Clip Chart

A Simple Discipline Strategy for Promoting Positive Behavior

Outstanding

Great Job

Good Day

Ready to Learn

Rick Morris

Creator of New Management

Clip Chart: A Simple Discipline Strategy for Promoting Positive Behavior
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Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything
as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency comes from God.
—II Corinthians 3:5

Discipline is teaching,
not punishment.

— T. Berry Brazelton

Clip Chart

A Simple Discipline Strategy for Promoting Positive Behavior

*H*ere's an idea I got from my son's third grade teacher, a truly gifted man by the name of Jonathan McDade. It's a wonderfully simple strategy that I was able to use in my own classroom with great success. And now that I'm no longer in the classroom—I resigned from my school district this past June after thirty-one years of teaching and three years of a leave of absence—I've been sharing this same strategy as a part of the discipline seminar I present at schools and districts.

Lately, though, I've received a number of email requests about the idea from teachers who had heard about it from another teacher and were looking for a bit more information about how it all works. Thus, this eBook.

> *By the way:* If you find yourself working with a tough group of students, i.e., lots of negative behavior and aggressive "limit testers[†]," you shouldn't start out using the Clip Chart.
>
> What you're going to need is a strategy that enables you to easily identify *and document* problem behavior so that you can begin to deal with it. For those situations, I suggest you try the ADOPT strategy. It's contained in my book, *Eight Great Ideas*. Then, after you've been able to steer them all in a better direction, you could easily switch over to the Clip Chart.

To this day, I can still remember the morning I walked into Mr. McDade's classroom to hang out for a while and spend a bit of one-on-one time with some of his students. As I wandered around the room, I came upon a multi-colored chart. About a foot wide and maybe four feet long, it was hanging on the wall at the front of the room. The whole thing was made from construction paper that had then been laminated. Attached to the chart were wooden clothespins. Each clothespin had the name of a student written on it.

[†]   In his must-read book, Setting Limits in the Classroom, Robert MacKenzie states that most misbehavior in the class-room is just *limit testing*. He also points out that some students are more aggressive testers than others.

It took me all of five seconds to realize the brilliance of his idea.

> **The clothespins started out the day clipped to the middle of the chart.**

Yes, of course.

Now that I see it, it makes so much more sense.

(I'll expand on this thought in just a bit.)

The Big Picture

Clip Chart—the name I've come to call it; you can call it whatever you wish—consists of just two items.

1. **A laminated strip of paper that has been divided into seven levels.**

As you can see, each level has been labeled. Outstanding is at the top of the chart and Parent Contact resides at the bottom.

2. **A set of clothespins with the name of a student written on each one.**

The clothespins are clipped to the left and right edges of the READY TO LEARN level of the chart.

During the course of the day, the clothespins move up and down the chart based upon the behavioral choices each student makes. Good behavior causes the clothespin to move up one level. Conversely, inappropriate behavior will cause the clothespin to move down one level.

What could be easier?

Outstanding

Great Job

Good Day

Ready to Learn

Think About It

Teacher's Choice

Parent Contact
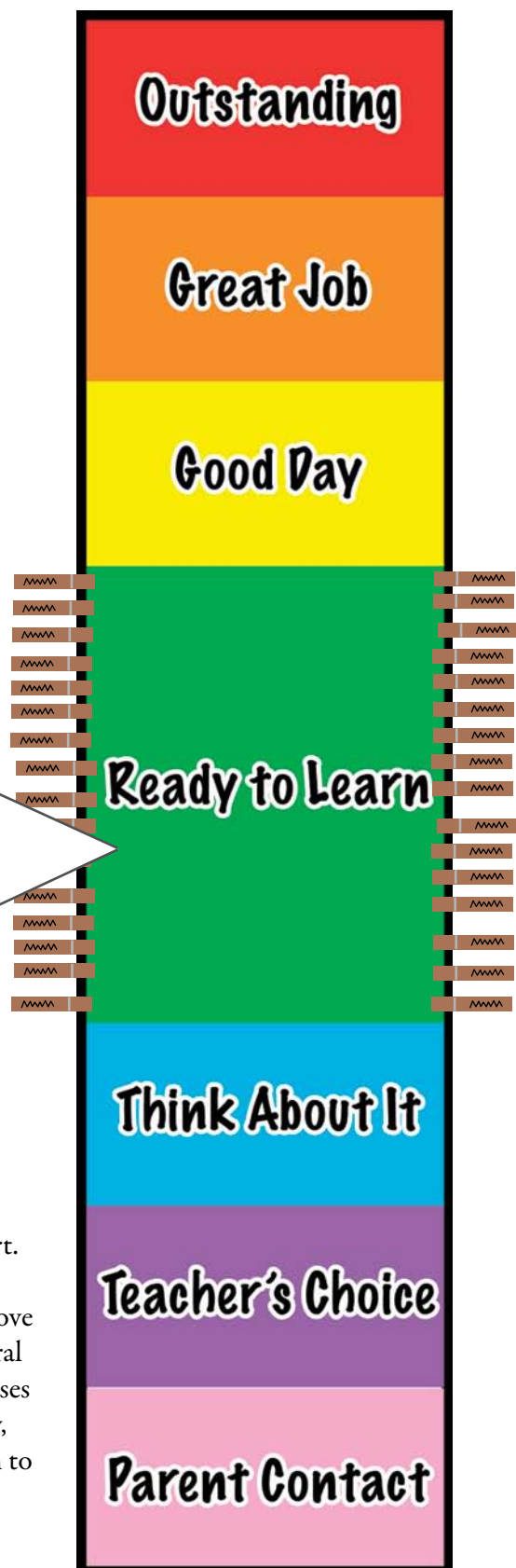
Teacher

Somewhat mystified by my stance:

> *Well, Rick. Since you asked, I'm going to say that the color-coded Pocket Chart we have in my room is pretty easy to use.*
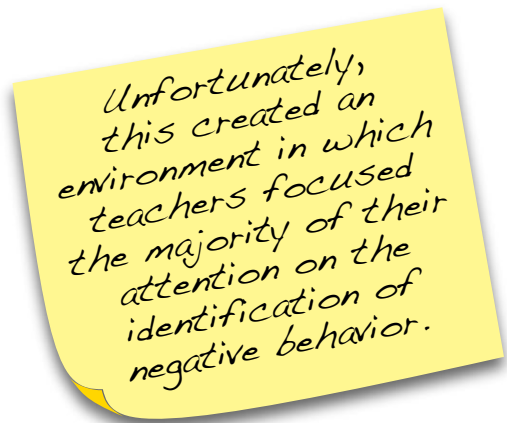
> *Every student begins the day with a set of colored squares in his "pocket." We use the rainbow as our color guide so everyone's pocket starts off with the violet card on top. Whenever a child is not following one of our rules, I merely ask him to remove a card from his pocket.*

> *The first removal results in the blue card being visible. Subsequent removals go from green to yellow to orange, and finally, to red.*

> *At the end of the day, I have a student re-place all of the colored cards that had been removed so that everyone once again starts the day with the violet card showing.*

Hey, you're right. That does sound easy.

So why the heck am I taking the time to produce an eBook on the Clip Chart? There's got to be a reason. After all, it's not as if I'm sitting around Starbucks sipping a latte trying to think of something to do with my day.

Unfortunately, this created an environment in which teachers focused the majority of their attention on the identification of negative behavior.

