

## Up and Moving with ELA

By Jessica Hill (ELA 7 & 8) and Abigail Beukema (ELA 8)

As teachers, we are up against sometimes seemingly insurmountable odds: capture short attention spans, prepare students for standardized tests, manage classroom behaviors, ensure all minds are engaged by appealing to a variety of modalities, and the list goes on and on. At Beaver Area Middle School, we have been focusing on adding a certain element to as many lessons and classroom routines as possible – movement.

From what we have observed, movement increases interest, aids retention, and enhances classroom culture. And the research is certainly there to support our focus. According to an Edutopia article “More Than a Dozen Ways to Build Movement Into Learning” by Stephen Merrill and Sarah Gosner, “Neurocognitive testing of the standing student... showed a 7 to 14 percent improvement in their cognitive performance, a noteworthy impact for such a simple intervention.” Admittedly, increasing the amount of movement built into our class periods was daunting at first, but the pay-off seems to be worth it.

The following are a few ideas we have tried that appear to be helping us beat the aforementioned odds with our seventh and eighth grade learners:

- **Get kids up and moving right away.** Our ELA classes use a twist on one of Peter Liljedahl’s practices for what he calls a “thinking classroom.” We use vertical, non-permanent features such as whiteboards or interchangeable daily questions mounted around the room. Students meet in small groups to discuss questions, tasks, or images at these spaces to start the class period. Students typically return to their seats after this time more engaged and ready to learn.
- **Add short design challenges to your lessons.** Whether you are introducing a new concept or reviewing skills before an assessment, taking a few minutes to get kids up and having fun while they are learning is a worthwhile enterprise. The beauty of these challenges is that they can take as much or as little class time as you see fit. Our classes have completed challenges that take anywhere from three minutes to three days. Also, the materials you offer do not need to be fancy. Sometimes Play-Doh and aluminum foil are all you need to get kids illustrating their thinking in a way that reaches the most kinesthetic of learners.
- **Use gallery walks to develop other skills.** You can incorporate writing and speaking into these challenges, too. Students can create exhibit placards to explain their creations and their relevance to the lesson in writing, or they can stay with their inventions and explain them to others to practice presentation skills. These walks get kids out of their seats once again and offer opportunities for collaboration and communication.

Movement can be a powerful tool for engaging learners and inspiring different kinds of thinking. Lesson planning with this practice in mind is something teachers will not regret. Good luck!

For more information on how this looks in the classroom, Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Beukema can be reached at [hillj@basd.k12.pa.us](mailto:hillj@basd.k12.pa.us) and [beukemaa@basd.k12.pa.us](mailto:beukemaa@basd.k12.pa.us), respectively.