INTERVENTION CENTRAL

RTI Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Schools

Six Reasons Why Students Are Unmotivated (and What Teachers Can Do)

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Motivation Challenge 1: *The student is unmotivated because he or she cannot do the assigned work.*

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: The student lacks essential skills required to do the task. Areas of deficit might include basic academic skills, cognitive strategies, and academic-enabler skills. Here are definitions of these skill areas:

- *Basic academic skills.* Basic skills have straightforward criteria for correct performance (e.g., the student defines vocabulary words or decodes text or computes 'math facts') and comprise the building-blocks of more complex academic tasks (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). The instructional goal in basic skills is for students to become 'automatic' in the skill(s) being taught.

- *Cognitive strategies.* Students employ specific cognitive strategies as "guiding procedures" to complete more complex academic tasks such as reading comprehension or writing (Rosenshine, 1995). Cognitive strategies are "intentional and deliberate procedures" that are under the conscious control of the student (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009; p. 127). The instructional goals are to train students to use specific cognitive instruction strategies, to reliably identify the conditions under which they should employ these strategies, and to actually use them correctly and consistently.

  Question generation is an example of a cognitive strategy to promote reading comprehension (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996); the student is trained to locate or write main-idea sentences for each paragraph in a passage, then write those main ideas onto separate note cards with corresponding questions.

- *Academic-enabling skills.* Skills that are 'academic enablers' (DiPerna, 2006) are not tied to specific academic knowledge but rather aid student learning across a wide range of settings and tasks. Examples of academic-enabling skills include organizing work materials, time management, and making and sticking to a work plan. The instructional goal is to train students to acquire these academic-support skills and to generalize their use to become efficient, self-managing learners.

What the Research Says: When a student lacks the capability to complete an academic task because of limited or missing basic skills, cognitive strategies, or academic-enabling skills, that student is still in the acquisition stage of learning (Haring et al., 1978). That student cannot be expected to be motivated or to be successful as a learner unless he or she is first explicitly taught these weak or absent essential skills (Daly, Witt, Martens & Dool, 1997).

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: The teacher collects information (e.g., through observations of the student engaging in academic tasks; interviews with the student; examination of work products, quizzes, or tests) demonstrating that the student lacks basic skills, cognitive strategies, or academic-enabling skills essential to the academic task.

How to Fix This Motivation Problem: Students who are not motivated because they lack essential skills need to be taught those skills.

Direct-Instruction Format. Students learning new material, concepts, or skills benefit from a 'direct instruction' approach. (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008; Rosenshine, 1995; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). When following a direct-instruction format, the teacher:

- ❑ ensures that the lesson content is appropriately matched to students' abilities.
- ❑ opens the lesson with a brief review of concepts or material that were previously presented.
- ❑ states the goals of the current day's lesson.
- ❑ breaks new material into small, manageable increments, or steps.
- ❑ throughout the lesson, provides adequate explanations and detailed instructions for all concepts and materials being taught. NOTE: Verbal explanations can include 'talk-alouds' (e.g., the teacher describes and explains each step of a cognitive strategy) and 'think-alouds' (e.g., the teacher applies a cognitive strategy to a particular problem or task and verbalizes the steps in applying the strategy).
- ❑ regularly checks for student understanding by posing frequent questions and eliciting group responses.
- ❑ verifies that students are experiencing sufficient success in the lesson content to shape their learning in the desired direction and to maintain student motivation and engagement.
- ❑ provides timely and regular performance feedback and corrections throughout the lesson as needed to guide student learning.
- ❑ allows students the chance to engage in practice activities distributed throughout the lesson (e.g., through teacher demonstration; then group practice with teacher supervision and feedback; then independent, individual student practice).
- ❑ ensures that students have adequate support (e.g., clear and explicit instructions; teacher monitoring) to be successful during independent seatwork practice activities.

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Motivation Challenge 2: *The student is unmotivated because the 'response effort' needed to complete the assigned work seems too great.*

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: Although the student has the required skills to complete the assigned work, he or she perceives the 'effort' needed to do so to be so great that the student loses motivation.

What the Research Says: Research indicates that (1) as the perceived effort to complete an academic task or other behavior ('response effort') *increases*, people are *less* likely to engage in that behavior, while (2) as the effort to complete the same behavior *decreases*, people are *more* likely to engage in it (Friman & Poling, 1995).

