



# Alternatives To Using Food As A Reward In The Classroom

Rewarding children with food is discouraged in the MCPS Wellness Regulation, which states: “It is encouraged that foods and beverages available to students during school-sponsored activities make a positive contribution to the students’ diet and promote health. **Staff should avoid using candy or other foods of minimal nutritional value as a classroom reward.**” Here are some alternatives.

## Zero Cost Alternatives

Sit by friends  
Wear a hat day  
Watch a video  
Read/have class outdoors  
Eat lunch outside  
Have extra art time  
Choose spot in line  
Play a computer game  
Have an extra recess  
Have a dance party  
Read to a younger class  
Lunch in the classroom  
Get a no homework pass  
Have class show and share  
Make deliveries to the office  
Listen to music while working  
Play a favorite game or puzzle

Earn play money for privileges  
Walk with a teacher during lunch  
Be a helper in another classroom  
Hand out directed draws for art time  
Allow students to learn in their socks  
Listen with a headset to a book on tape  
Bring stuffed toys as learning partners  
Get “free choice” time at the end of the day  
Have a class read in with blankets and pillows  
Wear socks outside of pants for crazy sock day  
Have a teacher perform special skills (i.e. sing)  
Have a teacher read a special book to the class  
Playing follow the leader around the school  
Brain Breaks using Go Noodle or other interactive education tool

## Low-Cost Alternatives

Select a paperback book  
Have a bubble party  
Enter a drawing for donated prizes  
Take a trip to the treasure box (non-food)  
Get stickers, pencils, and other school supplies  
Receive a movie theater coupon  
Get a set of flash cards printed from the computer  
Receive a “mystery pack” (notepad, folder, sports cards, etc.)

**An Idea from a Teacher:** Friday Free Time: “I give my students 30 minutes at the beginning of the week and they can earn or lose free time according to their behavior. I use a timer and turn it on (they can hear it) if they are too loud working, lining up, etc. I add time when their behavior is good. Adding time is the most effective. I save time by not waiting for them to settle down so I don’t feel bad about the free time.”

*(Adapted from materials from Michigan Dept. of Community Health)*

## Why not reward children with food?

1. Overrides parental consent;
2. Infringes on parents' freedom to feed their own children as they see fit;
3. Contributes to childhood obesity, which now adversely affects one-third of America's children;
4. Overrides children’s own hunger cues, and encourages them to eat simply because food is presented to them;
5. Undercuts the school’s own nutrition education, if the food in question is not nutritious.

*Excerpts from Bettina Elias Siegel’s “The Lunch Tray’s Food in the Classroom Manifesto”*  
<http://www.thelunchtray.com/the-lunch-trays-food-in-the-classroom-manifesto> and:  
<http://thebrownbagteacher.blogspot.com/2016/02/20-positive-behavior-rewards-that-arent.html>