



## BOARD BLURB

# FIVE WAYS WE CAN IMPROVE FINANCIAL LITERACY IN OUR COMMUNITIES

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Some of the most fun I have is teaching finance to high school kids. It started when my son was in middle school in Palo Alto and his history teacher, Francisco Lacayo, was also teaching Living Skills classes in the summer. The Living Skills class is a requirement in Palo Alto to graduate and covers health, drug, and sex education, as well as a 15-hour community service requirement. It is popular to take it in the summer, since teens often want to focus on the intense academic classes during the school year. He asked if I would come talk to the kids about finances, and from there was born our program, which has been running about five years at this point.

One of the biggest obstacles at first was making connections with the right teachers in both of the high schools in Palo Alto. Various teachers, such as a Japanese teacher or cooking instructor, tended to run the Living Skills classes on what seemed to me a haphazard schedule, so I had to make contact with the right person at the right time—much of it was luck. Some teachers would do a class one year, then not the next, passing me off to another person they thought might be in charge after them. In addition, I learned that teachers are extremely busy people, pressed for time, and just getting emails replied to was a challenge.

Eventually Gunn High School appointed one teacher, Jeanette Tucker, to teach all the classes throughout the school year and run the larger summer program which combines both Palo Alto high schools into multiple living skills classes taught simultaneously. Jeanette expertly coordinates the program so that each living skills class (with a few exceptions) contains one unit, usually 1.5 hours, of financial planning curriculum. Luckily I was able to recruit other financial planners, some regulars, some who come and go, to help teach, as I was overwhelmed by the demand and could not keep up. Generally the fall sees us talking to three or four classes of 25 kids each, the spring as well, and the summer might have up to eight sessions, of which many are combined classes, sometimes working with 50 teens at a time. In this way we ensure that every student in Living Skills gets their 1.5 hours of “financial time.”

Palo Alto has two high schools, but we mainly focus on Gunn in the school year, since we have not found a “Jeanette” equivalent at the other Palo Alto high school, and we get to talk to many of those teens in the summer anyway. We have occasionally also sent financial planners as speakers to a program in Palo Alto for graduating seniors that are the first in their family to ever go to college.

Jeanette offers her view on the classes: “We offer a finance/occupation unit in our Living Skills course at both high schools, and we found that students often asked questions about how to save, how to invest, what is a credit card and how does credit work, how do student loans work, and often tax questions as well. Many of the teachers for this course do not have answers for any of this, nor are we ‘trained’ in how to best answer these questions. Instead of skipping it, we felt that it would be best to bring in some professionals to address these concerns/issues. Ariadne had a connection to our high school, and this is how we met. Over the years we have been able to bring her and her colleagues into our classes to present material in an organized way, and also to answer burning questions that the kids have. It’s been great, they find it informative and in the future, I think it would be nice to offer a parent night where college-related finances could be discussed.”

I can’t write this article without mentioning David Meyers, CFP®, who has incredible energy and has probably talked to more classes than anyone. He is capable of teaching three units in a day! I tried it once and don’t recommend it for normal mortals! He focuses on a formula that works well for him, talking about, “What is money?” and focusing on taxes and investments. I use a presentation with many more slides than one could ever use in the timeframe, focusing on student loans, debt, credit cards, how to pay for college, interest rates, credit scores, and more. I tend to use the slides to generate questions and spend a lot of time responding to questions. I never get through all the slides or even try to, but sometimes I have just the right slide for a certain question. Other planners use my presentation as a base and take what appeals to them or change it as they wish. Each class is a little bit different, but kids pick up useful skills and ask great questions. Usually I see teachers taking notes too—I think they learn a little every time! My son declined to have me speak to his high school class (too embarrassing!), so he got David as a teacher and was quite inspired by what he learned!

Puong N. Quach, CFP®, CRPC® offers her view on the classes after teaching a few of them: “I would encourage our chapter members to volunteer to speak in a classroom. I had a great time talking to Ms. Tucker’s class. Her students asked really good questions. We spent a lot of time talking about credit and credit cards in the classes I was in. As financial advisors, we have the tendency to talk about budgeting, savings, and investment. But at the students’ age, I believe it’s important for us to help them understand how to use credit responsibly to avoid mistakes I see many young people make by having debts before their first real job: student loans, credit card debt, and car loan.”

The kids are loads of fun mainly from their questions. They are curious, energetic, passionate, and always wanting to push the limits. I get new questions every time that keep me on my toes and help me prepare for next time. And there are always the queries about what happens if you evade taxes and how do you launder money. They make me laugh!

Trends go fast. Six to nine months ago everyone wanted to learn about Bitcoin. This summer? No one cares. Lately increasing numbers of kids raise hands saying they are applying to go to college abroad, and lots of questions come up around that. I would encourage others to try and start a program in their local schools, in the name of the FPA, to show that we are totally objective and not trying to sell something or push a product. I always bring up the FPA first thing. I want it to be clear we are not individuals pushing our agenda but part of an international effort to increase financial literacy.

*Ariadne Horstman is a CFP® who has been an FPA member for as long as she can remember of her financial planning history. She practices out of her own firm in Palo Alto and specializes in international issues.*