

Understanding Standing Desks

1 An elementary school in Oregon introduced students to 40 adjustable standing desks. Teachers and students reacted in ways that were both anticipated and surprising. One teacher restructured her classroom by removing assigned seating and deliberately incorporating movement into lessons.

2 Students could choose where to work, whom to collaborate with, and whether to sit or stand. This freedom encouraged them to become more conscious of how their surroundings affected their focus and comfort.

3 The experience raises an important question: Are the benefits of standing desks significant enough for schools to adopt them widely?

4 Schools are increasingly exploring standing desks. Why? Many experts argue that standing is healthier than prolonged sitting. An article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in April 2019 reported that adolescents aged 12–19 sat 8.2 hours per day in 2016. Marc Hamilton, PhD, a professor at the University of Houston and an expert on the unhealthy effects of sedentary behavior, explains, “Our bodies were built to move all day. They weren’t built to be idle and stationary.”

5 Hamilton’s research shows that even small movements while standing can activate cellular processes vital for metabolism, skeletal health, and energy. Hamilton emphasizes, “You can’t impact those same cellular processes by going to a gym and doing artificial exercises for 30 minutes.”

6 Standing desks can reduce back and neck pain. A 2024 study involving 24 participants in South Korea found that standing provided postural relief. However, the complexity of the body’s responses leaves researchers debating the true health benefits of standing desks. For example, one study found that standing burns only eight additional calories per hour, which is relatively minor.

7 In a smaller study involving high school students, researchers used brain imaging to examine changes in neurocognitive functioning while standing. The findings showed improvements in executive functions such as time management, memory, comprehension, and organization.

8 Standing desks may particularly benefit students who need movement to concentrate. Furthermore, adjustable standing desks accommodate students of different heights and those with disabilities, creating a more inclusive learning environment. By allowing for adaptations, adjustable desks address diverse physical needs and preferences.

9 A small study published in 2011 in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that 70 percent of parents believed that standing desks improved classroom behavior, particularly in terms of focus.

10 According to a 2016 study, students appreciate being given the choice to sit or stand. However, teachers have expressed concern that the ease of moving around can create classroom management problems. Some teachers noted that students often revert to old habits once the novelty of standing desks wears off. Students' attention levels seem to taper off.

11 In another study, prolonged standing led to issues such as leg and foot pain. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work cautions that standing for more than four hours a day can cause lower back pain and fatigue, while even two hours of continuous standing may result in discomfort.

12 Mark Benden, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health at the Texas A&M School of Public Health. To counter these problems with standing too much, he and his team enhanced the standing desk design by creating a "stand-biased" desk. This updated version minimizes back strain and leg tension by incorporating a footrest and providing a tall stool. Students can change their positions or perch comfortably at will. "Sit less, move more," Benden emphasized. "That's our message."

13 A year-long study of 282 second, third, and fourth graders suggested that standing desks improve academic engagement. Benden's study found that students using stand-biased desks scored higher academically. "Considerable research indicates that academic behavioral engagement is the most important contributor to student achievement," commented Benden. "Simply put, we think better on our feet than in our seat."

14 Also, his 2016 study found "hard data" that elementary students who stood "burned 15 percent more calories . . . than students at traditional desks," over a two-year period. Students slowed the average increase of their body mass index, a key indicator of obesity, by 5.24 percentile points, even accounting for normal growth.

15 More research is needed to determine the success of standing desks for teens. What are the long-term consequences? Are standing desks equally effective in workplaces and other adult settings? Right now, are standing desks in schools improving health and concentration or causing discomfort and distraction?

Read “Understanding Standing Desks.”

Consider standing desks and conventional sitting desks at school. Write a multi-paragraph argumentative essay in which you argue whether sitting or standing is better for students and why.

Use details from the passage to support your argumentative essay.

Remember to —

- clearly state your argument
- organize your writing
- develop your ideas in detail
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar

Use the space provided to write your argumentative essay.