

E d u c a t i o n

Making Learning Rewarding

By CATHERINE PAGLIN

"Son, I will give you a dollar for every A on your report card."
 "Your choice of adjectives is excellent. I can tell you worked hard to make your writing more descriptive."
 "Congratulations on the algebra test. You're lucky you inherit your math genes from my side of the family."
 "Since everyone turned in a book report we will have an extra recess today."

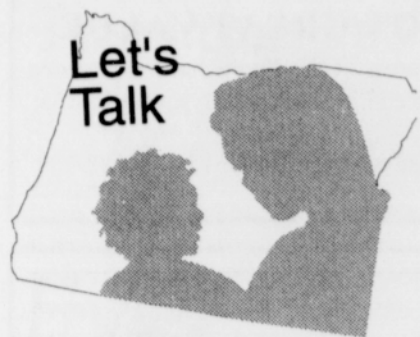
Rewards for learning take many forms-praise, gold stars, candy, field trips.
 Whether such rewards motivate more learning, discourage learning or have no effect at all is the subject of debate.
 Research reviewed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory gives parents and teachers guidance on this subject. Praise is the most commonly used reward or reinforcer in the classroom. It turns out

that not all praise is created equal. In the language of praise a whisper speaks louder than a shout. A quiet, "Anthony, I notice you've been working hard on the story problems," will spark greater achievement gains than "Class, I want to announce that Anthony got all the story problems right today."
 Praise is also more effective in motivating learning when the teacher compares the student's present performance to that of the past, rather

than to the performance of classmates: "Emily, your science report is excellent; you chose a more difficult topic than last time and gave a more organized presentation," rather than "Emily, your science report was the best in the class. You are one of the few who understands what research is all about."
 Effective praise is specific and informative. "The interesting examples you chose help show the difference between the book and the

movie versions of Jane Eyre," rather than "Good essay."
 If a little praise is good, is more better? No. Teachers who are careful with giving praise are more effective than those who gush over a correct answer. "Yes, that's right," is sufficient praise of a student's contribution to a discussion. "Fantastic, you're a genius," is overdoing it. Praise encourages learning when it is sincere and believable.
 Effective praise focuses on a

student's effort and ability; ineffective praise attributes a student's success to ability alone and factors outside the student's control such as luck, heredity, or getting an easy assignment.
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Oregonians Gauge Education Trends

Oregon citizens have given a glimpse of their thinking about 12 trends in public education. The trends were identified by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory through analyses of major reports and comments voiced by educators. Then Oregonians, as part of a larger study, were surveyed by telephone. Here are the trends, in descending order, followed by what citizens said:

Trend 1—Increasingly unstable and unpredictable structures for decisionmaking and resource allocation. Forty percent of Oregonians think that frequently changing state and federal education policies and budgets are making it difficult for schools to plan for the future.

Trend 2—Renewed focus on curriculum and instruction, on how students learn and what they know and can do. Oregonians are essentially unanimous in rating "teaching basic skills" as the most important emphasis of education, although they see other learning skills, such as decisionmaking and the ability to use computers, as important too.

Trend 3—Increasing emphasis on standards and accountability. Most Oregonians (61 percent) are optimistic that Oregon's educational standards to improve student learning can be successfully implemented.

Trend 4—Persistent and increasingly severe resource disparities among school communities. Oregonians have mixed opinions on this: 34 percent strongly believe that school funding is not distributed equitably; 6 percent are quite sure it is equitable; and 25 percent just don't know.

Trend 5—Increasing enrollments and concentrations of poor, minority, and special-needs students. Thirty-six percent of Oregonians say that poor, minority, and special-needs students have increased a lot in their schools locally.

Trend 6—Increasing state involvement in local improvement decisions and efforts. Forty-three percent of Oregonians feel that the state's involvement in local school affairs is too great.

Trend 7—Declining resources force competition for public funds. Seventy-nine percent of Oregonians believe education should rank as a top funding priority.

Trend 8—Changing role for individual school communities in decisionmaking. Thirty-eight percent of Oregonians say they would like to be more involved in school decisionmaking.

Trend 9—Increasing integration of services to support children. Many Oregonians agree that more support services should be provided at schools, although they don't regard all services as equally necessary. First on the list of onsite services is child care and after school recreation programs, next is mental health counseling, and then onsite drug and alcohol treatment.

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