The Clip Chart versus the Pocket Chart

Inspired by the aforementioned Pocket Chart, the Clip Chart is a clever adaptation that has some real advantages over its predecessor.

Advantage One

As was just stated on the previous page, a student's clothespin travels up and down the chart based upon his behavior. If he's making good choices, it's going to be moving up. If not, it's going down. This up-and-down movement is a significant departure from the down-only style of the Pocket Chart.

For the most part, the use of the Pocket Chart was limited to those times when the teacher asked that a student's card be removed for misbehavior. Unfortunately, this created an environment in which teachers focused the majority of their attention on the identification of negative behavior. Make a mistake, lose a card. Conversely, do a good job of being a responsible, hard-working student and I'm not going to do a thing.

I'm not saying that teachers didn't want to be positive. Not at all. It was just that there was no way to indicate on the Pocket Chart that good things were going on in the classroom except to leave the student's card untouched. Sad but true. True but sad.

The predictable result of the Pocket Chart program?

> **The teacher spends the day looking for problems**
> **while the students spend the day in free-fall.**

Gosh, what's not to like about that?

Advantage Two

All of the clothespins start in the middle level, READY TO LEARN, and not in the top level, OUTSTANDING.

That's what so struck me that morning when I walked into my son's third grade classroom and saw the Clip Chart for the first time. All of the clothespins were clipped to the edge of the middle level.

The students didn't start out their day at the top of the chart the way the Pocket Chart had everyone starting with the best color. Every student in this room began the day in a neutral spot and then attempted to work his way up the chart. And that's the brilliance of the idea.

When the Pocket Chart was first introduced, we were all lulled into thinking that it made sense for everyone to start on the best color. Upon further review, though, that concept doesn't make sense for a couple of reasons.

False Accomplishment

For one, starting on the best color can contribute to a classroom culture of false accomplishment.

Classrooms using the Pocket Chart have students begin their day with a high mark in citizenship—Violet card, the best you can do!—that was neither earned nor achieved. Absolutely no effort, self-control, or responsible behavior was necessary to receive this prize. It was just handed to them when they walked in the door. And in my humble opinion, there's already enough pandering going on in our society as it is without teachers aiding and abetting the whole mess.[†]

[†]   I mean, really now, does every kid at the soccer tournament need a four-foot trophy? I don't think they do. They're stronger than that. Besides, the trophy itself is somewhat diminished if everyone gets one regardless of their actual performance on the playing field.

A student using the Clip Chart, however, experiences a true sense of accomplishment as his clothespin moves up the chart because of his good choices. More than merely hanging onto his violet card by avoiding negative behavior, he went out of his way to exhibit positive behavior. And if he does end up on Outstanding, it's because he earned it. He didn't start out on that level. He actually got there by being a responsible, productive student.

Way to go, hard worker.

The Reluctance to Pull a Card

Another reason that starting at the top is a debatable concept is the irreversibility of a card being removed.

When the Pocket Chart was first introduced, we were taught that once a card was removed from the chart, it stayed removed until the beginning of the next day when everyone started over again. Even if a student was exhibiting good behavior later in the day, the previously removed card was gone, baby, gone. There was no goin' back.[†]

And since that bell cannot be unrung, self-doubt creeps in. Having to consider the harsh finality of a card being removed from the chart, a teacher might become reluctant to pull a card even though a student's behavior warrants such a response and, instead, merely threaten to pull the card.

The hesitancy to act upon inappropriate behavior—and all of the resultant messages—is eliminated with the Clip Chart.

Good intentions notwithstanding, threats ultimately reveal themselves to be nothing more than empty words. And once the students get a sense that the teacher is somewhat hesitant to do anything other than engage in hollow rhetoric, the Pocket Chart turns into the Paper Tiger.

The hesitancy to act upon inappropriate behavior—and all of the resultant mixed messages—is eliminated with the Clip Chart.

Any student who has been asked to move his clothespin down a level or two—more on this later—has the opportunity to improve his behavior and see his clothespin rise to a better level. This fundamental difference affords the teacher the freedom to ask that a clothespin be moved down, secure in the knowledge that the student can be restored to his former position later in the day when he is making better choices. The thought that a child is offered a chance at redemption is not only a powerful motivator for the student, it also enables the teacher to act on problem behavior and not just talk about it.
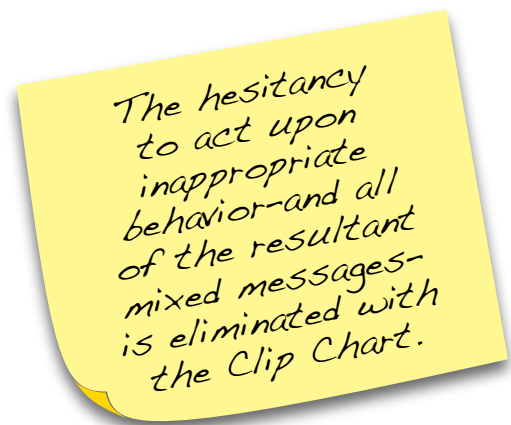
[†]   It's the rare teacher who gives back cards for good behavior. If you do, I applaud you for your sensitivity. That's assuming, of course, that your students are not manipulating you into returning a previously removed card.

Getting Started

As with most ideas I share, this one is easy to get started. There are only two things to produce: the chart and the set of clothespins.

The Chart

The chart I used for years was made of laminated construction paper. Although it was 12 inches wide, the levels did not have a uniform height. I made the middle level the largest because that's where the clothespins are placed at the beginning of each day.

LEVEL	FINISHED HEIGHT	COLOR
Outstanding	4 inches	red
Great Job	6 inches	orange
Good Day	6 inches	yellow
Ready to Learn	8 inches	green
Think About It	6 inches	blue
Teacher's Choice	6 inches	violet
Parent Contact	4 inches	gray

Note: These dimensions work for a class size of 20 students. Increase the height of the levels for a larger class.

Make the Levels

I printed out the labels on white paper and glued each one to the construction paper that represented that level.

Glue Them Together

The seven sheets of construction paper, <u>cut so that the middle five levels were an inch taller than their finished height</u>, were then overlapped and glued together.

4″ 7″ 7″

Laminate the Whole Thing

With all the clothespin movement that's going to occur, lamination will make your Clip Chart last all year.

Buy a Chart

Shown to the right is a professionally produced Clip Chart that was sent to me by a teacher who has been using the Clip Chart for a few years. Her husband, who runs a printing business, made her one from heavy-duty nylon. It's a work of art and will last for years. It's just a little bit expensive ($20).

Although this pro chart will eventually be in the New Management online store, it's not there yet. You'll find an order form at the end of this eBook that you can print out and either mail in or fax in.
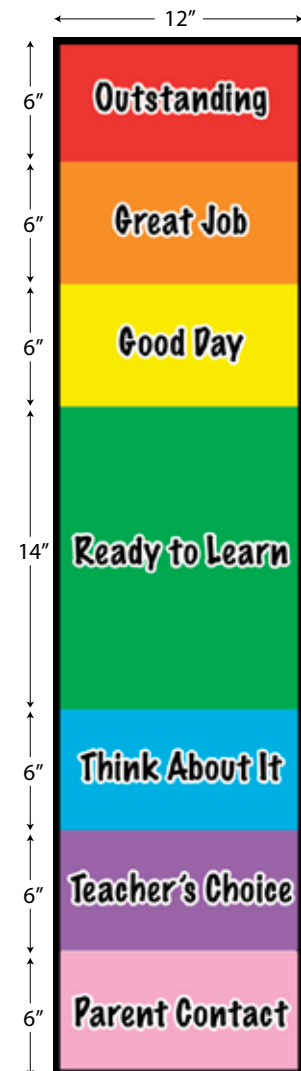
The Clothespins

There are two ways names can be written on clothespins.

