

# School psychologists develop intervention to reduce hallway disruptions

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A gamelike intervention developed by school psychology researchers in UT's College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences may help reduce hallway disruptions among elementary school children.

The intervention rewards classes of students for quickly transitioning from one room or activity to another. When implemented with three classes of students from grades one through six at a summer [school](#) program, disruptions during class transitions were reduced by up to 74 percent.

"Hallways are daunting spaces for teachers," said Christopher Skinner, professor of school psychology and co-author of the study, which was published in the *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*. "Being quick in transitions helps significantly reduce [inappropriate behavior](#)."

In the study, which was led by Associate Professor Merilee McCurdy, students were timed for one class transition a day (for example, from the gym to an academic classroom). A goal time was selected before the class and explained to the children. If the class met the goal time, a letter was rewarded at the end of the transition and placed on a Velcro board in the classroom. By the end of the week, classes had the chance to earn five letters.

"The letters were P-A-R-T-Y, in that order," Skinner said. "After successfully meeting the transition time for a fifth day, classes were rewarded with a 20-minute party with snacks and games."

If there were any disruptions by students—either stepping out of line, yelling, hitting, or running in the hallway—during a transition, classes were penalized by having five seconds added to their overall time.

"One student who misbehaves could risk the reward for the rest of the group," Skinner said.

On top of a notable reduction in disruptive behavior, class transitions were also much quicker. Relative to baseline transition times taken before the game was introduced, each class showed a decrease ranging from 91 to 172 seconds.

Similar games have been introduced by Skinner and colleagues in elementary school settings to boost math scores and help children who display emotional and behavioral disorders to improve social skills.

The reward in such interventions must meet at least two criteria to reap the desired result for teachers.

"It must be a bonus rather than an expected part of the class day," Skinner said. "And it must not involve a punishment. If the reward is a game of dodgeball, there are going to be children who don't want to play."

In other words, if the students dislike the reward, they may not try as hard in the class activity.

Other than class parties, Skinner's reward suggestions include additional recess or computer time or listening to music.

Since each classroom is unique, there's another way for teachers to identify the best rewards for their students.

"A suggestion box, or a simple class poll, can go a long way," Skinner said.

**More information:** Victoria VanMaaren et al, Reducing Hallway Disruptions in Elementary Students Using a Modified Timely Transitions Game, *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* (2019).  
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