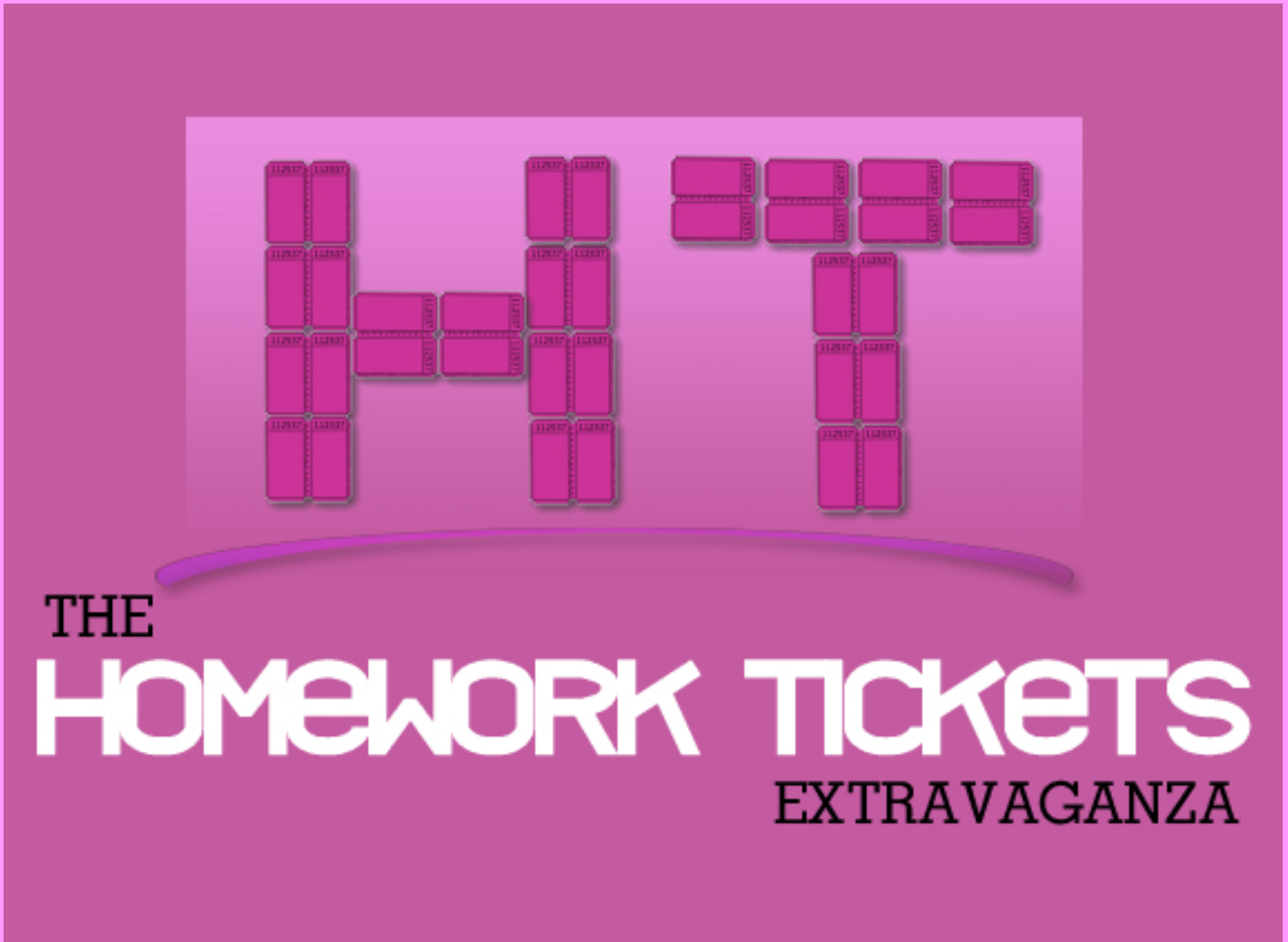


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The Positive Engagement Project
THE POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT PROJECT



Developed By

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Introduction

There are many challenges facing teachers everyday in the classroom. Expectations keep getting larger while resources keep getting smaller. With all the challenges being faced *in* the classroom on a day to day basis, does anyone want to have to worry about the challenges of work going home and coming back incomplete, or not at all? Unfortunately, this is happening all too often and there never seems to be a reasonable cure for this homework ailment that can often strike our students.

I once heard a teacher say he wanted to give up on assigning homework altogether. When asked why he wanted to do this, he explained that he collects homework each morning as soon as the students enter class. He then said, "I'm tired of starting every day on a bad note." Obviously, homework had become a chronic problem.

So what can be done about it? Well, there have been lots of suggestions with varying degrees of success. However, most of these homework procedures and systems are missing the one key component that will make it all come together and work: STUDENT BUY IN! That's right! The students need to buy into the importance and the desire to get homework turned in properly and on time. It's time to make homework something that gets done *for the students* and **not for the teacher**.

But how can this happen? Is there a system in which students **want** to do their homework? Well, funny you should ask, because the answer is yes, there is such a system. And this system is already being used by teachers right now with great success. The most amazing part of all this is not how easy it is to put into place, but how much the students *buy into the program*.

