

Sponsor a Terrific Kids Program

Our school is full of...

Thoughtful
Enthusiastic
Respectful
Responsible
Inclusive
Friendly
Inquisitive
Capable

Kids!

A Kiwanis Kids program promoting character development and good citizenship.

Kiwanis Terrific Kids



Introduction

Motivation, encouragement, recognition:
 These three elements can work magic with youngsters by creating positive attitudes and self-discipline.

This is what the Kiwanis Club of Black Mountain-Swannanoa, North Carolina, sought to achieve when it instituted a program in an elementary school in 1982. The members developed a system to reward students who strive to improve behavior, peer relationships, attendance, or school-work.

The program was called Terrific Kids, and its results were impressive: Absenteeism, tardiness, and littering dropped off while academic performance shot up. The program quickly spread to other area schools. Today, approximately 800 Kiwanis-family clubs sponsor Terrific Kids programs in more than 2,000 schools, reaching nearly 1 million students.

“We found that discipline problems decreased, says educator William McElrath. “We have had better attitudes on the part of students-and not only at school. Parents report the same at home.”

Terrific Kids, in fact, has been credited not only with affecting student behavior, self-esteem, and academic performance but also with improving PTA attendance and creating a school climate conducive to learning. In Hardy, Arkansas, PTA attendance rose 400 percent after the Terrific Kids program was implemented.



The Method

Achievements don't have to be difficult and complicated. Simplicity is the method behind the Terrific Kids program-both in its goals and in its implementation.

Five factors make Terrific Kids a successful program:

1. The goals are achievable-Any student can be a Terrific Kid by meeting a goal agreed upon with the teacher. The chosen goal is an attainable improvement rather than a demoralizing stab at perfection that sets up the student for failure.
2. Students compete with themselves. The student sets a goal to improve in some way, such as reducing tardiness or being quiet in class. Improvement against one's own record is easier and healthier for a child than competing against peers. The student should develop his or her goal during a discussion with the classroom teacher so the teacher can help the student work toward the goal and immediately recognize achievement of the goal.
3. Students get recognition-The recognition level for a Terrific Kid is high. Award ceremonies, prizes from businesses, media coverage, and attention from adults all contribute to the students' enthusiasm to be Terrific Kids. As one mother reports: "I have three framed certificates on the wall. I couldn't take them down without a storm of protest."
4. It's popular in the community-Schools, business sponsors, and the media have been eager to participate in the program.
5. Club support is minimal-Terrific Kids has been popular among Kiwanis-family clubs because it is a high-impact program that is neither costly nor time-consuming. This allows the club to support other service projects too. The program can be implemented in most schools for \$100-200. Club members need to monitor the operation of the program in the school and appear at award ceremonies or other specially planned events.

How It Works

The Terrific Kids program is a collaborative effort between the club, the school, and business sponsors. The program can be modified to meet local needs, but typically it is modeled around a seven-step process:

1. Each teacher announces the Terrific Kid(s) to the class on Thursday.
2. The teacher sends a letter home to the parents on Friday. See the sample letter on page ###.
3. The principal recognizes the Terrific Kids on Monday in a special assembly or over the intercom. Certificates and other prizes are awarded.
4. The school displays a photo of the Terrific Kids on a special bulletin board.
5. Each Terrific Kid enjoys some form of recognition in his or her classroom for the entire school week.
6. Businesses that contribute awards post photos in their establishments.
7. The local newspaper publishes names and photos of the Terrific Kids.

The club should be represented during each awards ceremony. This is important for positive reinforcement. Many clubs have lunch with the Terrific Kids each week. If the school is large, the ceremony might be conducted bi-weekly or in each classroom.

All students in kindergarten and special education should be Terrific Kids at some point during the year. A minimum of 80 percent of the other students should receive the distinction. It is extremely important that every child have an attainable goal and, therefore, that every child in any classroom might receive the award.

Receiving the award without attaining the goal makes it meaningless and allows students to feel that rewards are to be had



with no effort. It does not develop motivation to achieve, and that is a cornerstone of the program.

Parents and students need to remember that this program has been designed so that a student's only competition is oneself. Each child sets an attainable goal with the teacher. The competition is against one's own record, not with other children. It is entirely possible that 100 percent of the students will earn the award.

Some students will earn the award later in the year. This does not make the value of the award less. Children and adults learn to value most the things they have to work hardest to attain.

Some clubs have added another dimension to the program by asking the principal to select a surprise student at each awards ceremony. This is a student the principal has observed exemplifying the principles of Terrific Kids, though an official goal was not agreed upon ahead of time.



Alternative Approaches

Some parents and teachers have raised concerns about aspects of Terrific Kids. Some parents have commented that children recognized later in the year feel "less terrific" because they had to wait so long for recognition, and children who are never recognized may suffer damage to their sense of self-worth. This may frustrate parents in families where one child receives the award while another does not.

To address lack of recognition, some schools implement a policy that all students will be recognized as Terrific Kids during the school year. To solve the timing problem, some schools have adopted an approach of drawing names at random so all students know they will receive the recognition, and timing depends on chance.

