



RECOGNITION IDEAS TO PERSONALIZE SCHOOL

One of the key tenets of *Breaking Ranks*, the comprehensive framework for school improvement put forth by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, is to personalize the school environment and “banish anonymity.” One way to banish anonymity is to let students know that their accomplishments are noted through a vibrant recognition program that isn’t limited to bland certificates at an end of year ceremony. When students succeed in academics, the arts, athletics, or student activities, find a way to let them know their efforts are appreciated. Try a few of the following ideas.

ACADEMICS

Many schools recognize good grades with honor rolls and academic improvement with things like BUG (Bringing Up Grades) programs. Take the recognition a step further with personalized efforts like:

JUST DESSERTS. Playing off the phrase “you got your just desserts,” invite students who have achieved academic distinction and their parents to a Just Desserts reception in their honor. Feature a variety of desserts and let them enjoy their sweet rewards.

MAKE YOUR MARK. Invite students whose grades in any marking period meet a particular standard to make their mark with fabric paint on a large piece of canvas cloth titled “[School Name] students are making their mark!” Create a banner out of the cloth and hang it in a prominent place.

CUSTOM BOOKMARKS. Create your own bookmark design each quarter and have them printed on thick card stock. On the back of the bookmark, write a student’s name and the academic accomplishment for which they are being recognized and award them at your honor roll ceremony.

STARBURST DELIVERY. Call attention to the academic accomplishments of students by delivering a package of Starburst candies with a note that says “You’re a star in the classroom” to every student whose grades have improved from the previous semester and to those who have maintained straight A grades.

HONOR ROLL SLIDESHOW. Instead of calling out long lists of names to recognize honor roll students, create a multimedia slide show with candid photos of every student on

the honor roll set to some lively or inspirational music. Label each photo with the student’s name and play the show over the school’s broadcast system for all students to see. Include a link to it on your school website.

ACADEMIC LETTERS. Just as athletes earn letters for participation in sports, scholars should be able to earn letters for outstanding academics. Determine criteria for earning an academic letter—for example, having an overall 3.75 GPA for one school year or maintaining an overall 3.5 GPA for three consecutive semesters—and allow students who qualify to receive a letter that they can attach to a letter jacket. Award bars or pins for additional years of qualification.

ACADEMIC PEP RALLY. Celebrate the accomplishments of your school’s scholars in the same way you celebrate athletes with a pep rally. Feature music, skits, relay races, cheerleaders, motivational speakers, and so forth, all with a scholastic theme.

ARTS

Students involved in fine and performing arts programs can be recognized in unique ways.

SIDEWALK ART FAIR. Showcase student talent with a display in the community of artwork they have worked on throughout the year. Select a location that has lots of traffic—perhaps a downtown street or inside a busy mall—and ask viewers to cast a vote for best of show.

ARTS RECEPTION. Feature the best of student artwork at a reception in the evening. Invite parents, teachers, administrators and distinguished community members. Present awards such as:

- **Heart of the Arts** for outstanding volunteer efforts in the area of the arts
- **Backstage Award** for behind-the-scenes efforts of note
- **Artistic Achievement** for excellence and accomplishment in any arts discipline

BREAK A LEG GRAMS. Show support for students in upcoming performances by selling Break a Leg Grams. Design a paper message form with a theme consistent with the type of performance and attach a candy treat. Students and parents purchase them, write their message, and turn them back in to be delivered to the performers before the show.

RED CARPET TREATMENT. Literally roll out the red carpet for your students as they arrive at school to warm up for a school concert or drama performance. Have non-performing students line the carpet to give them high fives and wish them well in the performance.

WALK OF FAME. Create your own walk of fame in the lobby of your school auditorium by placing the names of outstanding student performing artists on gold stars. Laminate the stars and use clear contact paper to adhere them to the floor.

ROUND OF APPLAUSE CARDS.

Design and print a round card that anyone can fill out to give a round of applause to a student for their work in fine or performing arts.

ACTIVITIES

Students who are active in clubs and organizations often find their accomplishments go unnoticed by the wider student body. Use some of these ideas to draw attention to their efforts.

YARD SIGNS. Design a yard sign in school colors that proudly declares “A Seahawk [Debate Team] student lives here!” Create signs for the various clubs and organizations, or create one sign with a blank line that could be personalized instead of a specific group name. If funds permit, have a stealth squad go out in the evening and put the signs in the front yard of students in a group that has a big event coming up. For example, before the school play put signs in all the yards of the actors and stage crew members.

LOCKER DECORATIONS. When a competitive organization like DECA, FCCLA, chess club, or debate has a big competition coming up, decorate the lockers of members to wish them good luck. Personalize the decorations with personal spirit

signs with the member’s name and what part they will play in the competitive event.

TOOTSIE ROLLS. Package Tootsie Roll candies in a small bag and attach a note that says “Roll over the competition!” Present them to members of organizations heading into competitions.

HONOR CORDS. Allow members who meet certain participation requirements for the organizations to which they belong to wear honor cords during graduation ceremonies.

ATHLETICS

Athletes typically receive lots of recognition at school with pep rallies, cheerleaders, and so forth, and many of the ideas listed above also can be used for sports teams. A few additional ideas to add to the mix include:

TRAIL MIX. Obtain individual packets of trail mix and present them to athletes going off to district, regional, or state competition with a note that indicates they are “on the trail to victory.”

VICTORY FLAG. Design a school victory flag and fly it on the school flagpole whenever any team wins.

LOCKER ROOM DECORATIONS.

Decorate the team locker room prior to the first home game of any sport—girls or boys.

HIGHLIGHTS REELS. Play a short, action-packed highlights video on the school broadcast system followed by a good luck message for any team heading off to post-season playoff games.