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: The teacher first checks to see that the student has the requisite skills needed for academic success. The teacher then looks for evidence that, in specific situations, the student is reluctant to undertake academic tasks because they are perceived to require too much effort. Tell-tale signs that a student may be unmotivated because of the required response effort include procrastination, verbal complaining, frequent seeking of teacher help, and other avoidant behaviors.

How to Fix This Motivation Problem:

- ❑ Teachers can increase student motivation through any method that reduces the apparent 'response effort' of an academic task (Friman & Poling, 1995). - so long as that method does not hold the student to a lesser academic standard than classmates (Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005).

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by Reducing Response Effort: Here are ideas that use reduction in response effort as a motivation tool:

- *Start Assigned Readings in Class.* Whenever the teacher assigns a challenging text for students to read independently (e.g., as homework), the teacher (or perhaps a skilled student reader) reads the first few paragraphs of the assigned reading aloud while the class follows along silently in their own texts. Students are then expected to read the remainder of the text on their own.

- *Begin Challenging Homework Assignments in Class.* When assigned challenging homework, students are paired off or divided into groups and given a small amount of class time to begin the homework together, develop a plan for completing the homework, formulate questions about the homework, or engage in other activities that will create the necessary momentum to motivate students then to complete the work independently.

- *'Chunk' Assignments.* The teacher breaks a larger student assignment into smaller 'chunks'. The teacher provides the student with performance feedback and praise for each completed 'chunk' of assigned work (Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005).

- *Select a Supportive Peer or Adult to Get a Student Started on Assignments.* If a student finds it difficult to get organized and begin independent seatwork activities, a supportive peer or adult in the classroom can get the student organized and started on the assignment.

- *Provide a Formal Work Plan.* In advance of more complex assignments such as research papers, the teacher gives the student an outline of a work plan for completing those assignments. The plan breaks a larger assignment into appropriate sub-steps (e.g., 'find five research articles for the paper', 'summarize key information from research articles into notes', etc.). For each sub-step, the plan provides (1) an estimate of the minimum amount of 'seat time' required to complete it and (2) sets a calendar-date deadline for completion. The teacher then touches base with the student at least weekly to ensure that the student is staying current with the work plan. (TIP: Over time, the teacher can transfer increasing responsibility for generating work plans to the student.)

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Motivation Challenge 3: *The student is unmotivated because classroom instruction does not engage.*

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: The student is distracted or off-task because classroom instruction and learning activities are not sufficiently reinforcing to hold his or her attention.

What the Research Says: In classroom settings, students can choose to respond to a variety of reinforcing events—for example, watching the teacher, interacting with peers, looking out the window at passing traffic. The fact is that classroom instruction must always compete for student attention with other sources of reinforcement (Billington & DiTommaso, 2003; Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005). There are two ways that the instructor can increase the student's motivation to attend to classroom instruction: (1) by *decreasing* the reinforcing power of competing (distracting) stimuli, and/or (2) by *increasing* the reinforcing power of academic activities.

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: The teacher observes that the student is engaged in behaviors other than those related to instruction or is otherwise distracted by non-instructional events occurring in the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher has verified that the student's lack of attention to instruction is not due primarily to that student's attempting to escape or avoid difficult classwork.

How to Fix This Motivation Problem: The teacher can increase the inattentive student's focus on instruction and engagement in learning activities by using one or both of the strategies below:

- ❑ *Reduce the Reinforcing Power of Non-Instructional Activities.* The teacher identifies any non-instructional activities in the classroom that are competing with instruction for the student's attention and takes steps to reduce or eliminate them.
- ❑ *Increase the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction.* The teacher strives to boost the reinforcing quality of academic activities and instruction to better capture and hold the student's attention.

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Reducing* the Reinforcing Power of Non-Instructional Activities:

- *Use Preferential Seating* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The teacher seats a student who is distracted by peers or other environmental factors in a location where the student is most likely to stay focused on instructional content. All teachers have an 'action zone', a part of the room where they tend to focus most of their instruction; the instructor seats the distractible student somewhere within that zone. The ideal seating location for any particular student will vary, depending on the unique qualities of that student and of the classroom.

