

Gary classrooms get makeovers, new furniture during break

By Carole Carlson

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Traniyah Lockridge, 9, tries out a new "wobbl3" stool in her fourth grade classroom Tuesday at the Glen Park Academy in Gary. All the Gary schools received nearly \$8 million in new furniture over the holiday break. (Carole Carlson / Post-Tribune)

The kids walked in their fourth grade classroom Tuesday morning at Gary's Glen Park Academy with stunned looks.

"I like it, it's a good look," said fourth grader Lanae Glass, 10, as she eyed her classroom.

Over the holiday break, each of the school's 31 classrooms and all the other schools in the Gary Community School Corp. got classroom makeovers with nearly \$8 million in new furnishings.

"What happened to our classroom," asked a student as she walked into teacher Carmen Melton's fourth grade classroom.

Melton said she wasn't sold on losing the old classroom desks for newer models.

"It's your home... I didn't know what to expect," she said.



Glen Park Academy Principal Eric Worthington shows fourth graders Harmony Blackman and Danajah Smith how to move on balance boards on Tuesday. The boards were part of new-look classrooms throughout the Gary Community School Corp. (Carole Carlson / Post-Tribune)

“When I walked in, the first thing I said was ‘wow, I like this.’ The first thing I learned was trust the process.”

Melton liked the “wobble” chairs and the ability to reconfigure desks to better engage her students. The wobble chairs are flexible stools educators say help students with attention deficit disorder to focus better.

“I love it. I love it. I love it!” said fourth grade teacher Bonnie Thompson. “It gives the classroom a totally different learning environment. Kids can relax and read. I hope the kids will appreciate it.”

Principal Eric Worthington said he and two custodians spent more than eight hours Monday staging all the classrooms, including the music, art, science and special education rooms.

“The looks on the children’s faces were priceless. It was like Christmas all over again. They deserve to learn in an atmosphere that is most conducive to learning and triggers their creativity,” he said.



Glen Park Academy fourth-graders Traniyah Lockridge, left, and Lanae Glass share their surprise at the new classroom furniture on Tuesday. (Carole Carlson / Post-Tribune)

The state Distressed Unit Appeal Board approved the spending of \$4.9 million for elementary furniture and \$3 million for secondary furniture in July.

The state-operated district used \$7.4 million from its coronavirus relief funding for the project. Federal dollars from Title 1 and Individuals with Disabilities Act funds covers the remainder of the cost.

Representatives from Kay-Twelve, based in Columbus, Ohio, which provided the elementary furniture, were at Glen Park Academy to answer questions and explain the details about the new furnishings.

School officials said some schools have waited decades for new classroom furniture. Esther Goodes, director of elementary education, visited Glen Park Academy.

“This style of furniture provides an outlet for our students to be innovative and creative while demonstrating what they have learned not only to their teachers, but to one another...” she said.

Carole Carlson is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.