1. **You write the names of your students on the clothespins.**
   If you work with young students, this is what I think you should do.

2. **The students take care of this step.**
   If your students are more capable—second grade and up—I think you should have them do it. It won't be as neat and tidy as your own work, but that's okay.

| 12" |
|---|
| **Outstanding** |
| **Great Job** |
| **Good Day** |
| **Ready to Learn** |
| **Think About It** |
| **Teacher's Choice** |
| **Parent Contact** |

Something to think about: The primary purpose of the name on the clothespin is function—whose clothespin it is—and not form—how nicely the name was written. I know how much teachers like to make classroom displays attractive and visually pleasing; however, it's equally important to allow students to join in the creative process. Even though the clothespins won't be as pretty as if you had done each one, the Clip Chart will still work just as well. And, let's not forget, it *is* their chart.

Something else to think about: My grandfather was a real inspiration and taught me a lot of life lessons. One of his phrases, that still sticks with me to this day, was, "Sometimes good enough, is good enough." I often think of this when I have my students create a bulletin board which ends up looking somewhat crude. Or, to be more honest, not the way I would have made it look if I had created the same bulletin board display. My grandfather's voice, though, gently reminds me to let it go and not worry about it. It's good enough the way it is.
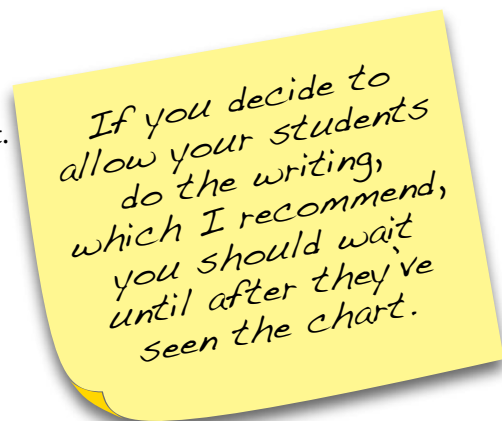
Teacher Writes Names

Before you actually write their names, you're going to have to decide which students will clip their clothespins to the left edge of the chart and which will clip them to the right edge.

| Marwa | | Ready to Learn | | Calvin |
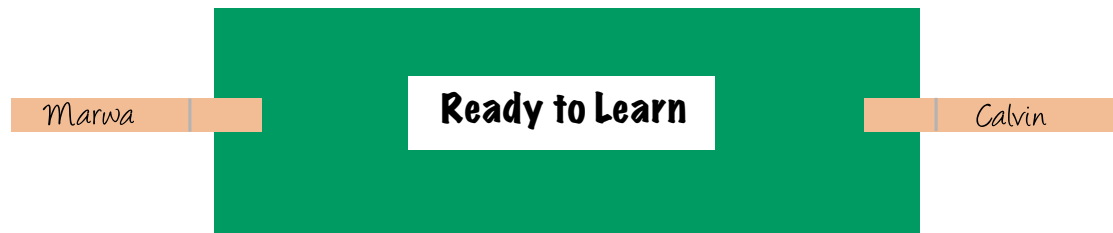
As you can see above, clothespins clipped to the left edge of the chart need the name written on the left side of the clothespin with the clip facing to the right. Conversely, clothespins clipped to the right edge needs the names written on the right side of the clip with the clip facing left.

To keep things easy, I had the boys keep their clothespins on the right side and the girls keep theirs on the left side. But, that's just how we did it. You are free, as always, to organize the clothespins in whatever fashion you wish.

After you've made a clothespin for each student, set them aside. You'll be passing them out to the students after you've introduced your chart.

If you decide to allow your students do the writing, which I recommend, you should wait until after they've seen the chart.

Students Writes Names

If you decide to allow your students to do the writing, which I recommend, you should wait until after they've seen the chart. Writing a name on a clothespin will actually make a bit more sense for everyone when they've seen how the clothespins are going to be used.

So, I'd wait on this step until the chart is actually hanging on the wall. Not only will the visual help your students to be more successful, they'll also have a place to put their clothespins when they are done with the writing.

Something to Consider

Another consideration is whether or not you want to have the name written on both sides. It's not really necessary because you only see one side when it's clipped on the chart. Nonetheless, since you're having the students do the writing, you might as well have them write it on both sides. It won't take that much longer and will offer them the freedom to choose which sides looks better and should be displayed.

Introducing the Chart to Your Students

You can introduce the Clip Chart to your students at any point in the year. Even if you've already spent several months using something such as the Pocket Chart with the colored squares of paper, you can change what you've been doing and head in a new direction. Although this may seem as if you are creating instability, you're not. Consistency is a good thing. However, to consistently use a less-than-effective procedure is not a good thing.

Also, it's a fact of life that things change over time and your students need to experience this on-going change in order to get a grip on reality. It's all part and parcel of what they learn during the school year that is in addition to the academic skills we're trying to impart.

So, rest assured that switching to the Clip Chart is not that big a deal. The results will be. But the transition from what you had been using to what you are now going to use won't.

Explain the Change

Since I like to keep things as simple as possible, I'd make the explanation as simple as possible. (Bear in mind that, like most things, it's going to take actual experience with the Clip Chart before your students really figure out the whole thing.)

Mr. Morris
  Addressing his students:
    I've got a new idea I'd like to use in our room.

Students
  Lighting up at the thought of something new:
    What is it? What is it?

Reality Check: The limbic part of our brain is always intrigued by new things. "Newness" helps the brain to continue to grow and develop new synaptic connections which is, after all, the *raison d'etre* for formal education. With that thought in mind, don't allow yourself to be troubled by their initial excited reaction to the introduction of something new. It's to be expected.

Overreactions, on the other hand, are a different matter all together. Whenever students attempted to ramp up the exclamations or escalate the response beyond a simple expression of surprise, I would almost always respond with a moment of silent disapproval and an interruption of what I was presenting. After a brief awkward pause, I would continue in a calm fashion. Sometimes after the pause I'd ask, "May I continue?" in a safe but serious way. That question would always produce some head nodding and, from a handful of students, a soft, "Yes, Mr. Morris."

Mr. Morris
  Waiting patiently for the initial outburst to pass:
    Calm down, please. We're going to be doing new things all year long. Let's not go crazy at each new thing.
  Pausing briefly to send a non-verbal message:
    Capiesce?

Students
    Capisco!

> *Maintaining control:* As I've mentioned in my seminars, students have a lot of energy, some of which is hard to suppress. But as opposed to always trying to suppress it, I've suggested that teachers find ways to redirect the energy. That's a win/win. The students get to express their enthusiasm yet emotions don't spiral out of control.
>
> *Capiesce...capisco:* This simple call-and-response two-word dialogue is one I use with my students whenever I want to check for understanding of something I've just said. "Capiesce?" actually replaced what I used to say which was the time-honored, "Okay?"
>
> The novelty of using something other than English—it's Italian—helps to keep the simple back-and-forth interesting yet still enables me to reinforce that I'm serious about them understanding my message.

