

Providing Positive Feedback to Individual Students

(Excerpt from *The Solution Book*, Topic Booklet H)

The most important part of any classroom-behavior plan is providing positive feedback to individual students regarding their own performance. This type of feedback teaches each student that his or her hard work and efforts will be recognized. The student learns that the teacher is aware of and pleased with his or her performance. There is nothing worse than working industriously on a project only to find that no one is interested in the results. Imagine that you are asked by your district administration to present suggestions for improving the district's health curriculum. After working on the project for six weeks, you send in the report and no one in the district office even bothers looking at it. In all probability, you'd feel resentful and you'd probably be unwilling to serve on other district projects. It's no different with students. They must see that their performance is being monitored and their efforts recognized.

Giving individual students positive feedback requires that the teacher be well organized. By using the Daily Record Sheet and the Wall Chart outlined here, the teacher can provide positive feedback consistently, without having to do lots of extra work.

Step 1

Determine what will be monitored daily. The teacher should monitor each individual's performance during small-group instruction and on written assignments, as well as the student's behavior in general. During small-group instruction, each student can earn up to two points. (Record keeping and the value of points will be discussed later.) Points are earned when the student works hard, is cooperative, and follows all rules. If an individual has a minor problem or only exerts an effort part of the time, he or she should receive one point. Major problems or the failure to put out any effort at all should result in zero points. It is essential that the points assigned be highly contingent on the student's behavior. No student should receive two points unless he or she has worked extremely hard.

On written assignments, each of the major daily assignments should be worth one point. A student automatically receives one point for writing a paper that's 100 percent correct. A student can also earn one point if he or she has corrected all the errors on a paper. This means that a student may earn one point, even if he or she has had some difficulty with an assignment, by working hard and correcting all

errors.

Write down the assignments that students complete on a daily basis. Each of these assignments should be allotted one point. If there are several small tasks that students are expected to complete, group those tasks together and assign one point to the group of tasks. The breakdown of daily tasks might look something like the following:

Reading worksheets	1 point
Math worksheets	1 point
Handwriting	1 point
Spelling	1 point
English	1 point
Phonics worksheet	} 1 point
Math facts	
Journal entry	

Any long-term assignments can be assigned a point value based upon how many days of work are required. For example, if a social studies assignment requires five days of work for a half hour each day, five points would be a logical value to place on the assignment.

Notice that this point system can work in conjunction with whatever system of grading you use, although it is not a substitute for your grading system. The student still should be assigned a grade based on his or her original performance. However, the point system serves as an incentive for the student to correct work and learn from his or her mistakes.

Points should also be given to students for improving their behavior. If a student has typically had trouble staying in her seat, periodically give that student a bonus point when her behavior improves. The bonus point communicates that you appreciate her efforts. If a student is usually rude to others and you notice him being polite and helpful to another student, give that student a bonus point. All students have social and academic behaviors that they need to learn. Use bonus points as a means of encouraging them and their efforts.

Step 2

Record points on the Daily Record Sheet and transfer them to the Wall Chart. Points should be recorded and marked on the Wall Chart, which is placed so all the students can see it. In the Materials section of this notebook, there is a blank chart that can be reproduced. Type or write the students' names in alphabetical order on the left side of the chart. Then, make eight or ten copies of this chart with the names filled in. Place one of the charts on a wall where it will

be accessible to you at all times. It should be placed close to your small-group instruction area and close to the area where most large-group activities take place. Place the chart at a height that is accessible to you and easily visible to the students.

You can make a larger, more decorative chart if you wish, but keep in mind that some students will earn points at a faster rate than others do. This means some students will fill up the chart faster than others and a new chart will have to be made for them every few days, or at least once a week. Unless you or a particular student enjoys making charts, copying the chart in the Materials section is probably the easiest way to implement this system. Another idea would be to laminate your chart so that previous points can be erased to make room for more points. A laminated Wall Chart could be used throughout an entire year because information is so easily erased from it.

On page 6 is a sample Wall Chart that is partially filled in. Notice the varying rates at which students earn points.

