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## Money management lessons need to start early

12:00 AM CDT on Saturday, October 17, 2009

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New rules restricting the availability of credit cards to people under 21 are an attempt to save them from themselves and from succumbing to temptations.

I endorse the rules, but we need to get to youngsters much sooner than age 21 to give them a firm foundation in managing money so they don't get themselves in trouble later on.

And we can't let up, because the need is great.

In its 2008 biennial survey, the Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy said high school seniors correctly answered only 48.3 percent of the financial literacy questions posed to them, down from 52.4 percent in 2006.

"The consistent message is that young people – high school students – don't know enough about personal finance," said Laura Levine, executive director of JumpStart, a Washington-based group that focuses on personal finance education. "Kids learn best when they learn at an early age and a foundation is built."

Texas is one of several states that require schools to teach financial literacy to students.

Financial institutions have joined the effort, realizing that it's in their best interest to train their future customers.

This week, bankers at BBVA Compass hosted financial literacy education sessions for seniors at [Bryan Adams](#) High School in Dallas.

"They've seen the customer who comes in with thousands of dollars in credit card debt trying to get out from under it," said Scott Flowers, district regional executive for BBVA Compass. "It's real life."

When teaching financial literacy to young people, a key component is the presentation. Kids today live in the interactive world, and that's the best way to reach them.

Take, for example, the Capital One/Junior Achievement Finance Park, an interactive mobile financial education program for middle-school and high-school students.

Each school year since 2006, [Capital One](#) Financial Corp. and Junior Achievement have set up the finance park to teach students about money management. Participating school districts this year are Dallas, Coppell, Richardson and Garland.

After four weeks of classroom lessons, students in the program get to put their new skills to work at Finance Park, where they're assigned fictional jobs, incomes, families and expenses.

They develop budgets they use to make real-life decisions on things such as housing, furnishings, investments, utilities, food and savings.

"It forces the children to look at how much they have and where it gets spent," said Kent Eastman, Texas state president for Capital One.

They also learn that money is finite and that a spending decision on one item affects other parts of their lives, he said.

To increase teens' financial fitness, [H&R Block](#) has donated more than \$1 million in personal finance curriculum grants to high schools nationwide.

More than 25 schools in the Dallas-Fort Worth area are part of the new program, which uses a virtual-world game to give students experience in such areas as renting an apartment, financing an education and investing for retirement.

"The computer-based simulation software is something that teenagers can really connect with," said Amy McAnarney, vice president of the H&R Block Tax Institute.

"We see millions of clients all the time, and we know how important it is for people to understand their finances," she said, "and there's no better place to start than youth."

Lisa Greco, who uses the program in her travel marketing classes at the Birdville Center of Technology and Advanced Learning in North Richland Hills, said it's been a "really eye-opening experience for the kids."

The program has introduced her students to what it's really like living on their own.

"A lot of my kids just didn't realize how much there is in being an adult," Greco said.

These programs are great learning tools, but parents should remember that the most important teacher of financial literacy to your children is you.

Give them good examples to emulate by managing your money prudently and responsibly.