

WHITEPAPER

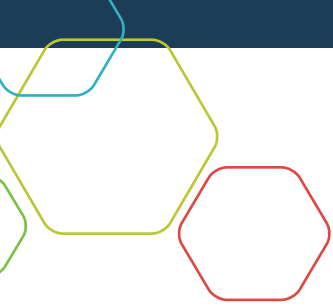
BUILDING FINANCIAL CAPABILITY FROM ELEMENTARY THROUGH MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Framework for Preparing Students for Lifelong Financial Decision-Making



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**A Framework for Preparing
Students for Lifelong Financial
Decision-Making**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Financial literacy is rapidly becoming a core expectation of K–12 education. Across the United States, more states now require students to demonstrate financial literacy before graduating from high school. These policies reflect a growing recognition that young adults must understand how to manage income, evaluate financial decisions, and plan for the future.

However, many districts are discovering that introducing financial literacy only in high school is often too late. By the time students encounter personal finance coursework, many of their financial attitudes and habits have already begun to form.

A more effective approach is to create a **K–12 continuum of financial literacy instruction** that begins in upper elementary grades and develops progressively through middle school and high school.

Upper elementary and middle school years are particularly important. During this time, students begin thinking about careers, making independent spending decisions, and forming beliefs about work, money, and opportunity.

By building financial capability earlier, districts can ensure students enter high school prepared to engage deeply with financial literacy instruction and apply it to real-world decisions.

“Financial literacy should not begin with a single course in high school. It should grow gradually as students develop decision-making skills from elementary through middle school.”

Council for Economic Education, Survey of the States: Economic and Personal Finance Education in Our Nation’s Schools (2022)

Financial Attitudes Form Early

Research consistently shows that financial attitudes and behaviors begin forming during childhood. Long before students open a bank account or earn their first paycheck, they are already observing and interpreting how money works in the world around them.

Children watch how adults talk about spending, saving, borrowing, and budgeting. They notice the choices families make about purchases, the priorities adults set when money is limited, and the ways financial decisions affect daily life.

These early observations quietly shape students' beliefs about money. By the time they reach upper elementary and middle school, many students already hold assumptions about how money is earned, how it should be used, and what financial success looks like.

In many cases, these beliefs develop without formal explanation or instruction, leaving students to fill gaps in understanding based on incomplete or inaccurate information.

Without intentional financial education, students may develop misunderstandings about several key concepts, including:

- » **How money is earned.** Some students may not fully understand the relationship between work, skills, education, and income. They may assume that income levels are random or unrelated to preparation and career choices.
- » **The difference between spending and saving.** Students often see the immediate benefits of spending money but may not yet understand the importance of saving for future goals or unexpected needs.
- » **The role of financial institutions.** Banks, credit unions, loans, and credit systems can seem abstract to young learners. Without guidance, students may struggle to understand how these institutions help individuals manage and grow their money.
- » **The long-term impact of financial decisions.** Children and adolescents naturally focus on short-term outcomes. Without instruction, they may not recognize how financial decisions today can influence opportunities and financial stability in the future.

Because these ideas begin forming early, waiting until high school to introduce financial literacy can make it more difficult to correct misconceptions that have already taken root.

By contrast, early financial education provides students with accurate information and a structured framework for understanding how financial systems work.

Introducing foundational concepts during elementary and middle school allows students to build knowledge gradually as their cognitive abilities develop. Students can begin by learning simple ideas such as earning, spending, and saving, and then progress toward more complex concepts such as budgeting, financial planning, and evaluating financial trade-offs.

Early financial education also helps students develop the habits and decision-making skills that support long-term financial well-being. When students understand how financial choices connect to goals, opportunities, and future outcomes, they begin to approach money with greater awareness and responsibility.

Providing this instruction early ensures that students enter adolescence—and eventually adulthood—with the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate financial decisions thoughtfully and successfully.

A widely cited study from the University of Cambridge found that many core money habits are established by age seven, highlighting the importance of early financial education (*Whitebread & Bingham, 2013*).

“Children’s financial habits are formed by the age of seven.”

Whitebread & Bingham, Habit Formation and Learning in Young Children (University of Cambridge, 2013)

Financial Habit Formation Timeline	
Age/Grade	Financial Development
Early Elementary	Awareness of spending and saving
Upper Elementary	Understanding earning and goal setting
Middle School	Decision-making and budgeting
High School	Credit, investing, financial planning

Source: Whitebread & Bingham (University of Cambridge, 2013); Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (2016)



The **Footsteps2Brilliance Financial Literacy Career Readiness** program introduces foundational financial concepts beginning in upper elementary grades. Interactive lessons help students explore how money is earned, how spending choices affect goals, and why saving and planning are essential life skills.

