

# Arkansas School-Age "LINKS"

January/February 2008

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School-Age  
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## Fiddlin With the Farm Bill

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The 2007 Farm Bill offered an opportunity to improve the standards of school nutrition nationwide. Regrettably, that part of the bill has died, even as the remainder is under debate in the U.S. Congress, with prospects for passage now likely in early 2008. The Farm Bill might best be seen as a culture war about how nearly \$300 billion of taxpayer money is spent to influence what we all have to eat. My main concern is for our children.

You may already know the Farm Bill is largely devised to meet the needs and satisfy the interests of powerful agriculture and food industry elements. Trade associations put their lobbying muscle behind subsidies for growing certain crops, such as corn, and for not growing others. The Farm Bill has a lot to do with the low price of processed foods, which deliver copious amounts of high-fructose corn syrup (subsidized), for example, and the relatively high price of fresh produce (unsubsidized).

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Funded by  
Arkansas Department  
of Human Services  
Division of Child Care  
& Early Childhood  
Education  
through the  
Child Care  
Development Funds



**ARKANSAS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF**  
**HUMAN**  
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# Fiddlin With the Farm Bill

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The Farm Bill also sets guidelines for the foods made available to children in school. In that arena, what had been under debate was an update to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. Yes, folks, you heard correctly. There was actually debate on the pros and cons of updating nutrition guidelines that are over 40 years old. The kids for whom these nutrition guidelines were first written have grandkids of their own by now!

The recently defeated school nutrition amendment to the Farm Bill would have imposed restrictions on the quality and portion sizes of school foods. Sodas, for example would have been eliminated from elementary schools. The fat, saturated fat, sugar, sodium, and calorie content of side dishes and snacks would have been limited to correspond roughly with standards in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These reforms are both needed and reasonable, and thankfully have their champions in Congress. We can hope they will be back under consideration some time soon.

If anything, such modest reforms don't go far enough. Even if the amendment had been adopted, sports drinks would still have been available in high schools. Less restrictive standards would potentially apply to foods sold outside the "reimbursable meal" program. And the reforms would not have been required until 2011. Consequently, most advocates for children's health saw the compromise measures in the bill as better than nothing- but certainly not yet enough to place schools in the vanguard of healthful nutrition. Isn't that exactly where the schools that feed our kids belong?

As a public health pragmatist, I often note that perfect should not be made the enemy of good. Doing what we can to improve health is better than insisting on pie-in-the-sky policies.

But when it comes to the basic care and feeding of our children, I think it's appropriate to be pretty fussy. Consider that when the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 was written, there was no obesity epidemic. Fast food was a novelty. There were no video games, and no

videos for that matter; no Internet, and no personal computers. Schools reliably offered recess and Physical Education. And only adults got adult-onset diabetes.

In the span of a generation, due to decreasing activity levels, increasing portion sizes, and the mass adulteration of our food supply, propagated in no small measure by the predecessors of the farm bill now under debate, we have transformed what once was an occasional disease of mid-life, adult-onset diabetes into an increasingly common pediatric scourge. Type 2 diabetes now stalks those elementary school populations we are debating how to feed.

If we fed our children optimally, got them up and moving a bit more often, we could banish this intruder. Of all the common risk factors for heart disease, diabetes is perhaps most potent. So much so that expert guidelines for heart attack prevention in adults call for treating patients with diabetes just like patients who have had a heart attack already.

Adult onset diabetes in children, then, means nothing less than the threat of heart disease by adolescence.

As we chew on half-hearted measures to improve the Farm Bill, we should choke on the fact that the hearts of our children are in jeopardy.

Acts that harm or kill a child quickly are crimes of the gravest caliber. Acts that harm or kill children slowly are business-as-usual national nutrition policies. Can there really be any debate about the need for that to change?



# Becoming an Advocate for School-Age Care

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## Becoming an Advocate for School-Age Care:

### Tips for Getting Through to Legislators

By Tracey C. Ballas

You don't have to be an expert on politics or even an expert on the issues to be an effective advocate. All you have to do is realize that you, as a voter and constituent, have the power to influence your legislator. The way you influence (and put pressure on) your legislator is by communicating your thoughts and opinions to them. Create a simple message about an issue and write, call, fax, email, or visit your legislator with it.

