

THE ULTIMATE SCREEN-FREE CHALLENGE

After completing a very successful Screen-Free Week, students in the South Orange/Maplewood, NJ school district decided they wanted to keep going! So school librarians designed the Ultimate Screen-Free Week Challenge. The program is now in its tenth year and every elementary school in the district participates—and so do a majority of students. The Challenge was designed to be administered during weekly library class, but it could also be led by teachers. And for the families interested in reducing screen time, the Gold/Silver/Bronze model described below can easily be adapted.

The Ultimate Screen-Free Challenge encourages students to turn off TV, movies, online videos, and electronic games during the school week for the entire school year. Computer use for email, word processing and research is permitted. The Challenge is in effect Sunday starting at suppertime and ends Friday after school. It is not in effect from after school on Friday until Sunday at dinner, nor is the Challenge in effect during vacations, holidays, snow days, or when a student is home sick.

At the beginning of the school year, students decide if they want to participate in the Challenge and if so, at which level:

Gold: No TV, videos, or electronic games Sunday evening to Friday afternoon (many children say this is actually the easiest because participants simply keep the screens turned off).

Silver: Only 30 minutes total per day of TV, videos or electronic games Sunday evening to Friday afternoon.

Bronze: Only 60 minutes per day total of TV, videos or electronic games Sunday evening to Friday afternoon.

Student pledge cards are displayed in the library by grade level on a colorful chart. Participating students are allowed to borrow one extra book per library visit (since they have more time to read!). At the end of the year, a school-wide celebration takes place and participating students are given a Gold, Silver, or Bronze certificate and trophy.

Going screen-free during the school week is a big challenge, but in the end the Maplewood students report that it was worth the effort.

The Ultimate Screen-Free Challenge helps students develop the following traits:

- **Determination:** “I can do this.”
- **Self-regulation:** “I can control my impulses and change my habits.”
- **Commitment:** “I care about my learning and want to be a better student.”
- **Creativity:** “So now what shall I do?”
- **Perseverance:** “This lasts the entire school year and I can do it.”
- **Cooperation:** “Family members, friends, and teachers will support me.”
- **Honesty:** “Did I really achieve my goals?”
- **Self-esteem:** “I’m satisfied from sticking to and achieving my goals.”

And the best reward of all? Students take a lot of pride in accomplishing such a challenging task over an extended period of time. Those who participate show a real commitment to learning and education.

www.screenfree.org