- *Create Low-Distraction Work Areas* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004. For students who are off-task during independent seatwork, the teacher can set up a study carrel in the corner of the room or other low-distraction work area. The teacher can then either direct the distractible student to use that area whenever independent seatwork is assigned or can permit the student to choose when to use the area.

- *Restrict Student Access to Electronic Devices and Other Potential Distracting Objects.* The teacher creates a list of personal possessions that can pose the potential to distract from instruction (e.g., cell phones, personal game devices, etc.). The teacher either completely bans use of these items of student property at any point during a course session or restricts their use to clearly specified times or conditions.

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Increasing* the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction and Activities:

- *Use Bellringer Activities.* The teacher routinely gives students 'bellringer' activities to work on as soon as they enter the classroom. The point of this strategy is to capture students' attention at the outset with academically relevant activities. Ideally, bellringer tasks should be engaging but also should review and reinforce previously taught content or prepare students for the upcoming lesson.

- *Provide Opportunities for Choice* (Kern, Bambara, & Fogt, 2002). Teachers who allow students a degree of choice in structuring their learning activities typically have fewer behavior problems in their classrooms than teachers who do not. One efficient way to promote choice in the classroom is for the teacher to create a master menu of options that students can select from in various learning situations. For example, during independent assignment, students might be allowed to (1) choose from at least 2 assignment options, (2) sit where they want in the classroom, and (3) select a peer-buddy to check their work. Student choice then becomes integrated seamlessly into the classroom routine.

- *Structure Lessons around High-Interest or Functional-Learning Goals* (Kern, Bambara, & Fogt, 2002; Miller et al., 2003). A student is more likely to be engaged when academic lessons are based on 'high-interest' topics that interest the student (e.g., NASCAR racing; fashion) or that have a 'functional-learning' pay-off—e.g., job interview skills; money management skills --that the student values and can apply in his or her own life.

- *Incorporate Cooperative Learning Activities into Instruction* (Beyda, Zentall, & Ferko, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Teacher-directed cooperative learning activities can be highly reinforcing for adolescent students, who typically find opportunities to interact with classmates to be a strong motivator. Cooperative learning tasks have the added advantages of promoting active student engagement and allowing the instructor to get real-time feedback through direct observation about the abilities and learning of individual students.

- *Maintain a Brisk Pace of Instruction* (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). Instruction that is well-matched to the abilities of the classroom and moves at a brisk pace is most likely to capture and hold student attention. Additionally, the teacher is careful to avoid 'dead time', interruptions of instruction (e.g., time-consuming transitions to other activities; etc.) when students may get off-task and be difficult to redirect back to academic tasks.

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Motivation Challenge 4: *The student is unmotivated because he or she fails to see an adequate pay-off to doing the assigned work.*

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: The student requires praise, access to rewards, or other reinforcers in the short term as a temporary 'pay-off' to encourage her or him to apply greater effort.

What the Research Says: The use of external rewards ('reinforcers') can serve as a temporary strategy to encourage a reluctant student to become invested in completing school work and demonstrating appropriate behaviors (Akin-Little, Eckert, Lovett, & Little, 2004). It is expected that as the student puts increased effort into academics and behavior to earn teacher-administered reinforcers, the student will in turn begin to experience such positive natural reinforcers as improved grades, increased peer acceptance, a greater sense of self-efficacy in course content, and higher rates of teacher and parent approval. As the student enjoys the benefits of these natural reinforcers, the teacher can then fade and perhaps fully eliminate the use of programmed reinforcers or rewards.

Here are recommendations for using reward programs with students:

1. Do not use reward programs with students who are already demonstrating acceptable academic effort or general classroom conduct (Akin-Little, Eckert, Lovett, & Little, 2004). While incentives can be a good way to 'jump-start' the academic motivation of a disengaged learner, they are not likely to benefit a student who is already making an adequate effort to perform in school.

2. Adjust rewards to match a student's developing academic skills (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007). During initial acquisition of a skill, provide reinforcement (e.g., praise, exchangeable tokens) contingent upon on-task behavior (time-based reinforcement). This approach avoids 'penalizing' students for slow performance. As the student moves into the fluency-building stage of learning, change to reinforcement based on rate of performance (reinforcing both accuracy and fluency in the skill). This approach explicitly reinforces high response rates. Then, as the student reaches acceptable rates of accuracy and fluency, maintain high rates of academic performance through such efficient methods as intermittent reinforcement or reinforcer lottery (e.g., the student earns tickets for each successful performance of target behaviors and those tickets are used for periodic lottery drawings for possible rewards).

