chair were now standing up and paying attention."

Standing desks force teachers to adjust some classroom management techniques, Richardson says. For example, when students are sitting at traditional desks, teachers can see to the back of the room. With standing desks, some teachers need footstools in order to see their whole class.

The high school is requesting additional standing desks from Benden because more teachers want them this year, Richardson says.