



SCHOOL WIDE COMPETITIONS AND INCENTIVES

School wide competitions are a great way to build a culture of achievement beyond the walls of a single classroom. When implemented intentionally*, school wide competitions can build community and supercharge student performance over a defined period of time. The additional element of excitement a competition brings can also prevent students from feeling “burnout” when using content providers. This document provides some information to help administration and teachers get a school wide competition off the ground.

*School wide competitions are most effective when built upon an existing framework of tracking and goal setting. Click [here](#) to learn more about suggestions for tracking metrics school-wide.

Factors to consider

When planning a school wide competition between more than one classroom or grade, there are several key factors to consider. These key factors can also look different based on the age of the students involved:

Factors	Kindergarten - third grade	Fourth - eighth grade
Metrics to track	<p>Younger students do best wrapping their heads around simple metrics, but each teacher should determine what their classroom is ready for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of lessons passed • Total number of students meeting/exceeding a weekly goal 	<p>In addition to the metrics suitable for kindergarten - third grades, consider introducing more advanced metrics as students mature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class average pass rate
Time frame	<p>Students in primary grades will most likely need a more compact feedback loop. When hosting competitions, consider starting with manageable chunks of time that younger students can digest, like days or weeks. Many teachers choose to use a one to two week timeframe.</p>	<p>Students in upper grades can do well with either short term or long term competitions. Generally speaking, competitions last no longer than a month.</p>
Competition vs cooperation	<p>Younger students respond in a variety of different ways to competition, and the inevitable winning and losing that is associated with it. Individual teachers should decide when their classrooms are ready to compete. Some teachers prefer to prioritize the notion of cooperation between classrooms to reach a common goal. Once the goal is reached, everyone wins. For an example of this, see the Thanksgiving Turkey challenge below!</p>	<p>Older students have the emotional intelligence to participate in competitions. Before competitions begin, it is important for teachers to clearly lay out the rules so everyone knows how to play and win. The most important thing is that the competition feels fair, and that every class/grade has a shot to win and knows how to win when the competition starts.</p>



Possible Incentives	<p>Free ideas: extra recess, movie day, special recognition by the school (parade through all classrooms)</p> <p>Paid ideas: field trip, pizza party, ice cream party, etc</p>	<p>Free ideas: out of uniform day, ability to use computers to listen to music, ability to use phones for a period of time, homework pass</p> <p>Paid ideas: field trip, pizza party, ice cream party, etc</p>
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Additional points to consider

Prevent disengagement: Competitions are meant to get kids excited and increase student motivation extrinsically. When planning a competition, think critically if the structure will keep kids engaged over the entire duration. To illustrate this, consider the following example:

A competition has been started that lasts four weeks, and the grade that passes the most lessons wins. If one class/grade quickly builds an insurmountable lead, the competition might dishearten the other classes/grades. To combat this, consider having a spectrum of awards for classes that finish second, show the most improvement, etc.

Invest all teachers involved: When planning a competition between grades there will always be multiple teachers involved. While it might be natural for a single teacher to emerge as a leader, it is important to invest all teachers in the process. Students often reflect the attitudes of the adults around them, and if a teacher doesn't care about a competition, their students most likely will not as well. Also, consider how much time teachers need to put towards the competition. Can the commitment be balanced while managing core teaching priorities?

Think of ways for admin to get involved: Principals are often busy running the day to day operations of schools. However, it can mean a lot to students if administration takes intentional time to be involved. This can be as simple as announcing competition progress over the intercom, or visiting classrooms to introduce the competition in an exciting manner.



Example: Thanksgiving turkey challenge

In this school wide competition, each classroom attempts to earn as many turkey feathers as possible! When the total number of feathers reaches two hundred, then all classrooms celebrate.



Metrics to track	When a student passes a math lesson, they earn a feather for their class. The tracking is done in real time, and students can add a feather to their class turkey anytime they pass a lesson.
Time frame	The Thanksgiving Turkey Challenge starts two full weeks before Thanksgiving break. At the end of every day, teachers will count the number of feathers and the totals are announced over the intercom.
Competition vs cooperation	This is all about cooperation. The different classrooms work together and everyone's progress builds towards the common goal of two hundred feathers.
Incentives	Free idea: When two hundred lessons are passed all participating grades get an extra recess. Paid idea: When two hundred lessons are passed all participating grades get to attend an ice cream party.



Examples: March madness competition

In this school wide competition, each student in each grade has a weekly goal for how many reading lessons they pass. If a student meets their weekly goal, then they earn a basketball for their grade. The grade with the most basketballs at the end of the competitions wins.



Metrics to track	In this case, each student is setting a weekly goal. For some, that might mean passing ten reading lessons. For others, that might mean passing twelve reading lessons. If a student meets the weekly goal that is just right for them, they earn a basketball for their grade.
Time frame	March Madness typically lasts a month. At the end of each week the courts are updated with the correct count of basketballs.
Competition vs cooperation	This is all about competition. Each grade wants to have the most basketballs by the end of the competition.
Incentives	Free idea: The winning grade gets recognized at the end of year school parade. Paid idea: The winning grade gets a pizza party.