To record points on the Wall Chart, whenever a small group is finished, take the students over to the chart and award them their points as you mark the points on the chart. Points may be recorded by simply putting a check or checks (✓), as many checks as points, in the appropriate squares. The dialogue that accompanies this ceremony might go something like the following:

"Lynn, fantastic job today. Two points.

"Julie, you were not working as hard as you should. One point today.

"Erik, terrific job; you kept your eyes on me and you answered every question. Two points.

"Clark, you kept your place throughout the entire story and you worked very hard. Two points.

"Allen, you were talking and not paying attention for a couple of minutes. Only one point today."

Awarding points at the end of each small-group session teaches students that you are evaluating and monitoring their efforts during their lesson. Don't wait until later to mark the chart. It's too difficult to remember who did what, and the delay will make the feedback seem less important to the students.

Whenever you have corrected written work, mark the chart before the work is handed back to the students. If you corrected the work during the evening, begin the next morning by marking the Wall

Chart and handing back the papers. The dialogue might go something like the following:

"Last night I graded the papers you did yesterday. When I call your name, please come up and get your papers and I will mark your points on the chart.

Charles, you have three papers, all with no errors, so I can mark three points next to your name. You need to make some corrections on your math and handwriting papers. Make the corrections and hand those papers back in. I can mark those points tomorrow.

"Jane, you get three points for yesterday's work and four points for your corrected work from the day before. Nice job. I'm marking your seven points on the chart."

If you go quickly, marking all of the students' points on the chart will require only about three minutes of your time. After you have discussed a student's points, lay his or her papers out for the student to pick up, and go on the next student's points, without stopping. The time spent discussing points earned is well worth it because it demonstrates that you are monitoring and evaluating the students' written work. It also shows students that if they work hard and do well, they can earn points very rapidly. If, on a particular day, you have a very tight schedule, add points to the chart before the students arrive at school and just do a quick oral summary of the points each student earned.

Awarding bonus points for especially good behavior can be accomplished in two ways. If you are near the chart, record the points directly on the chart. If you are not near the chart, or are engaged in working with a student or a small group, record the bonus points on the Daily Record Sheet, which is designed to be carried with you. Record the bonus points next to the student's name in the column labeled "Points to Be Recorded." Throughout the day, periodically transfer points from the Daily Record Sheet to the Wall Chart. Checks on the record sheet can simply be crossed off once they have been transferred. (See the sample on page 8.) It's essential for students to know that their points will be transferred to the chart. The dialogue for awarding students points for good behavior might sound something like the following:

"I really appreciate the way everyone is sitting quietly and is working so hard. You are all being very independent. Everyone has earned one bonus point. I'm marking it on my record sheet, and I will put the point on the chart later this morning.

"Kelly, it's really helpful to me when you are trying hard on your science work. I'm giving you one bonus point. I'll transfer it to the chart later.

"Willy, you've gotten all your work handed in on time. I'm giving you a bonus point for your effort. Thank you."

Should points ever be taken away from students when they misbehave?

No! A method of correcting students for misbehaving will be described later in this booklet. Don't ever take away points that a student has earned. The student worked hard to earn those points, and if the points are taken away, the student may become discouraged and upset. He or she might even stop trying to earn points. However, if points are never taken away, the student learns to develop positive and pleasant feelings about earning points.

Step 3

Establish how many points students must earn to receive reinforcement. Determine the maximum number of points a student can earn on a good day. This will be the number of points set as the initial goal.

With young or immature students, it may be necessary to have the first goal consist only of three or four points. In this way, students can reach the goal quickly and will learn what the points are all about.

Cover up all but the spaces that are required to meet the goal. It might discourage some students to see all the blanks on the total chart.

When the first student reaches the goal, provide him or her with some kind of reinforcement, and then put up another Wall Chart. The new chart should require of the students about twice the amount of good work to reach the goal: two days for older students, four hours for younger students. Some students will still be trying to reach the first goal. If you are using a laminated Wall Chart, simply erase points for students who have already reached the previous goal and earned reinforcement, and begin them on a second goal.

