

Nefe Digest

November/December 2009

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR
FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Most teachers feel comfortable in front of a blackboard. They relish the opportunity to challenge students in the process of learning. But when personal finance is on the syllabus, many teachers aren't certain about how to help the sea of students before them develop financial wisdom. Personal finance education wasn't a part of their training.

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Are Teachers Prepared to Deliver Financial Literacy?

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Although 40 of the 50 states have acknowledged the need for financial education in schools by adopting some type of education standards, most of the teachers in those states remain uneducated on the basics of teaching personal finance and feel unprepared in how to effectively achieve those new standards.



instruction that our young people actually receive on a range of topics that are critical to their future success and satisfaction.”

Way and Holden’s ideas for counteracting this trend include helping teachers learn how to integrate personal finance education into various disciplines—rather than teaching it only as a stand-alone offering—and expanding opportunities for teachers to explore financial matters as part of their own career development. The researchers also stress the importance of showing teachers the developmental nature of financial reasoning and how to tailor concepts for different grade levels.

Unprepared Teachers

By 2006, NEFE had already recognized the serious consequences of the gap in teachers’ training. It administered a grant to researchers Wendy Way and Karen Holden of the University of Wisconsin-Madison to investigate the barriers to K-12 teachers’ preparedness for teaching financial literacy.

Through a survey of more than 1,200 teachers, teacher education students, and school-of-education faculty, the researchers found that although teachers recognize the importance of financial education, a majority of educators are not equipped to engage students on the complex topic. And they feel especially unprepared to teach subjects such as risk management, saving and investing, financial responsibility, and decision making.

“Financial literacy has not yet penetrated teachers’ training,” said Holden.

Pinpointing the Problem

Armed with this research, NEFE invited teachers, education faculty, and industry experts to a salon at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in July, with the goal of determining how to empower teachers and provide direction in their training and curriculum.

“The educational system lets students down by not helping teachers learn to teach financial literacy,” said Daisy Stewart, associate director of the school of education at Virginia Tech and salon participant. “This limits the amount and quality of

Salon Solutions

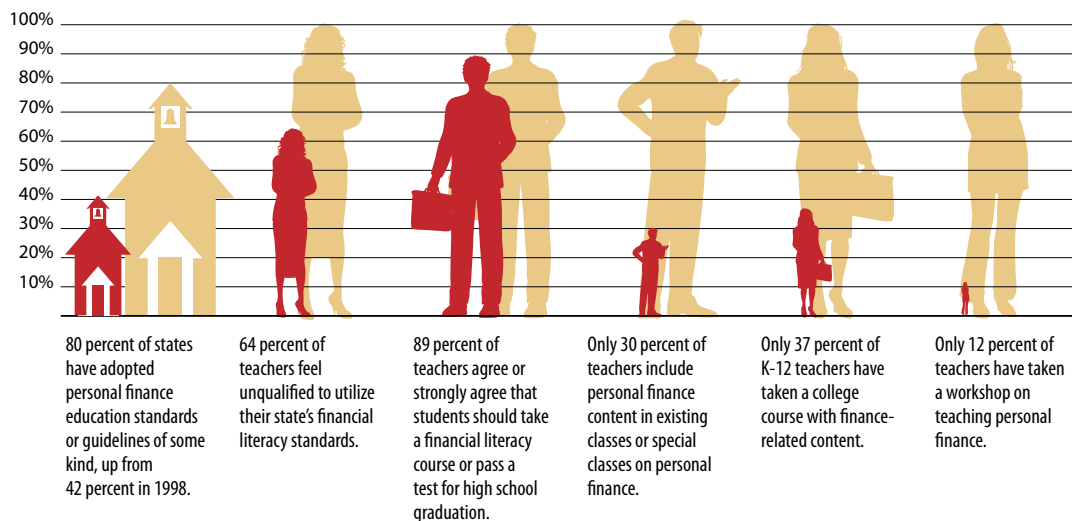
Salon participants elaborated on the research solutions with both creative and practical suggestions. Some encouraged tying financial wellness to physical and emotional wellness as an educational imperative. “Financial health is a viable part of the wellness equation,” said Christine Mayfield of Cal-State Fullerton.