Mr. Morris
  With a nod and a smile:
    Anyway.
  Pause for emphasis:
    Check out this Clip Chart I made for us.

I held up the chart for all to see.

Mr. Morris
    Ooooohhhhh!

Students
    Aaaaahhhhhh!

> This is another call-and-response strategy that enables them to share their wonder and delight at some new idea but prevents the overreaction I mentioned. It's also a relationship builder. Our parts in this little one-act play, although brief, are dependent upon each other to produce the desired effect. One without the other produces nothing. Both together create a bond.
>
> *How to:* I hold up something for them to see and pause a moment. I then say, "Ooooooohhhh," is a rather drawn-out fashion. After the briefest of pauses,

> they all respond with a drawn-out, "Aaaaaahhhhhhh." It's a timing thing that they'll quickly figure out and then something they'll look forward to saying whenever you're sharing something new or interesting.

MR. MORRIS
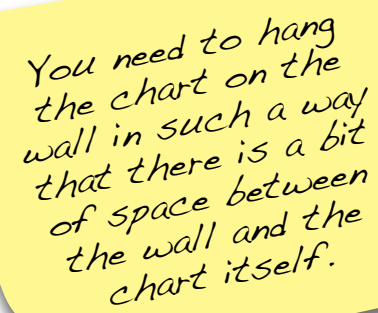> Showing his pleasure at their predictable response:
>> *Pretty sweet, huh? We're going to start using this to help keep track of student behavior.*

I would then move to the spot where I wanted to hang the chart and install it. (The location choice is up to you. I prefer the front of the room so that it's visible to everyone in class.)

Critical: You need to hang the chart on the wall in such a way that there is a bit of space between the wall and the chart itself. Having a space will make it easy for students to reposition their clothespins. If it's a hassle to clip the clothespin to a different level, you're going to create a bit of frustration. You want the reclip process to be as pain-free as possible.

Helpful: The installation process was practiced in the privacy of my room before I actually did it so that my students were not having to wait for me as I fumbled around trying to figure out the best way to do so. This behavior on my part is most likely a by-product of my old Boy Scout "Be prepared" mind-set.

Possible: Another possibility would be to mount the chart and then cover it up with some butcher paper. You could draw question marks on the paper to add a bit of mystery and intrigue if you feel so inclined.

> *You need to hang the chart on the wall in such a way that there is a bit of space between the wall and the chart itself.*

Clothespins Already Labeled

Since the clothespins have names written on them, you merely have to give them to your students and have them clip them to the chart.

MR. MORRIS
> Holding a little box of clothespins:
>> *I've got some clothespins we're going to clip to this chart. In fact, that's why we're going to call it the Clip Chart.*
> Holding up a clothespin with the word "Girls" written on it, moving to the chart, clipping it to the left edge of the Ready to Learn level, and then stepping back a bit:
>> *Very nice.*
> Attaching the one that has "Boys" written on it to the right edge of the chart, and again stepping back:
>> *Excellent.*

I returned once again to my teaching spot.

> **Mr. Morris**
> *When I call your name, I'd like you to step forward to get your clothespin and then clip it to the chart in the Ready to Learn level. Girls' clothespins go on the left edge and the boys' 'pins go on the right.*

I paused to look for understanding or confusion on the face of my students and saw only eager anticipation. Always good.

> **Mr. Morris**
> *As soon as your clothespin is clipped to the chart you are to return to your seat.*

Once the clothespins are clipped to the chart, you and your students are ready to give it a go.

> *Note:* If you're thinking that you could save some time and student conflict by having all of the clothespins attached to the Clip Chart before you introduce it to your students, you're correct. But if you think about the fact that it's going to best for the success of your chart to have the students move their own clothespins from one level to another, you might as well get them used to this reality during the intro.
>
> Granted, it would be easier for you to have the whole thing set up and ready to go and thus avoid the necessity—and hassle—of having the students attach their clip. Unfortunately, this behavior on the teacher's part represents not much more than a short-term gain. By denying students opportunities to exercise self-control, you're delaying its development. So go ahead and let the students play their part. Just be prepared to speak privately with any students who took advantage of the freedom you offered and caused problems during the process.

Clothespins Not Yet Labeled

Although it requires a bit more patience on the teacher's part to allow the students to label their own clothespins, I think this type of engagement is always worth it in the long run.

> **Mr. Morris**
> Returning to his original spot:
> *I've got some clothespins we're going to clip to this chart. In fact, that's why we're going to call it the Clip Chart.*
> Holding up a clothespin, moving to the chart, clipping it to the edge of the Ready to Learn level, and then stepping back a bit:
> *Very nice.*
> Returning once again to his teaching spot:
> *Of course, we're going to need to know which clothespin belongs to which student. So, I need each of you to write your first name on a clothespin and then clip it to our chart.*

The students begin to squirm with anticipation of being involved in something new. (More limbic brain activity.)

Here's the only tricky part about the whole deal. They need to write their names so that they appear right-side up when clipped to the chart. And since I have the boys clip theirs to the right edge and the girls clip theirs on the left edge, one set of directions won't work. It might actually make the most sense to work with the two groups separately and reduce the possibility of mistakes being made, clothespins being wasted, and tempers being raised.

Recommendation: You might want to have them trace the outline of the clothespin on a sheet of paper a couple of times and experiment writing the name inside the outlines. This practice run will provide them with the knowledge of how small they have to write in order to make the name fit on the clothespin. Just a thought.
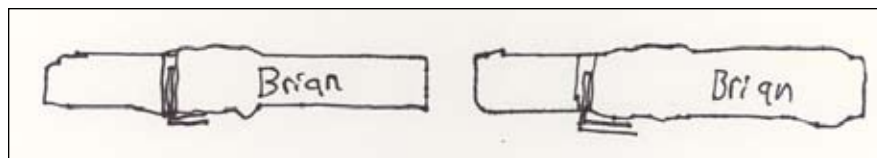
Instructions for Boys
1. With the clip side of the clothespin pointing to the left, print your first name on the right side of the clothespin.
2. Flip your clothespin over and write your name a second time.
3. When finished, clip your clothespin to the right edge of the chart in the level labeled READY TO LEARN.

Instructions for Girls
1. With the clip side of the clothespin pointing to the right, print your first name on the left side of the clothespin.
2. Flip your clothespin over and write your name a second time.
3. When finished, clip your clothespin to the left edge of the chart in the level labeled READY TO LEARN.

> *Note:* Be patient with any students who reposition their clothespin so that they are at the top of the READY TO LEARN level. Since they quickly realize that higher equals better, they might think that being higher on the same level is better. It's not, but it will take them a day or two to realize that it doesn't matter *where* on a level your clothespin is clipped. No, the important thing is *the level itself.*

Job Well Done
Regardless of how the clothespins were labeled—either you did them all or they did them— take a moment to stand back and enjoy the new creation.

Using Your Clip Chart

Making the chart is the most difficult stretch of the trip. Using it is pretty dang simple and a whole lot of fun.

Clip Up

Since the advantage of the Clip Chart over the Pocket Chart is that it is capable of displaying the results of, and thus reinforcing, positive behavior, make sure you focus on that as much as possible. That's not to say that you're going to have clothespins moving up for simple, everyday actions. It's just that we want to keep the climate and interactions as positive as we can.

When it comes to moving a clothespin from one level to the one above it, there are two ways to go.

