



## Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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### **Personalizing Recognition**

from Classroom Instruction that Works  
by Robert Marzano, et al.

When recognizing the accomplishment of a performance standard, it is best to make this recognition as personal to the students as possible. The following example describes the efforts of a group of teachers to establish school routines that result in personalizing recognition for students.

At a high school faculty meeting, teachers were engaged in a lively discussion about grading practices. Some teachers made the case that a significant number of students were making major improvements in their academic work, but might never make the honor roll. Although some teachers argues that “that’s the way life is,” other countered by reiterating the mission of the school – “to help all students reach their potential.” As a result of this conversation, and because of the work of a designated task force, the school developed a program where students—at all achievement levels—were helped to set ambitious personal achievement goals. Anyone who achieved his or her goal were publicly recognized by make the “Personal Best” Honor Roll. This evolved into an honor as coveted as much as, if not more than, making the traditional honor roll.

### **Pause, Prompt, Praise**

One strategy that makes effective use of praise is an adaptation of what is commonly referred to as “Pause, Prompt, and Praise.” This strategy is best used while students are engaged in a particularly demanding task with which they are having difficulty. During the “pause” phase of the strategy, the teacher asks the students to stop working on the task for a moment. During that time, teacher and student have a brief discussion as to why the student is experiencing difficulty. As a “prompt,” the teacher provides the students with some specific suggestion for improving his or her performance. If the student’s performance improves as a result of implementing this suggestion, then “praise” is given. Here is an example from a math class:

Jake was struggling with long division and was becoming discouraged. His frustration must have become obvious because the teacher stopped at his desk and asked him to put down his pencil. When she saw that he was making mistakes, mainly because his columns were sloppy, she gave him a piece of graph paper and show him how to use it to make sure his numbers were lined up properly. He was surprised how well it worked, and was thrilled when the next time the teacher stopped at his desk, it was to congratulate him on having completed four problems with no mistakes.

### **Concrete Symbols of Recognition**

Teachers who give appropriate verbal recognition would often agree that it is also appropriate to offer students concrete, symbolic tokens of recognition. Stickers, awards, coupons, and treats are examples of the types of tokens that are commonly used. These tokens do not necessarily diminish the intrinsic motivation if the tokens are given for accomplishing specific performance goals. The following example illustrates the use of concrete tokens in an informal but effective way. Darryl had been in the International Baccalaureate program for two years. He loved to learn and was generally successful, but, for some reason, he was feeling burned out this semester. His grades had slipped a little, and his mind was wandering in class. His teacher noticed this. She saw similar symptoms in other students. Fortunately for Darryl, she decided that her “serious” students, like Darryl, needed to lighten up. During the two weeks leading up to a particularly important exam, she systematically gave short practice quizzes. Every time a students scored between 90 and 100 percent, or scored 10 points higher than the previous day, he or she would receive a prize. The prizes? Smiley face stickers, McDonald’s toys, cracker jacks, paper party hats. Darryl and his classmates got into it. Cheers and laughter accompanied every awards ceremony. More important, when the teacher announced the scores for the big examination, academic performance had never been better.

Remember: reinforce student effort—especially the attainment of specific goals.