

***THE ECONOMIC AWARENESS & REALISM
LESSONS FOR YOUTH (EARLY) PROJECT***



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Introduction

The Texas Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs was established in 1999 with a primary purpose to develop statewide initiatives and create public awareness to assist Clubs and the youth they serve. The Alliance is the statewide membership association for all Texas Boys & Girls Clubs.

The Alliance and Citi™ have partnered in the delivery of financial literacy programs to youth in Texas Boys & Girls Clubs since 2004, providing children and youth six to 18 years old statewide with high-quality, targeted financial literacy programming delivered by Club professionals.

The *Economic Awareness and Realism Lessons for Youth (EARLY) Project* is the most recent collaborative project of these partners. EARLY was funded by Citi and launched by the Alliance in 2009, with a goal of preparing participating Club members across Texas for a life of financial responsibility. The effort was directed toward enabling participating youth to make positive financial decisions early in life, as well as toward equipping them to have positive impacts on their younger siblings' and adult family members' financial knowledge and behaviors, multiplying the project's impacts.

This report provides a summary of the results achieved by the Texas Boys & Girls Club members who participated in the EARLY Project. These results were analyzed and this summary was created by Holly C. VanScoy, Ph.D., of Academic Research Associates, an independent, outside evaluation consultant.

The EARLY Project

Project Plan

Citig Foundation awarded the Texas Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs funds, through the Texas Boys & Girls Clubs Foundation, for the EARLY Project in 2009. The Alliance sub-granted the funds for implementation of club-based EARLY Project implementation to Boys & Girls Clubs serving distressed neighborhoods in Bexar, Travis, Harris, Ector, Tarrant, Collin and Taylor Counties, where crime rates, drug activity and poverty are among the highest in Texas, and the ability of children, youth and young adults to legally acquire and manage personal wealth are among the lowest.

Seventeen Boys & Girls Clubs, operating 23 program sites, principally serving economically challenged youth participated. These Clubs delivered the *Citi Financial Education Curriculum* to their members in third through eighth grade. In addition, each Club created a culminating project event or activity through which participating youngsters had an opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of the financial literacy knowledge and skills they had gained through EARLY Project involvement.

Each Club delivered the *Curriculum* to two grade-distinct cohorts – the younger cohort comprised Club members in third through fifth grade; the older, Club members in sixth through eighth grade.

Expected Outcomes

Prior to rolling out the project, the Alliance established two key outcomes expected to result from project participation. These were:

1. At least 90% participating youth increase their knowledge of financial literacy.
2. At least 60% of participating youth demonstrate an increased awareness and knowledge of financial responsibility.

Target Population

The EARLY Project was targeted for delivery to at least 690 Boys & Girls Club members in third through eighth grade statewide, with an emphasis on serving youth whose families were of low- to moderate-income.

The EARLY Evaluation Plan

A pre-post, single group quasi-experimental evaluation design with a qualitative participant observation component was created to assess the extent to which the expected outcomes of the EARLY Project were achieved by participating youth.

Instruments

Prior to the EARLY Project launch, the evaluator designed a financial literacy knowledge pre- and post-test instrument for each grade-level cohort. The instrument for the younger cohort included 15 questions, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 15. The instrument for the older cohort included 25 questions, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 25.

The pre- and post-test version of each instrument included the same questions, in different orders.

A rubric – or standardized form – for Club leaders to use for recording their observations of participants' financial responsibility skills during the planning and execution of a culminating project activity was also designed. The form required leaders to record the number and percent of project participants who participated in the culminating activity and the number and percent who: a) demonstrated knowledge of the need to plan for or budget income and expenses for the project; b) contributed to the planning and budgeting process of the project; and, c) contributed ideas or suggestions to the project that were aligned with the curriculum

A set of instructions on using the instruments and a computer-based spreadsheet to record students' performance on both was also prepared by the evaluator. All forms were reviewed, approved and disseminated by the Alliance Executive Director to participating Clubs prior to the start of the project. A copy of each of these instruments is provided in the Appendix.

Data Collection

Prior to delivery of the *Curriculum*, a Club leader administered the pre-test to all members of each participating cohort, recording participants' pre-test scores on the standardized spreadsheet. After completing delivery of the *Citi Financial Education Curriculum*, the Club leader administered the post-test to all members of each cohort, then recorded the post test scores on the spreadsheet. During members' planning and execution of the final activity of the project Club leaders observed each participant and completed the rubric.

Evaluation Results

The independent evaluation of the EARLY Project showed **overwhelmingly positive results, including significant knowledge gains and observed demonstrations of financial responsibility skills** by a large majority of Club members in both cohorts.

Participation

Some 700 Club members participated in the EARLY project in the 2009-2010 evaluation period. Usable evaluation data on knowledge gains – comprising *both* a completed and correctly scored pre-test *and* a completed post-test – was provided by Club leaders on 459 members.

Of these, 345 (75.2%) were Club members in third through fifth grade and 114 (24.8%) were Club members in sixth through eighth grade.

Observational data regarding the demonstration of financial responsibility during the planning and implementation of the final activity was provided for 341 participating Club members.

Gains in Knowledge

Third through fifth grade cohort. Among the 345 third through fifth grade Club members participating in EARLY, pre-test scores ranged from 2 to 15. Six youths – comprising 1.8% of the cohort -- answered all knowledge items correctly on the pre-test, earning a perfect score of 15. The cohort's average score on the pretest was 7.3, which represented correct responses to slightly fewer than half (48.7%) of the items.

On the posttest, Club members' scores ranged from 6 to 15, with 44 youths – comprising 13.8% of the cohort -- earning a perfect score. Five members earned a perfect score on both the pre- and posttests.

