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## Local

Paying students for better grades is partially effective, study says

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### **BALTIMORE -**

It pays to get good grades.

Baltimore City is one of the few urban school districts nationwide that has resorted to the controversial practice of offering students money or shoes to improve their grades, but a new study shows that incentives work.

Students improved their reading grades an average of 4 percent every year their school rewarded them for better academics and behavior, according a study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at [Stanford University in California](#).

The study included more than 100 charter schools throughout the country. It is one of the first to examine incentive programs, which historically are popular in charter schools but recently have gained a foothold in Baltimore City. Schools in [New York City](#) also have used rewards to boost grades.

Researchers said incentives don't always have to be expensive to work.

"It does look like incentives could be a cost-effective way to attempt to improve student performance," said [Ken Surratt](#), who helped perform the study and is assistant director of Stanford's research center.

Students at one elementary school who performed well on their tests, for example, won the opportunity to pelt their principal with water balloons, Surratt said.

"It's something that gets student energized to act in a certain manner," Surratt said. "If it doesn't cost anything, why not do that?"

But in Baltimore City, since schools [CEO Andres Alonso](#) in January brought up the policy of giving students up to \$110 for boosting test scores, parents, officials and teachers have worried about whether money is appropriate to offer students.

"It sends a bad message: We will pay you to pass," [Baltimore City Mayor Sheila Dixon](#) said at the time.

Stanford's study shows that the incentive programs did not have an effect on math scores, and researchers were unsure why. The incentives also had more of an effect on older students than younger students.

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