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non FOOD

Rewards

for Good Behavior and Academic Achievement



When you were in school, were you rewarded for good classroom behavior with pizza parties or ice cream? Parties centered on food have long been common incentives used by teachers to encourage and support students' natural growth in a love for knowledge. While those techniques have worked in the past, with the Local Wellness Policy and its required implementation in schools beginning in 2006 (Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004), the use of food items to reward good behavior is no longer acceptable.

Through a local school wellness policy, districts address childhood obesity and chronic ill health, which have steadily increased over the past two decades. Since 1980, the percentage of overweight children aged 6–11 years has doubled, and it has tripled among adoles-

cents 12–19 years of age (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2007).

Sedentary lifestyles and over-consumption of nutrient-poor foods factor heavily in this epidemic trend, as do large-portioned sizes that have become the norm. The result is increased calorie intake of young bodies that no longer exercise to burn them off (Nestle 2002). In addition to the physical aspects of good health, research continues to associate children's health with student academic achievement.

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How can you reward students for good behavior and academic success? These ideas have worked for many teachers:

- **Reading privileges:** a favorite book in the classroom, opportunities to read outside the classroom.
- **Extra time at a favorite activity:** computer, art, puzzles, board games.
- **Designated honors:** class helper for the day, line leader, office runner, activity leader.
- **Outdoor activities:** tending the school garden, helping with the flag, conducting a science experiment.
- **Treasure box:** students choose a reward from a treasure trove of stickers, pencils, erasers, bookmarks.

To encourage students to listen well, participate in classroom discussions, and complete their schoolwork in class, innovative teachers have used points that accumulate for future privileges. For Family Math Fun Night, Jenna Bellina and her colleagues at Midway Elementary (K–3) in Natchitoches, Louisiana, use a point system to encourage students to learn math. Also motivating is earning time to help with the school's vegetable or butterfly garden. Of course, no-homework passes are always popular! Get creative and come up with your own innovative ideas to reward students, and then share them with your colleagues.

The school wellness policy asks teachers to promote healthy eating habits through all classroom activities to help students learn and adopt healthy behaviors, which in turn support learning. Teachers can start simply, as Joni House did. This first-grade teacher at Sudduth Elementary School (K–2) in Starkville, Mississippi, now demonstrates fractions with apples rather than cake.

New teachers also need healthy habits to be at their best for those first-year demands. When teachers take good care of themselves, they model good habits for their students. Healthy students, better learning, and happy teachers have resulted from an improved nutritional environment at school. Higher test scores, improved attendance, and fewer classroom behavior problems are being reported by schools that have implemented wellness practices. Though the programs are not universal, such practices are catching on among today's health-conscious teachers who are transforming outmoded food-reward practices. 🍏

References and Resources

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www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/keystrategies/index.htm

Start with this site for ideas and strategies to make a difference in the health of students at your school.

www.cn.mde.k12.ms.us/schoolwellnesspolicy/MSSchoolWellnessPolicyModel.pdf

Visit this page for an example of a local school wellness policy.

Wellness Programs

As a part of the school's recognition program, hard-working students at *Louise Archer Elementary School*, Vienna, VA, go on Friday afternoon "reward walks" with the principal rather than indulge in pizza parties. Students selected for the honor wear pedometers for the week following their reward



walk. In addition, teachers have integrated pedometer-related activities into math and health lessons.

Central Middle School, Whitefish, MT, removed all soft drinks from vending machines and replaced them with bottled water and 100 percent juices. The Parent Teacher Association purchased a vending machine that is stocked daily with milk, yogurt, pudding, string cheese, beef jerky, baked chips, and fruit. Additionally, the recess schedule was changed so that all students now have recess before lunch, with noted improvements in afternoon academics.