One school has solved these concerns by recognizing all students on the same day. This event is scheduled early in the school year, and teachers identify a trait of each student to praise. Parents are invited to the event to hear their children recognized.

These alternatives change the original objective of the program of motivating students to work toward a goal of self-improvement—and not being rewarded if no progress is made. However, they may prove useful in a particular school, and the school should choose the design of the program. The processes described below can be adapted to these alternative approaches.

Implementing the Program

Starting the Terrific Kids program is a five-step procedure.

1. **Obtain club approval**—As stated above, the club's monetary commitment is minimal. The choice and range of awards is up to the club. Items offered by the International Office appear on the Terrific Kids supplies flier in this bulletin. The club also may need to absorb the cost of sending letters to parents and photos of the Terrific Kids.

The most important commitment will be the members' time investment. The club should assign a chair and assistant to each school it sponsors, and different members should attend each awards ceremony to present awards and congratulate the students. Two or three Circle Kers should be present at each ceremony. This demonstrates support by the entire club.

2. **Approach business sponsors**—Before visiting a school, the club committee should canvass area businesses to see how many would support the Terrific Kids program by donating prizes and posting photos of the kids. Ask each business to send a representative to the award ceremonies to present the prizes.

Prizes might be presented in the form of coupons that give a Terrific Kid a free item or a discount on a purchase. If the business prefers, it may provide off-the-shelf goods.

3. **Obtain school approval**—Having established community support, you are ready to present the program to the principal of an elementary school. If the principal is persuaded that a minimal investment of time by school personnel will yield improved student behavior, he or she will approve the program.

Emphasize that the club presents proposed guidelines for the Terrific Kids program. The educators at the school know best how the program should be modified to meet the needs of the students and the school. The club will support the program as the school designs it.

4. **Secure support from school faculty**—The success of the Terrific Kids program depends on the enthusiasm of teachers and other staff. It will be necessary for a staff member to handle details inside the school. This person will keep the club chair informed about award ceremony dates and other vital information, such as the names of the Terrific Kids.

5. **Show gratitude**—Your club could show appreciation to school faculty and business sponsors by inviting them to club meetings and introducing them as special guests. The club might also consider creating a certificate for presentation to teachers at the end of the year.



Communication

The most important part of a successful Terrific Kids program is communication. Everyone needs to know what the program is and how it operates—including administration, teachers, students, and parents. This requires an annual process that follows four basic steps.

1. When a school agrees to operate a Terrific Kids program, the Circle K club chair needs to meet with the school principal and teachers and agree on:
 - The kinds of goals students should set—Normally goals address behavior, including attitude, social interaction, classroom decorum, playground activity, attendance, tardiness, mannerisms, and appearance. However, some schools include academics or exclude some of the items listed above.
 - The percentage of students who should achieve the award (*In kindergarten and special education, all students should be recognized as Terrific Kids*). In some schools, the objective is for all students in every grade to be recognized during the year. Again, the main thing is for children who receive the award to know that they earned it and what they did to earn it.
 - The communication plan for educating teachers, students, and parents—The three steps below outline a typical process.
2. The principal should explain the goal process and recognition system to the teachers at a faculty meeting. Circle K'ers may or may not participate. The principal may want to specify how the teachers introduce the program to their students.
3. Teachers explain the goal-setting process and recognition system to students in their classroom. Alternatively, this can be done in an all-school meeting.
4. The school introduces parents to the Terrific Kids program in a letter sent home with students or in its standard newsletter. The PTA also should discuss the program, preferably before implementation for the year. This communication is an essential element in avoiding problems later.

The Award Program

The award system must meet the needs of the school.

Teachers in each classroom should recognize their Terrific Kids. Some schools will conduct a weekly assembly of the school or a smaller award ceremony for the students, parents, and principal. Principals may announce the Terrific Kids over the intercom. Others may have Kiwanis-family members visit each classroom to present certificates and awards.

Another approach is scheduling the award ceremony at the beginning of monthly PTA meetings. The evening hours make it easier for parents to attend, and the awards motivate some parents to participate in the PTA meetings. This system probably requires a sitting service for the children who attend.

Publicity

As with any program, publicity is important.

The tremendous public appeal of Terrific Kids, however, makes it especially important. Take these steps to publicize the program:

- Contact local newspapers to get coverage.
- Contact local radio and television stations. Ask them to report award ceremonies.
- Make a presentation at PTA meetings or meetings of other organizations that might be interested in the program.
- Send letters to all parents to introduce the program. This is important!
- Have a writing contest for students during the year in which they express what it means to be a Terrific Kid.
- Have the Terrific Kids write thank-you letters to business sponsors. Then ask the businesses to post them and send a few to the newspaper for publication.

Kiwanis Terrific Kids

The focus of this program is to recognize children.

However, many clubs benefit when parents, grandparents, or teachers, impressed by the program, join the Kiwanis family. Making sure references are to the Kiwanis Terrific Kids program helps make this possible.

Another advantage of attaching the Kiwanis name is that students will remember this first positive experience with Kiwanis when they encounter K-Kids, Builders Club, Key Club, Circle K, and Kiwanis clubs. So, make use of the name and logo. For more information and resources visit the Terrific Kids Web site.