

Creating Healthy Schools

5.2 Avoiding food as a reward

What is the current policy?

Schools will not use food or beverages as rewards for academic performance or good behavior. If a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) recommends the use of food for behavior modification, a teacher may use food as a reward for that student. However, food shall be used as a last alternative for behavioral

modification as part of an IEP, and teachers should minimize classroom use and provide healthy food when available. Teachers may use physical activity as a reward for academic performance or good behavior, as appropriate.

Ideas!

How can your school get more involved?

There are several ways to eliminate the use of food as a reward in your classroom or in your school. Below is a list of suggested alternatives to food rewards for teachers, coaches and other staff:

Social Rewards

- Attention
- Praise
- Thanks

Recognition

- Photo recognition board
- Trophy, ribbon, or certificate
- Recognizing achievements during school-wide announcements

Privileges

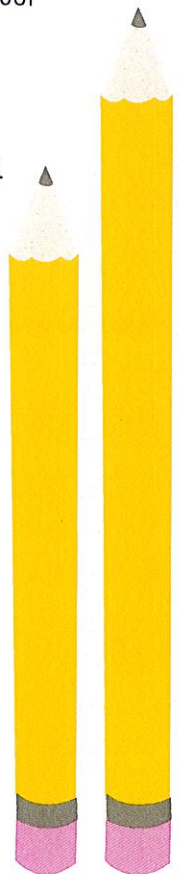
- Choosing a class activity or a physical activity break
- Sitting next to/being on the same team as a friend
- "No Homework" Pass
- Going first in a game or activity
- Being the "line leader"

Why use alternatives to food for rewards?

Children in today's environment are already overwhelmed with too many unhealthy food choices, which can lead to overweight, obesity, and other health problems. Rewarding students with unhealthy food can make food choices even more confusing and reinforces the unhealthy link between food of poor nutritional value and positive feedback. Providing food based on performance or behavior also connects food to mood.

Often, the food has little to no nutritional value. Using food as a reward can undermine other school nutrition education, encourage overconsumption of food with high sugar and fat, teach children to eat when they are not hungry and lead to obesity. Research shows that healthy children improve academic achievement. Staff can play an important role in avoiding the use of food as a reward.

Research shows that healthy children improve academic achievement.



Resources:

- The Center for Science in the Public Interest has produced a resource that explains the rationale for using non-food rewards, as well as more ideas for other non-food rewards. "Constructive Classroom Rewards: Promoting Good Habits While Protecting Children's Health":
http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/constructive_rewards.pdf
- The Saddleback Valley Unified School District in Mission Viejo, CA has offered examples of non-food rewards broken down into options appropriate for elementary, middle, and high school grade levels. Information can be found at:
<http://www.svusd.k12.ca.us/HealthyKids/PDF/IdeasforRewards.pdf>
- Michigan State University has outlined non-food reward ideas based on cost:
<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Michigan/foodrewards.pdf>
- The Utah Department of Health has an extensive resource on more specific ideas to implement non-food rewards and the benefits:
<http://health.utah.gov/obesity/gms/guide/RewardsKids.pdf>
- The Alliance for a Healthier Generation explains why using food as a reward is discouraged and provides alternative ideas for non-food rewards:
https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/tljc7f/12-5933_NonFoodRewards.pdf

Two other versions of this policy item are available for both administration and family to assist with implementation.



Ideas!

Class Rewards

- Listening to music while working
- Eating lunch outdoors
- Extra art, music, recess or PE time

Sports Equipment/Athletic Gear

- Water bottles
- Jump rope
- Frisbees

School Supplies

- Pens, pencils, markers
- Notebooks
- Gift certificate to the school store

Toys/Trinkets

- Stickers
- Magnifying glasses
- Balloons

Fashion Wear

- Hat/caps
- Sunglasses
- Bracelets, rings, necklaces

Token or Point System for a larger prize

- Pedometer
- Party
- Sporting event ticket

Miscellaneous

- Key chains
- Magnets
- Books