Focus Words

implement | motivate | undertake | incentive | enables

Weekly Passage

In September 2007, New York City underlined implemented a new program to try to motivate students to do well in school. The mayor wanted to undertake the task of raising student achievement in a new way. He offered students money as an incentive to try hard. Some fourth and seventh graders were paid up to $500 per year for doing well on the city's math and reading tests.

Many people are excited about the mayor's idea. They think this will make school more like the real world, where people earn money for working hard. Students might do better if they get immediate rewards. It is hard for them to wait for the "payoff" of getting into college or finding a good job. Also, they might learn more. Knowing they will be paid for high scores could make them study harder.

However, some people think that this is not fair. They worry about students who try their hardest, but still don't score well enough on the test to get the reward. Those students might stop trying in the future. Also, many people believe that education should be its own reward. A good education makes someone a better critical thinker and more creative. It enables people to deal with challenges they face. If students are only motivated by earning money, they might not understand that learning can be fun.

Will New York City's program help students succeed in school? Should students be paid for high test scores?

Should students be paid to do well in school?
Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms	Examples of Use	Notes
implement	(v.) - to put a plan into action			
motivate	(v.) - to make someone want to take action			
undertake	(v.) - to accept as a challenge			
incentive	n.) - a reward that leads someone to take action			
enables	(v.) - makes something possible			

Should students be paid to do well in school?
Problem of the Week

Option 1: Washington D.C. School Chancellor Michelle Rhee has **undertaken** the task of improving schools. With her help, D.C. public schools have **implemented** a cash **incentive** program. The program is designed to **motivate** students to work hard and behave properly. Good behavior **enables** 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. How much could each student expect to earn per year?

A) $180

B) $1,800

C) $360

D) $3,600

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 1-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 to do well in school?

Debating the Issue

1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Students should be paid for high scores on tests. This will motivate them to do well and reward hard work.

B Students should not be paid for high scores on tests. This incentive will lead them to think only of money and not of the value of learning.

C Schools should implement a plan to pay students for effort and improvement, not for their actual score on a test.

D Money should be offered only to students who are struggling, to enable them to improve.

E _____
_____
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2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

_____

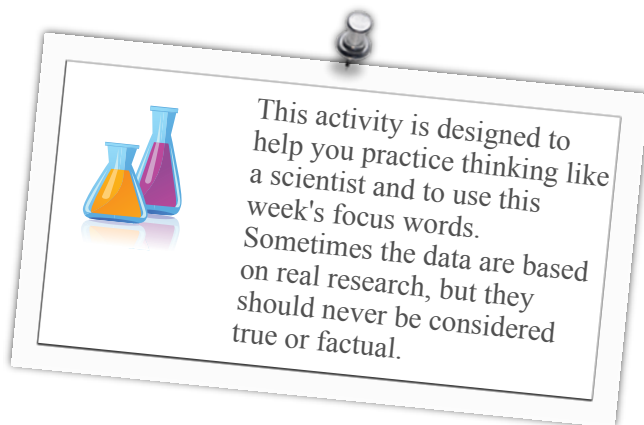_____

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GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

> I believe that...

> I agree with you because. . .

> You make a good point, but have you considered...

> Can you show me evidence in the text that supports what you said?

Should students be paid to do well in school?
Science Activity

This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

In Professor Seemy's classroom, Sekou reads aloud from a magazine article:

"Around the country, experts are **undertaking** the task of improving schools. To **motivate** students, some districts have **implemented** cash **incentive** programs."

"So they're paying kids for good grades?" asks Nicole. "Who provides the money?"

Sekou continues. "Special programs with names like Spark and Capital Gains **enable** schools to pay students for good performance."

"Great idea!" says Nicole. "Does it really work?"

Question:

Will cash incentives improve grades?

Hypothesis:

Cash incentives will improve students' grades.

Materials:

▸ 40 students
▸ incentive money

Procedure:

1. Record students' grades in all classes.
2. Introduce incentive program.
3. Wait one month.
4. Record students' grades.
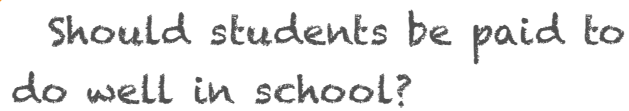5. Calculate the students' average grades before and after the incentives.

Data:

	Before Incentives	After Incentives
Average Grade	C-	B

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?

Writing Prompt

Should students be paid to do well in school?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

implement | motivate | undertake | incentive | enables

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A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

☐ Stated my own position
☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

☐ Stated my own position clearly
☐ Included 1-2 arguments
☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

☐ Stated my own position clearly
☐ Included 1-2 arguments
☐ Included 1 counterargument
☐ Used 2-5 focus words

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