



CASE STUDY

BOTHWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL (5TH-8TH GRADES), MARQUETTE, MICHIGAN**CLASSROOM REWARDS**

Searching for a non-food method to encourage and reward students for behavior that qualifies as “good” or “beyond what is expected,” the school district’s Health & Wellness Committee developed an incentive program that’s worth its weight in gold. The fact that the program has been in effect for over five years is a testament to its success.

When a student does a good job, helps someone, participates in a school-related activity or goes beyond what is expected, a teacher and other school staff member awards the student with a “gold card” (equivalent to raffle entry form) and/or sends a “positive postcard” home to the student’s parents.

The principal, Bill Saunders, asks that all teachers send home at least one positive postcard for each student in their class each year.

Once the gold card is signed by a parent, the student submits the card and is entered into a weekly prize drawing. Prizes include ski lift tickets, ski rentals, movie gift certificates, hockey tickets, YMCA passes, t-shirts, and gift certificates to local merchants. When a student wins the prize drawing, their name is announced during “Gold Card Friday”. Every two weeks, students in the 7th and 8th grades are eligible to win an iTunes gift card. Larger drawings are offered at the end of each marking period. At the end of the school year, all cards are entered into a drawing for a new bike.

In the past, many teachers used their own money to purchase candy and prizes for rewards. Now, Box Tops collected by students in the Honor Society and donations from the Parent Organization help cover the cost of prizes, gold cards and postcards. “We’ve reduced our reliance on candy as a motivator for students,” said Paula Diedrich, Honor Society Advisor and parent, “and it’s less expensive for staff.”

In fact, many parents have commented on how much they appreciate receiving positive postcards that recognize students’ improvement in the classroom, participation in school activities and /or success in school-related competitions such as spelling bees, talent shows, and music solos and ensembles. School staff members are pleased to have the opportunity to provide positive rewards—they feel better knowing that they are rewarding students positively instead of providing sugary treats.

The biggest challenges with the program are that older students are less likely to seek out gold cards and that some teachers continue to use candy instead of gold cards as rewards. The Wellness Committee is working on solutions to these issues.

In addition to the incentive program for students, Bothwell Middle School holds a weekly “Blue Card” staff appreciation prize drawing for faculty and staff.

The Health & Wellness Committee believes that the keys to the program’s success are to ask students for input on prizes, make sure prizes are age-appropriate, seek out donations for prizes, and develop a similar program for staff.

Students and school staff are motivated by and enjoy this incentive/positive feedback program. “Students are excited about prizes and more students seek out ways to earn a gold card. And families also appreciate the positive feedback. The parents also like that prizes are age-appropriate and allow the family to be involved.”

SARA MOYLE, NUTRITIONAL HEALTH TEACHER
AND HEALTH & WELLNESS COMMITTEE MEMBER