

## Should you dole out these..... for more of these? for these?... for more of these?

POSTED ON MARCH 6, 2012 BY TIDEWATER PARENT STAFF IN ARCHIVE, KIDS THROUGH TWEEN AND TEEN



My husband and I consider ourselves lucky. Both of our children do well in school – but earning those A's and B's comes about in different ways. One child listens in class, does homework without being asked and rarely studies. In a word, it's a breeze. The other listens in class as well – but has to be reminded, rallied and often reprimanded to do homework assignments and review for quizzes and tests. (Without that studying, the grades almost always slip!) The word in this case: A battle.

We toyed with the idea of paying for grades, wondering if we would face less agony every night, but eventually decided against it. The difference in our children's attitudes and approaches didn't provide a level playing field.

Yet, I've always wondered if we've made the right decision – and how things might be different if we did fork out some bills. I still felt a bit confused after asking parents and experts what they thought – but ultimately, think we've made the right choice. For now, I have to note, though, that a few experts make a good case for paying for effort, which I never would have considered before. In case you're contemplating the same do-or-don't decision during this mid-school year season, here's a sampling of what others shared.

What Hampton Roads parents think:

Alexis, mom to three boys, 7th grade to freshman in college

We feel that paying for grades sets up a bad precedence for rewards and sends the wrong message.

For instance, our children receive a very small allowance at the beginning of each month. They can spend half and save the other half. We don't tie the allowance to anything. The kids are paid regardless.

However, our kids are required to help with daily chores, taking care of the yard, cleaning their rooms, bathrooms, laundry, etc. The kids know they have to complete their chores before they can do anything else. They are typically motivated to get the work done early and quickly so they can enjoy the rest of the day. We have made sure they understand this is their responsibility, and this is how our family helps one another.

So in that vein, we impart on them that it is their job to be the best student they can be, and their grades are the payment they receive for doing their job. We find they have a lot of pride in doing a job well. Further down the line, their hard work, perseverance, and planning will help them be accepted into a four-year university and upon completion of school they will get a job that will allow them to live independently and take care of themselves financially, again giving them a sense of fulfillment that can't be bought.

Regina, mom to a third grade girl and sixth grade boy

We do pay for grades. A's get \$5, B's nothing, and C's, they owe me \$2. If they get

straight A's, they get an extra \$10. I started paying for grades when my son hit third grade and started receiving letter grades. My daughter also started receiving money for grades, but in 2nd grade, since she saw me paying my son. She got the same for S's - \$5 each and \$10 extra for all S's. I don't see anything wrong with paying for the grades. My kids are striving for honor roll on their own. **It is a bonus for them and a way for us to show we are proud of them.** So far they have never owed me any money. Hopefully it stays that way.

Debbie, mom to a 7th grade daughter and a senior in college son

I paid my son for grades, but don't pay my daughter. Don't tell her! **My son has always been money motivated, so it worked well for him.** I know it must have worked since he will soon be graduating from William and Mary. My daughter is motivated by things, so I will occasionally buy her something she wants and say it is because she did so well in school. **Different kids, so different ways to motivate.**

Stephanie, mom to two daughters, one in 7th grade and one in 5th  
We do not pay for grades. Good grades are expected - as are good manners, ethical behavior, love for God and family. We have always had pretty high expectations for them since they were very young, and now they have those same high expectations for themselves. They want to do well to please us and make us proud and so that they can be proud of themselves. We just feel you can put a price tag on that. However, we do not judge others that give money for grades. To each his own!

Renee, mom to four boys, from first grade to freshmen in college

We have never paid for grades. I am not saying that I wouldn't if I thought it would work on my particular child. I have always believed that each child is different, and parenting is a system of trial and error. I talked to my oldest about how we motivated him to do well, and he told me that it **had to come from within and no amount of pleading, screaming, or offering incentives would have changed anything.** He wouldn't have minded earning the cash, but it wouldn't have caused him to work harder. Haha!

What national experts say:

Ray Enckson, author of Ten Tips to Tame Your Teen

I'm a clinical social worker in Sacramento, California with over 30 years of experience working with teenagers and families. I've been counseling my parents not to pay kids for grades. There are a number of good clinical reasons for this position. The first and foremost reason: Paying kids to do what needs to be intrinsically valued tends to decrease internal motivation over the long run. Money is not the key to happiness, but rather, happiness is the key to money. Kids need to be intrinsically motivated to do their best. If parents are paying kids to do well in school, they are setting their kids up to value money over a job well done.

