



Educator's Guide to Flexible Seating

"With flexible seating, small behavior problems ended almost immediately, and the amount of stamina my students had for challenging work increased rapidly."

— Julie Ballew, Teacher

Talk to an expert at **800.356.1200**



Why Flexible Seating?

What if you could find a way to make your students better behaved, more motivated, and more productive? Would you do it?

Educators say flexible seating arrangements are the answer.

It's no secret that classroom instruction is rapidly evolving away from the old model of students seated in rows of desks facing the teacher. But even though desk arrangements may have changed, often the desks themselves have not. Many times students are still expected to remain sedentary throughout the day in traditional classroom furniture.

The alternative — flexible seating arrangements — empowers students to choose a spot that helps them do their best work from a variety of seating options.

Benefits include the following:

- Enables spontaneous collaboration and hands-on learning
- Boosts focus, especially for students who are sensory-sensitive
- Promotes self-regulation and problem-solving
- Helps develop social-emotional skills
- Encourages healthy movement during the school day

Webinar: How to Boost Student Performance with Active Learning Environments

Find out what the research says about how active learning environments can keep kids engaged, improve test scores, and result in greater creativity and positive behavior. Visit ideas.demco.com, search *boost student performance*.

“The most positive outcome has been the way students get right to work and focus when they find a seat. I believe the amount of movement the students get from choosing “right” work spots and the ownership that comes from choosing their own space causes them to concentrate more fully on assignments.”

— Stephanie Wilson, Primary Teacher



“I had a student that could not stay seated for more than a minute. ... The change was amazing. I couldn't believe how much the student's performance improved.”

— Stephanie Wilson, Primary Teacher



Keys to Making Flexible Seating Arrangements Work

Although every learning environment is different, there are some keys to making flexible seating work for you and your students.

Where will my students put all their stuff?

Flexible seating demands that you get creative with how students store supplies. There are myriad ways you can accommodate supplies — the key is finding a solution that works with your space and your furnishings. Below are some ideas to get you started:

- Invest in caddies with carrying handles for each student. The labeled caddies can carry essentials like pencils, notebooks, glue sticks, etc., and move with the students to their new seats for the day or as they move around the room.
- Label cubbies, one for each student. These can serve as an alternative to traditional desk storage.
- For larger items, such as workbooks, identify a specific bookshelf or mobile cart with pull-out bins where these can be stored, and make it the students' responsibility to ensure they are put back where they belong. Student helpers can also pass out resources when they are needed.
- Label the bins in your mobile carts, one for each student, and have them keep their supplies in the carts. Hanging file folders with wide pockets placed in crates can also support student supplies.
- Consider grouping students into teams (red team, blue team, etc.) and creating sections in your room for red bins, blue bins, and so on, so that students aren't all gathering in the same area when it's time to get supplies.
- Add clipboards to each student's supply list so they can write on a hard surface no matter where they sit during the day.

"My students love flexible seating. We learn how to use each type of seat appropriately, and students can pick the type of seat that works best for them each day."

– Sarah Rao, Teacher

How often should kids be allowed to choose seats?

There are several options for seating management, and you'll know best what works for your specific class. Don't be afraid to adapt the rules midyear if something isn't working. You can also change your rules from year to year as your class dynamics change. You may find you need to start with some more defined rules and your class can work up to free-choice seating.

You can give students the option to choose once a day, once a week, each time they transition to a new subject, or every time they move to a new activity. Whatever parameters you choose, remember to give students plenty of opportunities to get up and move their bodies throughout the day, the same as you'd do with traditional seating. Here are a few more options:

- Let students choose a new home base seat every day, but tell them they can't choose the same seat twice in a week.
- Rotate through groups of students, allowing each group a chance to choose their seats first.
- Divide your classroom into zones with specific seating types in each zone. Have groups of students rotate through the zones week to week.
- Allow students to move anytime they feel uncomfortable or have a valid reason to move.
- Consider having a two-minute transition time between activities and allow students to talk during that time to cut down on work-time chatter.
- For younger students, cut down on first-come, first-served seat monopolizing by having them meet at a designated spot, such as the carpet, to begin the day and then choose from there.

“My students are more engaged in their learning! Students have explicitly stated that having a comfortable place in the room to work helps them focus while working. Not only that, I have noticed that my students are developing valuable problem-solving and social skills while choosing workspaces in our classroom.”

— Melanie Wood, Teacher



How do I prevent arguments over seating choices?