1. **You move a student's clothespin from one level to another.**
2. **The student moves it.**

As you can probably guess by now, I'm of the opinion that the students should be doing the moving. And, granted, it's going to take a bit of time for the student to walk to the chart and repositioned his clip; nonetheless, think of it as twenty seconds well spent.

Mr. Morris
Catching a student's eye and nodding my approval of his behavior:
Michael. Nice job. Clip up, please.

If you want to eliminate the need for words, you could certainly use sign language. The sign phrase I use consists of two parts. The first one starts off with my index finger and middle finger held out like a pair of scissors. I then bring them together the way a pair of scissors closes when you are making the cutting action. After this "clip" message, I then morph my hand into a thumb's up sign. As the signs are being shown, I also mouth the words, "Clip. Up." It won't take but a day before they are able to receive that message loud and clear.

Clip Down

Having a child move his clothespin down one level—and it's always just one level for each move—is a bit more delicate. They're going to feel bad enough as it is without me piling on by making a big deal of it. So, a word in private might be the way to go.
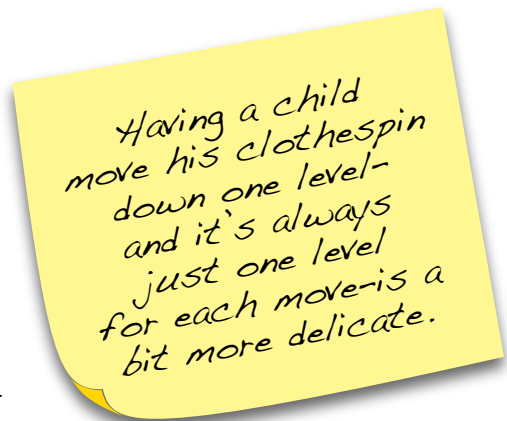
> Mr. Morris
>> Approaching a student at his desk and getting down to his level:
>>> *Not okay, young man. You need to put away your (fill in the blank) and get back on task. Clip down, please.*

At the same time, there are situations when I want to make a point about inappropriate behavior and will have someone leave the group to move a clothespin down.

Or, to make the same point, I could walk over to the chart myself and, without saying a word, move someone's clothespin down. Either way works.

It's best, though, if you reserve these types of interactions until after your students have had a chance to learn that you truly care about them. These feelings of trust and safety take a while to develop but are critical to everyone's ultimate success in your room.

Having a child move his clothespin down one level—and it's always just one level for each move—is a bit more delicate.

One Level Per Move

I recommend that clothespins move just one level each time it moves. This will make it safer for the students and less prone to abuse by the teacher.

If you truly feel as if the child's behavior warrants digging a hole below the chart and burying his clothespin, you might want to handle it in a completely different manner. An in-school suspension, an immediate phone call to the parents, or an invitation for the principal to visit the room so that you can hold a three-way meeting are just a few suggestions.

For normal misbehavior, though, one level per move is the best way to go.

Clip Down Documentation

As much as the Clip Chart is meant to focus on positive behavior, there are those students that need to be held accountable for their poor choices. Documenting the specific misbehavior will enable you to better deal with those situations.

Unfortunately, the one disadvantage to the Clip Chart—and a flaw shared by the color-

coded Pocket Chart—is that there's no record of why a student's clothespin ended up in one of the levels below Ready to Learn. We just know that it did.

Although this might not be much of an issue when the level reached is Think About It or Teacher's Choice, it will be an issue if a student ends up on Parent Contact.
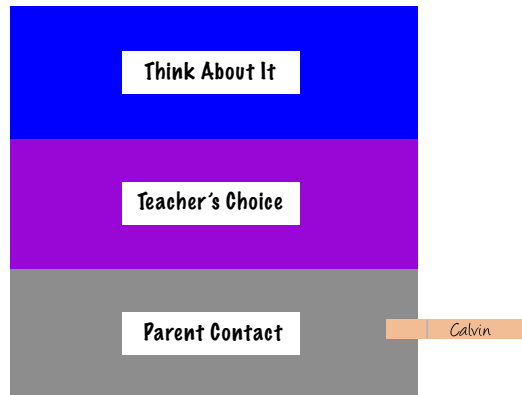
Because if a student's clothespin ends up in Parent Contact but the teacher doesn't actually follow through and make the contact, the level might as well be labeled Get Out of Jail Free.

> *By the way:* Just because I've labeled the levels the way I did doesn't mean you should. In fact, the chart in my son's classroom used Hello for the starting point and Restriction for the one above Parent Contact.
>
> The problem with the Hello label was that adults were misunderstanding what it meant. They didn't realize that it was the starting point. They just saw that it was quite a few levels from the top and so took it sarcastically. Helllloooooo?!?
>
> Restriction, I quickly realized, was too limited. I wanted a bit more freedom when choosing an intervention because not all students respond to the same consequence in the same way. Some students hate to have a part of their recess denied to them. Others don't mind at all. They'd much rather stay in the classroom with the teacher during recess than endure the drama and trauma of a typical Lord of the Flies recess experience. Thus, I substituted Teacher's Choice for Restriction and granted myself the freedom to intervene as I thought best.

Anyway, back to the documentation issue for students whose clothespins move down the chart.

Unless you're some kind of super teacher who can keep everything that happened during the day neatly stored away in your head, the lack of a record as to what actually happened is going to cause problems. The biggest problem, of course, is this one: What do you say to Mom

when you are speaking to her about her child's behavior? Without some kind of a simple written record to guide your discussion, you won't really know.

And that's not a good thing.

I found that the easiest way to maintain a record of misbehavior was to use a quarter-page form the students filled out to indicate why they had been asked to move the clothespin down a level.

Here's a sample of what I used.

You can find the blackline master in the Appendix at the back of this book.

Or, if you wish, just use the sample as a guide for creating your own form.

Your call.

Having a form for the student to fill out will provide you with the information you're going to need when you speak after school with the student, the parent, or both. The accumulated forms will clearly identify to you, and them, what had gone wrong that day.

The beauty of knowing what needs to be addressed, without having to guess or search your memory, is that: 1) you'll look like a professional since you know what behavior is causing the problem; and 2) you'll be encouraged to act on misbehavior by asking the student to move his clothespin from TEACHER'S CHOICE to the PARENT CONTACT level when the behavior of the student warrants such action.
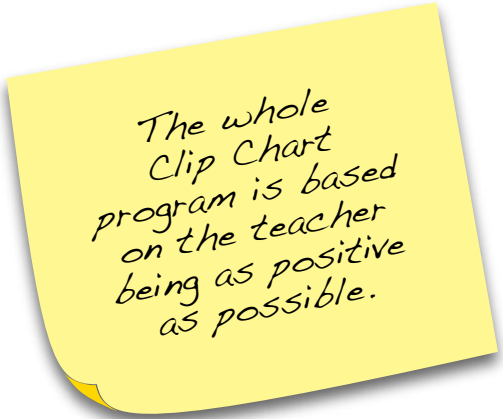
Without the documentation, you might hesitate to ask that the clothespin be moved down or, worse, threaten to have the clothespin moved down. As I've already mentioned in so many words, threatening to intervene but not actually intervening is a sign of weakness. And weakness, we should all know, is provocative. Weakness almost always invites a challenge to the teacher's authority.

