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Word Generation - Unit 2.05

Focus Words

implement | motivate | undertake | incentive | enables



Weekly Passage

In September 2007, New York City 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?

TEACHER - Discussion Questions

- ▶ Describe the plan the New York mayor plans to implement to help students succeed.
- ▶ What motivates you to do well in school?
- ▶ Are there incentives that might motivate students in your school to work harder?
- ▶ What would you do if you decided to undertake the task of raising student achievement?
- ▶ Why do some people think education should be its own reward?

Unit 2.05**Should students be paid to do well in school?****Focus Word Chart - TEACHER VERSION**

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
implement	(v.) - to put a plan into action	implements implemented implementing implement (n.)		implementation implementable	
motivate	(v.) - to make someone want to take action	motivates motivated motivating	motive	demotivate unmotivated motivation motivator	motion demote promote
undertake	(v.) - to accept as a challenge	undertaken undertaking undertakes	take	undertaker	overtake
incentive	n.) - a reward that leads someone to take action	incentives		disincentive incentivize	
enables	(v.) - makes something possible	enabled enabling	able	enabler	disable

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.

Answer: $.05e = i$ or $20i = e$ etc.

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?

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2010). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2009*. Retrieved on July 21, 2010 from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=66>.

Should students be paid to do well in school?

Debating the Issue



GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

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 _____

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?

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:

TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

Unit 2.05

Should students be paid to do well in school?

Science Activity

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



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.

TEACHER

Real Research:

-The Education Innovation Laboratory ("EdLabs") at Harvard University is dedicated to using the scientific method to improve education. Presently, the lab is studying incentives as a way to motivate students. (Spark and Capital Gains are both EdLabs projects.) Although the experiments are still in their early stages, preliminary data suggests that incentive programs improve achievement and behavior, at least in the short term.

EdLabs. (n.d.). Innovations. Retrieved on January 12, 2010 from <http://www.edlabs.harvard.edu/>

The Other Side:

Critics of incentives say short-term compliance is the wrong goal. Alfie Kohn has written several books about rewards in education, including *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*. He claims that students view reward systems as a means of control, and that while rewards may spur compliance, the process makes them less likely to voluntarily adopt desired behaviors once the rewards are removed. He also claims that people's ability to perform creative tasks or tasks that require higher-level thinking is actually hindered by the offer of a reward for good performance.

Classroom Discussion: To promote class discussion, ask students for their reactions. Would an incentive system motivate them to study harder? How much money would it take? How long would it work? If cash incentives raise grades, should we use more incentives? Or should we resist them nonetheless?

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?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Grades were higher after the incentive program.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



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

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

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

Unit 2.05

Source References:

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- » Tuinman, J., Roger Farr, B.E. Blantin. (1972). Increases in test scores as a function of material rewards. The Journal of Educational Measurement 9 (3), p. 215 – 223.