

Teachers Receive Tools and Training on Sensory Needs



All students have sensory needs, whether they bite their nails, jiggle their legs, or drum on their desks with a pencil, but for some kids, sensory needs can interfere with learning.

To ensure that Rosa Parks' students' sensory needs are understood and accepted, and that they have access to tools for calming and focus, teachers recently received Sensory Tool Kits and professional development training from the nonprofit Shadow Project, which partners with educators to help children with learning challenges.

"We have wonderful sensory libraries from The Shadow Project in the learning center and the counselor's office," said Principal Tamala Newsome. "But kids need to be able to access sensory tools in whatever classroom they are in, so they are

supported throughout the day.

"We are so over telling kids not to move in class," she said. "Our goal is to work collectively to meet kids where they are at, and keep them in the classroom, so they can focus on learning."

The Sensory Tool Kits for each K-5 teacher included about one dozen hand-held fidgets selected by Rosa's occupational therapist, Martha Thomas, as well as kinetic sand and beanbag chairs. Teachers were trained on how to introduce the Tool Kits to their students, and to work with kids on selecting the fidget that works best for them.

"We know the sensory tools are great for empowering students to regulate their own bodies and behavior," said Learning Center Teacher Kim Giarelli. "Self-awareness is the first step to student responsibility for setting and achieving academic goals."

Rosa Parks is the first public school in Oregon to ask for and receive the Sensory Tool Kits and teacher training.

"I'm so excited to try these new tools!" said third grade teacher Patrice Pierre.

