

Local teachers are updating their classrooms' more traditional **seating** furniture to help students stay focused and more excited about working.

A glance online at DonorsChoose.org — a

website like GoFundMe where **teachers** can propose projects and seek the community's financial support for them — shows projects from several **teachers** with the Jefferson City Public Schools and Blair Oaks R-2 districts who want to give their students of all ages more classroom **seating** options beyond the traditional desks and chairs.

"This traditional school setup in which students sit for long periods does not work and is not effective for every student. I have found that flexible **seating** helps my students to focus on their learning," Haylee Rethman, a ninth-grade Blair Oaks High School Spanish teacher wrote in her projects' description.

Rethman asked for and got funding for two convertible sitting/standing desks.

"Having these also helps (her students) feel more alert and focused in class and allows for a great space for collaborative work between students," she added after her project was funded.

There's a variety of **seating** options and **seating** accessories **local teachers** on the crowdfunding website are looking into, including a "Learning Grid" **seating** carpet; exercise pedalers; "Wiggle Band" elastic seat bands; and several brands of "wobble chairs" and stools.

Pedal, wiggle, wobble — these are all words that seem to endorse students being able to move around.

"Sitting at a desk all day can be monotonous," first-grade teacher Emilee Henderson said Friday in her classroom at Thorpe Gordon Elementary School.

Henderson added the **seating** options she's given her students in the classroom — including a couch, child-sized picnic table, bucket seats and carpet spots — give them flexibility and a chance to spread out.

"They need to be allowed choice in their activities," she said.

"They don't get as restless as easy as often," she said of her students — she's had the different **seating** for all of the five years she's been a first-grade teacher at Thorpe Gordon, out of 6 1/2 years she's been there.

"It gets them really excited about being in the classroom," Cedar Hill Elementary School fifth-grade teacher Amy Backes said Friday in her classroom. Backes' students have options including some

exercise ball-like “orbs” she picked out at Five Below.

“I think a lot more (teachers) would jump on it if it wasn’t so expensive,” Backes said about the cost of trying **alternative seating** options — she also fundraised on DonorsChoose.org, and added, “I’ve put in a decent chunk of money” investing in her classroom furniture.

Current **alternative seating** projects listed on DonorsChoose.org range from \$350-\$800.

Backes also brought in a couch from home when her family got new furniture and has asked parents for any spare furniture they may have available.

She also thinks the **alternative seating** options help her students concentrate and make them more apt to want to work. She said she was the first teacher in her part of the building to try out different furniture, and she’s had options for her students for three years out of the five she’s been at Cedar Hill.

JCPS Chief of Learning Brian Shindorf said Wednesday he has noticed more **alternative seating**, especially at the elementary school level.

Shindorf said he doesn’t encourage or discourage it, but it’s about whatever works in a specific teacher’s classroom.

He added there has not been enough academic research yet to conclusively determine whether **alternative seating** positively affects students’ performance, but he said most classrooms seem to see social impacts, like students being more likely to collaborate.

“I think it helps me think a little more,” Cedar Hill student Elizabeth Miller said, a fifth-grader in Joane Cash’s class.

“I like every chair,” Winter Mead said in Henderson’s classroom.

Backes said the **seating** options have become something younger siblings of students in her class look forward to, and she would love for her own 2-year-old daughter to have the options when she’s in school.