### Tips for Contacting Legislators

The best way to contact your legislator is in whatever manner is easiest and most comfortable for you! The most important thing is the legislator hears from you and knows how you want him or her to vote.

Generally, legislators are only concerned about the opinions of their constituents. However, there are times when it can be effective to contact the chairperson or member of a particular committee that is deliberating on an issue of concern. It is also worth knowing what committees your own legislators sit on, so that you can contact them when their committees are working on a critical issue.



## Writing to Legislators

Legislators are concerned with how their constituents feel about the issues and have different systems within their offices to keep informed about what their constituents write. Usually, legislators don't personally read letters since they may receive hundreds or even thousands of them on any given day. However, they have staff members who read and draft responses. And, their staffers do let them know what their constituents are saying.

Letters should be concise and clear. The letter should consist of how you feel about an issue and a short explanation of why you feel that way. Legislators and their staffers don't need long detailed accounts of why you support an issue. A couple of sentences is enough. One exception is when you have a personal story that directly affects how you feel about the issue. For example, if you were writing about the need for funding to subsidize the cost of after-school programs and there are children in your family who will be left home alone or wandering the streets vulnerable to undesirable activities without it, then that is something appropriate to mention.

While all correspondence with your legislator is important, pre-printed letters or postcards are the least effective. While some legislator's answer these, others will simply count the number they receive. The impact of pre-printed letters and postcards come from the volume an office receives, not from the actual message.

In most cases, your legislator's office will respond to your letter. If not, or if you want to emphasize your position, a follow up call is a good idea.

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## Faxes and E-mails

If you want your opinion registered quickly, perhaps on the day of an important vote, calling is better than faxing. Frequently, legislators ask for the tally of how many people have called on a pending issue whereas faxes are sometimes processed like mail. If time is not an issue, writing letters may still be a better option in most offices. Too many things can go wrong with a fax. For example, part of the fax could get cut off or the address and names may be separated.

Since some legislators aren't yet comfortable with online technology, writing or calling might be a safer bet than email. Because they still are catching up with new technology, many offices are still figuring out how to incorporate the emerging way of communicating into their constituents services. Younger legislators are often more familiar and comfortable with updated technology. Email is informal and there are no set rules about emailing your legislator, always include your name and your home address (as opposed to just your email address).

## Calling

When you call your legislator, the first person you will speak to will be a receptionist who handles all incoming calls. This is most likely the person to whom you will be conveying your opinion. Although every office has its own system, receptionists generally record the views of the constituents calling in and pass them on to the appropriate staff member who reports to the legislator. Most likely, the receptionist is the only person to whom you will speak. Simply inform the receptionist that you are a constituent, and you would like to convey your feelings on an issue. Receptionists receive dozens to hundreds of constituent calls a day and will guide you through the phone call. If you give your address, you may receive a letter from your legislator's office thanking you for voicing your views. This is why it is important to leave

your name and address.

## Visiting

Contact your legislator's appointment secretary who can be reached by calling the main office number and asking for the receptionist. The appointment secretary or scheduler may set up an appointment over the phone but usually will ask you to send your request in writing. When sending a letter, the dates and times you are available, the issue you want to discuss, and the names of the others joining you on the visit. If your appointment is arranged over the phone, you should send a letter confirming the appointment date, time, location, the issues you want to discuss, and any other people who will be coming with you.

Legislator's offices are used to dealing with all sizes of meeting groups. Often it is easier to get an appointment if you go as a part of a larger group, but it is perfectly fine to go as an individual constituent. It does not matter if you visit the legislator at the home office or in the state or federal office. If, however, your legislator isn't available to meet you at a time that is convenient for you, consider meeting with an aide or another staff member. Aides are very important members of the legislator's team and are relied upon heavily by the legislator. Even if you have a meeting with the legislator, an aide will probably be in attendance. It is the aide's job to know everything about the issues they are assigned. Legislators turn to their aides for answers to questions, facts and figures, information on how an issue affects constituents, the status of bills, etc. Therefore, aides have a significant role in what happens in a legislative office.



