

To the Peace People,

We are writing to congratulate you, the Grade 4s and 5s, on your dedication to accessibility and inclusion within your school! Your student led audit to determine accessibility improvements, and your questionnaires to the classroom teachers to gather information on inclusion tools, were commendable ideas.

We thought we would share some of our knowledge regarding alternative seating, and how it functions in the classroom. Alternative seating can take a number of different forms, from wobble chairs, to zuma rockers, to howda seats. These differ from typical classroom chairs in that they provide an increased level of sensory input.

Sensory input can come from our five external senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell), as well as the three internal senses (proprioception, vestibular, and interoception). Everyone, including adults, have different levels of tolerance or need for each sensation, which can impact our ability to best function in our environments.

When we think of these sensory needs, we often think of regulation, and subsequently, dysregulation. Regulation can be thought of as the ability to control our energy levels, emotions, and behaviours. Dysregulation happens when we are unable to do so, and our energy levels, emotions, and behaviours, do not match what is needed in our environment. Dysregulation can happen due to a myriad of factors, of which unmet sensory needs are one (others include stressful events, big emotions, and task demands).

Alternate seating provides an avenue for students to seek out vestibular sensory stimulation, which, in a broad sense, refers to balance, and an understanding of where our body is in space. These alternative seats allow for a student to move while sitting, which provides that increase in vestibular input that some of our students require for regulation, and therefore increases and supports concentration and engagement in the classroom.

From an ergonomic and postural consideration, alternative seating can also encourage proper sitting posture, reducing risks of muscle strain and fatigue. Proper trunk control is also a foundation of fine motor skills, and can encourage increased pencil control.

Alternative seating is a generally recommended tool that is easy to use, and benefits the student whenever they're using it. They provide both sensory support, in the form of vestibular input, and motor support, in the form of positioning and comfort – and we know that when we are able to meet students' needs, they are better able to regulate, attend, and engage in material. It is a tangible way that teachers can accommodate different learning styles, and it fosters an inclusive, supportive learning environment. Please speak to your teacher if there are any questions or concerns, or reach out to your schools occupational therapist for more information.

Sincerely,
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