Documentation, Take Two

The whole Clip Chart program is based on the teacher being as positive as possible. That's why I stated on the first page of this eBook that if you have a tough class you might not want to start with the Clip Chart. The ADOPT program—described in the book, *Eight Great Ideas*—would actually be more appropriate.

With that thought in mind, you might want to think about not using any kind of documentation for clothespins that are moved down. At least at first. This will not only keep things in the positive column but will also help to make the use of the Clip Chart as simple as possible.

Later on, when some of your students have shown you that they actually require documentation, you could introduce the form shown on the previous page.

The whole Clip Chart program is based on the teacher being as positive as possible.

Final Thought on Documentation

How about this idea? Don't use the form shown on the previous page. Instead, require any student whose clothespin moves to the PARENT CONTACT level to write a brief note explaining why.

Having the student do the writing will make it easier for you to use the Clip Chart. You won't have to worry about forms being filled out which means you also won't have to worry about trying to keep track of them. You'll just be able to say, "Clip down, please," and be done with it.

The documentation consequence will only be invoked when the child moves his clothespin to the PARENT CONTACT level. Then, and only then, will the note be written. And the fact that the child is the one to document the behavior which prompted the demotion will actually make it more meaningful for the student and his parents when you do meet.

End of the Day

When the day is over, or just before the new day begins, have a student reset all of the clothespin to the READY TO LEARN level. The grace you extend in this regard sends an encouraging message to your students.

What's past is past. The slate has been wiped clean.
Today is a new day. Make it a good one.

Documentation, Take Three

If you would like to keep a simple record of how your students are doing with the Clip Chart, you can easily add a grade keeping component to the process of resetting the clothespins to the Ready to Learn level.

Grade Keeping

1. Assign a score for each level. As you can see by the sample to the right, I numbered the levels from 7 down to 1.
2. Before the clothespins are returned to the starting level, have the student write the students score on a grade sheet. (Blackline masters for the grade sheet can be found in the Appendix. There's one for a small class and one for a larger class.)

Brianna	5	7	5	5	6	
Calvin	6	3	4	2	5	
Christa	7	5	6	6	5	
Devin	8	4	6	7	5	

3. Once the scores have been recorded, the clothespins can then be reset for the new day.

7 Outstanding

6 Great Job

5 Good Day

4 Ready to Learn

3 Think About It

2 Teacher's Choice

1 Parent Contact

Intervention Levels

We've already dealt with the Parent Contact level and the need for documentation for anyone who ends up in that level. The other two intervention levels below Ready to Learn are much easier to handle.

Think About It

This first level below Ready to Learn is really a warning area. Similar to the way the Pocket Chart didn't exact punishment for someone who had the first card pulled, Think About It is designed to merely indicate that a student had made a bad choice.[†]

There's no onerous consequence associated with the level. Just move your clip down and get back on task. After all, everyone needs a chance to show that he can learn from his mistakes.

[†] Once again, though, you won't remember at the end of the day why the clothespin is clipped to that level. And that's why I discussed the documentation option in the first place: the need to know. On the other hand, if the student was able to move up from that level later in the day, the documentation might not be necessary. This judgement call on your part is just one more reason why teaching is considered to be more of an art than a science.

With that thought in mind, let's lighten the language a bit and not even call it a warning. If there's no actual consequence for ending up in this level, maybe we should call it a reminder.

The word "reminder" is just so much more positive than the over-used Old School "warning." Maybe it's me but warning sounds so confrontational. So negative. So punitive. The word warning is just not a very forgiving or loving word. It's more of a relationship killer than anything else. I think it's time to show the concept of warning the door.

Teacher's Choice

The level is labeled TEACHER'S CHOICE so that the teacher has some latitude in regard to the actual intervention employed for any student whose clothespin ends up in this level at the close of the day.

As I mentioned back on page 16, not all students respond to the same consequence in the same way. I could speak to some of my students in a serious, disappointed-at-your-choices tone and they would tear up on me. And it was genuine remorse. So for those few, a talk was all they needed.

There are some students, on the other hand, who need a bit more action in order to convince them that they need to change their ways. Loss of privileges, restriction from a favorite activity, or a phone call home to folks are just a few options. Hey, call out the SWAT team if you have to. Anything *other than talk* for these what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it students.

Just try to keep the consequence reasonable and of a short duration. It would actually be better to restrict a student from recess five days in a row for five repeated offenses than to assign a five-day loss of recess for one infraction. To lose a portion of recess each day a poor choice is made reinforces the all-important philosophy that every day is a fresh start. Assigning long-term consequences only fosters resentment and resistance on their part and frustration on yours. And, besides, research indicates that punishment is the least effective way to make a change in a child's behavior or attitude anyway. I'm not saying we shouldn't punish students for their misbehavior. I'm just trying to point out the limited effect it sometimes has on our less-than-compliant students.

By the way: You don't have to wait for the end of the day to crack out some kind of intervention for anyone whose clothespin touches down in the TEACHER'S CHOICE level. You could talk privately with any student whose behavior is less than appropriate and let him know that you won't be waiting until the end of the day to assign a consequence. The child will receive the consequence upon entry to that level.

As already stated, the beauty of Teacher's Choice is the freedom you have to intervene. Use this power wisely and you can have a profound impact on how a student chooses to navigate the day; abuse the freedom and you might end up starting a mutiny.

Beyond the Basics

Before I recommend some modifications to the basic operating principles of the Clip Chart described in this eBook, I want to stress the importance of keeping everything as simple as possible for the first month or two. You, and your students, are going to need a bit of time to figure out exactly how it works in your classroom. This will, of course, require some trial-and-error. That's to be expected with any new idea. You've got to live with it before you truly know it.

After a month or two, though, you might want to think about how the whole thing could be modified to keep it both exciting and motivating as the year progresses. After all, novelty is a form of fun and fun is a student need. Anything you can do to add a new twist to your Clip Chart will help to boost their interest and your effectiveness in maintaining a positive classroom environment.

Just bear in mind that there's no rush to add all sorts of variations to the original concept. You've got all year with your students and you wouldn't want to go too fast. Operate the whole thing in the basic mode for at least a month or two and then slowly integrate some new ideas.

I've listed just a couple of modifications to get you thinking in this direction.[†]

Leftover Clothespins

There will be times when you want to recognize a student's good behavior but don't want the student to go to the chart to make the move. Maybe you're in the middle of a lesson and don't want the distraction. Or maybe your class is at an assembly and the chart is not accessible. Whatever the reason, I'm thinking it might make sense to have a way to acknowledge the behavior and then allow the clip to be moved at a later time.

How about if you keep a small supply of leftover clothespins to use in this situation? By giving a student a clothespin you'd be basically saying, "When it's appropriate, you may move your clothespin up one level." It's a win-win.

You win by being able to reinforce the behavior without the disruption of the student moving the clothespin immediately. The student wins by being recognized in a timely fashion for making a good choice. The added bonus is that the student will have to engage in some problem-solving as he figures out not only how to hang onto his prize but also when it's appropriate for moving his clip up one level.

Warning: This is not something I actually used with my students but is, instead, an idea I came up with as I worked on this eBook. That just means that I wasn't able to live with it and work out any bugs. But the more I think about it, the more I like the idea.

[†]   If you come up with your own ideas to make it better, which I'm sure you will, send me an email and tell me about them. I'll add a new section to this book called *Teacher Suggestions* and include yours.

