



Alternatives To Using Food As A Reward In The Classroom

Rewarding children with food is discouraged in the MCPS Wellness Regulation, which states: “It is encouraged that foods and beverages available to students during school-sponsored activities make a positive contribution to the students’ diet and promote health. **Staff should avoid using candy or other foods of minimal nutritional value as a classroom reward.**” Here are some alternatives.

Zero Cost Alternatives

Sit by friends
Wear a hat day
Watch a video
Read/have class outdoors
Eat lunch outside
Have extra art time
Choose spot in line
Play a computer game
Have an extra recess
Have a dance party
Read to a younger class
Lunch in the classroom
Get a no homework pass
Have class show and share
Make deliveries to the office
Listen to music while working
Play a favorite game or puzzle

Earn play money for privileges
Walk with a teacher during lunch
Be a helper in another classroom
Hand out directed draws for art time
Allow students to learn in their socks
Listen with a headset to a book on tape
Bring stuffed toys as learning partners
Get “free choice” time at the end of the day
Have a class read in with blankets and pillows
Wear socks outside of pants for crazy sock day
Have a teacher perform special skills (i.e. sing)
Have a teacher read a special book to the class
Playing follow the leader around the school
Brain Breaks using Go Noodle or other interactive education tool

Low-Cost Alternatives

Select a paperback book
Have a bubble party
Enter a drawing for donated prizes
Take a trip to the treasure box (non-food)
Get stickers, pencils, and other school supplies
Receive a movie theater coupon
Get a set of flash cards printed from the computer
Receive a “mystery pack” (notepad, folder, sports cards, etc.)

An Idea from a Teacher: Friday Free Time: “I give my students 30 minutes at the beginning of the week and they can earn or lose free time according to their behavior. I use a timer and turn it on (they can hear it) if they are too loud working, lining up, etc. I add time when their behavior is good. Adding time is the most effective. I save time by not waiting for them to settle down so I don’t feel bad about the free time.”

(Adapted from materials from Michigan Dept. of Community Health)

Why not reward children with food?

1. Overrides parental consent;
2. Infringes on parents' freedom to feed their own children as they see fit;
3. Contributes to childhood obesity, which now adversely affects one-third of America's children;
4. Overrides children’s own hunger cues, and encourages them to eat simply because food is presented to them;
5. Undercuts the school’s own nutrition education, if the food in question is not nutritious.

Excerpts from Bettina Elias Siegel’s “The Lunch Tray’s Food in the Classroom Manifesto”
<http://www.thelunchtray.com/the-lunch-trays-food-in-the-classroom-manifesto> and:
<http://thebrownbagteacher.blogspot.com/2016/02/20-positive-behavior-rewards-that-arent.html>