Lois Vitt, director of the Institute for Socio-Financial Studies, recommended giving awards for outstanding financial literacy teachers. “Not much credit is given to teachers in our field,” she said. “Recognizing great teachers helps publicize what it is that makes them particularly effective.”

Others conjured up a YouTube-like Web site with videos of outstanding teaching in financial literacy—a sort of Teacher’s Tube.

All participants agreed that financial education must be implemented in a manner that prepares teachers to teach personal finance; that it remains sensitive to the life stages and cultures of students; and it establishes financial literacy as an accepted component of lifelong learning.

Jane Schuchardt, national program leader for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)—the federal partner in the Land-Grant University System—felt the salon brilliantly extended the research. “It is not enough to ask questions and add to the body of literature,” she said. “The true measure of exemplary research is its potential for application to real world problems. The salon resulted in an action plan well-positioned for implementation.”



Visit www.nefe.org for future updates about this research.

What Do We Do Now?

NEFE Sites Address Consumers' Ongoing Crises

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said in September that the recession is “very likely” over, but consumers are still in the midst of some of the biggest economic challenges of their lives. The downturn’s impact on the economy won’t reverse overnight, and the effects continue to hurt those who have lost their jobs and homes and suffered damage to their credit.

To help, NEFE’s SmartAboutMoney.org offers microsites to make sure Americans focus on what they need to do now, and do always, for specific aspects of their financial health. Through interactive technology, the microsites break down actionable information and establish a community where users can share their experiences and learn from one another.

Targeting Problem Areas

When faced with economic hardship, people can find it difficult to locate a starting point for action, says Brent Neiser, CFP®, director of Strategic Programs and Alliances for NEFE.

“If I know I’m going to be laid off, I’m thinking about a lot of problems, but I have to focus on some specifics,” Neiser says. “The microsites help by narrow-casting information in a way people can receive it.”

Through text and video components, the microsites focus on the areas in which individuals are suffering the most: Job Change, Housing, Spending, and Credit and Debt. Rather than having to weed through broad stories, consumers can listen to, and read about, action items geared toward the particular challenges they’re confronting.

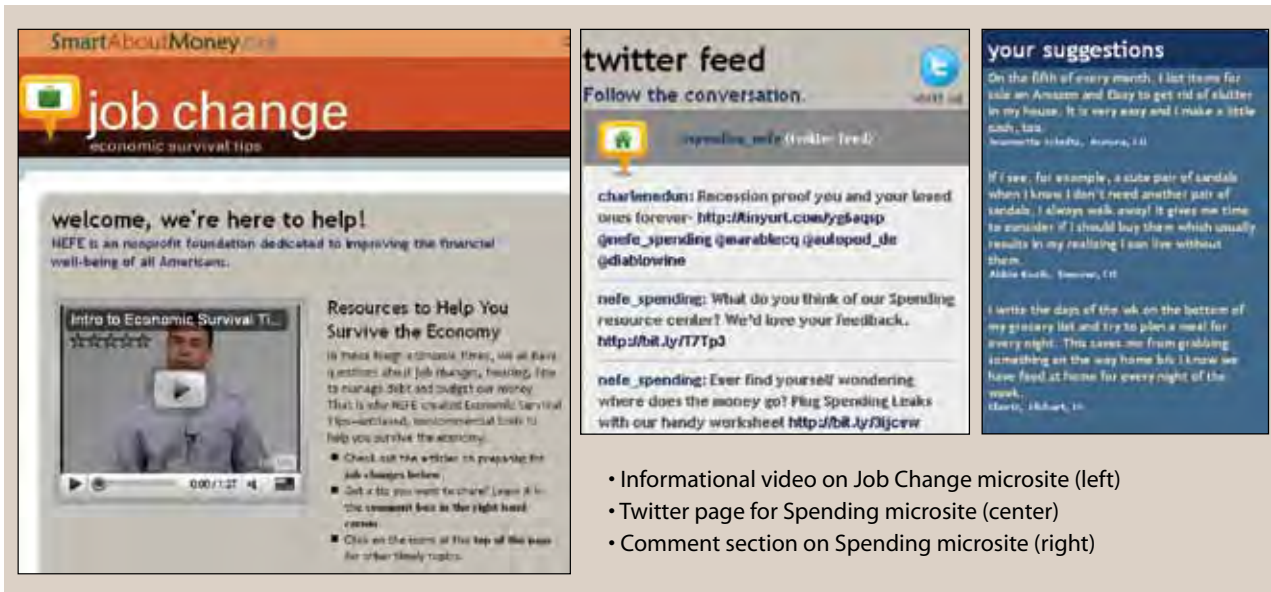
“People are overwhelmed with bills, emotions, missed opportunities of a job they could have taken. Some might be dealing with a big change such as their spouse leaving or their kid enrolling in college,” Neiser says. “[The microsites] connect with people from where they are. They narrow the focus of subjects and then allow individuals to address the unique challenges they’re facing.”