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: Through direct observation, student interview, and/or other means, the teacher has verified that instruction is effectively delivered and sufficiently engaging for most of the class, that the target student has the academic and related skills required for the academic work, and that the student has failed to be motivated by existing incentives such as grades that are typically available in classrooms. In the teacher's judgment, the

target student needs additional incentives (e.g., praise, rewards) to promote motivation to complete academic tasks.

How to Fix This Motivation Problem:

- ❑ Praise the Student. The teacher praises the student in clear and specific terms when the student engages in the desired behavior (Kern & Clemens, 2007). The teacher uses praise statements at a rate sufficient to motivate and guide the student toward the behavioral goal.
- ❑ Use Rewards. The teacher establishes a reward system to motivate an individual student by implementing these steps (e.g., Kazdin, 1989):

  1. *Define the Target Behavior*. The teacher writes a definition of the undesired student behavior to be decreased or the desired behavior to be increased as a result of the reward program.
  2. *Establish Criteria for Success*. The teacher defines the minimum acceptable criteria for student success in the target behavior, which may include information about time intervals, cumulative frequency, and/or percentage of compliance.
  3. *Choose Student Incentives*. The teacher selects incentives (positive reinforcers or 'rewards') that are likely to motivate the student.
  4. *Decide Whether a Point System Will Be Used*. The teacher decides on one of two options in delivering rewards: the student is either given earned rewards directly whenever those rewards have been earned or the student can is assigned points (or tokens or tickets) each time that he or she meets the teacher's behavioral expectations and then is allowed at some point to redeem these points for items from the reward menu.
  5. *Decide How the Reward is to Be Delivered.* The teacher selects a means for the student to receive earned rewards (e.g., from the classroom teacher, from another school staff member, from the parent).

NOTE: A more thorough description of each step, *Setting Up a Reward Program for a Middle or High School Student: Five Steps*, is found elsewhere in this document.

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Motivation Challenge 5: *The student is unmotivated because of low self-efficacy—lack of confidence that he or she can do the assigned work.*

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: The student has a low sense of self-efficacy in a subject area, activity, or academic task and that lack of confidence reduces the student's motivation to apply his or her best effort. NOTE: Self-efficacy is the student's view of his or her own abilities specific to a particular academic area (e.g., mathematics) and should not be confused with self-esteem, which represents the student's global view of his or her self-worth.

What the Research Says: Students who believe that they have the ability to complete a particular academic task (self-efficacy) do better and have higher levels of motivation (Jacobs et al., 2002). Yet students often sabotage their academic performance by engaging in negative self-talk about their abilities and by making faulty attributions to explain poor academic performance (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002).

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: Teachers can tap students' impressions of self-efficacy by asking them to 'think aloud' about their abilities in the academic area of interest. Instructors will find the information that they have collected to be most useful if students are encouraged to:

- talk about their perceived strengths and weaknesses as learners in particular subject areas
- give examples (with details) about specific successes and failures that they have experienced on academic assignments
- discuss how they complete a range of common academic tasks (e.g., undertaking a term paper, completing a chemistry lab exercise, doing homework)
- disclose their routine for preparing for quizzes and tests.

As the teacher evaluates the student's comments, the instructor concludes that the student's attributions/explanations are unrealistically negative and do not adequately acknowledge the role of effort or other controllable factors in improving that student's academic skills or performance.

How to Fix This Motivation Problem:

- ❑ Challenge Faulty Student Attributions about Ability. As a student articulates attitudes toward learning and describes techniques that he or she uses as an independent learner, the teacher can use this information to identify whether a low sense of academic self-efficacy may be holding the student back.

  A useful framework for analyzing student views about their academic abilities is presented by Linnenbrink & Pintrich (2002). The authors analyze student attributions along three dimensions: internal/external; stable/unstable; and controllable/uncontrollable. As explained below, the

teacher can use this framework to analyze and challenge a student's faulty attributions about self-efficacy and help the student to reframe those attributions in a more optimistic (and motivating) light.

