

# *Hamblen County JA BizTown and Junior Achievement Programming*



In early 2008, HC\*EXCELL was told by area business and industry leaders that there was a need for incoming employees to have improved basic workforce skills. Coinciding with this request, Don Rogers approached the HC\*EXCELL Board of Directors and Hamblen County School System with a vision of strengthening Hamblen County's future workforce through expanding Junior Achievement (JA) programming in the Hamblen County elementary schools. JA Worldwide® is the world's largest non-profit education organization dedicated to teaching young people about business, economics, and free enterprise. At the time only 3 to 4 Hamblen County elementary classes were participating in Junior Achievement.

Rogers offered to fund a program for three years if HC\*EXCELL would develop a plan to manage and expand JA programming in the Hamblen County elementary schools. With the approval of the Hamblen County Board of Education, the HC\*EXCELL Board voted to develop a three year JA Expansion pilot to introduce our youngest population to basic business skills and knowledge. The project objective was to provide a student pathway to connect the dots between academic curriculum and applied skills.

The program began by expanding JA sessions in the schools currently participating: Alpha, Fairview Marguerite and Manley. The pilot targeted second and third grades with the intent of broadening the program to include first through fifth grade by the third year. Rotary Club of Morristown A.M. joined the partnership by providing materials and volunteers to teach programming.

Original programming included Junior Achievement Program Cost of \$225 per class and training by JA staff to volunteer instructors who conducted classroom sessions. HC\*EXCELL, schools and JA staff recruited volunteer instructors to teach with the classroom teacher in the classroom; each Junior Achievement class was conducted over five sessions of 30 minutes for grades 1-2 and 45 minutes for grade 3 in either the fall or spring and Pre and Post assessments.

In 2009 John Hay Elementary School was added to the JA Pilot Program increasing the number of elementary schools involved to four.



Early feedback resulted in first grade being removed from the program's expansion plan. In the third year JA Biztown for fifth graders was added at the four pilot schools. JA Biztown teachers taught a 12 week curriculum that consisted of 10-12 hours of instruction culminating in a participatory 4 1/2 session in Clinton, Tennessee.

JA Biztown encompasses important elements of community and economy, work readiness, financial literacy, and business management. As



part of the program, students spend the day at the JA BizTown facility in Clinton. This on-site visit provides students with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in school in a realistic setting. Each student assumes a job, produces and/or sells products or services, receives a paycheck, works on a business team, repays business loans, shops, and manages a personal bank account. Throughout the program, students are encouraged to use critical thinking skills to learn about key economic concepts as they explore and enhance their understanding of free enterprise.

HC\*EXCELL and partners paid \$20 per student which covered teacher training, a 4 ½ hour BizTown experience and pre and post assessments; schools paid for student transportation and lunch for students and chaperones.

Following the first year of JA Biztown and the final year of the pilot program, HC\*EXCELL conducted a teacher survey to determine the impact of the JA pilot program. From the survey results and review of program costs; the HC\*EXCELL Board and staff developed a plan to end the volunteer instruction program and expand JA Biztown to all Hamblen County fifth grade classes. By 2013, all Hamblen County elementary schools were participating in JA Biztown, with over 800 students, per year, engaging in and learning about workforce applications.

Currently, HC\*EXCELL contributors are offering JA Biztown programming, simulation day and t-shirts to all Hamblen County 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. As one fifth grade JA Biztown remarked to the HC\*EXCELL Board of Directors, “I have been waiting for JA Biztown since the second grade”.