When some students have completed the second chart, place a third chart on the wall. The third chart should require of older students approximately three days of hard work and of younger students approximately one full day of hard work to reach the goal. Once all students have reached the goal on the first chart, it should be removed from the wall. It may be possible to have three charts on the wall at the same time; however, this indicates that some students

are not earning as many points as they should. Every student should have an equal chance to earn points regardless of his or her academic ability. (Study step 5 for ideas on how to deal with students who are not earning points.) Continue expanding your expectations until students are working for a full week to meet their goal.

Step 4

Determine what students will receive when they reach a goal. What students receive is actually less important than most people might think. The truly important thing is communicating to the students that reaching the goal is an important accomplishment. Whenever any student reaches the goal, congratulate the student. Let the student know that you appreciate his or her efforts. This type of positive feedback is essential. The dialogue might go like this:

"Class, I'd like to announce that Ann, Michelle, Denny, and Calvin have reached their goal. I truly appreciate your hard work. You have done a nice job. Congratulations. And, for reaching your goal you have each earned . . ."

There are any number of reinforcers that can be used. Below are several possibilities to consider. Some of the reinforcers are more powerful than others. If the students in your class are generally unmotivated and uncooperative, plan to use some of the more powerful reinforcers, such as earning free time or getting to go to recess five minutes early.

Free time. With this reward, anytime a student reaches a goal, he or she earns five minutes of free time while the other students are working. Establish one period in the morning and one period in the afternoon during which students can spend their free time. These two periods should be at the same time every day and they should be at a time when students can afford to miss work. For instance, a student could miss a timed test occasionally because he or she can be tested the next day. A student might also take free time during an independent work session and be excused from doing one assignment.

Going to recess five minutes early. This reward functions much the same way as free time does. Make sure that allowing a student to go to recess early does not oppose school rules or result in supervision problems.

Certificates. In the Materials section of this notebook are several different certificates. Make

copies of these certificates. When a student reaches a goal, write the student's name on a certificate and present it to him or her. If you make a big deal about the certificate, the student will feel very proud of this award. One advantage to the certificate is that the student can take it home to show his or her parents.

If a particular student is unmotivated by the point system, contact the student's parents. See if they would be willing to help you motivate the student. If they are interested, arrange a plan whereby anytime the student takes home a certificate the student gets to choose a game to play with his or her parents for one half hour.

Visiting the principal. Many principals appreciate the chance to deal with students on a positive, rather than a negative, basis. Check with your principal first to see if this procedure is acceptable.

Trading certificates for class jobs. If students are interested, you might allow them to save their certificates and trade them for the opportunity to do a class job. For example:

2 certificates = being line leader for a week

3 certificates = getting to be "teacher" for 15 minutes

4 certificates = reading to younger students for 15 minutes

If responsibilities are presented as privileges, students of all ages will value the opportunity to help out.

Step 5

Monitor the progress of each student and modify the point system for students who aren't meeting their goals. Even if only one or two students are not earning points, something is seriously wrong. Some action must be taken to remedy the situation or the point system will lose its value as a motivator for the students who need it the most. Answer the following questions to determine why the students aren't motivated:

Is too much being expected of the student?

If the student is extremely slow or extremely immature, your expectations for the student may have to be lowered and gradually built up. It may be necessary to set up a system that allows the student to earn a point for every ten minutes of good behavior during small-group activities. It might also be necessary to provide the student with bonus points for good behavior, like staying in his or her seat, working quietly, or getting into line well. Don't give the

student any points when he or she misbehaves, but make a concerted effort to catch the student when he or she is doing something right.

Is the work too difficult for the student?

If the work is beyond the student's abilities, no points or reinforcers of any kind will be effective in getting the student to complete the work. It would be like offering someone a million dollars to learn to speak a foreign language fluently within an hour's time. No matter how hard an individual worked during that hour, the task is impossible. Motivation is irrelevant. No person can perform an impossible task. So, too, a child's work must be planned to accommodate his or her skill level.

If you aren't sure whether or not the student's work is too difficult, provide easier work for several days to see if the student does better on it. If so, continue to provide him or her with easier work while you're teaching the student the skills that are needed to complete more difficult work. If the student still isn't able to do the work, examine the points that follow:

Are your interactions with the student negative or positive?

