

Payday Practice

In the fall of 2010, Community Action House (CAH), a non-profit organization in Holland, MI, approached ASI Consulting with a radical vision to put itself out of business by equipping children and families with the tools for financial freedom. This sentiment is reflected in their mission statement, “to break the cycle of poverty by empowering families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency.” ASI accepted this challenge and partnered with CAH on this project.

After extensive research of existing national standards for financial literacy, the ASI Consulting team (Maria Kotman and Kathryn Carlton, advised by Jonathan Koop, Virgil Gulker, and The Carl Frost Center for Social Science Research) set forth to create a survey to assess the personal finance education currently offered in Holland Public Schools. ASI then compared the results to existing financial literacy programs and the best practice standards for personal education materials distributed by state and national educational institutions.

The ASI Consulting team (Kathryn Carlton and Matt Rutter) then administered a fifty-four question survey to third through fifth grade students of Holland Jefferson Elementary in May of 2011. The survey data revealed two main conclusions:

1. Students have a strong ability to recall and communicate financial information and concepts.
2. There is no statistically significant difference between the responses given by students of differing socio-economic backgrounds.

Though most students and adults of all income levels have a basic understanding of financial concepts, these teachings too rarely influence one’s spending and saving behavior outside the classroom. Working with a team of mentors and advisers, the ASI Consulting team (advised by Tammy Kamps, Jodi Oren, and Kathleen Beck), chose to focus on teaching the “Concept, Integration, and Application” of all financial matters. In order for personal finance education to be successfully implemented in everyday situations, financial concepts must be integrated into the interests of the students and applied to their lives at home and in their future workplace.

Currently, ASI (Matt Rutter) is working with Holland Jefferson’s fourth grade to integrate personal finance teachings into the state curriculum standards and Market Day program. “Market Day” is an annual event in which fourth graders at many local schools develop their own products (i.e. homemade jewelry) and set up booths to sell their goods to the rest of the school. ASI’s newly developed activity, named “Payday Practice,” allows students to intentionally prepare for their first paycheck – what they will save, what their expenses may be, how to develop a budget given income scarcity, and more. By framing these applicable teachings within the context of Market Day, the students’ learning will be fueled by eager anticipation and interest toward the coming school-wide program.