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DISTRICT NEWS**[Horace students use fitness balls in classroom for better posture](#)**

**Sue Cwikla West Fargo Pioneer
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Last fall, Molly Westphal, a first grade teacher at Horace Elementary, researched the health benefits of using stability balls with legs in the classroom to replace traditional chairs. In her studies, she discovered that sitting on the stability balls forces students to sit up straighter, which improves posture, strengthens back muscles, and improves balance and coordination.

Studies also showed that sitting up straighter increases the blood flow to the brain and other parts of the body. She also found research showing that there is a link between movement and academic achievement.

Westphal approached Jerry Barnum, principal at Horace Elementary, and asked if she could apply for a grant from Dakota Medical Foundation in Fargo to purchase 21 WittFitt stability balls for her first grade classroom. Taking the initiative, she went through the application process, and volunteered to conduct motor tests and classroom observation of the students' behavior prior to implementing the stability balls in the classroom, and then again after 10 weeks of sitting on the balls.

The motor tests would include toe touch, tandem heel-toe walking, and single foot standing balance. The classroom observations would focus on student posture, time spent on tasks, and squirminess. Chris Haugen, physical education instructor, would help Westphal conduct the motor tests. Westphal also agreed to go through personalized training through WittFitt.

The price of each ball was \$28. Through the grant, Dakota Medical Foundation funded 43 percent of the total cost, with Horace Elementary picking up the remainder.

Westphal said sitting on the balls took a little getting used to at first, even for her, but she could already see a marked difference in the students' posture. "Students gently rock when they are reading or studying. It's kind of a soothing motion. There is less squirming," Westphal said.

Dakota Medical Foundation, based in Fargo, focuses on improving access to medical and dental care. Since its inception in 1995, the Foundation has invested nearly \$32 million toward more than 299 non-profit organizations to help improve health and access to healthcare.

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