

I-4: Consistently reinforce academic efforts toward the big goal

Vary reinforcement based on the student and the situation

What are some effective strategies for reinforcing academic effort?

Important Notes:

- **Many of the strategies below can be used both as reinforcements of effort toward academic achievement and** as positive consequences for student behavior. For example, a teacher who gives a raffle ticket to a student who doesn't break any class rules for an entire day is using the reward as a way to reinforce following behavior expectations, whereas a teacher who gives a raffle ticket to a student who improves their assessment scores significantly or turns in homework consistently is using the reward as a way to reinforce academic effort.
- **The different types of strategies below are often used in conjunction with each other.** For instance, when giving rewards like raffle tickets, often teachers will also tell students why they are receiving the reward, serving as a way to praise or recognize their hard work. Similarly, competitions and parties can be used as a privilege to reward students for hard work while also being connected to more tangible prizes (e.g. students receive a gift certificate for winning a classroom competition or the class gets to eat popcorn at a publishing party)
- While these strategies are primarily extrinsic motivators, it is important to keep in mind that the **ultimate purpose of using the strategies is to supplement and help build intrinsic motivation for academic achievement.** To help do this, make sure to
 - use these strategies as reinforcements for academic growth and improvement,
 - clarify that the purpose of rewards is to celebrate progress toward the big goal,
 - avoid overusing extrinsic motivator

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General Strategies		Examples
Recognition	Teacher or peer praise	<p>Highlight specific actions and student effort</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> “I was so impressed by the way you listened attentively to the speaker during the assembly,” “Your opening sentence hooked me immediately – I was dying to read more,” “You attended after school when you were struggling, and now your unit score has improved a grade-level – I love the determination you showed!”</p>
	Charts and graphs that show student progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking whole class achievement and gains • Individual achievement tracking charts (coupled with teacher feedback that conveys student growth). This is a powerful way to build students’ “I Can” (I-1)—to read more about how to use charts and graphs in such a way, visit the I-1 page.
	Public acknowledgement of academic effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Student of the Week,” “Honor Roll,” or “Top Dog,” lists to highlight student progress and achievement. Read how this was successful for one corps member • Communicating with student influencers about their students’ progress • Class newsletters that highlight student work and progress (posted in the classroom, or shared with parents and administrators) • Letting students share successes with class • Posting excellent student work in the classroom or on bulletin boards • Reporting extraordinary accomplishments to local paper or television • Chants and cheers for hard work (“kiss your brain”, “firecracker,” self-created class raps/songs etc.) (elementary)

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Privileges	Classroom or school – related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free time (being able to read, work on the computer, do challenge assignments, play academic-related games) • Collaborative group work – as a reward for hard work by individuals or the entire class (e.g., if the class meets a certain academic goal, students can work in teams on an assignment) • Tutoring other students in the class or younger students in the school • Physical activity (e.g., extra recess or physical education time; playing basketball, jumping rope, etc. with students after school) • Classroom jobs (e.g., attendance-recorder, hall monitor, line leader, group leader, paper passer, etc.) • Visits to the school library or computer lab • Helping to create a class bulletin board (elementary) • Show and tell (elementary) • Eating lunch with the teacher (also a great way to build relationships with students) (elementary)
	Special events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties or celebrations (popcorn parties, dance/music parties, writing publishing parties, class feasts, etc. used to celebrate academic achievements and student success) • Whole class challenges or competition between classes* to meet an academic goal, with a reward or prize for success (e.g. challenging a class to improve their knowledge of the time tables, pitting periods against each other for reaching the highest unit assessment scores, if you're teaching the same unit to multiple classes in a content/grade level, etc.) • Field trips – as a whole class reward or a special privilege for a select group of students (e.g. visits to museums, performances, libraries, bookstores, etc.) • Guest speakers – not only can you use speakers as motivational role models for students (I-3), but students can eagerly anticipate such speakers in the same way that they may look forward to class parties • End of the year privileges - many middle and high schools use these, especially for “senior” students in the building (secondary)

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	<p>Special events</p>	<p>Note: <i>When establishing a competition, create a system with a positive, rather than negative, root. For example, a system where students achieve X reward after earning Y points for being on task is usually more successful than a system where students achieve X reward for wasting less than Y minutes of learning time over the course of a month. The former allows you to “catch students being good,” while the latter system sets up a divide between you and the students because you are keeping track of what they are not doing well.</i></p>
<p>Stuff</p>	<p>Prizes and Celebrations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raffle tickets or group/class points (that can translate into other rewards) • Books, magazines, and book marks • Snacks (fruit, granola bars...sometimes candy) (check with parents first to ensure there are no allergies or dietary restrictions) • School supplies (pens, pencils, pencil sharpeners, erasers, notebooks, folders, etc.) • Achievement Certificates • Earning a class pet (elementary) • Stickers/Stamps (elementary) <p>Note: prizes are often connected to or used in conjunction with the privileges listed above (e.g., competitions and parties)</p>

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How do I tailor my strategies to fit individual student needs?

In order for your reinforcements to be successful, you need to use a variety of strategies that will meet the needs of individual students. While the strategies in the table above are helpful as a start, the most effective teachers think of *specific* things that will motivate *specific* children. An effective coach knows he sometimes needs to deliver slightly different pep talks to each key player in order to spur them to strive tirelessly in the big game. A strong political leader knows and appeals to the values, feelings, and interests of her constituencies when crafting new legislation. And a successful teacher constantly discovers more and more of what makes each student “tick” and uses that information to draw out and motivate him or her. To help do this:

- **Build relationships with students** through sharing meals, tutoring, extracurricular activities, home visits, or just talking with students before and after school or during free time. When you take the time to listen to your students, you develop a stronger grasp of how you might tap into their experiences and opinions to develop reinforcement strategies that will motivate and excite them.
- **Ask students what they would find exciting.** They are sure to have lots of good ideas for what would motivate them to work hard! “If we had a party, what kind of food would you be most excited to have at the party?” “If you could spend 30 minutes on Friday afternoon doing exactly what you wanted to do, what would you do?”
- **Use student surveys** to gather information about their interests, background, personality, etc. that can be used to help find motivating strategies
- **Pay attention to existing reinforcement systems** – notice how different students respond to your current reinforcements and adjust them accordingly
- **Talk to student influencers** about what they find motivates or interests their children
- **Ask other teachers** (past or present) about what reinforcements they have found to be effective for your individual students