



The big debate

Should schools reward attendance?

Some people think it's helpful to offer prizes to students just for showing up.

What you need to know

- "Chronic absenteeism" means missing more than 10% of a school year. About 23% of US students are chronically absent.
- To tackle the problem, some schools reward students who have high attendance rates.
- Some schools also work closely with families by encouraging parents to make sure their children go to school.
- Over the past two years, absence rates have fallen in some schools that reward students.



FAST FACTS
New York City has the largest school district in the US, with about 845,000 students. Los Angeles, California, is second, with about 420,000.

Public high school students in Detroit, Michigan, can win up to \$1,000 per semester in the "Perfect Attendance Pays" program. In New Orleans, Louisiana, high school graduates can win a car for perfect attendance. An elementary school in California offers students new sneakers or gift cards for regular attendance, while other kids can receive a free pass on homework or pencils and stickers. These programs can be effective: Chronic absenteeism in Detroit fell by 10% this year. But some people say winning prizes takes away from the point of school, which is to learn, and that the plan can backfire. What do you think? Should schools reward attendance?

Yes—it's positive reinforcement

Giving students prizes for good attendance makes them feel valued. It's motivating and creates positive associations with school. Whether it's a pair of sneakers, money, or even a car, winning is exciting, and it's more than most students could buy with their pocket money. And when students win prizes they can share with their family, it helps everyone. Studies show that when families are invested in a student's attendance, it improves. Schools have used reward systems for years, for anything from attendance to grades and participation. Giving cash or prizes is just a more modern way of recognizing a student's efforts.

No—school is its own reward

Getting an education has its own benefits, and prizes put the emphasis on the wrong thing. They could even become a distraction if students are more focused on rewards than learning. Besides, attendance rewards don't prepare young people for the real world, where you don't get a trophy for showing up at work. They also aren't fair. What if a student has a valid reason for being absent? Young people often miss school because they're caring for family members or having financial or transportation issues. Not only will they feel bad because they can't win a reward, but prizes don't solve the underlying challenges they're facing.

YES

Three reasons schools should reward attendance

- 1 Rewards create a fun, positive, and motivating environment at school.
- 2 Prizes can benefit the whole family, which gets everyone invested. Studies show that boosts attendance rates.
- 3 This isn't a new idea—it's just a modern version of reward systems that schools have had for years.

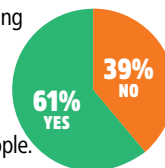
NO

Three reasons schools should not reward attendance

- 1 Attendance rewards put the focus on winning rather than learning, and they could even be a distraction.
- 2 It's not helpful to teach young people that you get a prize for showing up.
- 3 Prizes for attendance are unfair and don't help students with the real issues that could be keeping them out of school.

LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if the US should ban social media for teens. Most of you voted in favor of making the online platforms inaccessible to young people.



What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote **YES** if you think schools should reward attendance or **NO** if you don't. We'll publish the results next week.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.