The background of the slide features a soft-focus photograph of several young children smiling. In the foreground, a birthday cake with a single lit candle is visible. The text is overlaid on this image in a clean, white, sans-serif font. The slide is framed by dark blue horizontal bars on the left and right sides.

Using Incentives to Increase Participation in Out-of-School Time Programs

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Research-to-Results: Practitioner Insights



What Are Incentives?

- Incentives are the various methods used to motivate and/or reward children and youth to participate in out-of-school time programs.
- Incentives may be in the form of activities (such as special field trips, food, or recreation) or rewards (such as gift certificates).

Why Might Out-of-School Time Programs Use Incentives?

- Research suggests that out-of-school time program participation can:
 - Spur higher academic achievement,
 - Improve school attendance and student behavior,
 - Increase students' effort in and enjoyment of school, and
 - Deter delinquency.

Incentives may promote program attendance.

- Studies find financial incentives can motivate older youth to participate in out-of-school time programs.
- Research finds positive associations between special program offerings (such as art projects, recreation, & academic activities) and program attendance.

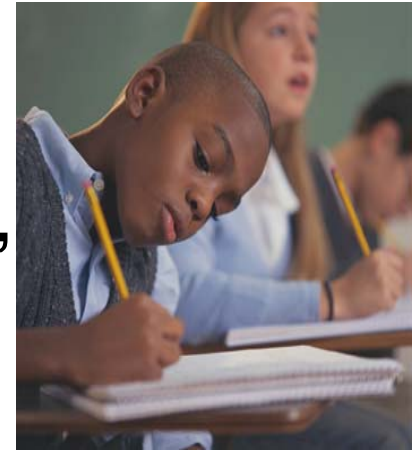


Incentives may promote a sense of belonging to a program.

- Research finds program activities can be used as incentives and can instill a sense of belonging in participants. Activities that build belonging include:
 - Special leadership opportunities,
 - Career-development activities, and
 - Service projects.
- Research finds that participants continue program involvement when they feel a sense of belonging to an activity.

Incentives may spur academic achievement.

- Incentives may strengthen students' commitment to learning.
- Program participation can motivate students to attend programs and receive additional academic support and personal attention that studies show improve students' academic performance.



What Types of Incentives Can Be Used for All Age Groups?

■ Financial Incentives

- Cash
- Gift certificates
- School-store coupons
- Stipends

■ Food

- Food can help recruit and retain participants.
- Some programs hold picnics and pizza parties at the start of the school year to attract program participants.



What Types of Incentives Can Be Used for All Age Groups?

■ Prizes

- Prizes are effective for all age groups, but the type of prize depends on participants' age and interest.

■ Special Field Trips

- While field trips may be a regular program feature, special trips for high attendance can reward participants who attend frequently.



Incentives for Young Children

■ Small tokens

- Small toys
- Decorative pencils or pens
- T-shirts
- Tickets to high school athletic events
- Daily passes for attendance that can be traded for prizes.



■ Special fields trips

- Children's museum, zoo, and planetarium

■ Special performing arts activities, computer time, or board games.

Incentives for Middle School Children

■ Prizes

- Tickets to sports events and raffle prizes (iPods, school spirit apparel, and gift certificates)

■ Special field trips

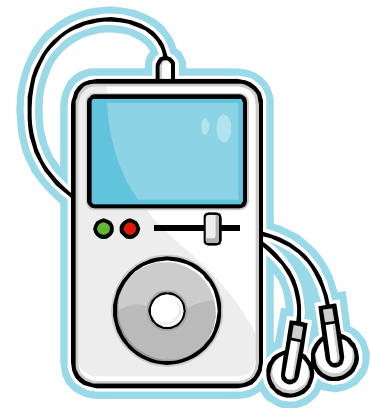
- Skating rink, bowling alley, or movies

■ Special enrichment activities

■ Computer time (Web design)

■ Extended sports or game time

■ TV or video time



Incentives for High School Youth

■ Prizes

- Tickets to sports events and raffle prizes (iPods and gift certificates).

■ Special field trips

- Skating rink, bowling alley, and movies

■ Leadership opportunities

- Program planning opportunities

■ Internships and other job preparation activities

■ Financial incentives



Incentives for Families

- Family engagement important to participants' program participation particularly of youth from cultures that value family closeness.
- Incentives may include:
 - Sewing or arts & crafts programs
 - English-as-a-Second language (ESL) classes
 - Access to program facilities (the computer lab or space for family gatherings)



Four Tips for Choosing and Using Incentives

Tip 1: Ask program participants for ideas.

- Ask or observe participants' interests to determine the incentive likely to have the greatest influence.

Tip 2: Provide incentives immediately after goals are reached.

- Provide the incentive immediately after the set goal is reached and preserve the value of the incentive by limiting the time for its use.

Tips for Choosing and Using Incentives Continued...

Tip 3: Gain community support.

- Partnerships can help provide incentives by contributing funding or special opportunities (special job shadowing or special field trips).
- Possible partners may include: local businesses, museums, colleges or social service agencies.
- To build long-term support with community organizations and businesses that are unfamiliar with your program, introduce your program mission, its successes, and future plans.

Tips for Choosing and Using Incentives Continued...

Tip 4: Use incentives sparingly.

- Research suggests that, if incentives are used too often, participants may rely on incentives as the sole motivation for program attendance.
- Instead, use incentives primarily to create interest in program participation.
- Incentive use should diminish (or be eliminated) as participants enjoy program components.

Resources For Your Program

■ Printed Resources:

- Blyth, D. & Walker, J. (2007). *Rethinking Programs for Youth in the Middle Years: New Directions for Youth Development, No. 112*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Edwards, S. & Martinez, K. (2004). *Fun Literacy Activities for After-School Programs: Books and Beyond*. Nashville, TN: School Age Notes.
- Haas-Foletta, K., Cogley, M., & Ottolini-Geno, L. (2005). *School Age Ideas and Activities for After-School Programs*. Nashville, TN: School Age Notes.
- Kirshner, B., O'Donoghue, J., & McLaughlin, M. (2003). *Youth Participation: Improving Institutions and Communities: New Directions for Youth Development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Resources For Your Program

■ Online Resources:

- **The Council on Foundations** provides a database for identifying potential funding sources. <http://www.cof.org/Locator/>.
- **After-School Snack Program** offers cash reimbursement to schools & out-of-school time programs serving students after-school snacks.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Afterschool/default.htm>
- **The After-School Corporation** shares an assortment of relevant publications and information on funding.
<http://www.tascorp.org/>
- **National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)** provides publications on partnership-building and creating engaging program activities. <http://www.niost.org/>
- **Harvard Family Research Project** shares research on increasing program attendance, engaging adolescents, and program recruitment and retention.
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/publist.html>
- **Afterschool Alliance** offers examples of ways to engage young people in out-of-school time programs and provides potential funding sources.
http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/funding_main.cfm



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Research brief available at:

http://www.childtrends.org/files//child_trends-2008_06_18_pi_ostincentives.pdf