

BEHAVIOR POINTS

(The Basic Explanation)

Here is the essential breakdown: Students are using imaginary "currency" in class called Behavior Points. I have also heard this referred to as a "token system". The idea is the same. I just use imaginary "tokens" as the numbers we produce would be too many for a physical representation.

Points are gained for good choices/behavior (but slowly and not easily), and lost for poor choices/behavior. It is MUCH easier to lose points than gain points (just like real money). Every student begins the year with 15 points, and I add another 15 points each school term (for us it is 9 weeks). It is like a payday. I don't RESET them, I just ADD to their total. One of the big parts is that they get a "passive reward" for maintaining a certain level of points (see the "scale" handout), or get a "passive punishment" for dropping below a certain number. I call them "passive" because you don't spend points for it to happen. It just occurs. Like turning 18 and getting to vote. At 20+ points they can sit on the top of their desk whenever I am reading stories out loud and at 50+ they can choose their own seat in class. If they have earned 50 points, then they have shown some responsibility so the seat choice usually works. If they move spots and talk too much, then I just move their seat. They can ONLY move seats on Mondays (makes less work for me), so I move them to a new spot they have several days to ponder their poor choice before attempting to move back again. More importantly, these built incentives give them a reason to try and *gain* points or **keep** the points they've already earned.

One of the main drawbacks to this method is that it requires quite a bit of paperwork. I keep a class list on a clipboard that I keep within reach while I'm teaching. I just leave it on my desk or podium, and refer back to it whenever a kid makes a poor choice (or a good one). And then make little hash marks next to their name letting me know how many points they lost (or gained). At the end of the week, I spend about ten minutes "re-figuring" their updated B points and writing the new totals on the sheet. It is usually pretty quick, as most kids don't change their totals much throughout the week.

I have found the B points work exceptionally well for classroom management. I don't yell at a class to stop talking anymore. All I have to do is raise my clipboard and start looking around the room. I then pick out a kid that is talking (sometimes random, sometimes a kid that has made me grumpy), say their name quietly – but out loud for everyone to hear - and take off their points. I then progress to the next kid. And so on and so on. Now once they are used to the system, then I usually don't even have to take off points. Once they see me pick up my clipboard and pen, they will stop talking. It is a wonderful example of operant conditioning. Pavlov would be proud. On the days when they are not grasping it as quickly, I might have to commit to actually charging them points (example – saying softly, but just loud enough to be heard, "[kid's name] lost 3 points for talking...<pause>...and...[another kid's name] lost 3 points...<pause>...etc."). This is usually the most extreme I have to go to get my room under control.

A necessary part of this (in my eyes) is staying consistent. Letting them know that bad behavior will always cost points, and good behavior will always help them. You kind of have to fully commit to it for it to work. You can't just sometimes do it, or sometimes forget about it. They need to see the constant clipboard (or whatever you use), and be reminded (gently) that the loss of points is there for poor choices. This method is frighteningly effective, but it does take a commitment. If you start making the punishments inconsistent, then the system will fail.

I also focus on "choices" quite a bit. You will have kids get to the zero or negative point range. Kids screw up. Have solid consequences for this. And be consistent. I always give my kids a choice when they reach a low total: take a lunch detention or do a Simpsons sheet. The lunch detention will wipe all negative points and bring them up to positive 5 or 10 points (your choice. I do 5 points and then give a bonus 5 points if they take the responsibility to tell their parents about the detention and get the slip signed). Or they can do a Simpsons Sheet (see attached file. I got the idea from watching the beginning of the The Simpsons TV show where Bart has to write his name multiple times on the chalkboard. That is what the Simpsons Sheet does. They just write a phrase A LOT of times. I tell them it has NO educational value. It is to torment them and make them unhappy, so that they will stop making poor choices.). Neither choice is one they will like, but by having a CHOICE it allows them to take ownership of it. And if they choose the Simpsons Sheet but don't have it done, then they will automatically get the detention.

I have a lot of kids earn detentions at the beginning of the school year. It is an unusual system and kids have the desire to "test" it. They want to know if I will be consistent. They want to make sure it works so they can feel safe. But as the year progresses and kids realize I am consistent, and I *will* give a detention if they drop too low with their points (Even to the "good" kids I like who screw up. That's important, too.), then the detentions decrease. And kids settle in and it just works. And kids like it. It allows the good kids to really thrive with rewards and bonuses that they can strive for. They earn rewards that other kids don't get and it makes them feel special.

At the same time my "slower to learn rules" kids also enjoy it...after a while. Once they realize that my system allows them to escape detentions with just the slightest bit of responsibility then they start to respond to it. I don't just "give detentions when I have a bad day". Any kid sees a detention coming from days away as their point total dwindles. I only give detentions when their points are gone. Then again, I only *have* to when their points are gone. I don't have other behavior issues. And when they *do* get a detention, I commiserate with you and tell them I'm sorry it's happening and I wish they had done something. I let them know that I am on "their" side, and that I have faith in their ability to avoid this happening again (even though for many kids they will be repeat "offenders" before they learn). What is important is that *I*, the teacher, am not the bad guy with my detentions. Kids see that it was their choices that got them the detention, and not an evil teacher handing down unknown decrees.

Plus to stress the "choice" idea even more, once a kid has gone down to "detention level" in points, I give them until the next day to get back up to 10 behavior points in an attempt to redeem themselves and avoid the detention. I encourage them and let them know I hope they can do it, but at the same time I *will* give a detention if the requirements aren't met. Rules are rules. This mentality allows me to be on the kid's side and foster a connection.

This system allows me to have very few rule issues in my room. My biggest problem is kids not turning in homework or bringing materials to class. That is the extent of my "behavior issues", and usually I can begin to curb those by the end of the year. But how I solve the missing homework issue is another fun system. ☺