



## PR-B students are "on the ball"

By Kelly Virden

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Fifth-graders in Diane Norlin's classroom are trying out something new that should enhance their concentration and improve posture and blood flow.

They've replaced their regular classroom chairs with round stability balls and are sitting on them during the school day.

Other classrooms across the country are utilizing stability balls, but Norlin's fifth-graders are the only Pine River-Backus classroom to literally have every student "on the ball."

The balls resemble large exercise balls - used in yoga and other exercise programs - but they have udder-like feet for added stability.

Norlin and Title I teacher Linda Henkel completed a web-based seminar on the use of stability balls through WittFitt, a consulting company that specializes in the classroom use of stability balls.

The classroom was able to purchase the stability balls after winning a decorate-a-scarecrow contest through the Pine River Library last fall, and with the help of private donations and funds from collecting General Mills Box Tops for Education.

Norlin sent out parent permission letters and information prior to bringing the balls into the classroom.

The WittFitt consulting company has a "Having a Ball," curriculum that Norlin has incorporated into the classroom.

Students studied the history of stability balls and the benefits of their use beforehand.

Norlin field-tested a stability ball at her desk for a month before the students received theirs.

Different-sized balls are available for different heights and they can be inflated to different degrees to accommodate varying weights. Regular chairs are available if the students want to use them.

The students compiled their own list of rules for stability ball-use in the classroom.

Rules include respecting the stability ball and not abusing it; keeping the stability ball safe from sharp objects; not disturbing others with movement; keeping hands away from the plug; keeping the ball at their desk; one person on the ball at a time; and keeping the ball on the floor at all times.

If students break any of the rules they are not allowed to sit on their stability ball for 1.5 weeks. If a substitute teacher is present they lose the privilege for 2.5 weeks.

On Jan. 23 the students had been using the stability balls for around two weeks and no one broke the rules.

When students were asked what the benefits of the stability balls were they easily spouted off answers including improved handwriting; improved concentration, posture and blood flow; reduction of fidgeting; strengthened core muscles and physical balance, and proper spine alignment. The balls are burst resistant and latex-free. If one springs a leak it will slowly deflate, unlike a balloon pop.

Each day Norlin has the students do exercises using the balls. On Jan. 23 students were doing variations on arm lifts, side bends, leg lifts and abdominal crunches, all to the tune of "Eye of the Tiger."

Norlin said that she plans on continuing the ball's use in the classroom this year and next. She's noticed the students' posture improving and that the students are more alert after the exercises. Norlin used to have students stand up and stretch between subjects, but now they don't need those transitions.

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