Group Up

My students sat together in teams of four, five, or six students depending upon the overall size of my class. Whenever I saw a team doing a really good job, I would walk by their table and let 'em know.

> MR. MORRIS
> Addressing a team privately:
> *I'm impressed by how well you all are working on this project. Why don't you all take a moment and go move your clips up one level.*

And off they would go to move up their clothes-pins as they celebrated each other's success and the success of their team.

Class Up

There were times when my whole class would be so on-task that I wanted to make sure it was recognized. But as opposed to doing so verbally, I introduced a new sound maker. It was a cheap little wind chime I got on sale at a Rite-Aid drugstore.

I hung the wind chime from one of the light fixtures so that it hung down low enough for me to reach it. Then, whenever I wanted to share my pleasure with their locked-in focus during independent work times, I would walk by the wind chime and run my finger along the little hanging bars. Upon hearing the wind chime, the students all knew Mr. Morris was saying, "Wow. You guys are really on-task right now."

My Chart Manager, the student in charge of resetting the clothespins each day, would then go to the chart and move everyone's clothespin up one level.

Sweet.

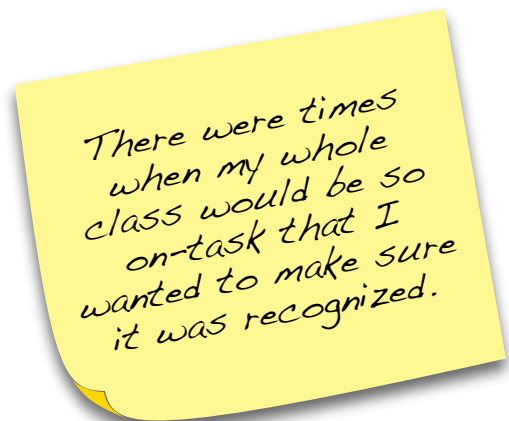*There were times when my whole class would be so on-task that I wanted to make sure it was recognized.*

Top of the Chart

One day a student had his clothespin clipped to OUTSTANDING when I asked him to "Clip up," or move his clothespin one level higher.

> OUTSTANDING STUDENT
> A bit confused:
> *It's already at the top, Mr. Morris.*

Outstanding

After a pause, I walked over, removed his clothespin from the side edge, and reclipped it to the top edge of the chart.

There was a quiet, "Oooohhhh," from the students. Thus was born the new level: Top of the Chart.

My Chart Manager quickly figured out that this level would receive a score of 8 on the grade sheet. Nice work, kid.

Pencil

After that first student had risen to the new Top of the Chart level, I decided to make a special award to recognize the occasion. I ran some 1" X 4" address

labels through my printer so that the words Top of the Chart were printed on both ends of the label.
I then peeled off the label and attached it to the eraser end of a decorative pencil. The label, when stuck to itself, made a cool little flag that announced to one and all that the holder of this pencil had reached the peak of the mountain known as Top of the Chart.

Kinda goofy, I know, but a fun and inexpensive way to show your appreciation. And you'll never see students take such good care of a pencil as they will this one.

Experience: Before trying to attach the label to the pencil, I learned to fold the label in half and make a crease. The crease then enabled me to position the label so that the ends meet evenly.

Off the Chart

A student's clothespin was clipped to the Top of the Chart level when I showed her the "clip up" sign.

She pointed at the chart. When I turned to look, I saw her clothespin sticking up from the top edge.

> MR. MORRIS
>> With a big smile and a nod of my head:
>>> *Top of the Chart. Excellent.*

Big smile from the student.

> MR. MORRIS
>> With a perplexed look:
>>> *Now what?*

She shrugged her shoulders but clearly wanted some kind of special recognition. So, I walked over to the chart, removed her clothespin, and clipped it to my shirt.

Everyone was, to put it mildly, impressed. And, just like that, another new level was born. We eventually called it OFF THE CHART.

Clothespin Necklace

Well, the day immediately following the OFF THE CHART experience, one of my students brought me a necklace. His older sister had just had a baby and the family had been making baby necklaces that contained lettered beads for spelling out the name.

> ALEJANDRO
>> Coming up to my desk before school started:
>>> *Here, Mr. Morris.*
>> Handing me a necklace:
>>> *I made this for you. I thought you could wear it and clip clothespins to it.*

After thanking him and giving him a hug, I put it on and wore it proudly.

In fact, for the remainder of that school year, putting on the necklace was the first thing I did to start class for the day. And at least once a day, someone would end up with his or her clothespin clipped to the necklace. Very cool.

Student wears the necklace of clothespins

A teacher who had heard me share the necklace idea told me that she allows her Student of the Day to be the one to wear the necklace. Even if no clothespins are clipped to the necklace, it still acts as a simple reminder to everyone in the room that the wearer is the day's special student. And if a clothespin does get clipped to it, we're talking icing on the cake.

What a great idea. Thanks.

Reward Indicators

I'm wondering if it would work to have students who end up on Outstanding, Top of the Chart, or Off the Chart to receive some kind of indicator—smaller sticker, glue dot, sequin, or some such—to stick on their clothespins as a way to show their past success. It would be similar to the way high school and college football players receive decals to stick on their helmets for outstanding performance in past games.

I say "wondering" because this is another idea I never used with my own students. So, once again, I'm just guessing right now. As I run the idea through my head, though, I can see a couple of issues that would need to be addressed.

The first constraint is the size of the clothespin. There's not a whole lot of room for affixing stickers, decals, or what have you. But what if you were to award clothespin upgrades for repeatedly having your clothespin end up on higher levels?

Whenever your clothespin ended up on Outstanding or higher, you would receive a small sticker, jewel, sequin, or bead to attach to your clothespin.

Then, when you had received five awards, you would trade in your original clothespin for a new one. (The retired clothespin could go on a bulletin board or be clipped to a ribbon that hangs near the Clip Chart. A clothespin Hall of Fame, if you will.)

I found these 3mm adhesive jewels at Michael's Arts & Crafts. $2.29 for a pack of 192 of them. Turns out, though, that they don't stick well. The adhesive wants to stay on the backing paper and not the jewel. I'd go with something you can glue on with white glue. Just another example of having to live with something before you can figure it out.

The new clothespin would be colored yellow, the color of the level immediately above Ready to Learn. The student would write his name on it and place it on the chart.

I used a yellow highlighter to color this clothespin. You're going to want to use something that will enable you to glue awards to it. Watercolor paint could work. A color pencil most likely wouldn't. Whatever. It's going to take some experimenting. Sounds like the perfect thing to turn over to the students to figure out.

As before, awards would be earned for attaining Outstanding and beyond. Since it would be a new clothespin, though, the child will have room for new awards. Five awards and you graduate to an orange clothespin, the color of the Great Job level.

After that, it's going to be a red clothespin, the color of the Outstanding level. And if the student is such a hard charger that he fills up the red clothespin, you could get creative.

How about a silver one followed by a gold one?

How about some glitter?

How about asking the students what they think would work?

Reward Cards

Sharing a student's success in the classroom with the folks at home can really contribute to the behavior being recognized becoming more of a habit than a happenstance.

Here's a card I created to do just that. You can find the blackline master in the Appendix.

To make it easy, have the student fill it out and circle the level they reached. You can then sign and send it home. How about if the parents sign it and it's returned to class, it could be dropped into a container for a prize drawing?

