Play Tickets – A System for Center Time

Having a system in place for students to move through center/free choice time is a requirement in our building.

For preschoolers, "free choice" can be a very abstract part of the day. They are learning "how to do school." A simple system such as play tickets makes the routine concrete. When a child has a ticket for a center, and that center has a visual showing how many children can play there, they can follow classroom expectations using a simple, self-correcting system. If the center is full, they can see that they need to choose another area and can come back when a space becomes available.

For example, if there are four playdough trays and all four are being used, a child can learn, *"The playdough center is full. That's okay. I can get a turn later."* This provides opportunities to practice positive self-talk, flexibility, waiting, problem-solving, sharing, and resilience while also giving children a concrete structure for how to spend their time.

When a student with more challenging behaviors joins your classroom, students who already have a clear understanding of how center time works are much more likely to continue following those expectations. Putting the structure in place now makes things much easier later in the year.

I have attached several examples of systems below. Please choose or adapt a system that works well for your classroom. The important piece is that students have a consistent, concrete way to understand center capacity, make choices, and move between areas.

Videos

Excusing students with name tag or play ticket: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qwUjus4BMw0

What centers can look like: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/zx6832lBGlU

Resources on the drive:

https://drive.google.com/drivhttps://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QEfD0PXAkuRS7eQguD8sNSa2uurGgoMt?usp=drive_linke/folders/1QEfD0PXAkuRS7eQguD8sNSa2uurGgoMt?usp=drive_link

A few recommendations:

- Make multiple play tickets for each student so you have extras when one gets lost.I recommend laminating blank tickets and simply writing each child's name on them with a sharpie. No need to make it labor intensive.

- Some students may need a picture/photo on their ticket in addition to or instead of their name. As the year progresses, begin phasing out the picture when appropriate so students have opportunities to recognize their name in print.
- Using play tickets to excuse students from the carpet is also an excellent way to quickly assess student understanding, space out students as they leave the carpet, and give children a clear direction for choosing a center. You can even build in fun ways for students to transition, such as crab walking to their center, telling you a fact about what you just taught, or answering a quick question, ID a shape or color, clap out syllables, etc., before receiving their ticket. You can also pair students who are more independent with students who need additional support to provide a peer model or buddy-play opportunity.
- This system supports independence, name recognition, problem-solving, turn taking, and resilience.

When we establish these routines early, our students become models for newer students who may need more support with routines and expectations. The children who already understand the system can help demonstrate what to do, which can make the transition much smoother for everyone.

Thank you for making this an intentional part of your classroom routines. The structure we put in place now will pay off throughout the year! Your coaches are happy to help you get this system implemented.