

# **2021-2022 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set**

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*<https://sites.google.com/a/kentplace.org/new-jersey-middle-school-ethics-bowl/>*

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### **Case #3: Cash Incentives**

Money is a strong motivator, and for this reason it has been used to incentivize people to participate in public-interest programs. Most recently, many states implemented gift cards, free access to public places like beaches and parks, and lotteries to encourage adults to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

Proponents of cash incentive programs point to their effectiveness in pushing people to “do the right thing” and “strive for success.” Vaccinating the public, for instance, is a public health priority. Sometimes people who receive an initial “push” to do the right thing end up feeling so good about themselves that in the future they may not require an external reward to “do the right thing.” It is also true that many private companies willingly donate money to fund these programs.

Others point out that financial incentives prioritize external rewards over internal motivation. This can be problematic in the long run if it inclines people to do what is good or right only when they expect to be rewarded for it. In addition, paying people to participate in an optional program may devalue those who participate willingly. Also, offering cash incentives diverts monetary resources that could be spent in other important ways.

**Match Question:** Is it ethical to incentivize human behavior? Why or why not?

#### **Study Questions:**

1. What’s the difference between incentivizing and bribing?
2. Does the overuse of external rewards diminish our capacity to value intrinsic rewards?
3. Do monetary incentives take advantage of the economically disadvantaged people in our society? Or are they a way to promote public good?