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The only material needed in advance of the meeting is the letter requesting or reconfirming the meeting. Within the letter, put in a sentence or two describing the issue you want to discuss. At the visit, the legislator should be given written information concerning the issues you are talking about in the course of the visit.

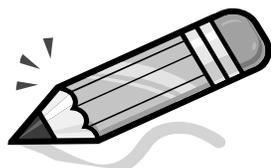
Although you are not expected to be an expert on the issue, you should be prepared before the visit. Have any materials you will be presenting ready to go. If you go in a group, it is always a good idea to have one person take the lead. She or he can introduce the group, make a brief statement about why you are there, and call on various people in the group to talk about their particular concerns.

The better prepared you are, the more comfortable you will feel. Legislative visits generally run 20 minutes in length. The staff will guide you through the visit whether you are meeting with them or the legislator. Just remember the job of the legislator and staff is to represent YOU, the constituent.

If you are asked a question you can't answer, explain that you don't currently have the answer but you would be happy to find out and send information after the meeting. Make sure, if you promise to send information later, that you do so in a timely manner.

Write a thank-you letter to the legislator and staff with whom you met. Reiterate your main arguments on the issue and include any additional information that might have been requested at the meeting. If the legislator was not present, you should still send him or her a copy of the thank-you letter that you sent to the aide.

*(Adapted from the National Council on Jewish Women publication, "Advocacy Made Easy")*



The Arkansas Out of School Network is in the process of inventorying what professional development opportunities and trainings currently exist in the state for persons working with Out of School/ Afterschool and Summer Care programs for children and youth (Kindergarten and above). If you offer or know of others that offer training opportunities targeted to this population, please encourage them to go to the following website to complete a short survey. The information will be critical in determining what next steps need to happen by way of educating out of school time professionals.

**Thank you for your support!**



**[http://www.arkansas.gov/  
childcare/programsupport/  
survey.html](http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/programsupport/survey.html)**

# Lights on Afterschool 2007 Local Update

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The Arkansas Out of School Network would like to thank all that showed their support and have shared their Lights On Afterschool event successes. Here are examples of some of the events that took place across the state.

## Little Rock

Little Rock Parks and Recreation hosted its 2nd Annual "Lights On Afterschool" pep rally celebration where participants from each of the four community made a presentation representing an activity they participate in afterschool. Activities featured included poetry reading, keyboard music, vocal performances, and cheerleading. Prior to the pep rally, the afterschool participants took part in an individual light bulb art contest as well as a group poster contest for each community center. The art work was displayed at the City Hall for all to see. Nearly 100 people were in attendance including the Mayor of Little Rock who read a proclamation to commemorate this special day.

## Bentonville

At the Bentonville Childcare Enrichment Services— Adventure Club, program participants were given light bulbs to decorate and write about the favorite things they like to do at their afterschool program. Once completed, they will be sent to governmental officials.

## Hope

Grandma's Child Care hosted a rally at Hope City Hall where various speakers to include Mayor Dennis Ramsey, Vice Mayor David Johnson, and State Representative Bubba Powers spoke to parents, children, local business leaders, educators, and other officials about three important contributions that afterschool programs make to Hope, including keeping kids safe and healthy, inspiring them to learn, and relieving working parents of worries about their children's activities during the afterschool hours. Forty-five people attended the event to include other afterschool providers in Hope.

## Blytheville

Students, parents and the entire community were extended an invitation to drop in and visit the Blytheville Intermediate School Boys and Girls Club program for a tour and to participate in various activities. An article was placed in the Blytheville Courier newspaper in addition to sending out personal invitations. Approximately 140 people attended. In addition, later in the month an event titled "Hands Across America" International Festival took place. Different booths highlighting different cultures were available along with various displays created by the after school staff and international guests. During the event Councilman John Singleton emphasized the importance of afterschool programs in the community. Various other government officials as well as members of the school board, district administrative offices, parents, teachers, etc. were in attendance. Approximately 127 attended this event.

