



## NH Healthy Lives

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## Moving and Learning In Jim Hansen's Fifth-Grade Classroom

When you walk into Jim Hansen's fifth-grade classroom, you immediately realize that it functions quite differently from most. Students are sitting, standing, moving, balancing, and one student is even riding a stationary bicycle.

When Jim is asked why he has worked so hard to create such a physically active classroom, he replies, "I know that I do my best thinking on my bicycle after work. It's the perfect way to process each day's challenges and think of ways I can teach more effectively the next day. The ideas and the creativity just seem to flow, and I knew being active would help the student be creative, too."



Jim Hansen (left)  
Deanna Lavoie (right)



Fitnex X5 Kids Bike

One of the changes Jim made first was to add a kids-sized stationary bicycle. Jim learned of the bikes from a friend in Canada, where the bikes are built. Jim loved the fact that the bikes were kid-sized, extremely sturdy, and whisper-quiet. The bikes were very popular in Canada, with classrooms from Vancouver to Toronto using them. Supporters of the bikes in Canada say that the bikes have helped students with their concentration, memory, and overall engagement in the learning process. They also shared that the bikes are a great way to have helped kids burn off some of the excess energy that kids are always bound to have.

When Jim asks a nearby student why she likes being able to ride the bike during class time, she replies, "it just helps me to relax a bit and not have so much stress." Jim asks another student and he replies, "The bike helps me to be able to focus and do my work better."

"Not all the kids feel the need to get on the bike every day, but it's there if they need it. The kids that need to ride it to improve their focus or to avoid sitting gravitate to it instinctively – it's never been a big drain on my time to get kids on or off the bike," Jim says.

Jim tells the story of one student, who was having a lot of anxiety before taking tests. Jim and the student's parents were trying a variety of ways to help the student be less anxious and weren't having much success. Jim then asked the student to try getting on the bike before taking a test to see if it would help. "The student really felt a lot less anxiety while taking the test after riding the bike for a while, much less anxiety than with all the other strategies we had tried," Jim remembers.

Overall, Jim sees the bikes, the standing desks, the under-the-desk exercise bands, and posting math lessons on the walls so kids can move around while completing the problems, as helping his students sit less.

“Sitting for prolonged periods of time just isn’t good for you,” Jim says, “So we try as many ways as we can to get students up and moving. If we create movement opportunities, we know we can help them improve their concentration, help them focus on their work, and improve their self-regulation skills.”



Under-the-desk  
Elastic Bands



Under-the Desk Cycles

Deanna Lavoie has been able to purchase three additional bikes through a grant from the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, a Jump Rope for Heart gift certificate the school earned, and through a donation from the school’s Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Deanna was also able to purchase ten under-the-desk cycles. “The under-the-desk cycles tended to slide, so we placed them against the wall with a chair for kids to sit in or have students use them as arm cycles on a table,” says Deanna.

Susan Carr, second-grade teacher at New Searles Elementary, was willing to take one of the three new Fitnexus bikes for her classroom, though she did have some reservations.

“I know that I relieve stress through physical activity, and I saw another teacher using both the Fitnexus bikes and the under-the-desk pedals so I wanted to give them a try. I was concerned about how much classroom management the equipment would take on my part, but I’ve been pleasantly surprised that it has been much less than I expected,” Susan explains.

Susan has even recognized some patterns such as some students needing to get on the bike first thing in the morning, whereas some students really like to ride during instruction time or right after lunch. “Several students like to get on the bike during instruction time and it really seems to help them focus. The bike is so quiet that it really hasn’t been a problem,” Susan says.

When asked for any advice he would give to teachers thinking about adding classroom bikes or other types of active classroom equipment, Jim replies, “Just do it, but don’t make it available only to those students you might consider ‘hyperactive.’ The quietest child that never gets in trouble may very well be the most stressed student in your class and might need to ride the bike to help with that stress.”

As for raising funds for these types of equipment for the classroom, Jim recommends [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org), which is a website that specifically looks to help teachers and classrooms get funding for special projects.



Standing Desk with  
Balance Board

Deanna Lavoie has registered New Searles Elementary for the Reebok “Boks Program,” that provides free exercise equipment to schools if the schools agree to create exercise opportunities both before and after school. For more on the Boks program, visit [www.bokskids.org](http://www.bokskids.org).

This story was written as a part of collaboration between staff at New Searles Elementary School and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services. For more information, please contact Scot Foster ([Scot.Foster@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:Scot.Foster@dhhs.nh.gov)), Jim Hansen ([hansenj@nashua.edu](mailto:hansenj@nashua.edu)), or Deanna Lavoie at ([lavoiede@nashua.edu](mailto:lavoiede@nashua.edu)).