Middle School Is the Decision-Making Window

Middle school represents a particularly important developmental stage for financial learning. During these years, students experience significant cognitive, social, and emotional growth that allows them to begin thinking more abstractly and analytically about the world around them. They become more capable of weighing options, considering consequences, and connecting present actions to future outcomes. These emerging decision-making abilities make middle school an ideal time to deepen students' understanding of financial concepts.

At the same time, many students begin gaining greater independence in their daily lives. They may receive allowances, birthday money, or payments for small jobs such as babysitting, yard work, or helping neighbors. Some students begin saving for items they want to purchase themselves, while others make spending decisions for the first time without direct adult guidance. These real-life experiences with money create natural learning opportunities that can be strengthened through structured instruction.

Because students are beginning to interact with money in more direct ways, middle school provides an ideal window to introduce more complex financial ideas that build on the basic concepts learned in earlier grades.

One key area of focus is budgeting and trade-offs. Students begin to understand that financial resources are limited and that choices must be made about how to use them. Learning to compare options, prioritize spending, and consider alternatives helps students recognize that every financial decision involves trade-offs. These early budgeting exercises provide a foundation for more advanced financial planning later in life.

Another important concept is financial goal setting. Middle school students are increasingly capable of thinking about the future and setting goals for themselves. Financial education can help them connect their spending and saving decisions to longer-term objectives, such as saving for a desired purchase or planning for larger future expenses. This process helps students understand that small, consistent decisions can accumulate into meaningful outcomes over time.

Middle school is also an appropriate time to introduce evaluating costs and benefits. Students can begin learning how to analyze choices by considering both immediate and long-term outcomes. Whether deciding between two purchases or comparing the value of different options, students learn to ask questions such as: “What am I giving up if I choose this? Is this purchase worth the cost? Could waiting help me make a better decision?”

In addition, students can begin developing an early understanding of financial risk. While middle school instruction does not need to focus on complex financial instruments, students can learn that financial decisions often involve uncertainty. For example, they can explore why saving provides security, how borrowing involves responsibility, and how certain financial choices may carry potential



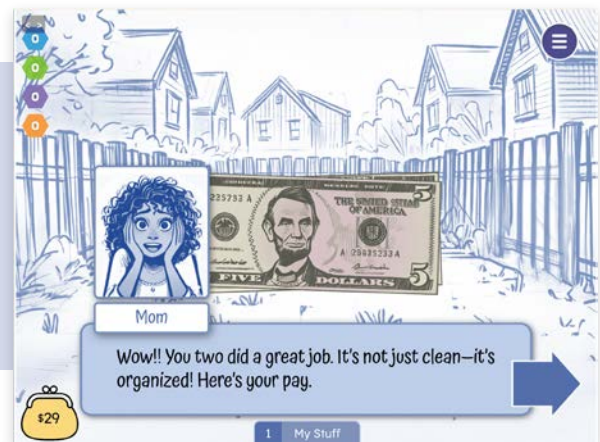
Introducing these concepts during middle school helps students strengthen critical thinking, planning, and decision-making skills. By practicing these skills in age-appropriate contexts, students build confidence in their ability to manage financial choices thoughtfully.

When students learn these foundational concepts during middle school, they enter high school better prepared to engage with more advanced financial topics such as credit management, taxes, investing, and long-term financial planning. Rather than encountering financial literacy as a completely new subject, they build on a foundation of knowledge and habits that has already begun to develop.

In this way, middle school serves as a bridge between early financial awareness and the more sophisticated financial education students will encounter later in their academic journey.

The Financial Literacy Development Window		
Grade Band	Focus	Skills Developed
Grades 3–5	Foundations	<i>Earning, spending, saving</i>
Grades 6–8	Decisions Made	<i>Budgeting, trade-offs, planning</i>
Grades 9–12	Application	<i>Credit, investing, financial systems</i>

Footsteps2Brilliance supports this stage through **interactive financial simulations and decision-making activities** that allow students to practice evaluating spending, saving, and long-term planning in realistic scenarios.



Career Awareness Strengthens Financial Understanding

Financial literacy becomes significantly more meaningful when students can see how financial decisions connect to their future careers. While concepts such as budgeting, saving, and spending are important, they become far more engaging when students understand how these ideas influence the opportunities available to them later in life. Connecting financial literacy with career awareness helps students recognize that the choices they make about education, skills, and preparation today can shape their financial stability and lifestyle in the future.

During upper elementary and middle school, students naturally begin asking questions about what they want to do when they grow up. This curiosity provides an ideal opportunity to introduce the financial dimensions of career exploration. When students learn how careers relate to income, financial planning, and long-term opportunities, financial literacy becomes more than an abstract subject—it becomes a tool for understanding their own futures.

Career-connected financial instruction helps students explore several important concepts.

