**Fort Smith region's teachers awarded for economics education**

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Six teachers from the area received awards for their teaching in economics and personal finance, according to a news release.

Tracy Floyd, Sheila Humphrey and Kristina Thrift from Woods Elementary School in Fort Smith, Amy Gordon from Barling Elementary School in Barling, Amy Hardy from East Hills Middle School in Greenwood and Valarie Harp from Hartford Elementary in Hartford won Bessie B. Moore awards for original projects they did with students to teach them economics from Economics Arkansas, a nonprofit organization, according to the news release.

First-grade teachers Floyd, Humphrey and Thrift shared an award for one project that they did together, "Patriot Pride Since '75 - Economics in Our Lives."

"When you're teaching economics, a lot of activities just lend themselves to having all the kids together," Humphrey said in a phone interview.

Sometimes, they would have their classes learn a concept together and then do the activities separately, she said.

They started out teaching the history of their school because it was the 40th anniversary of Woods Elementary and had former principals, teachers and students come speak, Floyd said in a phone interview. The students made a timeline of the school's growth, discussing adding buildings to the school and scarcity of space.

"We talked about how Walmart wasn't always there next to our school. We talked about how they planted pine trees, a natural resource," Floyd said.

The students saw how their community had changed, Thrift said in a phone interview.

The teachers showed the students how economics was applicable to their daily lives though a build-your-own-classroom activity where the pupils were given a budget and had to decide what items they wanted to buy for their "classroom," Floyd said.

They also talked with them about how a budget would work to create a new school. An architect who worked on a remodel for Woods Elementary came in and talked with them about how they had to cut out certain things so they wouldn't go over their budget, Floyd said.

"We feel like providing these kids with real-life relevant things will help them understand better how making good choices affects their life from now on," Humphrey said.

They hired a sixth-grader to draw a picture of the school in 1975 and another in present day.

"The kids learned about hiring a specialist," Humphrey said.

They then sold copies of the photos to make money for their business.

The students had to fill out job applications and be interviewed for specific positions, Thrift said.

Valarie Harp teaches second grade at Hartford Elementary. As part of her project, "Super Economists," the school had assemblies Mondays and Fridays, and students would do skits and train kindergarten through sixth-grade students on economic concepts, such as natural resources or capital goods, Harp said in a phone interview.

They learned about some concepts through a field trip - decked out in their "Super Economists" costumes. They went to Cici's Pizza and learned about distribution of labor and producers and consumers. Then, they went to Home Depot and learned how to make birdhouses, Harp said.

"It was a little nerve-racking because they all had hammers and they were second-graders," Harp said. "We made it through there OK."

Then, the students became entrepreneurs and made Christmas ornaments - standard ones for $1 and $2 for specialty ones.

The students learned about how economics ties into their community.

"We're in a rural community. They love the connection to the immediate real world," Harp said.

They learned about how their community was once a coal-mining town and how supply and demand had affected that, she said.

"We try to let them understand, 'This is your town. This is your area. This is how it used to look, and this is how far we've come,'" she said.

They also researched how U.S. presidents, science and new machinery had changed the economy, Harp said.

Hardy did her project, "The Dream Team Entrepreneur," with seventh-graders at East Hills Middle School.

Groups of students created their own sports teams, and did everything that starting a team from the ground up would entail, she said in a phone interview. They created business cards, made team rosters, researched average salaries, decided on ticket prices and looked at how much revenue they would earn.

Because Hardy taught this as part of a Information, Communications, Technology class, the students used software programs such as Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint throughout the project, she said. For example, they created PowerPoints to introduce their team that would be played during a game.

"They definitely got into it a little bit more because they were able to choose who they were working with, choose their team. Everything was their choice," Hardy said.

Amy Gordon teaches fourth grade at Barling Elementary School. As part of her project, "3-2-1 Economics," students learned about economics terms and budgeting, she said in a phone interview. They budgeted what they wanted for Christmas.

They went First National Bank to talk about savings plans, she said.

"They actually got to hold $100,000 in their hands," Gordon said.

In one activity, the kids played "service and goods charades," where they had to act out a service or a good and the class had to identify what it was and if it was a service or good. For example, one student acted out picking up trash, and the students correctly guessed "janitor" and identified that as a service, Gordon said.

In another activity, they were presented with items and had to decide which were needs and which were wants and when to decide to spend less money on certain items.

Teachers had to apply for the Bessie B. Moore awards and won $1,000. Economics Arkansas gave out 10 Bessie B. Moore awards and three Lifetime Achievement awards.