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NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—May 6, 2011

Vermont Participates in Financial Fluency Pilot Project

MONTPELIER, Vt.—Four Vermont public schools will join more than a dozen schools located throughout New England to test a new financial fluency program that teaches financial concepts within a math-based curriculum. The aim is to help educators develop new approaches to offering students instruction in personal finance.

Teachers at Bellows Falls Union High School, St. Albans City School, Twinfield Union High School and U32 High School started testing a six-lesson curriculum in late April. The lessons focus on budgeting, including ratios and proportions, and the power of compounding interest as applied to credit cards and investments. Case studies in the final lessons challenge students to apply what they have learned to individuals in financial trouble or who have poor personal finance habits.

"While schools recognize the value of this subject area, it is challenging to find a place in the curriculum that will reach all students," said State Treasurer Beth Pearce. "This pilot project tests teaching these concepts through math—a subject students are already taking. It is hoped that the results of this pilot will give educators useful information in their continued evaluation of effective approaches to teaching personal finance."

The financial fluency pilot project is a joint effort of the non-profit Valmo Villages and its leader Valerie Mosley and an economics education team from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Testing of the curriculum in Vermont began the week of April 25 and will continue through early May. A student pre- and post- test will help educators gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum and explore ways to improve teaching approaches.

St. Albans City School math teacher John Cioffi is coordinating the pilot project with three teams of teachers working with approximately 160 seventh and eighth grade students.

"I have seen the passing attempts at educating our students on financial matters. Generally, the attempts are vague and do not stick with the students," explained Cioffi. "This program provides the opportunity to integrate the mathematical knowledge of linear and non-linear relationships with the life skills of managing money. The case study approach matches the style of my learning community."

At Bellows Falls Union High School, math teacher Susan Swan will present the lessons to students enrolled in math applications and in AP calculus. U32 High School will test the curriculum in their "Money Matters" course. Math teacher Kit Walker said her students are especially responding to the case studies where they must come up with practical ideas to help the fictional characters solve his or her financial dilemmas.

Math teacher Charlie Wanzer of Twinfield Union High School is introducing the material to students enrolled in a class called “post- high school math.”

“In this day and age it is important that students be knowledgeable about the financial forces that will impact them when they graduate. Be it student loans or credit cards, students will find that financial realities can be harsh and they must be prepared to handle them,” said Wanzer.

Following the pilot test, developers will evaluate the results from all of the schools across New England. Plans are to continue to refine the curriculum and offer the financial fluency lesson plans to states outside of the New England area.

“We recognize the strong contributions of our Vermont school partners in helping to create a new national model for financial education in our schools,” said Valerie Mosley, who was inspired to create the program two years ago. “Once students understand the math behind how money, investing and financial decisions work, it engages students, makes math relevant, and prepares our young for a bright, financially sound future.”

The curriculum is grouped as follows: lesson one – budgeting and saving; lesson two – compounding interest; lesson three – credit cards; lesson four – investing; lessons five and six – interactive case studies.

“While both parents and teachers agree that personal money management is something that we should be teaching our children, how best to do this remains a challenge,” said Lisa Helme, director of financial literacy and communications for the State Treasurer’s Office. “Parents need support in talking to their kids about money, especially as our financial system becomes more complex. Teachers recognize the importance of the subject, but question where, in an already crowded curriculum, can this subject be taught. The results of the pilot will demonstrate whether this is an effective way of reaching every student.”

Additional collaborators in the financial fluency project include the Center for Mathematics and Quantitative Education at Dartmouth College, EdTech Leaders Online, Mathematics for All, Leadership Teachers & the Center for Real World Education and the American Life Panel at the Rand Corporation.