

Students pedal their way to better education

By Shelby Harrell Staff Writer | Jan 15, 2014

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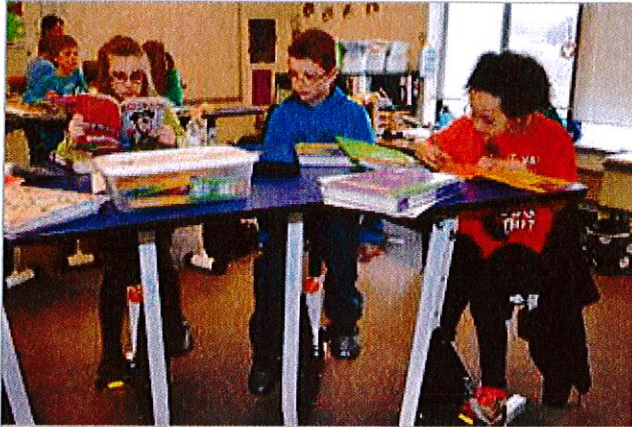


Photo by: Shelby Harrell

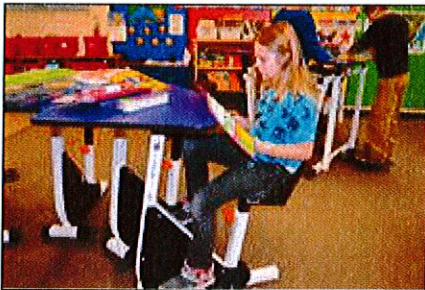
Junaluska Elementary School fourth-graders, Addison Boulay, Clay Burnette and Claire Golden read while pedaling at their new kinesthetic learning table in Amy Kilgore's class.

Classrooms at Junaluska Elementary School and Bethel Elementary School are putting a new spin on education now that their everyday learning includes kinesthetic learning tables.

While many people may not associate wiggling with classroom learning, more than a dozen movement learning tables and desks were purchased and placed in both Amy Kilgore's fourth-grade classroom at Junaluska and Laura Beth Gibson's first-grade classroom at Bethel.

Kinesthetic learning has been shown to improve students' attentiveness and focus through a steady range of motion that increases blood circulation and brain

Kinesthetic learning tables



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activity. This statement is proving true to both Gibson and Kilgore.

"I see a difference in behavior, probably because they get to release a lot of energy," Kilgore said about her class after observing them for a couple weeks. "Some students struggle to pay attention, and this really helps them. It keeps them focused for whatever reason."

In Kilgore's classroom are four horseshoe shaped tables with pedaling seats and a station that includes balance boards and wiggle boards for children to stand on.

"For me the tables are at a helpful height so it helps me work with small groups and makes it more accessible to the kids," Kilgore said.

Kilgore said her students' physical education teacher, Sharon Cagle, had also noticed an improvement.

"She said they were more cooperative," Kilgore said. "She thinks the movement they get here in class helps them focus."

In Gibson's class, her first-graders have more equipment that helps her 6-year-olds get their wiggles out.

Her four kinesthetic tables include pedal seats, wiggle seats that slide in all directions, and knee seats that lets students to wiggle on their knees.

"There's all kinds of different learners and wigglers, I think it just depends on how they wiggle and what keeps them occupied," Gibson said.

Gibson's first-graders have only had their new kinesthetic desks for less than a week due to school closings, but she already can tell a difference in their behavior.

"These kids are distracted easily by everything around them because they're so little — but they haven't been like that at all," Gibson said. "They seem to be doing better work and they're more excited to work. They are distracted with their legs and feet, but they pay attention at the same time."

Gibson also has regular sit down chairs in case her students get tired. She said she lets her students choose which machine they want to use each day.

"I don't have specific seats, so they go where they feel they do best," Gibson said. "They make the choice of where to sit who beside. Some really like the knee seat, and others will try different things out every day."

The machines were paid for by a Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) grant. Natalie Boone, assistant principal at Bethel Elementary School, said Haywood County received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education for a little over \$1 million.

Boone said the portion of the PEP grant that was eligible for the kinesthetic equipment covered enough for two classrooms. She said installing the tables cost about \$20,000-\$22,000 per classroom.

Boone was inspired to pursue kinesthetic learning tables after visiting another school that used them.

"I wanted learn what other counties in other parts of the country were doing," Boone said. "We saw these learning tables in a school in Charleston, and talked to other teachers to find out about them."

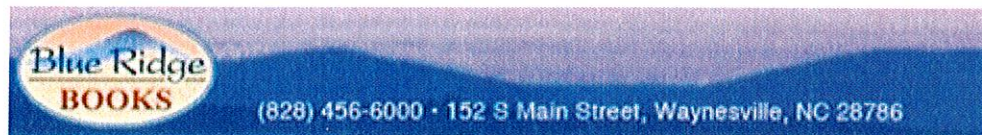
The equipment was installed just a couple days before Christmas break. Boone said the two teachers who received the new tables were chosen based on their flexibility.

"The two principals at the schools chose which teacher," Boone said, referring to Bethel Elementary Principal Jill Baker and Junaluska Elementary Principal Sherri Arrington. "They each picked a teacher they thought would be more open to this style of classroom."

Both Kilgore and Gibson agreed that more kinesthetic learning equipment could be beneficial in the future, but both are still learning about and observing the machines.

"Overall it's going to effect how well they learn, and I think it will make a huge difference in what they sustain," Gibson said. "I think we're going to see a whole lot of growth."

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Comments (1)

POSTED BY: BETH G. JOHNSON | Jan 15, 2014 14:05

These new moving-and-learning stations sound like a very good idea. The extra exercise could also help combat our obesity problem. I hope the school system will be able to find more funding to equip more classrooms. We should all be proud of the excellent quality of our Haywood County schools.