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart

Top of the Chart

Outstanding
Great Job
Good Day
Ready to Learn
Think About It
Teacher's Choice
Parent Contact

Teacher Suggestions

I mentioned in the footnote at the bottom of page 21 that if you have a suggestion that you think will add to the effectiveness of the Clip Chart program, send it in and I'll share your idea in a new section called Teacher Suggestions. Well, other than the ones that were included in the body of this eBook, here's the first one:

Give me some bling
(Suggestion offered during a seminar)

Teacher: I've been using the Clip Chart with my sixth grade students with great success. I was worried, though, about putting clothespins on my lanyard for the students who are "off the chart" for their outstanding behavior. I felt they might think it was too immature.

So what I did was call the clothespins on my lanyard "bling." They loved the idea and love to hear me say, "Oh, I got some bling," as a student brings me his clothespin.

Keep 'em comin'.

And That's a Wrap

Alright. I'm done. I've probably written more than I should have about something that is supposed to be simple yet effective. And so we'll make that the last thought.

Keep it simple.

Don't get caught up in all the variations I shared toward the end. You'll have more than enough time to try them out as the year progresses. You want to master the basics before you move on to the bells and whistles. The variations were merely offered to get you thinking about the possibilities for upgrading the program so that you and your students can turn the whole thing into one sweet system.

For right now, though, take your time.

Exercise patience.

And don't forget to enjoy the journey.

Regards,
Rick

Thanksgiving Week, 2008
San Diego, CA

Clip Chart

Appendix of Blackline Masters

Documentation Form
4-up sheet

Grade Sheets
Class of 20
Class of 36

Reward Slip
8-up sheet

Clip Chart Order Form
For mailing or faxing

MAKING BETTER CHOICES

Student #

Name: _____   Date: ___ / ___ / ___

I didn't make a good choice today. I didn't obey one of our classroom rules. (You can see the rule I checked below.)

I'm going to make a better choice next time.

STAY ON TASK	DO NEAT, CAREFUL WORK
COMPLETE WORK ON TIME	CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR
WORK COOPERATIVELY	PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR
FOLLOW DIRECTIONS	RESPECT RIGHTS OF OTHERS
LISTEN TO LEARN	PRACTICE SELF-DISCIPLINE

☐ Student comments on back.   ☐ Teacher comments on back.

MAKING BETTER CHOICES

Student #

Name: _____   Date: ___ / ___ / ___

I didn't make a good choice today. I didn't obey one of our classroom rules. (You can see the rule I checked below.)

I'm going to make a better choice next time.

STAY ON TASK	DO NEAT, CAREFUL WORK
COMPLETE WORK ON TIME	CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR
WORK COOPERATIVELY	PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR
FOLLOW DIRECTIONS	RESPECT RIGHTS OF OTHERS
LISTEN TO LEARN	PRACTICE SELF-DISCIPLINE

☐ Student comments on back.   ☐ Teacher comments on back.

MAKING BETTER CHOICES

Student #

Name: _____   Date: ___ / ___ / ___

I didn't make a good choice today. I didn't obey one of our classroom rules. (You can see the rule I checked below.)

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STAY ON TASK	DO NEAT, CAREFUL WORK
COMPLETE WORK ON TIME	CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR
WORK COOPERATIVELY	PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR
FOLLOW DIRECTIONS	RESPECT RIGHTS OF OTHERS
LISTEN TO LEARN	PRACTICE SELF-DISCIPLINE

☐ Student comments on back.   ☐ Teacher comments on back.

MAKING BETTER CHOICES

Student #

Name: _____   Date: ___ / ___ / ___

I didn't make a good choice today. I didn't obey one of our classroom rules. (You can see the rule I checked below.)

I'm going to make a better choice next time.

STAY ON TASK	DO NEAT, CAREFUL WORK
COMPLETE WORK ON TIME	CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR
WORK COOPERATIVELY	PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOR
FOLLOW DIRECTIONS	RESPECT RIGHTS OF OTHERS
LISTEN TO LEARN	PRACTICE SELF-DISCIPLINE

☐ Student comments on back.   ☐ Teacher comments on back.

CLIP CHART GRADES   *Week of*

Name	#	M	T	W	T	F
	1					
	2					
	3					
	4					
	5					
	6					
	7					
	8					
	9					
	10					
	11					
	12					
	13					
	14					
	15					
	16					
	17					
	18					
	19					
	20					

CLIP CHART GRADES   *Week of*

Name	#	M	T	W	T	F
	1					
	2					
	3					
	4					
	5					
	6					
	7					
	8					
	9					
	10					
	11					
	12					
	13					
	14					
	15					
	16					
	17					
	18					
	19					
	20					

CLIP CHART GRADES   *Week of*

Name	#	M	T	W	T	F
	1					
	2					
	3					
	4					
	5					
	6					
	7					
	8					
	9					
	10					
	11					
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	26					
	27					
	28					
	29					
	30					
	31					
	32					
	33					
	34					
	35					
	36					

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart
Top of the Chart

| Outstanding |
| Great Job |
| Good Day |
| Ready to Learn |
| Think About It |
| Teacher's Choice |
| Parent Contact |

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart
Top of the Chart

| Outstanding |
| Great Job |
| Good Day |
| Ready to Learn |
| Think About It |
| Teacher's Choice |
| Parent Contact |

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart
Top of the Chart

| Outstanding |
| Great Job |
| Good Day |
| Ready to Learn |
| Think About It |
| Teacher's Choice |
| Parent Contact |

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart
Top of the Chart

| Outstanding |
| Great Job |
| Good Day |
| Ready to Learn |
| Think About It |
| Teacher's Choice |
| Parent Contact |

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart
Top of the Chart

| Outstanding |
| Great Job |
| Good Day |
| Ready to Learn |
| Think About It |
| Teacher's Choice |
| Parent Contact |

Name _____

Date _____

Off the Chart
Top of the Chart

| Outstanding |
| Great Job |
| Good Day |
| Ready to Learn |
| Think About It |
| Teacher's Choice |
| Parent Contact |

CLIP CHART ORDER FORM

Outstanding

Great Job

Good Day

Ready to Learn

Think About It

Teacher's Choice

Parent Contact

12" X 50"

heavy-duty
13 oz vinyl

#	ITEM		PRICE	COST
	Clip Chart		20.00	
	Clip Chart (5-pack)	~~$100.00~~ →	90.00	
	Wooden clothespins (36 per bag)		3.00	
	Wooden clothespins (5-pack)	~~$15.00~~ →	12.00	
SHIPPING & HANDLING RATES			**SUB-TOTAL**	
shipping for over $100 is 10% of Sub-Total	up to $40 .... $6.00 $41 to $60 ....$7.00 $61 to $80 .... $8.00 $81 to $100 .... $9.00		**S & H**	
			TOTAL	
(Please note: Prices shown above include sales tax.)				

Shipping Address

_____
Name

_____
Address

_____
City   State   ZIP

FORM OF PAYMENT   ☐ Check   (payable to New Management)

☐ Purchase Order
_____
Purchase Order #

☐ MasterCard   ☐ VISA   Expiration Date: 3-digit code on back of card:
|__ |__   ___ ___ ___

Credit Card Number:

|__ __ __ |__ __ __ |__ __ __ |__ __ __

_____
Print name as it appears on card

_____
Cardholder signature

_____
Telephone number (for credit card verification)

Billing Address   ☐ same as shipping

_____
Address

_____
City   State   ZIP

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