

# Financial Literacy in the Classroom

*A look at a few outside resources to enhance learning*

Lack of knowledge about personal finances can be a major handicap for children and young adults as they move towards higher education or the workforce. A solid grasp on basic financial concepts gives youth a strong foundation on which to build their financial future — from their first paycheck to retirement and beyond — yet many are struggling.

Several recent studies highlight alarming gaps in our nation's financial education. According to the 2008 Annual Report from the President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy, just 26 percent of high school students understand how credit card fees work and only 34 percent know how to balance a checkbook. Perhaps the most staggering statistic comes from the American Dream Education Campaign: without significant behavioral changes, 40 percent of American students ages 15 to 21 will never gain a net worth above \$10,000. Especially in light of the current economic crisis, financial literacy cannot take a back seat in the classroom.

## Bringing Technology to Financial Literacy

One way to excite children to learn about personal finance (which can be difficult, as it involves a lot of math) is to incorporate technology into the lessons.

Since cutting-edge technology is expensive, the Wisconsin Bankers Association recommends EverFi, a technology company that engages the private sector to fund educational technology platforms in schools. Its current program targets high school students, but programs for elementary and college students are in development.

EverFi pairs sponsoring financial institutions with schools to ensure that every school system can take advantage of the program. They are involved in every step of the implementation process, from installing



Sara Baker of Ladysmith Federal Savings and Loan gives a presentation to a classroom of students as part of Teach Children to Save Day.

software to teacher training. You can learn more about this financial literacy resource at [EverFi.com](http://EverFi.com).

## Presentations from Experts – Bankers Promoting Financial Literacy

Another way to get students excited about financial literacy is to bring outside presenters into the classroom. The break from routine and interaction with an expert — followed by reinforcement from the teacher — makes it easier for students to retain the knowledge.

One way Wisconsin's bankers get involved in teaching financial literacy, especially to elementary students, is through Teach Children to Save Day, a national effort promoted by the American Bankers Association that has reached more than five million young people since it began in 1996.

This year's **Teach Children to Save Day is April 24**, and to help volunteer bankers prepare their presentations, the Wisconsin

Bankers Association is providing a free Reading Raises Interest Kit to each bank branch. The kits include an age-appropriate book about personal finance and saving along with a lesson plan and classroom activity ideas. This year's book is *Pigs Will Be Pigs* by Amy Axelrod. Schools interested in having a banker participate should reach out to local bank branches for volunteers and be willing to collaborate with local financial institutions on lesson plans and logistics.

## Producing Smart Consumers

Only 41 percent of American adults report spending less than their household income. Preparing young people for financial independence must become a priority if we are to see more Americans save and spend wisely. ■

*For more information about how your school can take advantage of the Wisconsin Bankers Association's EverFi or Teach Children to Save Day programs, please contact this article's author, WBA's Amber Hartl at 608/441-1237 or [ahartl@wisbank.com](mailto:ahartl@wisbank.com).*