While visiting a fourth grade class after work one day, I asked the two teachers (they taught as a team), Lauren Armijo and Michelle Ott, if they were having problems with students turning in their homework. They replied by saying, "No, not at all." At this point, I figured I had worked far too many hours and had started slipping into a dreamlike state. When they assured me I wasn't delusional, I asked the most obvious question in the world: "How did you do that?"

They explained what they had devised for their students and I immediately wanted to try this myself. The results I obtained in my class were exactly what they told me was happening in their classrooms. With their permission, I am giving a brief explanation of how this system works. I want to give a huge thank you to both Lauren and Michelle for their willingness to share this great idea with me and also allowing the idea to be put out in this public forum as well.

Homework Reward System

Step 1: Develop a set of rewards for students who adequately finish all their homework for the week. The rewards should be items which require very little to no cost for the teacher. Examples of these types of rewards are:

- Sit at the teacher's desk for 15 minutes
- Comfortable chair for a day
- Homework pass (good for one assignment)
- 15 minutes of computer time
- 15 minutes of free time in the class
- 15 minutes of reading time
- 15 minutes of math game time with a friend (partner must be approved by teacher)
- Pass to the library (15 minutes)
- Sit anywhere in the class for the day (Students can choose to sit where another student is sitting and that other student must move for the day. This option does not include the teacher's desk.)
- Lunch with the teacher
- Shoes off in class for the day (be sure to get administrator approval for this in advance due to potential district safety regulations)
- Raffle tickets/classroom money reward (i.e.: 10 Tickets or Tiger Dollars)

Step 2: Write these rewards onto cards of cardstock (four per page) and make several copies. Adding a picture for each reward card can be a great tool for younger students and English Language Learners. You will cut the cards into fourths after they have been printed and copied and put all the cards into a container that students cannot see into when choosing a card.

Step 3: Assign "Homework Captains" (1 captain for every 4-6 students) who will be responsible for collecting homework. They are responsible for

- * Checking to see if homework is complete and neat and has a name on it
- * Making sure all work is facing the same way and turned in to the teacher
- * Alert the teacher to who, if anyone, did not complete the homework (This

can be done by having the Captains writing down the names of the students who did not adequately complete the assignment on a slip of paper located next to the designated turn-in area.)

Whether or not the Homework Captain leaves the incomplete homework assignment with the student or still collects it is entirely up to the teacher.

It should only take about 1-2 minutes to get all homework turned in with names on all assignments and neatly facing the same direction, as well as have a record of those who did not complete the assignment. As you can see, this is a fast way to collect homework with very little time lost in class.

Step 4: Teacher double-checks homework to be sure all assignments turned in on time are acceptable (captains will weed out most problems). If there are assignments not completed satisfactorily, return the work and note it as incomplete and that student is not credited with turning in their homework on time.

Step 5: On Monday morning let students who have completed all assignments for the week randomly select a reward card from the container using the same 2 minute block of the day that is already built into your schedule. *Students do not write their names or numbers on the card when they get it. The cards will be returned to the container for future drawings when redeemed by the students.*

Step 6: Students can redeem their cards for their reward at any time the teacher sees fit. It is important that the teacher spends some time in the beginning teaching the students when it is appropriate to redeem their cards. One idea would be to have a sign (much like a reversible Open/Closed sign in store windows) in a visible place in the room and the teacher must have the "Open" sign posted for the students to request permission to use their cards. A student can hold up the card and the teacher can quietly call them over and accept the card or not (not all cards are practical to accept at all times).

NOTES:

The teacher can decide how long the students may keep the cards or if there is a limit to the cards that a student can redeem in a day. It is recommended to only accept one card per day from any given student. Many students will "collect" the cards rather than spend them and then want to start using them as the school year nears an end, so please be sure to establish a clear procedure for this with students in advance so they have the opportunity to redeem what they have earned while avoiding mass redemptions in a short period of time, thus breaking down the ability to affectively teach.

Using the cards as part of classroom consequences (i.e: a student loses a homework card for bad behavior during the day) is totally up to teacher discretion. However, it is important to be very careful about mingling homework and classroom expectations together. A student with habitually bad behavior may give up on homework if they feel they will just lose the cards in class. Also, if there is no way to earn a card during class time for *good* behavior, it becomes a one way, negative system, which is not the purpose of the program.

It is not recommended to replace any lost/stolen cards. Keeping track of the cards is their own responsibility and perhaps losing one and not getting a replacement will help teach some personal responsibility for their own property.

Some students will want to trade a card. If trading is allowed, it should only be allowed between the student and teacher. *No student-to-student trading should be permitted.* A student can trade the card they don't want for another card by way of the same random selection process. A student should not be allowed to trade a card more than once. One idea of how to keep track of this would be to have all the initial cards on green cardstock paper. A student can trade the green card for a red card (random selection as before). Once a student has a red card, *it cannot be traded again.* This will provide an easy way for the teacher to keep track of traded cards and ensure that a student does not keep trading a card repeatedly until he or she gets the cards they want, thus wasting a

lot of the teacher's time. Also, trading should not be permitted during class time. This would not be a wise use of time.

Well, that's it in a nutshell. As you use this system (if you choose to do so), please feel free to change what is necessary for your particular class and please don't hesitate to let us know if you come up with some ideas or changes to help improve on it. The greatest source we have in education is each other.