You may find that there are specific seating options that soon become the coveted spots. To prevent arguments, dip into your toolbox of classroom management techniques. There are strategies you probably already use that will work well in helping to stop or prevent arguments over seating choices. Here are a few to think about using:

- Set the expectation when you introduce the arrangement that flexible seating should be viewed as a privilege. If students misbehave, remove the seating until students can show you they can make positive choices.
- Make the carpet the only seating option during whole-group time.
- Use one craft stick for each seating choice, and have students draw sticks to choose their seat for the day or the week.
- Make it a rule that if students are having trouble picking a spot, the teacher will choose for them.
- Have students record where they sit every day, and set a limit on how many times they can choose that seat each day or week.
- Maintain a couple of traditional desks where students can be placed if they are having trouble making good choices. Let them know that they are welcome to use the flexible seating when they show you they can be responsible in their seats.

- Randomly pick student names and let them choose their seat for the next day at the end of class the day before.
- Move students quietly, calmly, and with empathy when they aren't following the rules: "I'm sorry this seat isn't working out for you today. Please move to a new seat. You can try again tomorrow." Direct them to a seat of your choosing.
- Start with a small number of seating choices. Once you've determined that you've found a seating option that students love, acquire more of the same.

How to Introduce Flexible Seating to Parents

It's possible that you'll run into some snags when a few parents aren't ready to embrace your new classroom arrangement. The best thing to do to prevent fallout is to be prepared with solid reasoning. Use the tips below to help you get parents on board.

- Invite parents and students to try out your classroom seating during back-to-school night. Parents will soon see how excited their children are to be in your classroom.
- Ask parents to keep an open mind and have a dialogue with their child about how he or she feels about the seating.
- Get more tips in ["How to Introduce Flexible Seating to Students and Parents"](https://ideas.demco.com/2015/09/01/how-to-introduce-flexible-seating-to-students-and-parents/) at ideas.demco.com and download a free parent handout. Send the flyer to parents before school starts, or hand it out on back-to-school night. Go over the benefits of a flexible seating classroom, as well as your expectations for students.

"Students were thrilled from the very first day. Their parents were apprehensive at first sight, but the kids' excitement often spilled over on the ride home from school, so their parents were sold quickly too."

– Julie Ballew, Teacher



How to Introduce Flexible Seating to Students

The key to making a smooth transition is preparing your students for the shift, setting expectations for their behavior, and continually reinforcing those expectations. The following tips will help you transform your classroom into a flexible seating environment that works for everyone.

- Focus on the mindset before you focus on the stuff. Start by spending a few weeks letting students sit on the floor, stand, or kneel instead of sitting in traditional seating.
- Start using your new storage system for students' supplies with students before you transition their seating. Then they only have to get used to one change at a time.
- Spend some time during the first few weeks of school having students reflect on each of the seating choices. What worked well for them? What didn't work well? Which seating choices felt comfortable? Uncomfortable? Where did they feel they did their best work? This can be group dialogue, a writing assignment, an oral presentation, or all three.
- Model appropriate behavior and choose students to model appropriate behavior for their classmates. This is a great opportunity to choose a child who has had issues with traditional seating to be the star. Work with him or her to model appropriate and inappropriate behavior and role-play situations for the class.
- Practice, practice, practice. It may take a few weeks for your students to get the hang of choosing seats, transitioning between activities, and figuring out the best workflow during the day. Continue to build their stamina with flexible seating by reinforcing expectations, practicing routines, and praising positive behavior.
- If you plan to have an open-choice classroom, be sure to spend some time the first few weeks of school assigning seats and having students rotate through them so they can try each one out before you transition to free choice.
- Retain a few traditional desks for students who need more structure.

- Consider letting the students help you make the rules for your classroom. If they are able to contribute to the rules, they'll feel more invested in making sure they're followed. Display the rules where students can see them at all times.
- Reserve the right to move students if they are not being productive. They may need guidance in making a seating choice that helps them do their best work or in how to work effectively in each location (without misusing or damaging the furniture).
- Have students sign a contract stating that they understand the rules, pledge to follow them, and understand that their flexible seating privilege will be revoked if they do not follow them.

"The students love the choices. ... I took the time to teach, model, and practice procedures for each type of seat, and I haven't had any trouble."