- *Internal/External.* The student may view the explanation for his or her poor academic performance as internal (tied to aspects of the student's own personality, abilities, or other personal factors) or external (linked to factors other than the student, such as teacher behavior, school policies, state curriculum requirements, etc.). When listening to student explanations about his or her academic standing, the teacher considers whether the student should reframe that explanation to acknowledge internal factors that may have been overlooked.

  For example, when a student blames the teacher for giving unannounced quizzes that catch the student unprepared (external explanation of the problem), the instructor can point out that the student has the option to review course content regularly and thus always be prepared for quizzes (shifting the focus by tying the internal explanation of student preparation to the goal of improving academic performance).

- *Stable/Unstable.* The student may view the situation relating to poor academic performance as stable (likely to last for a long time) or unstable (likely to change soon). The teacher evaluates whether the student is realistic in estimating the stability of the situation.

  For example, when a student laments to her math teacher that her difficulty in grasping concepts relating to negative numbers shows that she 'will never get a good grade in math' (a view that the problem is long-term and therefore stable), the teacher can help the student to reframe the problem as unstable and likely to improve soon by noting that many students struggle with negative-number concepts but that the student should find upcoming math instructional modules to be much easier to comprehend.

- *Controllable/Uncontrollable*. The student may see him or herself as having substantial control over the factors relating to academic performance or instead view the situation as beyond personal control. When listening to student explanations of academic problems, the teacher considers whether the student may be overlooking or minimizing his or her own influence and responsibility.

  For example, a teacher may point out to a student who complains about the requirements of a particular course as arbitrary and unfair (uncontrollable) that the student was given a syllabus at the start of the semester spelling out all academic requirements to be used as a roadmap for the course, that the syllabus will allow the student to complete assignments ahead of time if he wishes, and that furthermore the student is welcome to seek help from the teacher whenever he chooses (controllable factors).

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Motivation Challenge 6: *The student is unmotivated because he or she lacks a positive relationship with the teacher.*

Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem: The student appears indifferent or even hostile toward the instructor and thus may lack motivation to follow teacher requests or to produce work.

What the Research Says: Because humans are highly social beings, positive teacher attention can be a very powerful motivator for students (e.g., Kazdin, 1989). However, teachers often do not make adequate use of simple but effective tools such as praise to promote positive interactions with their students (Kern & Clemens, 2007). At times, instructors and students can even fall into a 'negative reinforcement trap' (Maag, 2001; p. 176) that actively undercuts positive relationships. In this situation, a student who has difficulty with the classwork misbehaves and is then sent by the teacher to the principal's office. Both teacher and student are reinforced by the student's exclusion from the classroom: The teacher is negatively reinforced by having a difficult student removed from the room and the student is *also* negatively reinforced by being allowed to escape the challenging classwork. Because this scenario is reinforcing to both parties, it is very likely to be repeated with increasing frequency unless the teacher intervenes to break the negative cycle.

How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem: The teacher looks for evidence that the student lacks a positive relationship with the teacher, such as:

- the student's apparent avoidance of opportunities to talk to the teacher
- a lack of eye contact, sarcastic or defiant student comments
- a general pattern of defiant or non-compliant behavior.

NOTE: Because teachers as well as students are social beings, an instructor's impression of whether a student 'likes' them or not can often be a good predictor of the actual state of the teacher-student relationship.

How to Fix This Motivation Problem:

- ❑ The teacher provides the student with increased doses of positive attention at times when the student is engaging in appropriate behavior (Kazdin, 1989). (At the same time, the teacher keeps interactions with the student brief and neutral when that student misbehaves—although the student otherwise is held to the same behavioral expectations as his or her peers.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by Improving the Teacher-Student Relationship: Here are ideas that promote an improved teacher-student relationship as a motivation tool:

- *Strive for a High Ratio of Positive Interactions with Students* (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). A general, proactive rule of thumb to promote positive teacher-student relationships is for instructors to maintain a ratio of at least three positive interactions with any student for every negative (disciplinary) interaction that they have that student.

