

Youngsters know next to nothing about economics

As most parents who have tried discussing budgeting with their kids know all too well, most high school seniors know next to nothing about economics.

Here's how abysmal the ignorance is, according to the National Council on Economic Education: Only 34 percent know that money loses its value through inflation. Less than 60 percent understand that when demand for a product goes up but the supply doesn't, the price is likely to increase. Around two-thirds do not know the stock market works to bring people who want to buy stocks together with people who want to sell them.

Just how dangerous economic illiteracy can be to our kids is demonstrated in the news headlines last week:

■ Stock exchanges tumbled.

The NASDAQ dropped 82 percent below its all-time high, closing below 2,000 for the first time since December 1998. The Dow industrials also tumbled, closing below the 10,000 mark for the first time in years. Kids who are leaving school and going to work will have to start making personal decisions about 401(k)s and IRAs, but they don't have the foggiest idea what a bear market is or how to make informed investment decisions.

■ DaimlerChrysler laid off 2,700 white-collar workers. Unemployment in Michigan jumped a full 2 percentage points, putting our out-of-work numbers above the national average for the first time in five years. Up to now, the main question for kids leaving school was which job to pick from the pages of help wanted ads in the newspaper. But today's kids have no idea how to manage their careers in a time of rising unemployment, much less an understanding of the kinds of skills needed to qualify them for good paying jobs.

■ What's odd about all this is that while 98 percent of Americans think economics should be taught in the schools, only 13 states require students to take an economics course to graduate, Michigan not included.

Many of our high schools do offer economics courses, and Michigan started last year to teach economics in the social sciences part of the MEAP test. But many Michigan teachers admit economics is the subject most lacking in their professional preparation, and most experts think course materials need improvement. Not surprisingly, less than a quarter of the 11th graders who took the MEAP test met the standard.

Just in time, now comes an outfit called the Michigan Council on Economic Education, a non-profit group based at Walsh College's Novi campus. Headed by an MSU economics education Ph.D., David Dieterle, the council is in the second year of a five-year program to increase and improve economics education in Michigan high schools.

Kids learn about personal budgeting and investing through a Web site, appropriately enough called "The Mint." Kids and teachers learn about the mysteries of the stock market by playing "The Stock Market Game." Teachers get generalized but up-to-date support materials through www.economicamerica.org. The council offers Michigan Standards and Benchmarks for Economics, where a teacher can click on a given benchmark and get a listing of classroom material appropriate to his grade level; the Web site is www.michecon.org.

Dieterle is careful to make clear his group isn't about to push ideology down the throats of stu-

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dents or teachers. "What we're here for is to empower and inform teachers," he says. "They're professional educators, and our only job is to help them become better professional educators."

It's a sensible approach, as Americans unfortunately tend to shy away from public discussions of two vitally important subjects: sex and money. But if we talked — and taught — a bit more about sex, fewer kids would get AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. And if we talked — and taught — more about money and economics, our kids wouldn't be wandering into the world of adult responsibilities so uninformed and so likely to get into trouble.

Bill Clinton actually had it right when he ran for president back in 1992 on the slogan, "It's the economy, stupid." Today, it's stupid not to learn about the economy and the economic principles that drive it. The Council on Economic Education is playing an important part to help out. If you'd like to learn more, Dieterle's office phone is (248) 598-9550 and his e-mail is d Dieterle@www.walsh-col.edu

Phil Power is the chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He is also a member of the board of the Michigan Council on Economic Education. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 983-2047, Ext. 1886, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net

Columnist responds to nursing home industry letter

I'd like to comment on the March 8 letter from Jonathon Stanton, director of communications for the Health Care Association of Michigan, a nursing home industry organization.

Mr. Stanton attempts to discredit the facts in my Chat Room column (Nursing Home Guide misleads, Feb. 22) in which I substantiate that the nursing home industry's publication, *The Consumer Guide to Michigan Nursing Homes* misleads the public into thinking that Michigan nursing homes are providing high quality care.

Mr. Stanton indicates that the Health Care Association of Michigan, the Michigan Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, and the Michigan County Medical Care Facilities Council published the guide. He doesn't reveal that these are trade organizations of the nursing home industry.

