

## REWARDS

Research clearly demonstrates that healthy kids learn better. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, schools must provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Students need to receive consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. Finding alternatives to food rewards is an important part of providing a healthy school environment.

Consequences of Using Food Rewards:

1. **Compromises Classroom Learning:** Schools are designed to teach and model appropriate behaviors and skills to children. Nutrition principles taught in the classroom are meaningless if they are contradicted by rewarding children with candy and other sweets. It's like saying, "You need to eat healthy foods to feel and do your best, but when you behave or perform your best, you will be rewarded with unhealthy food." Classroom learning about nutrition remains strictly theoretical if schools regularly model unhealthy behaviors.
2. **Contributes to Poor Health:** Foods commonly used as rewards, like candy and cookies, can contribute to health problems for children, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cavities. Food rewards provide unneeded calories and displace healthier food choices.
3. **Encourages Overconsumption of Unhealthy Foods:** Foods used as rewards are typically high in fat, added sugars and sodium with little nutritional value. Decreasing the availability of these foods is one strategy schools can use to address the current childhood obesity epidemic.
4. **Contributes to Poor Eating Habits:** Rewarding with food can interfere with children learning to eat in response to hunger and satiety cues. This teaches kids to eat when they are not hungry as a reward to themselves, and may contribute to the development of disordered eating.
5. **Increases Preference for Sweets:** Food preferences for both sweet and non-sweet foods increase significantly when foods are presented as rewards. This can teach children to prefer unhealthy foods.

If rewards are given in the classroom, schools shall encourage the use of non-food based rewards whenever possible. Alternatives to food based rewards are:

Elementary School Students:

1. Make deliveries to office
2. Teach class
3. Be a helper in another classroom
4. Read morning announcements
5. Sit with friends
6. Have lunch or breakfast in the classroom
7. Have a private lunch in the classroom with a friend
8. Play a favorite game or do puzzles
9. Extra recess time

10. Free time at the end of class
11. Dance to music in the classroom
12. Walk with the principal or teacher
13. Fun physical activity break
14. Trip to treasure box filled with non-food items, e.g., stickers, pencils, erasers, bookmarks, school supplies
15. Teacher or volunteer reads special book to class
16. Fun movie
17. Certificate, trophy, ribbon, plaque
18. Teacher performs special skill, e.g., singing, guitar playing Listen to music or a book on audiotape
19. Read outdoors or have class outdoors
20. Extra art, music or reading time
21. Access to items that can only be used on special occasions, e.g., special art supplies, toys gift certificate to school store (nonfood items)
22. Commendation certificate or letter sent home to parents
23. Resources
24. Show-and-tell
25. Earn points or play money for privileges or non-food items

#### Middle School Students:

1. Sit with friends
2. Choose partners for activities
3. Listen to music while working at desk
4. Reduced homework or “no homework” pass
5. Extra credit
6. Fun movie
7. Brainteaser puzzles, group activities and games
8. Earn points or play money for privileges or non-food items
9. Free choice time or chat break at end of class Assemblies
10. Field trips
11. Eat lunch outside or have class outside

#### High School Students:

1. Extra credit
2. Fun movie
3. Reduced homework
4. Late homework pass
5. Donated coupons for music or movies Drawings for donated prizes
6. Pep rally
7. Recognition on morning announcements Tickets to school events, e.g., dances

Source: Alternatives to Food Rewards, Connecticut State Board of Education,  
[https://healthymeals.fns.usda.gov/hsmrs/Connecticut/Food\\_As\\_Reward.pdf](https://healthymeals.fns.usda.gov/hsmrs/Connecticut/Food_As_Reward.pdf).

Find more ideas and discussion in this document: Healthy Alternatives for School Celebrations, Rewards, Fundraisers and Snacks from Kansas City  
(<https://www.tpchd.org/files/library/3379ffef0bb808ad.pdf>).