

Elementary Student Chair and Desk Height

Our students come in different sizes. However, many of our classrooms have one chair size and most desks are set to the same height.

Smith-Zuzovsky and Exner (2004) found that 6 and 7 year old children performed in-hand manipulation skills significantly better when the chair and table were at an optimal height when compared to a table and chair that were too high. A chair of optimal height (with feet resting on floor) provided stability for the child allowing optimal arm/hand use. An optimal desk height promotes good posture and positioning when writing.

The following sections explain how to optimize chair and desk height. The student will need to be seated in a chair of correct height before desk height can be measured. Depending on your building, you may be able to trade for chairs of different heights with other teachers. Your service person can adjust desk heights or may loan you the tool. If you need further information or assistance, the Occupational Therapist or Occupational Therapy Assistant may be able to assist depending on their availability.

Chair Height

This girl is sitting in a chair that is 3 or 4 inches too high (Image 1),



Image 1

When sitting in a correctly sized chair, the student's feet should rest easily on the floor with ankles, knees and hips positioned at 90 degrees (Image 2). The depth of the chair is also important. The chair should not cut into the back of the student's knees. At the same time, the back of the knee should not more than inch from the edge while the student's bottom is positioned back in the chair.



Image 2

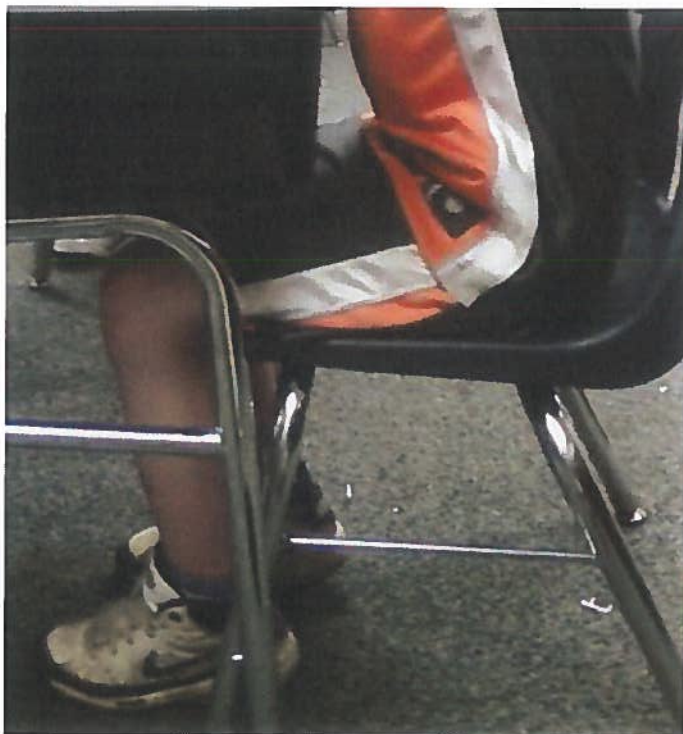


Image 3

The student in Image 3 is sitting in a good chair for him.

The Desk

After the child is sitting in a correctly sized chair, the correct desk height can be determined. With the student sitting up straight (feet on floor, hips & knees at 90°), have the student flex (bend) his/her elbow. The desk top should be between 1 and 1½ inches from the bottom of the elbow (distance between the two red lines in image 4).

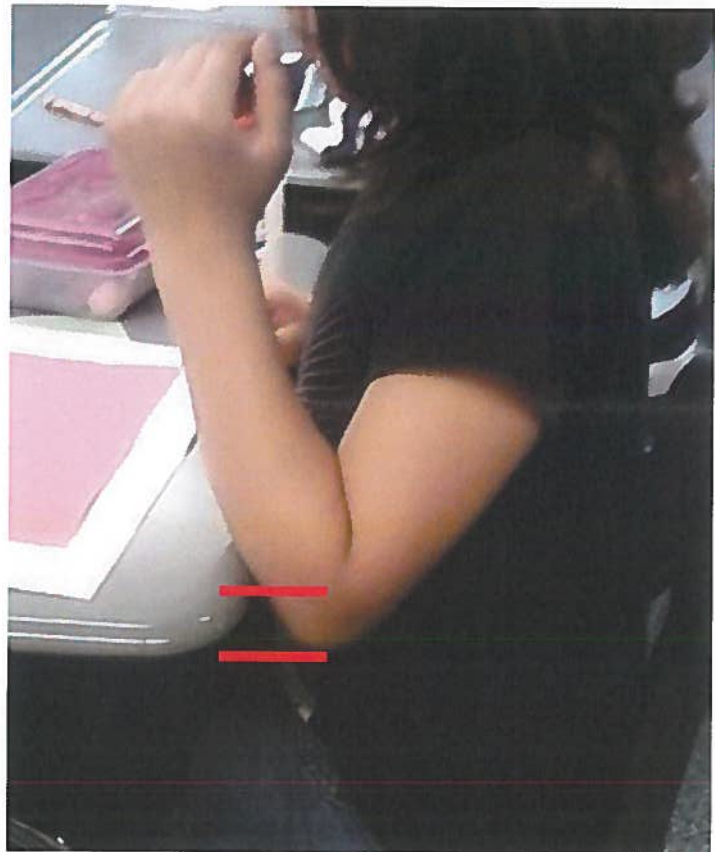


Image 4



Image 5

The girl's desk in image 5 is too high and should be lowered!

Desks are adjustable by loosening the special bolt with a correctly sized Allen Wrench/hex key. When retightening, go slowly to make sure the bolt goes into the deepest part of the notch on the lower piece of the leg. Check to see the desk is level and does not rock. Some classroom floors are not level requiring slight adjustments to prevent rocking.

Deep desks as pictured in Image 6 are a poor choice for younger elementary students. When the desk top is adjusted correctly, there frequently is not enough room for student's legs between the desk bottom and chair. This desk should be lowered but this would require the student to squeeze his legs between the chair and the desk bottom.



Image 6

Reference:

Smith-Zuzovsky, N., & Exner, C. E. (2004). The effect of seated positioning quality on typical 6- and 7-year-old children's object manipulation skills. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 58*, 380–388.