Roland Fryer, Harvard University professor and researcher

**Paying for grades doesn't work, but paying for homework and attending classes can,** according to research by Fryer that was published in 2011. He and fellow researchers followed 38,000 students in 261 schools in Dallas, Chicago, New York City and Washington, D.C. Some were paid for grades and some for behaviors such as reading and going to school. The students who did the best were in the second group. **Researchers think students may not always see the connection between effort (studying and behaving in class) and results (good grades).** They could be lacking "forward thinking," so it could be better to concentrate rewards on the effort and not the outcome.

In some cases, students continued to benefit after researchers stopped paying them. For example, second graders who had been paid to read books continued to improve their reading comprehension scores a year after receiving payment. But researchers did not seem too encouraged by the overall study results for students in high-need communities, concluding:

"In summary, we find that relative to achievement-increasing education reform in the past few decades - Head Start, lowering class size, bonuses for effective teachers to teach in high-need schools - student incentives for certain inputs (behaviors) provide similar results at lower cost. Yet, incentives alone, like these other reforms, are not powerful enough to close the achievement gap."

Dr. Robert Neuman, author of Are you really ready for college? A College Dean's 12 Secrets for Success - what high school students don't know and [www.GetCollegeSmart.com](http://www.GetCollegeSmart.com)

Dr. Neuman, a former dean of academic advising for Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, recommends paying for studying - not grades.

**"The research screams that we need to change students' personal academic habits to get them ready for college: the freshman drop-out rate, the awful graduation rates - we now rank 12th globally - enormous student debt (all support this idea),"** he wrote in an email. "I've watched these statistics play out dramatically across my desk literally thousands of times in my professional life: successful high school students in trouble, overwhelmed, and defeated (in college.) They don't know what to do. Parents have to help and start early."

His advice:

"College students are expected to study at least 30 hours each week. So to get ready, high school seniors should study 25 hours each week, juniors 20 hours,



sophomores 15 hours, freshmen 10 hours each week. Middle school students, then, should be studying around eight hours weekly. Break that into a young person's five- to seven-day week, and it doesn't sound so jarring. Students who have studied only five hours a week as high school seniors cannot just transition to 30 hours a week as college freshmen."

"Most pre-college students, and even their parents, consider these numbers almost ridiculous, especially when students can earn A's studying much less. But they're missing the point. First, teens 'skim the surface' when they study, and they should be doing a much deeper job to retain the material they need, not for the moment, but for college. So they should be studying more, even when they are getting A's. Secondly, devoting these hours to study develops in students the mindset that study is important and must be made part of their days. Parents must help students create this critical attitude for college."

To change students' efforts in preparing for college and succeeding once there, parents should take matters in their own hands, offering middle and high school students strong incentives to develop a well-muscled study mindset, says Dr. Neuman.

"Reward them for effort, not grades. In other words, reward them for time spent on uninterrupted study and academic work. Parents know their children and what will move them. We are, after all, asking them to change their behavior, and that behavior may be very different compared to what their friends do. Therefore, the incentive has to be very alluring. Keep in mind that developing this mindset will ready your student to succeed in college and the rest of their lives."

What kind of incentives work?

Dr. Neuman says it depends on the child:

"The incentive should be strong enough to change student behavior and replace the need for a part-time job. After all, paying students early to study and become good students will be vastly cheaper than paying for extra college semesters," he notes.

"If you pay your teens enough to study each week, they won't squander study time flipping burgers to earn spending money. Given your child's preferences, you know the amount that will motivate them. Some students will respond to 'things': electronic devices, sports equipment, privileges, selecting a vacation destination for the family. This means you might have to find a series of rewards to keep the motivation alive."

The benefits to studying are many, says Dr. Neuman:

- The studying can translate into good grades, which can bring in scholarships.
- A learning mindset will head off college debt, because students will graduate on time, avoiding costly added semesters.
- A well-developed study mindset will give them the confidence to choose from a variety of majors with potential for good incomes. If they want to go to medical, law or graduate school they are "equipped" to do so.