If your interactions with the student are predominantly negative, the student is probably misbehaving to get your attention. Study booklet E, "Increasing Positive Interactions and Improving the Student's Self-Concept," for details on how to monitor your interactions with the student. In order to increase your positive interactions with the student, you must try to catch the student doing things the right way. You'll also have to ignore most of the student's misbehavior, so that he or she learns to get your attention only through hard work and positive behavior. As long as the student gets your attention for misbehaving, points will probably be meaningless to the student.

Is a certificate enough of a reinforcer for the student?

If the student is not motivated by a certificate, it may be necessary to find another reward that is a reinforcer. Some ideas might include the chance to read to younger students, to have some free time, or to talk to the principal. If the student is working for a reinforcer that is more powerful than other students are working for, explain the reasons to the other students. Let them know that the student is having problems and needs a little extra help to learn to work hard. (The explanation should be handled tactfully so

as not to embarrass the student in front of his or her classmates.) Also, let your students know that you appreciate their efforts and praise them frequently, so that no student feels like his or her work is being ignored.

DAILY RECORD SHEET

Date _____ Daily Reminders _____

Group Minutes Owed _____

STUDENT	POINTS TO BE RECORDED	MINUTES OWED	COMMENTS
Anderson, Harry			Lardy (9:10)
Bahret, Janie			
Campbell, Bonnie			
Cline, Lamar			
Corns, Angela			
Eaglefather, Virginia			
Frye, Milton			Trouble with math
Gulka, Ray			
Hiddleston, Flo			
James, Kathy			
Knapp, Jessica			Absent
Lucas, Bart			
Miller, Marianne			
Mayer, Greg			
Nyath, Ruby			Antagonistic and talking back
Pazini, Alonga			
Pemberton, Beth			
Ras, Alex			
Sanchez, Rose			
Sundberg, Wanda			
Tidd, Lauren			Absent
Tower, Brian			
Waddell, Bob			Sams withdrawn
Wong, Le			
Wood, Lana			
Young, Ron			
Zink, Larry			Absent

Student

WALL CHART

Anderson, Harry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Bahret, Tania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Campbell, Bonnie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓													
Cline, Lamar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Dems, Angela	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										
Eaglefather, Virginia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓														
Frye, Milton	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Gubka, Ray	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Hiddleston, Flo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
James, Kathy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓													
Knapp, Jessica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Lucery, Bart	✓	✓	✓	✓															
Miller, Mariamne	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Morser, Greg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										
Nryeth, Ruby	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Pagini, Alonzo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓													
Pemberton, Beth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Rees, Alex	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									
Sanchez, Rose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓														
Sundberg, Wanda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Tidd, Lauren	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
Tower, Brian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Waddell, Bob	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										
Wong, Lee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Wood, Lama	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									
Young, Ron	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓												
Zink, Larry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				

DAILY RECORD SHEET

Date _____

Daily Reminders _____

Group Minutes Owed _____

STUDENT	POINTS TO BE RECORDED	MINUTES OWED	COMMENTS
Anderson, Harry	✓✓✓✓		Lardy (9:10)
Bahret, Jamie	✓✓✓		
Campbell, Bonnie	✓✓✓		
Cline, Lamar	✓		
Stems, Angela			
Eaglefather, Virginia	✓		
Frye, Milton	✓		Trouble with math
Gulka, Ray	✓✓✓		
Hiddleston, Flo	✓✓		
James, Kathy	✓		
Knapp, Jessica			Absent
Lucy, Bart	✓		
Miller, Marianne			
Mayer, Greg			
Nyath, Ruby			Antagonistic and talking back
Pazini, Alonzo	✓		
Pemberton, Beth	✓✓✓		
Rae, Alex	✓		
Sanchez, Rose	✓		
Sundberg, Wanda			
Tidd, Lauren			Absent
Tower, Brian			
Waddell, Bob	✓		Lame withdrawn
Wong, Le	✓		
Wood, Lana	✓✓✓✓		
Young, Ron	✓✓		
Zink, Larry			Absent