» **The Relationship Between Education and Income**

Students begin to understand how different levels of education, training, and skill development influence earning potential. By examining examples of various career pathways, they can see how additional preparation and specialized skills often open the door to a wider range of career opportunities and higher income levels. This understanding helps students recognize that the educational choices they make today can significantly influence their financial opportunities later in life.

» **Earnings Differences Across Career Fields**

Comparing income ranges across different occupations helps students see how factors such as workforce demand, specialized skills, and required training affect compensation. When students analyze these differences, they begin thinking more critically about how their personal interests, talents, and educational goals may align with potential career paths. This awareness encourages thoughtful career exploration and helps students understand how preparation can shape future earning potential.

» Financial Implications of Postsecondary Pathways

Many careers require education or training beyond high school, and these pathways often involve financial considerations. Students benefit from exploring the costs and potential returns associated with different options, such as college degrees, vocational programs, apprenticeships, or professional certifications. Understanding these factors helps students begin viewing education as an investment—one that may involve short-term costs but can lead to long-term financial and career opportunities.

Career Awareness Strengthens Financial Understanding		
Education	Career Example	Median Income
High School	Skilled trades	\$45k–\$65k
Associate Degree	Technician roles	\$55k–\$75k
Bachelor’s Degree	Professional careers	\$70k+

Source: Whitebread & Bingham (University of Cambridge, 2013); Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (2016)

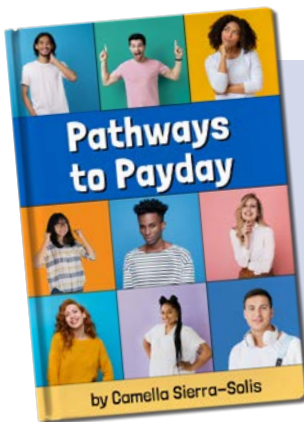
» Long-Term Financial Planning

Career-connected instruction also introduces students to the broader concept of long-term financial planning. Students begin to see how income supports major life goals, including housing, transportation, family responsibilities, and saving for the future. By examining how career choices influence income and lifestyle possibilities, students gain a clearer understanding of how financial decisions connect to larger life plans and personal goals.

When students understand these connections, academic learning becomes more relevant and engaging. Subjects such as mathematics, reading, and problem-solving begin to feel more purposeful because students can see how those skills contribute to real-world opportunities. Lessons about percentages, budgeting, or data analysis suddenly relate to decisions they may face later in life.

Just as importantly, career-connected financial literacy can increase student motivation. When students recognize that education opens doors to future opportunities, they are more likely to see the value of the work they are doing in school today. This understanding encourages goal setting, persistence, and a stronger sense of ownership over their learning.

By helping students connect financial literacy with career exploration, schools provide young people with a clearer picture of how their choices today influence the possibilities available to them tomorrow.



Footsteps2Brilliance Alignment:
The Footsteps2Brilliance Financial Literacy Career Readiness program integrates **career exploration with financial literacy**, allowing students to compare career pathways, analyze potential earnings, and understand how education choices influence financial outcomes.

Digital Finance Requires Updated Instruction

Modern financial systems are increasingly digital, and the way people earn, spend, and manage money has changed dramatically over the past decade. Many financial transactions that once required cash or in-person banking now occur through smartphones, websites, and digital payment platforms. As a result, today's students will enter adulthood in a financial environment that looks very different from the one previous generations experienced.

Young adults are expected to navigate a wide range of digital financial tools and services. These include **online banking platforms**, which allow individuals to manage accounts, transfer funds, and monitor financial activity in real time. Many people now rely on **mobile payment platforms** that allow them to pay for goods and services instantly using their phones or wearable devices. In addition, **digital wallets and financial apps** allow users to store payment information, track spending, and automate savings.



Online Banking



Mobile Payments



Digital Wallets



Financial Apps



Online Marketplace

Beyond everyday transactions, individuals must also interact with online financial marketplaces. These platforms allow consumers to compare credit cards, loans, insurance options, and investment opportunities. While these tools can provide convenience and access to financial services, they also require users to carefully evaluate financial products, understand terms and conditions, and recognize potential risks.

Because these systems operate primarily online, young people must also develop strong digital financial awareness and security habits. Students need to understand how to protect sensitive financial information, recognize fraudulent activity, and evaluate the credibility of financial offers they encounter online.

For example, students should learn to recognize risks such as:

- » Identity theft, which can occur when personal or financial information is stolen and used without permission
- » Financial scams, including phishing emails, fraudulent investment schemes, or fake online retailers
- » Misleading digital offers, such as predatory lending, hidden fees, or unrealistic investment promises

Without guidance, students may assume that digital financial tools are inherently safe or trustworthy simply because they appear on widely used platforms. Teaching students how to critically evaluate digital financial services helps them become more informed and cautious consumers.

