

Improve Student Outcomes with Small Changes to Your Classroom Environment

A student's engagement within the classroom depends on a number of factors, but one that all teachers control is the classroom physical environment.

Students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Learning Disabilities, or Emotional Regulation Difficulties are more prone to visual and auditory distractions, creating additional challenges for them in attending to the teacher or task. Making specific changes to the environment can minimize these challenges for many students.

Through our work in community schools, we have found success with the following **5 Classroom Modifications for Student Engagement**



Modification # 1: Lighting

Florescent lighting in the classroom can cause a heightened state of arousal and increased eye stress for students and staff alike. Certainly, a flickering light, which we've all experienced, is most distracting. Try using natural lighting if you're fortunate to have a lot of windows in your classroom. A light dimmer can be helpful, if you have the ability to put one in.

Another option is to use fabric magnetic light filters like we have at PGCS and in many of our community partner schools.

Modification # 2: Desk Placement

Placing students' desks in groups can increase distractions. Instead, face desks to the front of the classroom and give students plenty of room between desks. This gives students their own space and directs their body and eyes on the teacher. This will also help students with ocular motor difficulties to accurately copy material from the board.

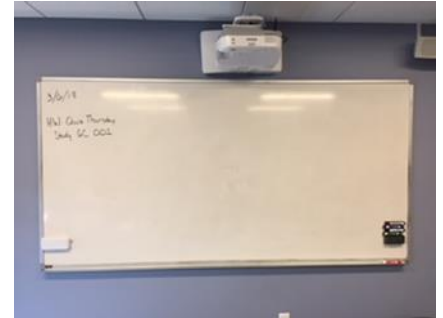




Modification # 3: Decreased Clutter

Open shelving and a lot of wall art are difficult for students to filter and visually attend to the teacher or their independent work. If you have access to cabinets, use them to store all your materials, making sure the doors can close. If you don't have cabinets, cover up bookshelves using either blue or green fabric. If you have the option to paint your walls, the colors blue and green are the most calming.

Decrease the amount of written material on your dry erase board and keep materials off the walls, particularly around your dry erase board, Smart Board, or projector space. If students have to copy their homework from the board, always write it clearly in the same place on the board without any visual distractions around it.



Modification # 4: White Noise

White noise helps students who are distracted by extraneous noises to maintain their focus on a task. Simply use an electric fan or white noise machine and see the difference it makes in your students' attention. You might also want to check out white noise apps for phones.



Modification # 5: Seating Options

Allow students to get up and move to change their seating either during a lesson or during independent work. For example, students may like the opportunity to lie on their stomach on the floor and use a clip board to complete assignments. Below are some optional classroom seating ideas.

- Large bean bags
- Large exercise or therapy ball
- Balance stool
- Rocking chair
- Wobble cushion



All photos courtesy of The Craig School, Mt. Lakes, NJ where P.G. Chambers School provides occupational therapy consulting and related services.