Access to money, even play money, becomes increasingly important as students get older and discover that meeting many of their wants requires having money. Part-time jobs begin to compete with school and homework as students enter middle and high school, making pay for academic achievement one way to fight back. However, this is not the only way and unless done carefully can fail to produce the desired results.

Rewards to Motivate Students

A particularly intriguing example of paying middle-school students is the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), a nationwide collection of open-enrollment college preparatory schools commonly located in urban and poor communities. (Erin Macey, Janet Deckera, and Suzanne Eckesa, “The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP): An Analysis of One Model’s Efforts to Promote Achievement in Underserved Communities,” *Journal of School Choice* 3, no. 3, 2009) These schools rely heavily on financial and nonfinancial rewards to motivate students who might not otherwise experience a rigorous education. KIPP students typically receive 60 percent more instruction than students at other schools due to a longer school day and attend mandatory summer school and a wide range of after-school activities. Keeping students focused during these long school days can be a special challenge.

At the end of each week, each middle-school student receives a paycheck in “KIPP dollars” to reward effort, good behavior, and completed homework. KIPP dollars are not real dollars, can be used only within KIPP schools, and are used exclusively to reward effort and not for getting good grades or passing tests. Students’ pay may be “debited” for misbehaving. The paychecks can be used to purchase notebooks, writing supplies, snacks, and more from a school store as well as the right to participate in field trips to such places as Washington, DC and the Grand Canyon.

According to one report on the reward system, “The Paycheck Program has achieved its primary goal, improving student behavior and communication between students and faculty. When the principal hands out the paychecks on Friday afternoon, positive conversations usually result. Reinforcement of the students’ behaviors makes them think about consequences and better understand expectations, the staff members have said. Communication with parents has been amplified as well. Weekly feedback on a child’s behavior prompts regular dialogue between parents and teachers.” (Center on Educational Governance, University of Southern California, “KIPP Bayview Academy: Paycheck Program,” [http://www.uscrossier.org/ceg/products-and-services/promising-practices-compendium/education-programs-of-charter-schools/kipp-bayview-academy-paycheck-program/](http://www.uscrossier.org/ceg/products-and-services/promising-practices-compendium/education-programs-of-charter-schools/kipp-bayview-academy-paycheck-program/))

Using Rewards and Incentives

In an interview with PBS, KIPP cofounder Mike Feinberg explained why the schools use rewards and incentives. “Well, it goes back to the general premise that ... when you do the right
thing, good things happen and when you do the wrong thing, bad things happen. I know it doesn’t always work out that way in life but it usually follows that pattern and we want the kids to learn that valuable life lesson,” Feinberg said. (Interview with Mike Feinberg, co-founder of KIPP, “Making Schools Work with Hedrick Smith,” PBS, undated, http://www.pbs.org/makingschoolswork/sbs/kipp/feinberg.html) He continued:

[C]hildren who are at public schools … don’t feel the sense of earning things which we know exists beyond education out there in the real world. They’re entitled to their desk, they’re entitled to books, they’re entitled to the breakfast and the lunch, they’re entitled to have a teacher in front of them, they’re entitled to be in a school building that’s somewhere in their neighborhood. … [W]ithout teaching the value that things need to get earned, you can create a situation where kids grow up thinking that this is going to keep happening, that they’re going to be entitled to a college education, they’re going to be entitled to become a lawyer, doctor, architect, engineer, whatever they want to do in this world.

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http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2014/12/06/paying-students-achievement-does-it-work