## Jonesboro

The Westside Booster Club as part of the Westside Consolidated School hosted a carnival celebration for Lights On Afterschool. Various clubs and organizations from elementary to the high school level were asked to participate by setting up a booth. Those involved were encouraged to get involved by keeping any funds raised by their organization. Activities included temporary tattoos, bobbing for objects, limbo, balloon darts, pumpkin bowling, fishing for prizes, pony rides, huge inflatable bouncers and much more. Local agencies that had afterschool activities set up information booths. The Mayor of Bono, AR stressed the importance of afterschool activities and the Superintendent of Westside Consolidated Schools, Dr. James Best read a proclamation from Governor Mike Beebe. Approximately 550 people attended the event.

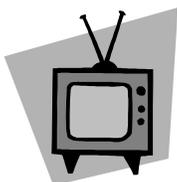
# Websites to CHECK OUT

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## [www.backyardnature.net](http://www.backyardnature.net)

Don't think that because it is winter you can't explore the wonders of the "great outdoors"! Check out this website to learn about school-linked activity ideas that are simple enough to be conducted on the grounds of your afterschool program!



## <http://www.commonsemmedia.org>

Media Literacy 101, a free media literacy toolkit for afterschool program, is available for download from Common Sense Media, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the media and entertainment lives of children and families. The toolkit is designed for children between the ages of 10-14 and includes five media literacy activities.

## <http://www.kidsacookin.ksu.edu>

Looking for some east and fun recipes ideas to whip up for snack or as a part of a great activity for youth? This website has super simple recipes that are sure to be a crowd pleaser for your afterschool program.



## <http://www.sciencetoymaker.org>

If you like to roll up your sleeves and make fun, mysterious toys that entice scientific investigation then this is the site for you! Contains a wide range of activity ideas including those that can be done with little adult intervention and last about 30 minutes to more advanced projects that are geared to middle school youth and require more adult participation.

## <http://www.gameskidsplay.net>

Games can serve a wide variety of purposes. Children can play circle games, outdoor high-energy games, clapping games, ball games, mental games and much, much more. Learn about new games, International games, and variations of old favorites at this website.



## <http://www.exploratorium.edu/cooking/>

Discover how a pinch of curiosity can improve your cooking! Explore recipes, activities, and Webcasts that will enhance your understanding of the science behind food and cooking.

# Professional Development

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## New year... new college semester... new STAFF?



**Give your new staff a  
jumpstart to better  
understanding their role  
as an afterschool  
professional!**

**Enroll them in  
School-Age Specialist  
Online Training!**

**Get the high quality training you need in a way that is  
easy for the working School-Age Professional to  
access!**



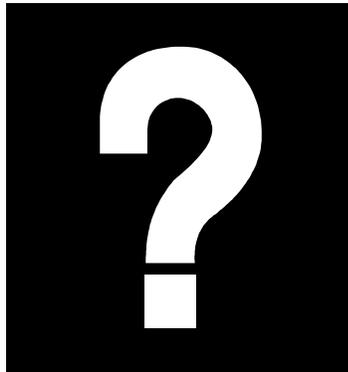
### **Online Module topics:**

Understanding School-Age Youth  
Health and Safety  
Planning the Environment  
Appropriate Activities  
Program Planning  
Guiding Behavior  
School-Age Youth in Groups  
Building Relationships

To register, call Woodie Sue Herlein with  
ASU Childhood Services at 888-429-1585

Come join the fastest growing group of early childhood and school-age professionals in the STATE!

Becoming a member of the Registry is now easier than ever with a NEW quick and EASY application!



## What are you waiting for?

Become a part of the Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development Registry and gain:

- Easy online access to your training transcript, consisting of the verified trainings you have attended in the past.
- One-stop shopping for training opportunities.
- Online registration can even be done quickly and at your convenience!
- The ability to move forward to reach professional career goals by use of the SPECTRUM as your guide.
- Satisfaction of knowing that you are taking control of your professional development!

It's Free!

