

BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES

Carrots for the classroom



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Doing his best to avoid peeking, kindergartner Julio Aragon pulls a ticket during a drawing at the second-quarter recognition assembly at Mockingbird Elementary in Ralston. Pupils win one ticket for each week's perfect attendance, and tickets are drawn each quarter for prizes.

Attendance prizes show promise at metro-area schools

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When Debashish Koirala gets to school on time — and doesn't leave during the day for an appointment — he gets a stamp on his assignment notebook.

That might not sound like much, but these aren't any old stamps. These stamps could earn the 8-year-old a video game or a bike.

"We can win prizes," said the third-grader at Ralston's Mockingbird Elementary.

Mockingbird, not far from 90th and Q Streets, is one of 15 schools in the Ralston, Millard and Omaha school districts that started an attendance incentive program last fall through Building Bright Futures, an education-focused philanthropy.

The group and an outside grant are paying for supplies and prizes for the students and schools, everything from a popcorn machine to playground equipment.

While first-semester attendance figures are still being compiled, anecdotal evidence and numbers from some individual schools suggest that results are mixed so far.

At Mockingbird, for example, about 70 percent of the students attended school daily a year ago. Now it's 90 percent. But too many students — a few dozen out of 350 — are still tardy in the morning, said Principal

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Mockingbird first-grader London Crocker holds out hope for a prize as tickets are drawn. The incentive program has improved attendance, but tardiness is still a problem.

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