These impressive sounding names lead consumers to think that these organizations are non-profit consumer-friendly social and governmental agencies. The industry uses these names on the cover of the guide. It's a slick marketing gimmick.

Mr. Stanton's opinion is that the majority of Michigan's nursing homes provide high quality care, but he gives no substantiation of his opinion. My statement, not personal opinion, that Michigan has one of the highest nursing home deficiencies in the nation, is based on independent studies of the U.S. General Accounting Office (1999 and 2000); independent survey of Michigan State University Institute for Public Policy and Research (January 2000); testimonies of hundreds of Michigan citizens in legislative hearings; and on over 2,000 complaints investigations a year. Mr. Stanton ignores referring to these sources because he can't refute their evidence.

He states that consumers of nursing home care and not the provider community developed the industry's survey. He's referring to the survey whose findings declare a family satisfaction rate of nearly 90 percent, even for nursing homes with serious violations.

Actually, the industry sponsored this survey by contracting and paying a polling company, and the participants in the survey were drawn from lists of people chosen by the nursing homes. Thus the industry had complete control. It would be interesting to know which people and state agencies would go along with the nearly 90 percent satisfaction rate for Michigan nursing homes.

Mr. Stanton admits the guide's information is out of date because of the cut-off date of Nov. 1, 2000. But, he says, the guide gives other sources the consumer can consult. I pointed out that these sources are buried in the back of the book.

The question is why the industry officials even bothered to publish extensive data in the body of the book that is non-specific, outdated and therefore useless. All the publishers had to do was to prominently refer the consumer to superior sources such as Citizens for Better Care which provides up-to-date accurate and specific information on violations.

Mr. Stanton says that the 1999 guide had "some inaccuracies" which, when discovered, the industry took action to correct. Actually, it was research by the Campaign for Quality Care that exposed the fraudulent ratings. The campaign's documentation gained attention of the Michigan attorney general and Channel 7 that forced industry association president Reginald Carter to publicly retract information.

Mr. Stanton is an agent of the nursing home industry paid to promote its interests. I am a former teacher and librarian with studies in library sciences beyond the master's degree. I am well trained in research and I know that in seeking information, one must be very careful of sources. In my writings I try to pass this warning on to fellow citizens.

Lodja Rizzo of Farmington Hills is active with the Oakland County branch of Michigan Citizens for Better Care.

Michigan has one of the highest nursing home deficiencies in the nation, based on independent studies...testimonies of hundreds of Michigan citizens in legislative hearings; and on over 2,000 complaints investigations a year.

LETTERS

Thanks for ice

I wanted to thank the City of Farmington for the great facilities you have, such as the ice rinks.
I would have never been a

hockey player if there wasn't a rink in Farmington Hills. The snack bar is good to have in case I forget to eat something before practice or a game.
The youth center is fun, and I like what they have there. I real-

ly have a lot of fun at the arena. The opportunity to play hockey gets parents watching their children play and have fun.
Thank you for providing it.


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"It Might As Well Be Spring!"
Put a spring in your step with this special Children's Theatre of Michigan musical production. Performances are Wednesday through Sunday at 1:00 p.m. in Hester's stately Victorian home garden.

Smile And Say "Carrot"
Enjoy the perfect photo opportunity! Bring your little ones to visit Hester Fairweather. Monday through Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. and Sunday Noon - 6:00 p.m. Choose a Polaroid with a special frame or a Peek-a-viewer for only \$10.00. Hugs are free and no reservations are required.

Breakfast With Hester
Join Hester Fairweather and friends for one of two very special gatherings in her Victorian home garden. Somerset Collection South Rotunda, from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Saturdays, April 7th and April 14th. Seating is limited and tickets are \$15 per person (children 2 and under are free). Admission includes breakfast in the garden, a special performance of "It Might As Well Be Spring" by the Children's Theatre of Michigan, a Classic Polaroid photo per family, treats and surprises. Tickets must be purchased in advance in the North Grand Court from Noon to 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 23rd and Saturday, March 24th or at Hester's House, March 31st through April 13th during Bunny Visiting Hours.



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