

## Ergonomics in the Classroom

By Annette Satterly, Risk Management Associate

Much has changed over the years with respect to our working environments in schools and elsewhere. Technological equipment has shrunk considerably in size, with room-sized computers being replaced by iPads and desktops, while typewriters, mimeographs, and overhead projectors have, thankfully, disappeared from our daily lives. Yet despite these and many other changes, the classroom furniture teachers rely on to support them and their efforts remain woefully out of date. This is largely because furniture continues to be made to fit the “average” man of the WWII era, as that was the last time we had a true industrial flux. In consequence, teachers are forced to deal with the problems that attend ill-fitting and outmoded chairs, tables, desks, and other such necessities.

For this reason, the MSGIA focus group in FY16 is teachers and paraprofessionals, the goal being to utilize ergonomics in an effort to ensure that we can fit the workplace to our teachers, rather than requiring our teachers to fit their workplace.

For starters, one critical task that needs addressing immediately involves providing teachers with properly fitting, high-functioning chairs and desks. Without question, few, if any, of our desks fit users as well as we would like, nor do they give them as much room as they need. Because desks (in most cases) do not adjust, chairs – truly the most important piece of equipment in our arsenal to prevent discomfort and injury – must therefore be adaptable. The chair should be able to adjust up and down, and it must provide lumbar support; it should likewise include a waterfall seat pan, adjustable arms, a five-star base, and a mat for easy movement.



Though there are many types and brands of ergonomic chairs, the key when selecting one is to make sure it meets the above requirements. The label “ergonomic” does not necessarily ensure that it meets these minimums.

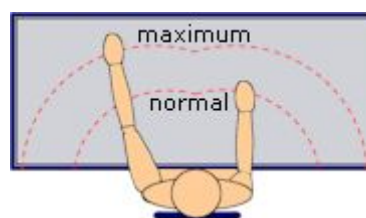
While finding a proper chair is the best move one can make when selecting furniture, the most important thing you can do throughout the day is, in actuality, move. As the song from Madagascar reminds us, you’ve got to “Move it, move it!” The body is not made to stay in one position all day. Just as a car has many gears that need to be used in order to remain functional, our many joints and muscles benefit from frequent but not overly repetitive use.

Because you can’t always “Move it, Move it!” you sometimes, of course, have to sit at your desk. In these instances, there are better body positions to try to achieve. Your thighs should be parallel to the floor, which may require a foot rest (foot rests that allow the foot to tilt so that the toes are facing up are better for circulation). Your wrists should be flat, and your arms should be at your sides. (Your arms should be able to rest on our hips, which is why I work hard at mealtimes to pack away the calories in order to make sure my hips are up to this important task.) Your head should be over your shoulders, and you should not be sitting in a manner that makes it so that you do not need to strain your neck forward or backward to look at your computer monitors. When looking at the monitor, your eyes should line up with the tool bar in your programs. (If you wear bifocals, trifocals or

progressive lenses, this positioning may not be possible.) If you wear special lenses, please adjust the screen so that your head is neither tipped up or down in order that you can focus in the middle of the screen. This will allow you to read what's on the screen without having to crane your head too far up or down. You should also be able to approach your monitor directly. If it is to the side, it will cause twisted and asymmetrical positions.



Try to place all objects that you use routinely within the circle of your reach. If this cannot be arranged, move them farther away so that you will be required to shift your overall position in to reach them.



For more information regarding ergonomics, or to set up an ergonomic assessment of your workstation, please contact the Risk Management Associates at 1-877-667-7392. Thanks, and remember, You've got to "Move it, move it!" (And, yes, the song is catchy. And, yes, it will come back on you when you least expect it. Sorry.)