Preparing students for this evolving financial environment requires financial literacy instruction that reflects the realities of modern financial systems. Traditional lessons about budgeting and saving remain important, but they must now be complemented by instruction on digital financial tools, online financial safety, and responsible technology use.

By introducing students to digital financial systems during upper elementary and middle school, educators can help them develop the awareness and skills needed to navigate these tools responsibly. As students gain experience evaluating digital financial choices, they become better prepared to participate confidently in the increasingly technology-driven financial landscape they will encounter as adults.

Digital Finance Reality: More than 90% of financial transactions globally are now conducted electronically *(World Bank, Global Findex Database).*

Footsteps2Brilliance Alignment:
Footsteps2Brilliance introduces students to **modern financial systems and responsible digital financial practices**, helping them understand how financial transactions occur in today's digital economy.



Early Preparation Improves High School Outcomes

High school financial literacy courses are most effective when students arrive with a strong foundation of financial knowledge and decision-making skills. When financial concepts are introduced only at the high school level, teachers often must spend valuable instructional time explaining basic ideas such as earning income, distinguishing between needs and wants, or understanding simple budgeting principles. This limits the opportunity to explore more complex financial topics in depth.

By contrast, students who have been exposed to financial literacy concepts during upper elementary and middle school enter high school with a clearer understanding of how money works and how financial decisions affect their lives. Early exposure allows students to build knowledge gradually, reinforcing key ideas over time and strengthening their ability to apply those concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways.

When students begin learning about financial decision-making earlier in their education, they are better prepared to engage with the advanced financial topics typically addressed in high school personal finance courses. These topics often include:

- » Credit and loans. Students learn how borrowing works, how credit histories are established, and how interest and repayment terms affect the long-term cost of borrowing.
- » Taxes and insurance. Students explore how taxes support public services, how payroll deductions affect income, and how insurance helps individuals manage financial risk.
- » Investing and retirement planning. Students begin to understand how investments grow over time, how risk and return are related, and why long-term financial planning is important.
- » Postsecondary financial planning. Students examine the financial implications of different education and training pathways, including the costs of college, vocational programs, and certifications.

Financial Literacy Learning Continuum	
Stage	Learning Focus
Upper Elementary	<i>Earning, spending, saving</i>
Middle School	<i>Budgeting, trade-offs, goal planning</i>
High School	<i>Credit, taxes, investing</i>

Source: Council for Economic Education (2022); Jump\$tart Coalition National Standards

When students have already encountered foundational financial concepts earlier in their schooling, they are better equipped to understand these more complex topics. Instead of learning entirely new ideas, they are building on knowledge that has already begun to take shape.

Early preparation also allows high school financial literacy courses to focus more heavily on application, analysis, and real-world decision-making rather than introductory instruction. Teachers can engage students in activities such as evaluating loan options, comparing insurance plans, developing investment strategies, or planning the financial aspects of postsecondary education.

This deeper level of engagement helps students develop critical thinking skills and confidence in their ability to navigate real financial decisions. Students who understand the broader financial systems they will encounter as adults are more likely to make informed choices and avoid common financial pitfalls.

In this way, early financial education strengthens the entire learning progression. By introducing foundational concepts in elementary and middle school, districts can ensure that high school financial literacy courses serve as a capstone experience—one that allows students to apply their knowledge to realistic scenarios and prepare for the financial responsibilities they will face after graduation.

The **Footsteps2Brilliance Financial Literacy Career Readiness program** strengthens the financial literacy continuum by introducing foundational concepts in upper elementary and expanding them through middle school. Through story-driven lessons and interactive simulations, students explore earning, budgeting, career pathways, and goal setting—building the decision-making skills needed before high school. By the time students reach high school personal finance courses, they develop a proficiency of core concepts such as income, trade-offs, and financial planning, allowing teachers to focus on more advanced topics like credit, investing, and postsecondary financial decisions.



IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Embed Financial Literacy Across Subjects

One of the most effective ways to introduce financial literacy in elementary and middle school is by integrating financial concepts into the subjects students are already studying. Rather than treating financial literacy as a separate course, schools can embed relevant ideas across multiple disciplines. This approach helps reinforce learning while avoiding additional scheduling demands in already full school days.

Financial literacy is inherently interdisciplinary. The skills students need to make informed financial decisions—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, and communication—are already central components of many academic subjects. By connecting financial topics to these existing areas of instruction, educators can help students see how academic concepts apply to real-world situations.

Mathematics

Mathematics provides a natural foundation for financial literacy because many financial decisions involve numerical reasoning and quantitative analysis. Students can apply math skills to practical financial situations, helping them understand how mathematical concepts are used outside the classroom.