**Call (888) 429-1585 for an application or visit us on the web at**

**<http://professionalregistry.ystate.edu/>**

# Activity Ideas

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## Pennies in the Pot

Start the game with 25 pennies. Players take turns rolling a single die and picking up the number of pennies he or she rolls on the die. To pick up the last pennies, however, the number on the die must match *exactly* the number of pennies that remain. When there are no pennies left in the pot, the player with the most pennies is the winner.



## Icy Sun Catchers

To create one Icy Sun Catcher you will need an old shoelace, water, a 9-inch disposable pie tin, and natural materials gathered from the outdoors such as pine needles, twigs, leaves, pine cones and acorns. (Remind children to respect nature by only using items that have fallen to the ground; do not break twigs, pinecones or leaves from trees.) Fold the shoelace in half and place the two ends across the center of the pie tin. Arrange the desired natural materials in the tin. Fill the tin with water and leave it outdoors so that the water can freeze. When the water has frozen, remove the ice from the tin. Hang the Icy Sun Catcher so children can see it from a window.

## Sink or Float Experiment

Gather a clear plastic or glass container, water, vinegar, baking soda, teaspoon, food coloring, and small items to drop into the container such as raisins, dried fruit bits, rice, broken bits of spaghetti and small pieces of fruit. Fill the container nearly full with 3 parts water and 1 part vinegar. Add one teaspoon of baking soda **VERY SLOWLY** (it may bubble over). When the bubbles settle, add a second teaspoon of baking soda. When the bubbles settle from the second addition, add a few drops of food

coloring. Drop in a few of the small items and watch to see if they sink or float. (Typically, the items will sink to the bottom and then rise again a few minutes later and then sink again). If the movement slows down, add another teaspoon of baking soda. The Science Kids at Home website (<http://www.sciencekidsathome.com>) states "the vinegar is an acid and the baking soda is a base. When you combine them, a chemical reaction produces carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide bubbles build up on the surface of the object. When enough bubbles attach to the object, it floats to the surface and releases the gas. Then it sinks back to the bottom to start the process again."

## Chia Pet

Gardening activities can be fun for children in afterschool programs, so consider growing your own "chia creations" indoors. You will need non-hardening modeling clay, chia seeds, quart size plastic bags with fasteners, paper towels, and a spray bottle of water. Have each child make an animal or figure out of the clay. The creation should be small enough to fit inside the plastic bag. Press seeds firmly into the clay where desired- these are the areas that the hair or "fur" (depending on what the clay creation is) will grow when the seeds sprout. The creation should be sprayed completely with water. Then, have each child wet a paper towel and fold it to fit inside of the plastic bag. Have each child place their creation into a bag on top of the paper towel. Fasten the bag so that the moisture won't escape. Have each child spray their chia creation regularly to keep the seeds damp. If the seeds begin to get moldy, keep the bag open for a day or two. When the chia creation starts to sprout, take it out and display it on a sunny windowsill.

## Make a Triarama

A triarama is a three-sided display that is usually made with three triangular sides. The three triangles are placed back to back to create a 3-D pyramid shape. In most triaramas, the information is placed on the inside of the pyramid, making it similar to a diorama. However, information can also be placed on the outside or on both the outside and the inside. A triarama can also be made by placing three large rectangles end to end forming a triangular display.

- First cut a square out of a sheet of construction paper that is 8 inches X 8 inches.
- Next, fold the top right corner of the square down to the lower left-hand corner, forming a triangle. Fold that triangle in half again.
- Open the square and then cut one of the fold lines to the center of the square.
- Place glue close to the edges on one of the triangular flaps.
- Put the adjacent triangle directly on top of the flap with glue, forming a pyramid.

## Lava Pit

Make up a story that the group is being chased and they need to get across a field of hot lava. Give each group paper plates explaining that when they step on these plates they will not sink into the lava. (Give each team about 1/3rd the number of plates as people.) The group must figure out how to get the entire group from Point A to Point B (both marked by masking tape on the floor) from one side of the Hot Lava Pit to the other. Only one person can be on a plate at a time and the plates must be picked up and moved. The key to the game is that only part of the team will be able to cross the field at a time and one person will need to work their way back across the field to help the rest of the team

across. A time limit can also be placed on this game. Be careful not to slip on the paper plates!

