



9.- How to Effectively Reward students

You Don't Need to Spend a Cent to Get Great Behavior!

It's no secret that, each school year, we spend thousands of our own money to supplement what the school provides in the classroom. Schools only provide the bare minimum, so teachers often need to dip into their already shallow pockets in order to offer the very best for their kids.

Material rewards are one easy place where we can cut corners and still remain effective educators. You really don't need to spend your money on candy, toys, stickers, and other little goodies to *extrinsically motivate*, reward, and recognize your students' good behavior.

Emphasize *Intrinsic Motivation* (see definitions below) and teach that learning and good behavior are rewards unto themselves. Your students will rise to your heightened expectations. Save yourself the trouble and consider some of the free ways you can give your students a meaningful "thumbs up" when they do something right.



FREE WAYS TO SAY "GREAT JOB!"

- **Lunch Bunch** - Recognize a well-behaved table group by inviting them to Lunch Bunch with the teacher. The chosen kids bring their own lunches and eat in the classroom together with you. If you have a TV, find some cartoons to watch. Or, have the kids bring their favorite CDs from home to listen to during lunch (check the lyrics first!). They can also play games when they finish eating. The children feel special because they get to stay inside and you may even find that you enjoy this unique, low-key time with the kids as much as they do.
- **Longer Recess** - This is a great one because it doesn't have to involve extra time from you. If possible, reward a child by letting them stay outside and play until a later bell. For example, after my third graders come in, the fourth graders get to play about 10 more minutes. So, I can reward a student by letting them stay out until the "fourth grade bell." You may need to doublecheck with yard duty supervisors before doing this. Also, you probably won't want to use this one all the time. The kids do miss some instructional time and you are relying on the supervisors to help you out.
- **Special Seats** - Reward a well-behaved (or much-improved) child by letting them work at the teacher's desk for an entire day. Or, you can set up a special seat "on the rug" and let chosen students have a chance to sit there during story time. This free reward is zero hassle for you and quite a thrill for the kids!
- **Whole-Group Rewards** - Let individual students earn points towards a whole class reward. This works especially well for students who crave attention because they will earn positive attention from the whole class for their good behavior. For example, the student can earn a table point for their table group, or a few marbles for the class marble jar. This helps difficult students feel like a real part of the group and it provides for a little positive peer pressure to keep them performing well.

- **Read-In Party** - Stay away from popcorn parties that require extra money and preparation from you. Tell the kids that they can wear pajamas to school that day (discuss appropriate attire, first!). They can also bring their favorite stuffed animal and a pillow. Use the day to celebrate the joys of reading. The kids get to lounge around the room for part of the day, reading, relaxing, and savoring the joy of books. You can also add in other literary activities for a rewarding day that sends a clear message to the students: Reading is Fun!
- **Afternoon of Art and Music** - Art and music are worthy academic subjects. But, if you're like most time-strapped teachers, you can't fit enough of them into the school day. Motivate your class with this simple reward. Let the class listen to music while they work on an art project. They'll love it and so will you!
- **Good Phone Call Home** - Why do phone calls home always have to be negative? Set this standard on its head by letting parents and guardians know how great their child is doing in your class. Most students will work really hard to get this kind of individualized recognition that will make a big difference at home. This is also a wonderful opportunity to solidify your relationship with parents. They want to know that you love their child and this is an easy way to make everyone happy.
- **Help in Another Class** - This is a great one for reinforcing academic content and building self-esteem in kids who really need it. It's hard to implement in kindergarten and first grade classes, but with other grades, it works great. Recognize a worthy student by letting them help out in a lower grade for awhile. Use your professional judgment to make it work in your classroom and school environment.
- **Hand Stamp** - Don't get stuck on costly and consumable stickers. Use the simple ink stamps that you already have to let a student know that they are A-OK! Simple stamp your sign of approval on the back of the child's hand. You may want to clear this with parents first, since they might not appreciate ink on their kid's hand.



It may sound too good to be true, but if you don't introduce material rewards in the first place, your students will never miss them. In elementary school, children are so eager to please and so pleased to receive any little special recognition; they really will bend over backwards for these types of rewards that don't cost you a penny!

Definition: **Intrinsic Motivation** refers to a highly desired form of incentive that stems from a person's internal desire for self-satisfaction or pleasure in performing the task itself.

Intrinsic Motivation can be contrasted with [Extrinsic Motivation](#) which comes from external incentives such as money, grades, or prizes.

As teachers, we should aim to instill an appreciation for learning (a form of Intrinsic Motivation) in our students, so that they are not motivated to perform a task solely for material rewards.

Definition: **Extrinsic Motivation** refers to external incentives (such as money, grades, or prizes) for a person to perform a given task.

Extrinsic Motivation can be contrasted with [Intrinsic Motivation](#), a highly desired form of incentive that stems simply from a person's internal desire for self-satisfaction or pleasure in performing the task itself.

As teachers, it can be a slippery slope if we offer only material incentives for our students to learn or perform basic tasks. If Extrinsic Motivations become the primary incentives that motivate students to perform their work, the children will develop poor habits and miss out on the self-satisfaction that comes from hard work