For example, students can explore:

- » Budgeting and expense tracking, where they allocate limited resources across different categories such as savings, spending, and charitable giving
- » Percentages and interest calculations, which help students understand discounts, taxes, savings growth, and loan costs
- » Comparing financial options, such as evaluating different prices, determining the best value, or calculating long-term savings

When students see how mathematical concepts apply to everyday financial decisions, math instruction becomes more relevant and engaging.

English Language Arts

Financial literacy also connects closely with English Language Arts through reading, writing, and critical analysis. Students regularly encounter persuasive financial messages through advertising, social media, and online marketing. Learning to interpret and evaluate these messages helps students develop informed consumer habits.

ELA instruction can support financial literacy by helping students:

- » Analyze advertising and marketing messages, identifying persuasive techniques used to influence consumer decisions
- » Evaluate informational texts related to careers, personal finance, and economic topics
- » Write arguments or reflections about spending choices, saving strategies, or financial goals

These activities strengthen students' media literacy and critical thinking skills while helping them become more thoughtful consumers.

Social Studies

Social studies provides a broader context for understanding financial systems and economic behavior. Through lessons about economic systems, trade, and civic responsibility, students begin to understand how individual financial decisions fit within larger economic structures.

Within social studies instruction, students can explore:

- » Economic systems and markets, learning how goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed
- » Consumer decision-making, examining how individuals make choices about spending and saving
- » The role of financial institutions, including banks, credit unions, and government economic policies

These topics help students see how personal financial decisions connect to broader economic forces that influence communities and societies.

Subject	Financial Literacy Application
Math	Earning, spending, saving
ELA	Budgeting, trade-offs, goal planning
Social Studies	Credit, taxes, investing
Career Education	Budgeting, trade-offs, goal planning

Source: OECD. (2014). *Financial Education for Youth: The Role of Schools*.

Strengthening Real-World Learning

Embedding financial literacy across subjects also strengthens the relevance of classroom learning. Students are often more motivated when they see how academic skills apply to real-life situations they may encounter in the future.

For example, a lesson about percentages in math becomes more meaningful when students calculate discounts on purchases. An ELA lesson analyzing persuasive techniques becomes more engaging when students examine real advertising campaigns and then write to explain their thinking. A social studies lesson about economic systems becomes more tangible when students consider how businesses operate in their own communities.

By weaving financial literacy into multiple subject areas, schools create repeated opportunities for students to encounter financial concepts from different perspectives. Over time, these connections help students develop a deeper and more practical understanding of how financial decisions affect their lives.

This cross-curricular approach allows districts to strengthen financial literacy instruction while reinforcing existing academic standards and maintaining flexibility within the school schedule.



Footsteps2Brilliance provides **ready-to-use cross-curricular resources** that integrate financial literacy into math, literacy, and social studies instruction.

Begin Structured Instruction by Upper Elementary

Upper elementary grades provide an ideal starting point for structured financial literacy instruction. During this stage—typically grades four through five—students are developing stronger reasoning skills and beginning to understand more complex ideas about the world around them. They are increasingly capable of thinking beyond immediate needs and considering future goals, cause-and-effect relationships, and the consequences of choices. These emerging cognitive abilities make upper elementary students ready to engage with foundational financial concepts in meaningful ways.

At the same time, students in these grades are still forming many of their early attitudes and beliefs about money, work, and responsibility. Without guidance, those attitudes may be shaped primarily by observation or informal experiences. Structured financial literacy instruction allows schools to introduce accurate information and healthy financial habits before misconceptions or unproductive behaviors become ingrained.

Beginning instruction during the upper elementary years helps students develop a basic understanding of how financial systems work and how personal choices affect financial outcomes. At this stage, students can begin learning about concepts such as:

- » **Earning money**, including how work, skills, and education relate to income
- » **Spending and saving**, and how individuals prioritize needs, wants, and future goals
- » **Setting financial goals**, including planning for purchases or longer-term objectives
- » **Making trade-offs**, understanding that limited resources require thoughtful decision-making

These early lessons do not need to focus on complex financial systems. Instead, they provide age-appropriate opportunities for students to begin exploring how financial decisions influence everyday life. Through classroom discussions, real-world examples, and simple decision-making activities, students can practice evaluating choices and thinking about the future consequences of their actions.

