

Junior Achievement brings financial literacy to STREAM

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As the STREAM curriculum continues to circulate through many of the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Buffalo, students are refreshed and enthusiastic about their new learning opportunities. But when teachers are not fluent in some of the new subject areas offered, the schools create partnerships to fill in the gaps, like the one Department of Catholic Education has with Junior Achievement of Western New York.

Junior Achievement is an organization that helps recruit volunteers from the business community to help bring their experience, skills and knowledge into the classroom, inspiring and preparing students to succeed in the global economy. The organization has developed a curriculum program filled with resources for every grade level from kindergarten up.

"We work with all eight counties of Western New York to bring programs into schools and organizations that focus on financial literacy, entrepreneurship and work readiness skills," said Alycia M. Ivancie, senior education manager at Junior Achievement. "Our programs are presented by volunteers in the community: business volunteers, parents who want to get involved in their son or daughter's classroom, retirees, and in some cases, high school and college-age students. Because it's all real-world, practical information, you don't necessarily have to have a background in economics or finance, because everything is provided to you as the volunteer."

Local Catholic schools have partnered with Junior Achievement for about a half-decade now, and it's grown considerably from its first stage. Last year Junior Achievement provided programming for almost 1,400 students from K-8 at 22 diocesan STREAM schools. The program also integrates 21st-century skills like critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication into instruction.



COURTESY OF JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

This is a picture of Amy Schraufstetter's JA class at St. John the Baptist. She is a parent volunteer who also works at Blue Cross Blue Shield. She also might have been interviewed in the piece as well if they were able to connect.

"We're teaching those soft skills, real-world skills they can apply, regardless of what field of work they go into," Ivancie said.

The Junior Achievement curriculum operates with an inverse pyramid approach, so as the students grow older, the program gets broader in scope. For financial literacy, a kindergarten student would be introduced to the concept of money, while middle school children would be taught more practical information like balancing personal budgets and credit cards.

"We have specific programs at each level, so when we put it out to the volunteers, they can say, 'I want to teach second grade, and you have one here at St. John the Baptist,' so that might work for them. From the volunteer perspective, it's very much turn-key: they don't have to be teachers by trade."

Each volunteer is given a bag of resource and teaching materials they can draw from in the classroom. Each grade level has a series of lessons they can teach over a period of time, determined between the teachers and volunteer to allow flexibility.

"It's basically curriculum in a bag," she said. "Here are scripted lesson plans volunteers are given to use. They are so detailed they could literally take it and read off it. They do a little planning and prep work before, and when they go into a classroom, they know their stuff."

Amy Schraufstetter is a benefit consultant of BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, and instantly felt a connection to Junior Achievement's mission and purpose after a presentation at the office. She quickly signed on five years ago, and Schraufstetter now volunteers at St. John the Baptist School in Kenmore at the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade levels.

"It's just enjoyable," Schraufstetter said of her work with Junior Achievement. "Now that I've taught a variety of grade levels, I especially enjoy the middle school years. The students are old enough to grasp these concepts but (are) still young enough to appreciate the fun of it all. The curriculum is outstanding."

During her volunteer work, Schraufstetter introduced

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entrepreneurship to fourth-graders, the challenges of the modern job market and creating business plans to fifth-graders, and authentic entrepreneurship experiences in the sixth grade.

"As a business professional, I truly see the need to engage and inspire students to think about business and their futures," Schraufstetter said. "I see it as a way to give back and hopefully contribute to the success of our future workforce. Also, as a mom of a fifth- and seventh-grader, anytime we can expose our children to concepts beyond the traditional academic subject areas, it's a bonus. I love that my boys come home talking about their Junior Achievement classes, which starts a conversation about their goals and dreams. Being a small part of inspiring today's youth is a very fulfilling feeling."

For more information about Junior Achievement or to volunteer, contact Ivancie at 716-1381 ext. 215.

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~ Alycia Ivancie