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For further information contact:  
**Barbara Cragg**  
Phone: (780) 930-6765

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# Schools can't buy their way out of student apathy with cash incentives



CODY  
CIVIERO

Two Georgia high schools have started a program that involves paying underperforming students to go to the study hall. Students who qualify will be paid \$8 per hour to attend two-hour study hall sessions twice a week for 15 weeks—and if they sufficiently improve their grades, they're given a cash bonus at the end of the course.

The schools selected 40 of the weakest students to partake in the program, which means the hard-working kids who are self-motivated enough to study in the first place get the shaft. Moreover, this strategy won't have a positive effect on poorly performing students who genuinely want help and who attend study hall sessions without pay, so the experiment really only rewards the students who don't give a damn about school—an attitude that money can't change.

Even if some students respond to financial incentives, this teaches the wrong values. Being paid for something as inherently self-rewarding as acquiring an education will foster a sense of entitlement for the students involved. Being taught that success is synonymous with money will diminish their natural thirst for knowledge and replace it with greed.

We need look no further than the

countless social psychology studies demonstrating that extrinsic motivators destroy intrinsic ones. This means that even though they might initially be encouraged by financial gains, it comes at a cost of personal desire to learn. Besides that, your schoolwork is something that you're simply supposed to do. Monetary rewards give the impression that studying somehow goes above and beyond what's expected, which shouldn't be the case.

**Being taught that success is synonymous with money will diminish their natural thirst for knowledge and replace it with greed.**

Practically speaking, the idea doesn't make much sense either. Because only the students with low grades are eligible for this program, this could tempt some average students to take an intentional dive in marks in order to be eligible for easy money. With minimum wage in Georgia at a paltry \$5.15 per hour, it doesn't make a lot of sense in comparison for a kid to take a job flipping burgers while studying on his own time.

I wouldn't blame students who are slightly above the grade cutoff for bombing their next test—hell, I'd be one of them. Paying by the hour is also a poor choice, as it ensures that it will needlessly take hours to

get minutes' worth of homework done.

A 2006 study performed by Ellen Garbarino and Robert Slonim at Case Western Reserve University on student incentives indicated that such programs are ineffective. The only subject in which test scores improved was mathematics. Furthermore, the students who gained the most from receiving the incentive were those already performing well—not the lowest-performing students. Advocates of incentives-based education argue that while students will react to the cash at first, when the incentive is taken away, they will learn "for learning's sake." Yet this study found absolutely no carry-over effects when the incentive was taken away, concluding that "this may suggest that the existence of external motivation has a negative effect on the intrinsic desire to learn."

As much as I expect this hare-brained scheme to fail, even more problems can arise on the off-chance it appears to succeed. This could see misguided councillors propose that we pay students to engage in certain levels of physical activity in order to curb the obesity epidemic, or any number of things that people are just supposed to do without reward, like eat their vegetables and wash their hands.

Financial incentives don't attack the root problems of failing educational systems. They're unfair to some students, invite exploitation by others, instill the wrong principles, and, worst of all, simply don't work. We need to stop expecting a pat on the back and a cookie for scraping the bottom of the academic barrel and start working for the praise we desire.

## The kid gloves are off—it's time to be rude



MARIA  
KOTOVYCH

While some people like to make fluffy New Year's resolutions such as "losing weight," I decided to try something different this year—something that I'll actually stick to. On 1 January, I decided to be as obnoxious as I can to people who annoy me. It's now nearly a month into 2008, and I'm actually doing quite well with this resolution.

As we all know, traffic flow through campus hallways isn't always smooth, especially between classes or around noon. Yet, I'll always end up stuck behind that person who stops right in the middle of the crowded hallway to search for a book in their backpack or to dig around in a pocket or purse for a ringing cell phone. Equally charming are those groups of two or more who saunter casually in a hallway, their bodies spread out just enough to take up the entire space, their stories of weekend debauchery much too scintillating to allow for them to notice anyone else who happens to be in their surroundings.

In the past, if I wanted to get past these roadblocks, I might have tried to say a polite "excuse me." But all too often, I had to repeat this phrase several times before the human wall

"Next time I'm in the library and I'm forced to listen to your inanities, I'm going to take my biggest, heaviest textbook, slam it down on the table in front of them, and then proceed to treat them like third graders, giving them a syrupy, cutesy lecture about how 'inside voices belong indoors.'"

would grant me the favour of letting me pass.

A louder and more sarcastic "excuse me!" might do the trick; however, much like a badly clogged toilet, a human obstruction also requires a more caustic approach. So my new approach is to walk immediately behind these people, hold my cell phone up to my ear, and speak as loudly as I can about my horrible (but thankfully fictional) contagious rash and oozing blisters that doctors haven't yet been able to identify. The group's leisurely stroll suddenly turns into a trot as they try to be discreet about losing me and, all of a sudden, I can walk at a decent pace again.

But my new policy of rudeness isn't confined to crowded hallways: I also take it with me on the road. All too often, my quiet drives are disturbed by the sound and vibration of a loud thumping bass coming from the car that just pulled up alongside me. During the summer, this person is kind enough to open their windows so that they can share their music with everyone.

This is when I crank my volume as loud as possible, blasting my Ukrainian polka music right out the

window at the little brat. The thump, thump, thump is no match for my Oom-pa-pa.

And then there's the library, a location that some people insist on treating as a social hangout rather than a place to work and study. I've never understood why people would go to the library, spread out all their books, and then proceed to chat with their friends about the trivial details of their life, such as the number of times they puked the morning following a drinking binge.

Next time I'm in the library and I'm forced to listen to your inanities, I'm going to take my biggest, heaviest textbook, slam it down on the table in front of them, and then proceed to treat them like third graders, giving them a syrupy, cutesy lecture about how "inside voices belong indoors."

So to the inconsiderate few out there, remember that any person who can dish out obnoxious behaviour can expect an equally (if not more) rude reaction from me. So don't be surprised when, in 2008, you find yourself on the wrong end of an angry woman, because buddy, you've earned it. Besides, I wouldn't do this if I didn't value civility so highly.