Neiser notes this kind of direction helps consumers gain confidence. As they succeed in tackling one problem area, they feel motivated to attack the next. And, they have the opportunity to share their stories with others.

User Feedback

In addition to bringing users closer to solving their financial problems, the microsites connect consumers to NEFE and one another through social media. With up-to-the-minute communication via comment areas entitled “Your suggestions,” consumers can add their questions or share useful information about their own experiences. Instead of just visiting a page, consumers can become a part of it.

NEFE also uses Twitter to alert readers to important news



and information on the microsites. Consumers can subscribe to NEFE’s free Twitter feeds, which automatically send updates to personal computers or cell phones. Subscribers can then contribute to the discussion on the microsites’ Twitter pages. More than 2,000 Twitter followers have joined the pages so far.

“This puts us into the pulse and rhythm of the economy as people are trying to deal with new and continuing challenges,” Neiser says. “It will help us calibrate how we continue to work on the site as we see what’s on people’s minds.”

For more information, visit www.SmartAboutMoney.org/jobchange for links to all four microsites.



HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

NEFE will be closed on November 26 and 27 for Thanksgiving, December 24, 25, and 28 for Christmas and January 1 for New Year’s Day.

CashCourse Enrolls 300th School

NEFE Expands Financial Literacy to College Students

When Breana Sylwester came across the CashCourse® Web site, she breathed a sigh of relief. She loved its scope of information, enticing look, and user-friendly construction. But even more, she appreciated what the CashCourse program could do for her and her students. And she's not alone.

CashCourse Reaches 300 Schools

In August, Sylwester, a financial aid advisor at Central Oregon Community College, helped her school become the 300th secondary education institution to enroll in CashCourse, NEFE's online financial education resource for college students and recent graduates.

For Sylwester, CashCourse's worksheets and resources helped her provide financial services she wanted to offer her students but couldn't because she had been overwhelmed with increased enrollment.

"What I liked about the program was that it wasn't just financial aid tools for grants and loans," said Sylwester. "CashCourse had budgeting tools, information on accessing your credit report, and other consumer financial information students ask about. And we could provide it on our Web site."



CashCourse campus marketing materials

More Schools, More Tools

Since its debut in fall 2007, CashCourse has enrolled 322 schools and developed new tools such as online calculators and worksheets to engage students. This year, the program revamped its paying-for-college section, updated its marketing and student Web sites, introduced five new financial literacy quizzes, and established an online dictionary of financial terms—all at no cost to its users.

"University administrators and faculty are still shocked that we offer all these noncommercial resources for free to share with their students," said Amy Hartenstine, project manager



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at NEFE. "They're happy to have this resource because they are busy and dealing with budget restrictions but know their students need financial resources."

For those whose alma maters or local colleges have yet to enroll in CashCourse, the site features a letter about the benefits of the program that individuals can download and send to university administrators. For more information, visit www.CashCourse.org.

NEFE IS MOVING IN JANUARY!

Our new address is:
1331 17th Street, Suite 1200
Denver, CO 80202



The mission of the National Endowment for Financial Education is to help Americans acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to take control of their financial destiny.

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