- *Commit to a Short Series of Positive 'Micro-Conversations'* (Mendler, 2000). The teacher selects a student with whom that instructor wants to build a more positive relationship. The instructor makes a commitment to spend 2 minutes per day for ten consecutive days engaging the student in a positive conversation about topics of interest to that student. NOTE: During those two-minute daily conversations, the teacher maintains a positive tone and avoids talking about the student's problem behaviors or poor academic performance.

- *Emphasize the Positive in Teacher Requests* (Braithwaite, 2001). The teacher avoids using negative phrasing (e.g., "If you don't return to your seat, I can't help you with your assignment") when making a request of a student. Instead, the teacher request is stated in positive terms (e.g., "I will be over to help you on the assignment just as soon as you return to your seat"). When a request has a positive 'spin', that teacher is less likely to trigger a power struggle and more likely to gain student compliance.

- *Strive for at Least One Daily Positive Verbal Interaction* (Fields, 2004). The teacher makes a point early in each class session to engage in at least one positive verbal interaction with the target student. Whenever possible, the teacher continues to interact in positive ways with the student throughout the rest of the class period through both verbal (e.g., praise comment after a student remark) and non-verbal means (e.g., thumbs-up sign, smile.). In all interactions, the teacher maintains a polite, respectful tone.

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Preventing Students from Falling Behind Through Proactive Teacher Communication

Struggling students benefit greatly when the teacher provides a clear explanation of course requirements, and offers regularly updated information about upcoming assignments, missing work, and students' current standing in the course. When the teacher makes a proactive effort to keep students fully and continually informed about course expectations and their own performance, the instructor substantially reduces the likelihood that students will fall behind in their work and be at risk for underperformance or failure in the course. Here are some recommendations for teachers in communicating about course requirements:

1. *Prepare a Course Syllabus.* At the start of the semester, the teacher hands out a syllabus listing all major course assignments, their descriptions, and due dates, as well as dates of quizzes and tests. This syllabus provides the student with a comprehensive map of all of the work to be done in the course for the semester. It also gives a clear explanation of the grading system, including the relative weight toward the final grade of tests, quizzes, homework, classwork, and student participation. Additionally, the syllabus spells out any penalties for submission of late work.

2. *Hand Out Weekly Work Agenda.* On Mondays, the teacher gives students a work agenda for the week. The agenda lists any in-class and homework assignments for that week, their descriptions (if necessary), and due dates. [Optional but recommended] The agenda may also include milestone tasks from larger, multi-week projects (e.g., reminding students in a November agenda that they should have their 6 required source documents for a term paper selected by Friday of the current week).

3. *Schedule Weekly Student Conferences.* The teacher holds brief meetings with individual students. In those mini-conferences, the teacher reviews with students their performance in the course to date, notes any missing work and gets the student to commit to a plan to submit that work, and checks in with the student about upcoming assignments, quizzes, and tests to ensure that the student continues to stay on top of course requirements. NOTE: If time constraints prevent the teacher from being able to conference with the entire class each week, the instructor may instead meet with at-risk students weekly and meet less frequently (e.g., every other week or monthly) with the remainder of the class.

Helping the Student Who is 'Under Water' With Late Assignments: A Structure for Teacher–Student Conferences

When students fall behind in their classwork, they can quickly enter a downward spiral. They must stay caught up in their current assignments and also submit late assignments; as the work piles up, some students become overwhelmed and simply give up.

In such cases, the teacher may want to meet with the student to help that student to create a work plan to catch up with late work. (It is also recommended that the parent attend such a conference, although parent participation is not required.) At the meeting, the teacher and student inventory what work is missing, negotiate a plan to complete that overdue work, and perhaps agree on a reasonable penalty when late work is turned in. Teacher, student (and parent, if attending) then sign off on the work plan. The teacher also ensures that the atmosphere at the meeting is supportive, rather than blaming, toward the student. And of course, any work plan hammered out at this meeting should seem attainable to the student.

Here in greater detail are the steps that the teacher and student would follow at a meeting to renegotiate missing work:

1. *Inventory All Missing Work*. The teacher reviews with the student all late or missing work. The student is given the opportunity to explain why the work has not yet been submitted.

