

Youth Culture Lesson
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Making the Grade

Should Children be Bribed to Succeed in School?

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What Happened:

We all know that getting good grades is a big deal. Education, after all, is incredibly important; and kids who succeed in school are more likely to succeed after graduation, too. However, it can be a struggle for children to understand the importance of good grades; and adults are searching for new ways to motivate them.

Lately, there's been a trend toward bribery: Parents sometimes offer children money or other perks for A's and B's; and a few even give their children cars if their grades are up to snuff.

Now some schools are offering their own incentives. As part of an experiment, one Chicago high school recently offered students \$50 for every A and \$35 for every B they snagged—up to \$2,000 a year. Others dole out special privileges or other incentives.

Bribery, experts say, often doesn't work. They've found that offering money for grades actually may decrease a child's future performance: If a student gets cash for A's one semester, he or she *may* get better grades—but if that incentive is dropped the following semester, researchers say the student may not see the point of working hard anymore. "What we really want is for people to value the activity of learning," Edward Deci of the University of Rochester told *Time* magazine.

Research shows that sometimes bribes do work—even over the long term. Economist Roland Fryer Jr. of Harvard University found that paying second graders to read books paid off in better grades during the experiment and afterward. Perhaps as the children read more, their innate love of reading—and education—increased.

"If you pay kids to read books, their grades go up higher than if you actually pay kids for grades as we did in Chicago," says Fryer. "Isn't that cool?"

Talk About It:

Do you get good grades? If so, why? Do your parents offer you incentives for coming home with A's and B's? Are you working hard to get into college or a particular college? Do you just like to learn?

Many adults say it's better for youth to work hard in school for reasons other than money. Of course, most adults are paid for working. Do you think that's hypocritical? Are there better ways to motivate kids and teens to succeed in school? If so, what are they?

Is there a difference between an *incentive* and a *bribe*? If you become a parent, how would you try to motivate your child to succeed in school?

What the Bible Says:

“How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver” (Pr. 16:16).

“Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?” (Pr. 17:16).

“Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous” (Ex. 23:8).