## Straw Through Potato Science Experiment (or is it MAGIC?)

The challenge is quite simple: Stab the straw through the potato without bending or breaking the straw. Most will think it can't be done but you, of course, know better. You will need a plastic straw, raw potato, and paper towels. As you hold the potato, keep your fingers on the front and thumb on the back and not on the top and bottom. Grab the straw with your writing hand and cap the top end with your thumb. Hold on firmly to both the straw and the potato and with a quick, sharp stab, drive the straw into and partway out of the narrow end of the spud and not the fatter middle part.

### How does it work?

The secret is inside the straw: it's air! Placing your thumb over the end of the straw traps the air inside. When you trap the air inside the straw, the air molecules compress and give the straw strength which keeps the sides from bending as you jam the straw through the potato. The trapped, compressed air makes the straw strong enough to cut through the skin, pass through the potato, and out the other side. Without your thumb covering the hole, the air is simply pushed out of the straw and it crumples and breaks as it hits the hard potato surface. After you stab the straw, take a look at the end that passed through the potato. There's a plug-o'-spud inside the straw. Visit [www.stevespanglerscience.com](http://www.stevespanglerscience.com) for more fun experiments!



# Resolve to be More Fiscally Responsible

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The New Year has always been a time for us to look forward to the upcoming year and to reflect on the changes we want (or need) to make plus resolve to follow through on those changes. This LINKS edition has focused on helping you to be aware of important issues affecting school age youth and out of school programs. Whether you resolve to be aware of the nutritional needs of youth, take action as a school age advocate by becoming a member of the Registry or learning more about AOSN, or recommit to your professional growth by taking part in various school-age specific trainings, there is no better time to resolve to follow through in these areas and start making a positive change!

One of the common “Top Ten” Resolutions that are made each year is to get out of debt. Why not help the children in your program learn how to earn, share, save, and spend money in a fiscally responsible way so that “getting out of debt” will never make their list of resolutions as they get older. There are various curriculums available to help introduce the components of becoming a fiscally responsible person that are worth checking out. Here are samples of a few:

## Junior Achievement

**JA Dollars and \$ense** teaches students about earning, spending, sharing, and saving money, in addition to businesses they can start or jobs they can perform to earn money. **JA Dollars and \$ense** encompasses economics and business curriculum for students in grades three through five. The program emphasizes social studies content while providing a strong focus on mathematics, reading, and writing skills. The **JA Dollars and \$ense** experience enhances students’ classroom curriculum. Students are encouraged to use innovative thinking to learn money-management skills that support positive attitudes as they explore and enhance their career aspirations.

Through a variety of hands-on activities and technological supplements designed to support differentiated learning styles, students

develop a better understanding of the relationship between what they learn at school and their successful participation in a worldwide economy.

**JA Dollars and \$ense** is a series of six sessions. The program is packaged in a portfolio containing detailed session plans, informative Take-Home Flyers for students and families, and additional learning materials to ensure a successful experience for students, volunteers, after-school staff, and teachers.

All JA programs are designed to support the skills and competencies identified by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. These programs also augment school-based, work-based, and connecting activities for communities with school-to-work initiatives.



## Jump\$tart Coalition

First convened in December, 1995, the Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy determined that the average student who graduates from high school lacks basic skills in the management of personal financial affairs. Many are unable to balance a checkbook and most simply have no insight into the basic survival principles involved with earning, spending, saving, and investing. Many young people fail in the management of their first consumer credit experience, establish bad financial management habits, and stumble through their lives learning by trial and error. The Coalition’s direct objective is to encourage curriculum enrichment to ensure that basic personal financial management skills are attained during the K-12 educational experience. The wheels of education do not need to be reinvented, they simply require balance. In the “Clearinghouse” section of their website, you can find a variety of free resources and activity ideas that correspond to various books that address fiscal matters. To learn more visit: <http://www.jumpstart.org> and click on the “Clearinghouse” tab.