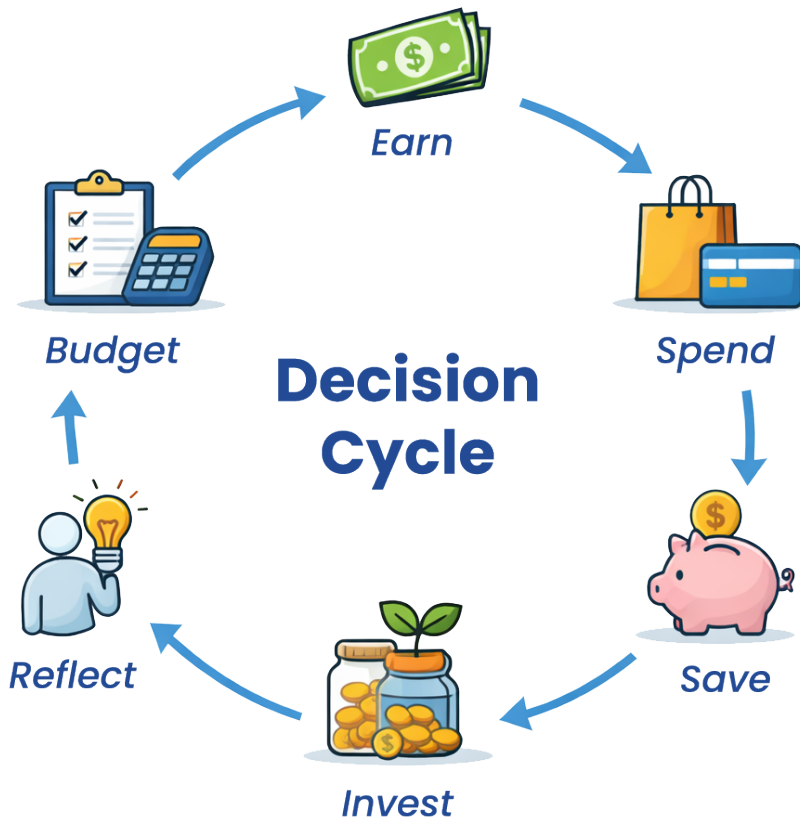
Starting structured instruction in upper elementary school also helps create continuity in financial literacy education. When students develop a foundation at this stage, middle school instruction can build on that knowledge by introducing more complex ideas such as budgeting, financial risk, and long-term planning. High school courses can then expand further into topics like credit, investing, and postsecondary financial decision-making.

In this way, upper elementary instruction serves as the starting point for a **developmental progression of financial learning**. By introducing key ideas early and reinforcing them over time, schools can help students develop the knowledge, habits, and confidence needed to navigate financial decisions throughout their lives.



The **Footsteps2Brilliance Financial Literacy Career Readiness program** provides grade-appropriate financial literacy modules specifically designed for upper elementary learners. These interactive lessons introduce core financial concepts through engaging stories, real-world scenarios, and guided decision-making activities. By presenting financial ideas in developmentally appropriate ways, the program helps ensure that students gain early exposure to financial literacy while building a strong foundation for more advanced learning in middle and high school. Connect Financial Lessons to Career Exploration Financial literacy becomes significantly more engaging when students connect lessons to career opportunities.

Provide Real-World Simulations



Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. (2016). Youth Financial Capability Framework.

Students learn financial concepts most effectively when they have the opportunity to apply them in realistic situations. While reading about financial concepts can provide foundational knowledge, experiential learning helps students understand how those concepts function in real-life decision-making. Real-world simulations allow students to practice financial thinking in a safe environment where they can explore choices, evaluate outcomes, and reflect on the consequences of their decisions.

Simulations bring financial literacy to life by placing students in scenarios that mirror the types of financial decisions they may face as adults. Rather than memorizing definitions or formulas, students actively engage with financial concepts by solving problems, weighing options, and making choices based on limited resources. This approach strengthens both comprehension and retention because students experience the reasoning behind financial decisions rather than simply learning about them abstractly.

One effective example is budget simulations, where students are asked to manage a fixed amount of money and allocate it across different categories such as housing, food, transportation, and savings. Through these exercises, students learn that financial resources are limited, and that prioritizing spending requires thoughtful trade-offs. They also gain insight into how unexpected expenses can disrupt financial plans and why maintaining savings is important.

Another valuable approach involves business planning exercises. In these simulations, students may develop ideas for small businesses, calculate startup costs, determine pricing strategies, and estimate potential profits. These activities introduce students to entrepreneurial thinking while reinforcing financial concepts such as revenue, expenses, and financial planning. Students also gain experience in evaluating risks and opportunities, which are key components of both entrepreneurship and financial decision-making.

Students can also benefit from financial goal-setting scenarios, where they practice planning for future purchases or longer-term financial objectives. For example, students may create savings plans for a desired item, determine how long it would take to reach their goal, and identify choices they might need to make along the way. These activities help students connect financial behavior with personal goals, reinforcing the idea that financial decisions influence future opportunities.

Real-world simulations also encourage collaboration and discussion. Students can work together to solve financial challenges, compare strategies, and reflect on the outcomes of different decisions. These conversations help students understand that financial decisions often involve multiple perspectives and that thoughtful planning can lead to better outcomes.

