4 Levels of Token Economy Management

Token economies are a powerful Tier I intervention that can also serve as a source of data for identifying at-risk students and monitoring school-wide progress. Unfortunately, managing a token economy takes significant time and effort. There are four main approaches to managing a token economy, and each comes with pros and cons.

Level 1: Every Teacher for Herself

How it works In this approach, each teacher in the building develops his or her own management systems. This includes technology-based systems like ClassDojo that do not facilitate collaboration between teams.

Advantages
• This approach requires no administrator bandwidth and does not drain school financial resources.

Disadvantages
• This approach does not create school-wide supports or a common school vocabulary for expectations
• This approach does not facilitate strong managers supporting and collaborating with teachers struggling with negative student behavior

Level 2: Paper Tokens or Bucks

How it works In this approach, the school creates a ticket or “behavior buck” currency that teachers award in recognition of great student choices. Tickets or bucks can be redeemed for incentives at the school store.

Advantages
• Effective at creating a school-wide vocabulary for reinforcing and rewarding positive student behavior
• Requires basic school-wide administration, preserving administrator bandwidth

**Disadvantages**

• This approach does not generate actionable data for progress monitoring at the student, teacher, grade, and school levels
• Prone to “inflation,” in which some staff devalue the school-wide currency by over awarding tickets or bucks
• Students losing their bucks, creating administrative headaches for teachers

**Level 3: Centralized Database**

**How it works** In this approach, the school creates a centralized Excel, Access, or Google Docs spreadsheet to centralize positive and negative classroom behavior data. Teachers track behavior on paper during the data, and transfer data to the centralized tracker on a daily or weekly basis. Parent reports can be generated programmatically from the shared database.

**Advantages**

• Effective at creating a school-wide vocabulary and methodology for enforcing consistent expectations
• Generate data required to monitor progress and set goals.
• Powerful opportunities to show students their growth over time, which helps students internalize the connection between their choices and outcomes
• Consistently communicate behavioral progress to parents.

**Disadvantages**

• Requires double-entry by teachers, first in class and then at the end of the day or the week. This double entry takes amounts to an average of two hours per teacher per week, or the equivalent of an FTE in a school staff of just 20
• Requires substantial administration, often falling on a key school administrator
• The “achilles heel” problem — if the system designer leaves school for any reason or has conflicting demands on their time, the entire school culture system can be negatively impacted.
Level 4: Web-based Platform

How it works In this approach, the school uses a web-based platform like LiveSchool to design its behavioral expectations, incentive program, and weekly reports before rolling out the system to teachers, then to students and parents. Teachers record behavior in real-time from any tablet, laptop, desktop, or smartboard. All information mechanics are handled in real-time by the platform, and advanced data analytics are available instantly.

Advantages

• Effective at creating a school-wide vocabulary and methodology for enforcing consistent expectations
• Generate data required to monitor progress and set goals.
• Powerful opportunities to show students their growth over time, which helps students internalize the connection between their choices and outcomes
• Consistently communicate behavioral progress to parents
• Requires very basic management

Disadvantages

• Requires financial resources
7 Rewards that Build Intrinsic Motivation

Rewards can sometimes feel like bribes, but they don't have to. The right kinds of incentives can even build intrinsic motivation by developing students' sense of pride and ambition. Here are seven great ideas to get you started:

1. **Reading Morning Announcements.** With points earned through positive behavior choices, students in any grade (K-12) can earn the opportunity to read morning announcements over the loudspeaker. If messaged properly as a privilege that requires responsibility and preparation, reading morning announcements can become a reward and an opportunity to practice public speaking.

2. **Earn Lockers or Parking Spots.** In the middle of the school year, offer an auction for your school's prime real estate—lockers and parking spots. Finding free incentives for older students can sometimes be a challenge, but by leveraging lockers or parking spots, teachers can teach students about supply-and-demand. After all, space is finite.

3. **Earn a Chance to Help.** The truth is, you can't help others until you've learned to take care of yourself. When students have earned enough points, allow students to reserve an hour helping in another classroom, a favorite teacher, or the office. They will love the chance to offer a helping hand. Make sure there are plenty of (fun!) responsibilities to tackle, whether it's reading to a small group of students or delivering Valentines in February. Students will line up to help—and they'll feel the positive effects of volunteering, which builds internal motivation, too.

4. **Teacher for the Day.** What's the point of being responsible? The chance to lead others. So when students have earned points—let them leverage those earnings into leadership in the classroom. Perhaps they want to teach the class about dancing, dungeons and dragons, or Dr. Dre—as long as teachers help students prepare the lesson—“Teacher for the Day” is another chance for students to practice leadership, public speaking, and preparation. It's an incentive, but it also builds an internal confidence they'll take with them far beyond school.

5. **Class Jobs.** It's valuable for students to understand that jobs aren't handed out like candy. They're earned. So, once they've achieved a certain number of
points, let students pay a (small) “application fee” to apply for a class job. (Many teachers require a paper application and interview, too). “Population Supervisors” take attendance. “IT Assistants” meet a teacher’s technology needs. A “LiveSchool operator” can aid in positive behavior management, rewarding points when they are earned on a tablet, PC, or laptop. We suggest hiring students for 9-week periods, and offering a LiveSchool “paycheck” for a job well done. That way, they're incentivized to apply again, or to save for a larger goal. That’s intrinsic motivation.

6. **Extra Reading Time.** When messaged right, you can leverage extra reading time as the ultimate prize (no matter what age). You can make this special by allowing students to read anywhere in the room or in a special loft or cozy chair. If it is a privilege and if they have the right book, students will beg to read more. Tip: make sure there is a process on how to check out a book when the privilege is earned.

7. **College Visit.** There’s nothing more important than exposing students to a vision of the future. Whether you plan a school-wide trip or a personalized visit to a college of a student’s choice, a trip to college is definitely something students earn—not only through their commitment to education, but also through excellence, persistence, respect and responsibility—all values that can be seen through choices and actions over the course of the school year. If you’re looking for ways to fund larger trips, DonorsChoose.org and Indiegogo.com are two platforms that help teachers fund exciting, intrinsically-focused, educational incentives.