2. *Negotiate a Plan to Complete Missing Work*. The teacher and student create a log with entries for all of the missing assignments. Each entry includes a description of the missing assignment and a due date by which the student pledges to submit that work. This log becomes the student's work plan. It is important that the submission dates for late assignments be realistic--particularly for students who owe a considerable amount of late work and are also trying to keep caught up with current assignments. A teacher and student may agree, for example, that the student will have two weeks to complete and submit four late writing assignments. NOTE: Review the form *Student Late-Work Planning Form: Middle & High School* that appears later in this handout as a tool to organize and document the student's work plan.

3. *[Optional] Impose a Penalty for Missing Work*. The teacher may decide to impose a penalty for the work being submitted late. Examples of possible penalties are a reduction of points (e.g., loss of 10 points per assignment) or the requirement that the student do additional work on the assignment than was required of his or her peers who turned it in on time. If imposed, such penalties would be spelled out at this teacher-student conference. If penalties are given, they should be balanced and fair, permitting the teacher to impose appropriate consequences while allowing the student to still see a path to completing the missing work and passing the course.

4. *Periodically Check on the Status of the Missing-Work Plan*. If the schedule agreed upon by teacher and student to complete and submit all late work exceeds two weeks, the teacher (or

other designated school contact, such as a counselor) should meet with the student weekly while the plan is in effect. At these meetings, the teacher checks in with the student to verify that he or she is attaining the plan milestones on time and still expects to meet the submission deadlines agreed upon. If obstacles to emerge, the teacher and student engage in problem-solving to resolve them.

Student Late-Work Planning Form: Middle & High School

Teacher: _____ Course: _____

Student: _____ Date: _____/_____/_____

Directions: At a teacher-student conference, use this form to create a plan for the student to complete and submit missing or late work.

Assignment	Target Date for Completion	NOTES

What penalty--if any--will be imposed for these late assignments? _____

_____

_____ _____ _____

Student Signature Teacher Signature Parent Signature

Setting Up a Reward Program for a Middle or High School Student: Five Steps

Students who lack motivation to apply effort or behave appropriately in their middle or high school classrooms may benefit from the temporary opportunity to earn incentives for important behavioral goals such as paying attention in class, doing assigned work, or complying with teacher requests. Reward programs can work well for students who chronically struggle in the classroom and do not see a meaningful payoff to doing their assigned work. The purpose of a reward program is to give the student external incentives to encourage increased effort. Presumably, as the student tries harder to attend to instruction and complete academic tasks in order to earn rewards, there is the possibility that the student will also begin to experience collateral benefits from the increased effort, such as improved grades, greater peer acceptance, and an improved sense of self-efficacy with course work. As these benefits accrue, the teacher can gradually fade, then discontinue, the reward program.

General guidelines appear below for setting up an individual reward program in a middle or high school classroom:

1. Define the Target Behavior. The teacher writes a definition of the undesired student behavior to be decreased or the desired behavior to be increased as a result of the reward program. The behavioral definition should be written in clear, specific terms—sufficiently clear to allow different observers who might review the behavioral definition to all be in general agreement about when the student is displaying that behavior in the classroom.

   Here are sample behavioral definitions:

   - *John turns in homework, with clear evidence that he has attempted each problem or item assigned.*
   - *Jane remains in her seat during large-group instruction.*
   - *Frank complies with teacher requests within 1 minute.*

2. Establish Criteria for Success. The teacher defines the minimum acceptable criteria for student success in the target behavior, which may include information about time intervals, cumulative frequency, and/or percentage of compliance.

   Time-intervals. Most reward systems are based on time intervals. If the student meets the behavioral goal within a specified time interval, the student is judged to have earned an incentive (e.g., reward, token point, praise, etc.). Here are examples of success criteria tied to time intervals:

- *During each 45-minute math class session, Jane will leave her seat without permission no more than once during large-group instruction.*

- *During daily 20-minute independent seatwork periods, Roger will avoid engaging in non-instructional conversations with other students lasting longer than 30 seconds.*

Cumulative Frequency. Reward systems may occasionally be tied to cumulative behaviors within or across sessions. When the student has engaged in a desired behavior a sufficient number of times, that student then is judged to have earned an incentive (e.g., reward, token point, praise, etc.). Here are examples of success criteria tied to cumulative frequencies:

- *Francine will write short summaries to show that she has read at least 3 books as outside reading.*

