



## Chair Affair: An Exploration of Classroom Seating Alternatives

[Half of adults](#) in the industrialized world complain of back pain or discomfort, and the majority of these issues may be attributed to subpar seat design. With everything in the traditional classroom ripe for technological advancements, schools are exploring ways to improve results through classroom furniture. There is agreement in the scientific community that [prolonged sitting takes a toll on the spine](#), so the education industry is slowly responding by injecting more movement into the school day. However, for the times students must sit, numerous interesting alternatives to the classroom desk and chair combo have emerged. How do you separate the fads from the true fixes? Learn more below.

### Stability Ball

Stability balls (also known as Swiss balls, exercise balls, or balance balls) are large rubber balls filled with air that originated as therapeutic exercise tools. In recent years, they've debuted as a chair alternative, either propped in a special stand or just held in place by a person's weight.

**Upside:** Fitness magazines laud the balls as a way for people to engage in trunk muscle activation to hold their balance and to burn extra calories by engaging in "dynamic sitting." With childhood obesity rates continuing to grow, many school leaders relish the potential opportunity to combat this during class. There may also be an extra layer of usefulness in the classroom as a way for students to fidget or release extra energy by moving slightly on the ball during class.

**Downside:** While the popularity of exercise balls as seating alternatives continues to increase, [numerous studies](#) show that the use of a ball does not actually increase core muscle activation while also not providing spine support. As for the additional calorie burn associated with stability balls, a [research review](#) shows this is minimal at best. There is, of course, a risk to giving the balls to students of a certain age as children may fall backward or sideways off the ball.

### Ergo seats

The Ergo seat compresses slightly and allows for small movements forward, back, and side-to-side. It's a new type of seating concept that combines active seating with a unique design. It comes in variety of colors and can add a pop of color and fun to any classroom. Proponents suggest it has benefits similar to the stability ball, so it stands to reason some of the same risks may be present as well.

### Collaborative or Flexible Seating

Collaborative seating arrangements are more of a category than a type of seating. These arrangements are also reflective of a shift in classroom dynamics away from lecture-only lessons to small group projects that require collaboration and cooperation.

**Upside:** Group work (done properly) teaches numerous valuable skills, including communication, delegation, peer and self-assessment, and creation of a production schedule. Collaborative seating arrangements make it easier for students to get into groups and share a task or project without wasting classroom time to rearrange desks. There is also a lot of opportunity to get creative with [collaborative workspaces](#), including modular soft seating (cushions, bean bags, and floor seating), tables with built-in technology such as a shared touch screen or doc cam, nesting tables, and much more.

**Downside:** Collaborative seating may take up a lot of space and not all are appropriate for portions of class that require lectures or presentations from the front of the room. A classroom only set up with collaborative workspaces may also lend itself more to distraction from other students. Though collaboration is a highly prized modern job skill, there are still highly independent career options, so a pedagogy that prizes both group and individual deliverables is ideal.

## Standing Desks

Standing desks must be included on this list not for their unique seat, but for their complete lack of one. Standing desks look similar to regular desks except they are of a (usually adjustable) height to allow students to stand for class. With the rising popularity of “sitting is the new smoking” and rising childhood obesity rates, standing frame desks will likely continue to join American classrooms.

**Upside:** Standing desks can be beneficial, however a distinction must be made: adjustable standing desks are the most beneficial. Just standing or just sitting all day is not the way to go. Instead, the real key is movement and variety. By incorporating some standing and movement each hour, adults are shown to reduce heart problems and other health problems. This is an excellent habit to instill in young people.

**Downside:** Standing all day comes with its own set of health concerns, including the blood pooling in the feet and spine problems. A combination of sitting, standing and moving is ideal. Many teachers are introducing brain breaks into their classroom. These are not only good physical breaks, but also mental breaks; by incorporating movement, the whole body benefits.

## Bouncy Bands

A low-cost alternative to buying all new chairs is to invest in bouncy bands. Bouncy bands affix around the front legs of a standard chair. Children may place their feet on the bands and bounce their legs, thereby redirecting some of the energy that causes some disruptive behaviors.

**Upside:** Bouncy bands are inexpensive and provide a quiet, non-distracting mechanism for children to release tension or “the wiggles.”

**Downside:** Bands may not be appropriate for constant use, as they are higher than the floor and may cause children’s hips to be bent up more than 90 degrees and place pressure on the spine.

After reviewing this selection of the many classroom seating options available, hopefully one thing has become clear: there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to classroom design. However, a classroom design can be tailored to best meet the needs of your curriculum, teachers and students. Speak with a [Troxell expert](#) today to learn more about how to create a flexible learning space.