

This week's issue:

SHOULD STUDENTS BE PAID FOR PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL?



During the 2008-09 school year, Washington, D.C., public schools **implemented** a new program. Middle school students were paid up to \$200 a month for attendance, good behavior, and other criteria like wearing uniforms and completing homework and classwork. The Schools Chancellor said that the payments were meant to **motivate** students at an age when many start to get bored with school. So she decided it was worth undertaking a monetary **incentive** program to see if it improved their motivation to do well.

Over the course of the school year, participating students received an average of approximately \$530 each, for a total payout of \$1.2 million. Harvard economist Roland Fryer analyzed the findings from the incentive study. He concluded that students who were paid through this incentive program scored slightly higher on some district tests than students who weren't offered a monetary incentive.

Some people criticize the idea of paying students to attend and do well in school. After all, in Africa, many students are willing to pay fees and undergo considerable hardship to attend school. Why should American students receive money for attending? Furthermore, paying students might undermine their natural motivation to learn. Even if paying students gets some quick results, wouldn't it be better in the long run to **undertake** changes or reforms to make school more interesting?

Others think that monetary incentives should only be used to motivate students who are more likely to struggle in school. In France, for example, there was a movement to pay students from low-income areas to attend school. Many argued that incentives would encourage these students who were at risk of dropping out to stay in school. This would help the country as a whole.

Defenders of the incentive program say the issue is simple: We should do whatever it takes to **enable** students to do better in school. They won't learn if they are not in school, so paying for attendance is worth it. Others are confident that paying students for different things like reading books would have an even greater effect. What is your opinion? Should students ever be paid to attend or do well in school?

SHOULD STUDENTS BE PAID FOR PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL?



implement | motivate | undertake | incentive | enable

USE THE FOCUS WORDS * and alternate parts of speech

implement (*verb*) to put something (a decision, plan, action, etc.) into effect

➡ **Sample Sentence:** On January 1, the two countries will begin **implementing** the new peace plan.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Should all schools **implement** a “no peanut” policy?

***implement** (*noun*) a tool

➡ **Sample Sentence:** A fork and a spoon are eating **implements**.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What **implements** would you need if you wanted to make a tuna sandwich?

motivate (*verb*) to make someone or something want to take action

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Our volleyball team was **motivated** to beat Central Middle School because we lost to them last time.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What would you tell a friend to **motivate** him or her to get healthy?

undertake (*verb*) to accept as a challenge

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Because she needed money, Susannah agreed to **undertake** the difficult task of babysitting her neighbor.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What task would you **undertake** to make a few dollars?

incentive (*noun*) a reward that leads someone to take action

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Playing chess with his father was Tyrese’s **incentive** to finish his homework early.

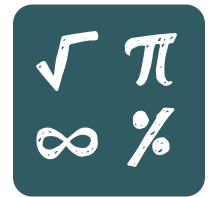
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What are some **incentives** a teacher could offer to convince all students to complete their homework?

enable (*verb*) to make something possible

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Mahmoud’s three-pointers **enabled** his team to make a comeback in the championship game.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How could knowing a second language **enable** you to get a good job?

SHOULD STUDENTS BE PAID FOR PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL?



implement | motivate | undertake | incentive | enable

DO THE MATH


Option 1: The **incentive** program in Washington, D.C., was designed to **motivate** students. Good behavior, good attendance, and other factors like homework completion **enabled** students to earn up to \$100 per pay period. Each pay period is 2 weeks, or 10 school days.

There are 180 days in the school year. What is the maximum amount of money that each student could earn for the year?

- A. \$180
- B. \$900
- C. \$1,800
- D. \$4,500

Option 2: Many different people have **undertaken** efforts to create better schools. Their ideas vary widely. Some schools are based on strict discipline, while others are based on student freedom. Some use complicated textbooks, while others use no textbooks at all. But no plan can **enable** schools to succeed if students are **unmotivated**. Are cash **incentives** the answer? If we took a fraction of the money spent buying books, paying teachers, and **implementing** programs, and offered it directly to students as an incentive to focus and study, would this fix our schools?

In the U.S., schools spend about \$10,000 per student per year. Some schools spend more and some spend less. What if we turned 5% of the money spent on each student into incentive money? If i = incentive money and e = expenditure per student, write a formula that would show the relationship between per-student expenditure and per-student incentive.

 **Discussion Question:** Pretend that your school wants to **implement** a cash **incentive** plan to encourage students to attend an extra one-hour study session after school each day. What is the minimum amount it would take to **motivate** you to attend for one week? How about for one year? Would it be cost-effective for your school to **undertake** this kind of plan?

SHOULD STUDENTS BE PAID FOR PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL?



implement | motivate | undertake | incentive | enable

THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

The students in Mr. Seemy’s class are about to take a test on organizing and interpreting data. Mr. Seemy asks, “What would you say if I told you that those of you who got an A on this test would get \$20?”

“I’d say that’s the best news I’ve heard all year!” exclaims Shantel. “I would be much more **motivated** to study if I knew I could make money for doing well.”

Mr. Seemy says, “The school is thinking about **implementing** a program to pay students when they get good grades. It would be a partnership between local businesses and the government to provide the money and payment plans.”

“Really?” questions Sharif. “**Incentives** are great, but I think that would send the wrong message to kids. There are other good reasons for doing well in school. Money isn’t everything, you know.”

“But it sure does help. I mean, anything that **enables** kids to learn more is good, right?” responds Shantel.

“Well, to **undertake** such a program, the school would need to gather evidence to support the idea that money **motivates** students to get better grades,” says Mr. Seemy. “Shantel, do you think you can prove you’re right?”

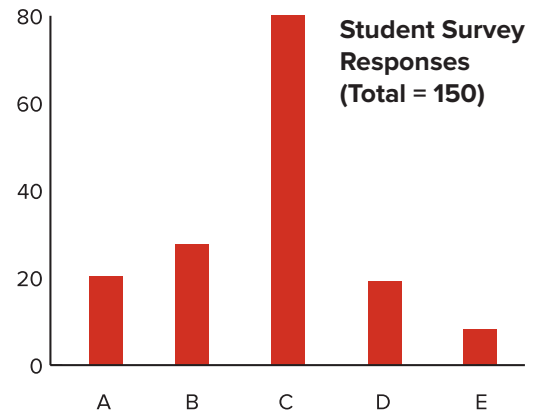
“I’m sure of it. I’ll survey everyone in 8th grade,” replies Shantel, “and my evidence will show that money is the most important reason students are **motivated** to get good grades.”

“I’ll work with you, just to make sure you report your data accurately!” says Sharif.

Shantel and Sharif’s survey

To me, the **most important reason** for getting good grades is...

- A. Having my friends think I’m smart
- B. Getting approval/privileges (not money) from my parents
- C. Being able to get a good job/get into a good college
- D. Getting money so I can buy stuff
- E. Feeling good about myself



Was Shantel right? Do students consider money to be the most important? How do you know?

Are you surprised by the data that Shantel and Sharif collected? Why or why not?

How could you replicate this investigation at your school?

