



Sensory Tools/Sensory Processing: **HOW DOES YOUR ENGINE RUN?**

You may have

- heard about sensory skills and sensory tools
- seen articles on “ball chairs” or sensory programs

Your child is fortunate to attend a school district that is Sensory Smart and uses the Alert Program (a.k.a. How Does Your Engine Run?) with sensory tools and strategies available for students to support their success in the school environment. The Alert Program recognizes that all students gather information through their senses, integrate or process the information, and then use the information for life and learning. We need vestibular (balance and spatial orientation) and proprioceptive (motion or position of parts of the body) input to tell us where our bodies are and where we are in space. We gather information from vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Sensory information can calm or stimulate us. Our “engine speeds” may be too high or too low for a specific activity. Sometimes sensory tools and activities are needed to keep us in the “just right” zone for learning. For over ten years, with collaboration among our teachers and special education staff, sensory tools have been part of the school day in East Grand Rapids.

“Wiggle” cushions, ball chairs, slant boards, pencil grips, weighted lap pads or collars and sound blocking headphones are part of a typical EGR elementary classroom. Age appropriate tools are available in some secondary classrooms. Teachers incorporate a variety of activities during the school day. Students may do wall pushups, perform “helicopters”, take deep breaths, use a quiet space, listen to background music, carry books to the office to calm themselves, or be told to “slow your engine speed”. With practice, our students develop the lifelong skills of monitoring their own behavior and “engine speed” and advocate for their own needs.