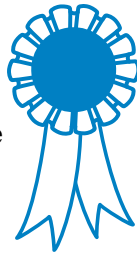


Healthy Choices for Classroom Rewards

Making the case for non-food rewards

Food is a commonly used, easy and inexpensive way to reward students for good behaviour and classroom success... with many negative consequences, such as:

- Contradicting the classroom nutrition lessons
- Eating foods high in fat, sugar and salt instead of healthy food choices
- Giving children sugary foods when they can't brush their teeth to prevent dental caries
- Making it hard for children to learn to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are satisfied, which could encourage overeating
- Fostering a preference for sweet foods, making it tricky to get children to eat foods that don't taste sweet, like vegetables, plain milk and unsweetened cereal



Nutrition Tools for Schools

- Helps children to develop a healthy relationship with food where they eat only in response to hunger cues and not for an emotional reward
- Reinforces the classroom healthy eating education
- Protects children's dental health
- Links to the 'whole school approach' to creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment
- Shows parents and the local community that the school takes the health of its students seriously

What are healthy classroom rewards?

Healthy classroom rewards are rewards that do not include food. Food rewards can be an easy way to bring about an immediate behaviour change in students; however, if rewards of food with poor nutritional value are used in schools, then students receive mixed messages about healthy eating. Consider using non-food rewards or incentives to recognize positive behaviour or classroom success.

Benefits of non-food rewards

Providing non-food rewards:

- Reduces the chance of contributing to health problems in children

Success to share

At Ellen Fairclough Public School in Markham, Ontario, Grade 1 students are encouraged to bring nutritious foods to school every day to nourish growing bodies and enhance learning. Students who have demonstrated healthy eating habits are rewarded in a fun and positive way. Every time a student brings a healthy snack for their 30 minute *Nutrition Break*, he/she receives a ticket to put into a special container. On Fridays, five names are drawn and these students are invited to choose a prize from the reward box. Their teacher provides the prizes using dollar store pencils, books, toys and games. The students see that the more healthy snacks they bring to eat at school, the better their chances are for a prize. The children respond well to this idea even when their name is not drawn knowing they have a chance again next week.

*Submitted by Christine Tracey, Teacher,
Ellen Fairclough Public School*

Privileges:

Use play money or tickets as rewards and set amounts that students can save up and cash in for certain privileges in the classroom. By using play money, students can learn some concepts from the Mathematics curriculum about measurement.

Reward and inspire students by giving them a chance to:

- Sit by friends
- Read outdoors
- Enjoy class outdoors
- Have an extra recess
- Read to a younger class
- Be first in line for the day
- Make deliveries to the office
- Have extra art or computer time
- Walk with a teacher during lunch
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Play a favourite game or do a puzzle
- Eat lunch with a teacher or principal
- Listen with a headset to a book on tape
- Dance to favourite music in the classroom
- Choose an activity for physical education class
- Have a teacher read a special book to the class
- Enjoy an 'invite a friend into the classroom for lunch' coupon
- Sit in the teacher's chair or act as teacher's assistant for the day



Recognition:

Recognizing a student's achievement in the morning announcements gives a child great pleasure. A phone call, e-mail, or letter sent home to a parent or caregiver commending a child also recognizes accomplishment. Acknowledge students who have demonstrated important school values (eg, respect, honesty, responsibility) with a certificate in front of their peers. Choose a 'Student of the Week' and present a trophy that the student can keep on their desk for the week. You can make a trophy or look for a used trophy at a second-hand store.

A treasure box of rewards!

Fill a treasure box with items that promote learning or physical activity. Consider the following treasures!

- Magnifying glass
- Stickers
- Slinkies
- Pencils
- Hacky sacks
- Note pads
- Frisbees
- Bouncy balls
- Skipping ropes
- Fancy paperclips
- Erasers
- Playing cards
- Bookmarks
- Marbles
- Hair accessories
- Jacks

Check out discount stores for other great ideas.

Does your school have a Healthy School Nutrition Environment?

A Healthy School Nutrition Environment exists when a school promotes healthy eating through words *and* actions. Students get the same message about food, nutrition and healthy eating wherever food is served – in the classroom, in the school and at home. The following nine Essential Elements¹ are recommended for a school to have a healthy nutrition environment.

| Whole School Approach | Essential Elements |
|---|---|
| In the School | <p>Does your school offer healthy, reasonably priced and culturally-appropriate food choices? For example does your school have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy fundraising? • a school milk program? • a healthy tuck shop? • healthy 'special food' days? • non-food rewards in the classroom? • healthy classroom celebrations? • healthy refreshments at school meetings and events? |
| | Do parents, teachers and volunteers role model healthy eating and body image behaviours at school? |
| | Does your school have a Student Nutrition Program (eg, breakfast, snack and lunch)? |
| | Does your school practise safe food practices and have an allergy-safe environment? |
| | Are nutrition breaks at school appropriately scheduled? |
| | Does your school have a food and nutrition policy? |
| | In the Classroom |
| Do teachers have up-to-date nutrition resources to support the healthy eating expectations in the curriculum? | |
| In Homes and In the Community | Does your school provide student, parent and community education about healthy eating? |

¹ Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup. 2004 *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*.

Need more information?

Public health offers *Nutrition Tools for Schools - a toolkit for elementary schools*. Whether you're a teacher, parent, school administrator or volunteer, this toolkit will lead you through a step-by-step process to creating a healthy nutrition environment in your school. *Nutrition Tools for Schools* contains a variety of resources and tools to implement the nine Essential Elements listed above. For more information about this toolkit, please contact your public health unit/department.

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