Incorporating experiential learning into financial literacy instruction helps students develop the practical reasoning skills they will need to navigate real financial situations later in life. By practicing financial decision-making in structured simulations, students gain confidence in their ability to evaluate choices, manage resources, and plan for the future.



Footsteps2Brilliance incorporates **interactive financial simulations** that allow students to practice real-world financial decisions such as creating a budget, planning for a business, and setting financial goals in a safe learning environment.

Engage Families and Communities

Financial literacy instruction becomes even more effective when families are involved in the learning process. While schools play a critical role in introducing financial concepts, students' attitudes and behaviors around money are also shaped by what they observe and discuss at home. When schools create opportunities for families to participate in financial learning, students receive consistent messages and reinforcement that strengthen their understanding and habits.

Students often share what they learn in school with family members, extending financial learning beyond the classroom. A lesson about budgeting, saving, or setting financial goals can spark conversations at home about how families make financial decisions. These discussions help students see how financial concepts apply to real-life situations, making the learning more meaningful and relevant.

Family engagement can also provide valuable context for financial literacy instruction. Families may bring different experiences, cultural perspectives, and financial practices that enrich students' understanding of how money is managed in everyday life. When educators acknowledge and incorporate these perspectives, financial literacy instruction becomes more inclusive and relatable.

Schools can encourage family involvement in several ways. For example, teachers may send home discussion prompts or simple activities that encourage students to talk with family members about financial topics such as saving for goals, comparing prices when shopping, or understanding how household expenses are prioritized. Schools can also host family events, workshops, or informational sessions that introduce financial literacy concepts and provide families with tools to support learning at home.

Community partnerships can further strengthen financial literacy education. Local banks, credit unions, business leaders, and community organizations often have expertise and resources that can help students understand financial systems and economic opportunities in their own communities. Guest speakers, career presentations, and community-based learning activities can help students connect financial concepts with real-world experiences.

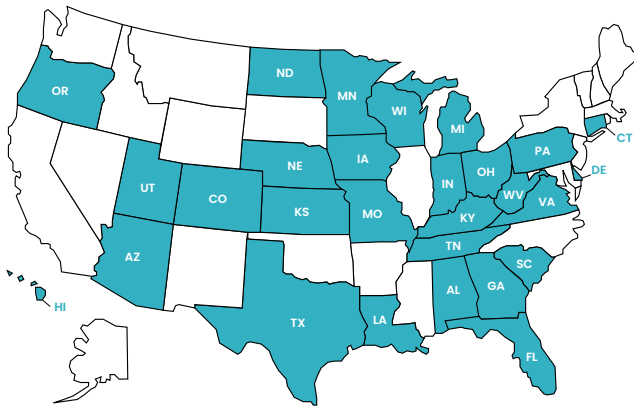


Engaging families and communities helps reinforce the idea that financial literacy is not simply an academic subject but an important life skill. When students see that financial learning is valued both in school and at home, they are more likely to apply what they learn and develop lasting financial habits. By building connections between classrooms, families, and communities, schools can create a supportive environment that helps students develop the knowledge and confidence needed to make informed financial decisions throughout their lives.

GROWTH OF FINANCIAL LITERACY POLICIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Financial literacy education is expanding rapidly across the United States. Most states now include personal finance instruction somewhere in the K–12 system, and a growing number require a course for high school graduation. However, many states still rely on high school instruction alone, highlighting the need for earlier financial literacy learning in grades 4–8.

Many states now build a progression from elementary → middle → high school.

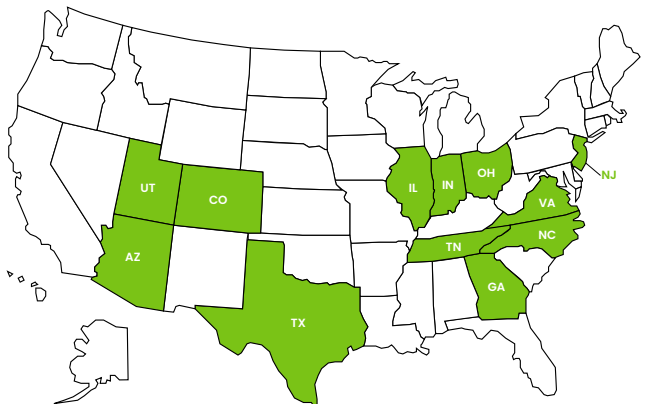


STATES WITH PERSONAL FINANCE GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (HIGH SCHOOL)

As of 2025, about 29 states require a personal finance course for high school graduation. Some states require a stand-alone course; others allow the requirement to be embedded in economics or CTE coursework.

