

Kids get current on currency

Class provides management skills

By **Bernard Langer**
For the Poughkeepsie Journal

FREEDOM PLAINS — In addition to math, science, English and history, students at Arlington High School have a somewhat different subject they can study: personal money management.

The elective class, which has been offered for six years, teaches students about managing their finances so they'll be ready to live independently when they leave high school.

"We're starting to get to them now, before they get thrown in there and start dealing with it themselves," said Darrell Flynn, who teaches the class with John Timm.

The course deals with different aspects of money management, from balancing a checkbook to investing in the stock market.

Topics include earning an income, paying taxes, finding a bank, buying insurance, using credit, investing and budgeting.

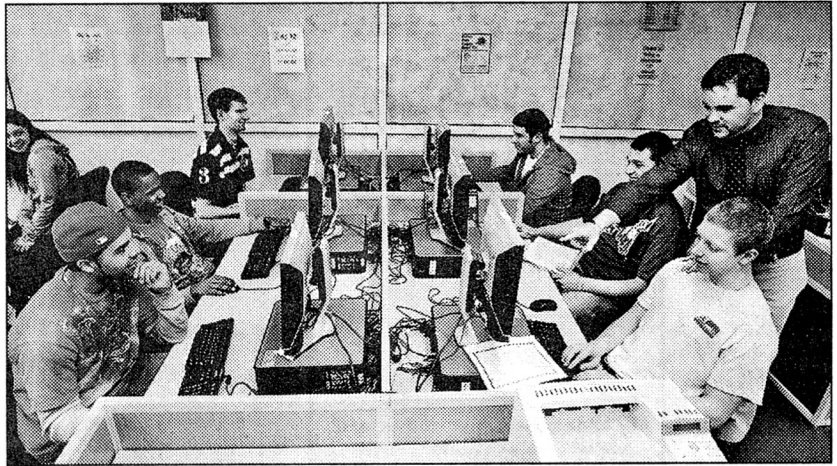
"What we're trying to do is bring on financial awareness at a young age," said Timm, who also teaches a college-level accounting class. "We found that during open houses, we get a lot of parents sitting there saying, 'Where was this when I was 17 years old?'"

According to the New York state Financial Literacy Coalition, a national survey found 68 percent of high school seniors failed to understand the basics of personal finance, and the group of people age 20-25 is the largest filing for personal bankruptcy.

"I barely knew anything," said senior Richie Kinnear, of Union Vale. "I had no idea about credit cards or anything like that."

"You learn from what your parents tell you," senior Dan Webb of Hopewell Junction said. "But they don't go into detail about teaching you what you should and shouldn't be doing."

The economic crisis plays a big



Flynn works with students in his personal money management class. Students, from left, are Jonathan Rosa, David Taylor, Dan Webb, Richie Kinnear, Mike Lockwood and Kyle Peabody. The students were working on a stock market project.

role in the class, as students learn about some of the personal financial decisions that contributed to the situation, such as overspending and falling into debt.

The students read articles in publications such as the Poughkeepsie Journal and Newsweek that bring up real-life issues.

Flynn pointed to an article in the Journal about how people have trouble differentiating between wants and needs.

"DVR, for example, people feel that they need a DVR," Flynn said. "And if you take a look at it on your bill, it probably costs you \$10.99 a month. Do you really need to put your money there?"

Changing attitudes

The class has affected students' spending habits already.

"Before, I spent money, spent money," said senior Jonathan Rosa, of Hopewell Junction. "I never realized what I was doing until I took this class. Now I'm just realizing, I blow a lot of money on dumb stuff."

The students also play the "Stock Market Game," in which they're given fake money to invest in real stocks. They track their investments and compete against each other.

Rosa said it's his favorite part of the class.

"At first, all my stocks were booming, and now I dropped a hundred spots. It's amazing how things can just change on you so quick," he said.

The curriculum is designed by the teachers, but at the end of the class, the students take the standardized WISE Financial Literacy Certification Test, which is created by the New York state Financial Literacy Coalition.

The students who take the class come from various backgrounds. Some are taking advanced placement classes to get ready for college, while others are looking to enter the work force and start jobs after graduation.

Regardless, the class appeals to everyone, and not only because there is no assigned homework.

"I love it," Kinnear said. "It's different than your normal everyday class, and it's going to help you with personal stuff."

Next year, the class will be offered as a half-year course instead of full year to accommodate more students. Flynn said the school could eventually make it a required class.

"We give them stuff that, I think, if they stepped out into the real world tomorrow, they'd be ready to go, money wise," Flynn said.

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