The cohort's average score on the posttest was 12.5, which represented correct responses to 83.3% of the questions. Two participants who scored very high on the pre-test scored lower on the post-test. Twenty-one participants' scores did not change from pre- to post-test, including the five who earned perfect scores at both administrations.

The average gain from pre- to post-test for the cohort was 5.2 points, representing a very significant knowledge increase for the cohort. Some 319

(92%) of this cohort's participants achieved a higher score on the posttest administration.

Sixth through eighth grade cohort. Among the 114 sixth through eighth grade Club members participating in EARLY, pre-test scores ranged from 4 to 23. The cohort's average score on the pretest was 13.3, which represented correct responses to just over half (53.2%) of the questions.

On the posttest, Club members' scores ranged from 13 to 25, with 2 youths -- comprising 1.8% of the cohort -- earning a perfect score.

The cohort's average score on the posttest was 20.7, which represented correct responses to some 83% of the questions. One Club member in this cohort scored lower on the posttest than on the pretest, and two Club members' scores did not change.

The average gain from pre- to post-test for the fifth through eighth grade cohort was 7.4 points, representing a very significant knowledge increase for the cohort. Some 111 (97.4%) of this cohort's participants achieved a higher score on the posttest.

Overall knowledge gains. Figure 1 summarizes the results from both cohorts.

Figure 1: Summary of all participating Club members' performance

Cohort	# Completing both tests	Average % correct on pretest	Average % correct on posttest	Average % change ¹	% With improved score
3 rd - 5 th	345	48.7	83.3	34.6	92.0
6 th - 8 th	114	53.2	82.8	29.6	97.4
Total	459	49.8	83.1	33.3	93.7

As shown, 94% of all EARLY Project participants showed knowledge gains in financial literacy from pre- to posttest, with an average increase in knowledge of 33.3% achieved. This **exceeds** the outcome expected by the Texas Alliance.

¹ All mean differences between pre- and posttest scores were statistically significant at the .05 level, one-tailed, using a t-test analysis.

Demonstration of Financial Responsibility

After Clubs completed delivering the *Citi Financial Responsibility Curriculum*, each engaged members in both cohorts participating in the EARLY Project in planning for and implementing a culminating event, which afforded an opportunity for youth to translate their knowledge into the demonstration of observable skills. Descriptions and photographs of these events are provided in the Appendix.

Project leaders used the rubric instrument to record the number of youth who participated in project planning and implementation, as well as the number and percentage of youth who were observed demonstrating a financial responsibility skill, including knowledge of need for planning and budgeting income and expenses for the project; contributing to budgeting and planning processes; and/or contributing ideas or suggestions to the project that were financially responsible. Figure 2 provides a summary of these observations.

Figure 2: Club members' demonstration of financial responsibility

# of members rated	# and % observed participating in project development/ implementation		# and % demonstrating knowledge of need to plan/budget		# and % contributing to planning and budgeting		# and % contributing financially responsible ideas or suggestions	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
341	217	63.6	234	68.6	213	62.5	208	61

As shown, 341 of the 459 Club members – comprising 74.2% -- in both cohorts were observed by Club leaders. Well over 60% of them demonstrated at least one skill related to financial responsibility in the planning of the event to culminate the Project. Most participants demonstrated all three skills. This represents a very substantial proportion of Project participants observed translating the knowledge gained in the Project into action, particularly given the limited time frame for leader observation and the limited circumstances in which the participants were observed. It is very likely that the Club members participating in the EARLY Project also translated the financial responsibility knowledge they had gained into skills they demonstrated in their homes and classrooms, but these demonstrations occurred outside the observational frame of the Club project and were not accessible to the evaluation.

The expected outcome of the Texas Alliance with respect to financial responsibility skill demonstration was **exceeded**.

Conclusions & Recommendation

Conclusions

Results from the evaluation of knowledge and skills in Texas Boys & Girls Club members participating in the EARLY Project who were provided with instruction in the *Citi Financial Education Curriculum* in 2009-2010 show that these youth achieved significant gains in knowledge, with many of them observed by their Club leaders immediately translating this knowledge into skills associated with financial responsibility.

It is noteworthy that the low scores of both cohorts on the knowledge pretest – 48.7 for third through fifth graders and 53.2 for sixth through eighth graders – represent “failing” grades prior to exposure to the *Citi Curriculum*. Such scores provide strong evidence of the need for structured financial education experiences for at-risk youth in Texas. The posttest scores for these cohorts represent knowledge mastery that is substantially improved and confirms the ability of instruction in the *Citi Curriculum* to increase at-risk youngsters’ knowledge in out-of-school settings, such as Boys & Girls Clubs.

The gains in knowledge identified on the standardized tests is corroborated by the observational data gathered in a naturalistic settings, as participants took part in planning and implementing an actual Club event. Moreover, it is very likely that the number of Club members demonstrating skills during the Project represents an underestimate of the number whose financial responsibility skills were positively impacted by the Project because of the relatively limited circumstances during which these skills could be demonstrated, observed and recorded during the evaluation timeframe.

Recommendations

The evaluation provides strong support for continuing the EARLY Project in Texas Boys & Girls Clubs. At a reasonable cost-per-member, the effort achieves very strong, positive results. Moreover, as it continues to be provided to Club members, many may have an opportunity to participate more than a single time between third and eighth grade. It is predicted that the participation effects from multiple exposures will be additive – that is, youth will continue to gain financial knowledge and demonstrate increasing levels of financial responsibility as the number of experiences they complete increases. Clubs should explore adding additional, more complex information in subsequent years to engage and challenge members who achieve mastery or near-mastery during their first period of participation.

APPENDIX



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