- *John will submit homework any four days in a row.*

Percentage of Compliance. Other reward systems might include a minimum percentage of compliance as a condition for success. Here are examples of success criteria that use percentage of compliance:

- *When given a teacher request, Frank will comply with that request within 1 minute at least 90 percent of the time.*

- *John will turn in homework at least 4 of a possible five times (80 percent) per instructional week.*

3. Choose Student Incentives. The teacher next selects incentives (positive reinforcers or 'rewards') that are likely to motivate the student. The goal is to develop a 'reward/reinforce menu' from which the student can select rewards whenever they have been earned. Because reward menus include a variety of incentives and allow the student to exercise choice, they offer the advantages of being more motivating and of often lasting longer than single reward choices. There are several ways that the teacher can discover what reinforcers the student would prefer. The instructor can:

    a. *Conduct a reinforcer survey*. The teacher (or other school staff member) compiles a list of reward ideas that can be delivered in a school setting. The teacher meets with the student and reviews the potential rewards. For each reward, the student rates whether he or she 'likes it a lot', 'likes it a little', or 'does not like it'. The teacher then takes all reinforcers that the student rated as 'likes a lot' and compiles them into a reinforcer/reward menu.

    b. *Observe the student's preferred activities in various school settings*. Often, teachers can gain insight into the kinds of experiences or incentives a student finds reinforcing by noting the preferred activities that the student regularly seeks out. A teacher may

discover, for example, that a particular student likes opportunities to socialize with two close friends, to visit Internet sites about space travel, and to work on art projects. This information could potentially be used to create motivating reward options for that student.

c. *Interview the student and others who know the student*. Meeting with the student and asking what school activities or incentives he or she would find rewarding can be an efficient way to identify rewards the student will work for. Or the teacher can talk with the student's parents or others—such as past teachers—who know the student and may have insight into rewards that will motivate him or her. These ideas can be turned into a reward menu for the student.

4. Decide Whether a Point System Will Be Used. Teachers have two options in delivering rewards: the student can be given their earned rewards directly whenever they have been earned or the student can be assigned points (or tokens or tickets) each time that they meet the teacher's behavioral expectations and then are allowed at some point to redeem these points for items from the reward menu.

   - For simple reward systems with time intervals that are limited to a school day or less, the teacher may elect to have the student claim a reward as soon as it has been earned.

   - For reward systems that extend beyond a school day, the teacher may use a point system. For example, a student goal may be to turn in completed homework four out of five days in the instructional week. The teacher has the student record a 'reward point' on her chart for every day that she turns in homework and then allows the student to redeem those points for a reward if the student earns a cumulative 4 points during the week. The advantage of points (or tokens or tickets) is that they provide immediate positive reinforcement of student behaviors in situations when the actual reward payoff is delayed.

5. Decide How the Reward is to Be Delivered. The use of rewards can be very motivating for some students. However, teachers may be concerned at the potential negative impact in their middle and high school classrooms if peers observe a student receiving rewards not available to the entire group. Here are options that offer some flexibility in the delivery of student incentives by allowing teachers to reap the benefits of reward programs while reducing the probability of negative side-effects:

   - *The teacher meets with the student privately to deliver rewards.* The teacher briefly meets with the student individually (e.g., just before or after a class session; during a free period) to deliver an earned reward.

   - *Another school contact delivers the reward.* In this scenario, the teacher is responsible for recording the student's target behaviors and tracking when the student has earned a reward. However, another school staff member (e.g., assistant principal; guidance

counselor; school psychologist) is enlisted to actually deliver rewards. For example, a teacher notes that a student has met her goal of turning in completed homework 4 out of five times in a given instructional week, making the student eligible for a reward. At the end of class, the teacher hands the student a ticket signifying that she has earned an incentive and directs the student to stop by the school psychologist's office at the end of the day to claim her reward for a successful week.

- *The parent delivers the reward at home.* The teacher communicates with the parent prior to starting the reward program. The parent and teacher reach agreement about a range of privileges and/or incentives that the student will be able to access at home based on reports of acceptable behavior supplied to the parent by the teacher. Details to be worked out include how the teacher will communicate with the parent about the student's behaviors (e.g., phone call, email, text message) and how often the reward can potentially be earned (e.g., daily, weekly).