

***Testimony: House Education Committee Hearing
October 6, 2014
Dr. Carol Johnson, Superintendent
Central Dauphin School District
Harrisburg, PA***

History of the Adoption of the Financial Literacy Course

The Board of School Directors of the Central Dauphin School District agreed in July, 2013, to commit nearly \$2.3 million for our initiative to support college and career readiness. The initiative has come to be known as Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships (RRR). This is the largest professional development undertaking in our district's history and the goal of the initiative is to transform learning, teaching, and leading through a focus on positive relationships and rigorous and relevant instruction in every classroom and every school in our district.

In September, 2013, we laid the foundation for the initiative by conducting focus groups with students and parents, and by surveying students, teachers, parents, and community members so that we could better understand community perceptions about rigor, relevance, relationships, and leadership within our schools and our district as a whole. We have used the data to set goals and measure community perceptions. We will later use it again to monitor our progress over time.

The results of the survey were very enlightening and informed our plans to respond to the needs of our community. One of the most interesting aspects of the survey was the response to the statement that students should be taught in school how to manage their personal finances. Over 85% of the respondents in the community survey agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. At about the same time, we heard the voices of both students and parents who said that the current offering of Business Computer Applications, required of all ninth grade students, was redundant and covered nearly the same material as a course required in the middle school curriculum. We saw these two concerns as an opportunity to get better, to respond to the needs of our students, and to stand behind our promise to help make our curriculum more relevant to students. We began the process of ending the Business Computer Applications course and adopting the Financial Literacy course in the Fall of 2013.

We approached our teachers in the Business Department with the results and formulated a plan to move for approval of the school board to add the financial literacy course. We requested approval to require all freshmen to take the course. Because the board was fully supportive of the Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships Initiative and because they truly have the needs of our students as their primary focus, they voted unanimously on January 27, 2014, to allow us to add the course and to approve the curriculum.

Financial Literacy in the Central Dauphin School District

The Financial Literacy course in our district is designed to teach students how to become financially literate adults. The course includes topics that prepare students for financial decision making, goal-

setting, saving money, budgeting, borrowing money, spending wisely, and managing credit. Financial Literacy is now required for all ninth grade students in our district.

In addition to many other skills, students taking this course will learn how to successfully save and budget their money, spend their money wisely, and understand the different methods of borrowing money.

Financial Literacy features a rigorous engaging design, relevant student-centered activities, research projects, discussion points, and tools and resources, all of which are designed to engage students in learning the personal finance skills they need to succeed in life after high school. It is our belief that these important life skills will help prepare students for living on their own.

The Curriculum

Our curriculum includes the following topics:

- Why it Pays to be Financially Responsible
- Money and Goals
- Researching and Buying a Car
- Financing your Education
- Finding the Right Career for You (Bridges)
- Why Credit Matters (Banking Simulation)
- Protecting your Identity
- Money and Roommates
- Making a Budget
- Saving for a Rainy Day
- Sharpening Money Decisions
- Selecting a Banking Partner
- Understanding Your Take Home Pay
- Taking Credit for Your Finances
- Staying out of Debt

Cost to the District

Delivering this course for the two high schools to a population of approximately 750 students will cost \$4300 this year, including program binders for \$3500 and software licenses for \$800. The rest of the resources are accessible at no cost online.

Resources

We have had the opportunity for input from many financial leaders in our community, who will eventually be called upon to present lessons to our students. In the meantime, some of the free resources we are or will be using are:

Teacher and Student Handout Guides: www.practicalmoneyskills.com

College Planning Website: www.asa.org (American Student Assistance)

Career Choices: www.access.bridges.com (Career Aptitude Program)

State Standard Based Lessons for Continued Professional Development: www.jumpstartcoalition.org

Junior Achievement: "On Your Own in Central City" Simulation

BE Publishing: "Dollar and Sense Banking" Software

What Our Students Think About the Course

Last week, Mr. Scott Stine, business teacher at Central Dauphin East High School polled his classes to find out how they feel about the course. They have been in the class for nearly a month, meeting every other day. Here are a few of the results:

- 97 percent of students stated they are more aware of the cost of college since starting Financial Literacy.
- 95 percent of students stated they have a better understanding of "Financial Responsibility" (Lesson One's Topic) than they did before starting Financial Literacy.
- 94 percent of students stated they believe Financial Literacy is a valuable course.

Students made the following statements within the survey:

- "I like being able to learn how to be financially stable in the future."
- "I like how we get to learn about money and how it works."
- "I like how I get to learn how to manage money and save up for the future."
- "I like this class a lot it helps lots of students!"
- "I like that I'm learning how to manage money."
- "I like everything about Financial Literacy because it is very informational and I love it. I don't have anything bad to say because it is preparing me for life."

Moving Forward

We believe that we have taken a positive first step in helping our students become financially literate. We intend to continue to monitor the course and student feedback and to make appropriate adjustments along the way.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our new course in Financial Literacy. I appreciate your interest in that aspect of our educational program.

Respectfully submitted:

Dr. Carol Johnson, Superintendent
Central Dauphin School District