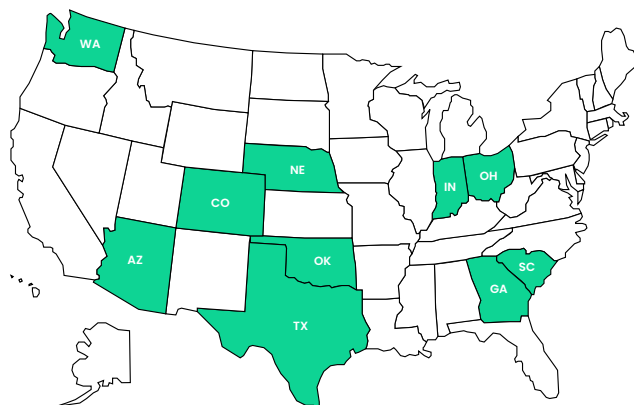
STATES WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL FINANCIAL LITERACY STANDARDS (GRADES 6–8)

Many states include **financial literacy instruction in grades 6–8**, usually within social studies, economics, or career readiness standards. Typical middle-school standards focus on budgeting, trade-offs and decision making, income and careers, saving and spending.



STATES WITH UPPER ELEMENTARY FINANCIAL LITERACY STANDARDS (GRADES 4–5)

Several states introduce financial literacy concepts as early as **grades 4–5** within math, economics, or social studies standards. These typically include concepts like: earning income, needs vs. wants, saving for goals, simple budgeting, consumer choices.



APPENDIX

Overview of Footsteps2Brilliance's Financial Literacy Career Readiness Curriculum

FOOTSTEPS2BRILLIANCE FINANCIAL LITERACY CAREER READINESS CURRICULUM

Overview

Footsteps2Brilliance Financial Literacy is a cross-curricular program for grades 4 – 8 that builds reading, writing, and math skills alongside financial literacy and career readiness.

Program At a Glance

Target Grade Levels	Upper Elementary (Grades 4–5) and Middle School (Grades 6–8)
Instructional Fit	Core ELA supplement; social studies, electives, and career readiness courses; summer learning; before- and after-school programs; reading intervention blocks; bilingual English/Spanish programs
Program Highlights	• Bilingual English/Spanish books and games • AI Writing Coach • Interactive graphic novel adventure games
Student Outcomes	Strengthens reading comprehension, reading stamina, vocabulary, writing, money math, financial literacy, and 21st-century skills
Time Commitment	45 minutes per week of self-paced student learning; with optional classroom lessons and projects
Core Components	Self-paced student curriculum with real-time teacher reports
Optional Extensions	Teacher lesson plans, lesson slides, projects, and extra books and activities for additional reading and writing practice

Sequence at a Glance

The curriculum guides teachers and students through a spiraling sequence of learning based on a continuum of financial literacy learning.



Introduction

- **Adventure:** Intro with Mayor Ace
- **Assessment:** Show What You Know



Unit 1: Earn It!

Objective: Learn how money is earned, how jobs match personal skills and interests, and how income is used to support personal goals and the community.

Books:

1. What Is Money?
2. Pathways to Payday
3. Seeds to Skateboards
4. Andre's Paycheck Puzzle

Adventure: Career Week

- Main character: Zuri
- Explore careers, income types, and savings goals.



Unit 2: Spend and Save It!

Objective: Learn how opportunity costs, values, peer pressure, and advertising shape spending choices, and how payment methods and credit affect money management.

Books:

5. Which Would You Choose?
6. Maya's Missing Money
7. The Savvy Shopper's Guide to Smart Spending
8. Ways to Pay

Adventure: New Job

- Main character: Kip
- Start a new job, earn paychecks, budget wisely, and learn essential work skills.



Unit 3: Grow and Protect It!

Objective: Learn how saving and investing help money grow, how planning and values guide financial choices, how credit helps manage short-term needs, and how insurance protects against risks.

Books:

1. A Trip to the Bank
2. The Birthday Bash
3. Amina's Doubling Dollar
4. Managing Risks

Adventure: Start-Up

- Main character: Rafa
- Learn entrepreneurship by investing, managing profits, and growing a business.



Ending

- **Adventure:** Ending with Min
- **Assessment:** Show What You Learned

For more information go to

<https://www footsteps2brilliance.com/bilingual-curriculum/financial-literacy>
or contact support@footsteps2brilliance.com.

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ABOUT FOOTSTEPS2BRILLIANCE

Footsteps2Brilliance is the leading provider of effective next-generation digital tools, bilingual content, and learning experiences that connect school and home, and enhance, not replace, excellent teaching. Since 2012 we've committed our research and resources to closing the reading achievement gap for all students from birth through elementary school using a collaborative impact approach. In partnership with educators, families, and communities we are unlocking brilliance and empowering students to realize their full potential.

Learn more at www.Footsteps2Brilliance.com.

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