

# Teacher Praise

Middle School

High school

Elementary Education



## Intervention Overview

Giving effective praise to students can have a significant impact on student-teacher relationships, engagement, motivation, and student behavior. Dr. Paul Caldarella and colleagues (2020) found that when teachers praise students more often than reprimanding them, on-task behavior significantly improves. Teachers can write individual praise notes to students, in addition to verbal praise. A teacher praise note intervention has been shown to reduce disciplinary referrals, encourage prosocial behaviors and create a more positive classroom and school climate (Peterson et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that praising intelligence and innate traits is less effective at improving motivation and performance than praising behavior and effort. Drs. Mueller and Dweck (1998) found that students who are praised for performance have less task persistence(motivation) and enjoyment than those praised for effort. In order for teacher praise to be most effective at boosting student wellbeing, it should be centered on student effort and improvement.

## Intervention Guide

Grade Level: All

Materials: Paper, pencil as needed.

Duration: Varies.

Implementation:

1. Make an effort to praise students more often than reprimanding them. A suggested guideline is three or four comments of praise to every reprimand.
2. Praise students for behavior and effort, rather than only academic performance or skill.
3. In addition to verbal praise, write "praise notes" for a few students on a daily or weekly basis.

## Does it work?

One middle school (with about 70 teachers and 2,000 students) was assessed for the impact of teacher praise notes on office discipline referrals, as part of a positive behavioral support intervention (Nelson et al., 2009). Teachers were instructed in how to give behavior-specific praise, and by the end of the study wrote an average of about 6 notes per 100 students per day. As the amount of praise notes increased, a decline was measured in the amount of disciplinary referrals, which indicates that writing praise notes for students may reduce their disruptive behaviors, encourage prosocial behaviors and create a more positive school environment (Nelson et al., 2009).

Though it has been suggested that a 3:1 or 4:1 praise-reprimand ratio (PRR), meaning that teachers give three or four comments of praise to every reprimand, improves student behavior in the classroom, there has been little research done to support this. Recently, Paul Caldarella and colleagues (2020) evaluated these praise-reprimand ratios for their effectiveness at improving on-task behavior in the classroom. For this study, data was collected over a three year period from 19 different elementary schools and 151 classrooms. Though they found no significant difference between a 3:1 or 4:1 PRR, it was found that generally as teacher praise increased, student on-task behavior improved linearly. Though teachers may not always reach a 3:1 or 4:1 PRR daily, striving to praise more and reprimand less will likely improve student behavior and classroom engagement (Caldarella et al., 2020).

## References:

- Caldarella, P., Larsen, R., Williams, L., Downs, K. R., Wills, H., Wehby, J. (2020) Effects of teachers' praise-to-reprimand ratios on elementary students' on-task behaviour. *Educational Psychology*, 40(10), 1306-1322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1711872>
- Mueller, C. M., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.1.33>
- Nelson, J. A. P., Young, B. J., Young, E. L., & Cox, G. (2009). Using teacher-written praise notes to promote a positive environment in a middle school. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 54(2), 119-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903217895>



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