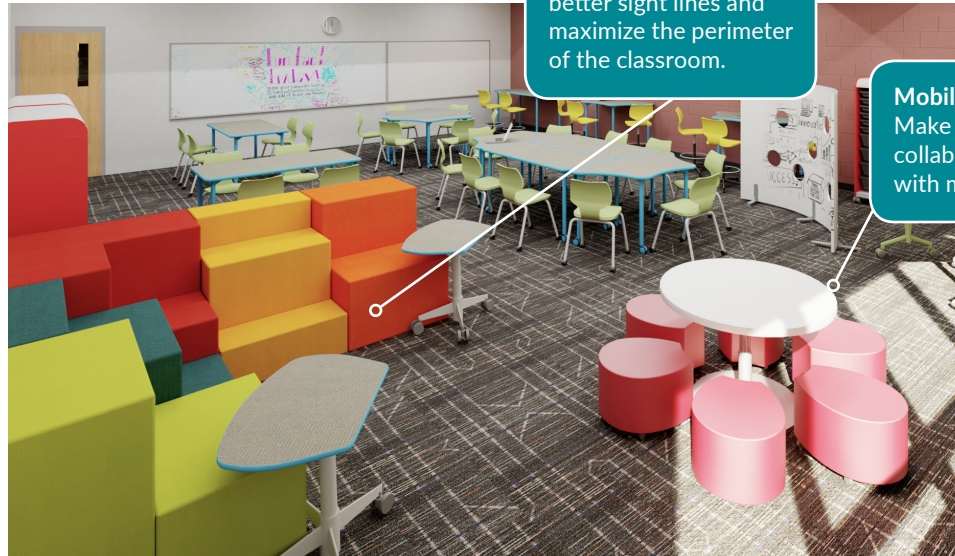
– Stephanie Wilson, Primary Teacher



Anatomy of a Flexible Seating Learning Space

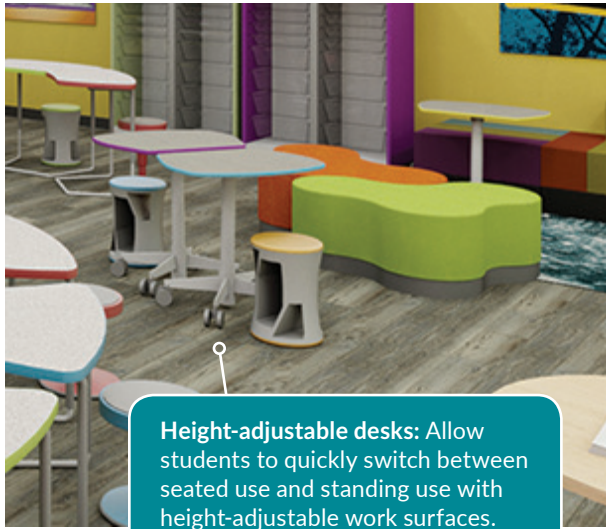


Stools: Promote better focus and higher academic achievement with active seating.



Tiered seating: Gain better sight lines and maximize the perimeter of the classroom.

Mobile seating: Make spontaneous collaboration easy with mobile seating.



Height-adjustable desks: Allow students to quickly switch between seated use and standing use with height-adjustable work surfaces.



Desks: Mobile desks or tables make it easy to quickly rearrange groups.

Anatomy of a Flexible Seating Learning Space



Explore the Products Featured in These Spaces



Demco® Gear Guard™
Mobile STEM Table



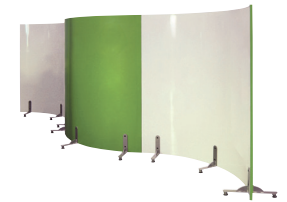
MooreCo™ Hierarchy
Height-Adjustable Grow Stools



Smith System™ Sit & Stand Desks



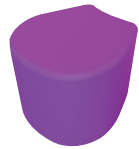
Smith System™
Elemental™ Engage Tables



MediaTechnologies®
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Smith System™
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Tenjam DuraFLEX
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MooreCo™ Hierarchy Flipz Stool



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MooreCo™ Shapes Desks



MooreCo™ Dot
Soft Seating



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HPFI® Flex Tiered Seating



Muzo Kite® Mobile Tables



Muzo Mix® Chairs



HPFI® Accompany™
Lounge Seating



JSI™ Totem Pods



Smith System™ Planner™
Makerspace Tables and
Cascade® Storage



BackJack® Floor Chair



Demco® ColorScape®
Playpod House

Engaging Spaces, Engaged Learners



Create effective learning environments with help from the experts

Driven by student-centered design, we work collaboratively with educators and architects to create flexible, modern classrooms where creation and inquiry are supported. Through Demco, you have access to a complete range of interior services and an extensive collection of furniture tailored to suit the way students learn and collaborate today.

"We knew if we were going to renovate the learning, we had to renovate the space. It's been transformative. Kids walk in and you can see how motivated they are."

— Ed Kemnitzer, Massapequa School District, NY

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