

## 'Playing the Market' Gets New Meaning at Schools

Game Allows Students to Virtually Invest in Real Stocks

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Thursday, November 20, 2008

Manassas sixth-grader Anthony DiRenzo said it has been a long-standing tradition to meet his dad in front of the television at 6:30 each night to watch PBS's "Nightly Business Report."

The difference now, the 11-year-old said, is that instead of following his dad's stocks, he is following his own as he invests through a virtual stock market game offered at Mayfield Intermediate School.

"I've always watched this with my dad, but now I have my own investments and am telling him what's happening in the market," Anthony said. "I like following the stocks to see when to buy and sell. It's exciting."

Anthony is one of 21 students in Mayfield's Biz Kids Club participating in the fall session of the Stock Market Game. The program, created by the nonprofit Foundation for Investor Education, allows students nationwide to invest virtually in stocks and market funds in a real-world simulation.

"The kids just love this game, and it is hugely motivating," said Rachel Powell, a coordinator for [George Mason University's](#) Center for Economic Education, who provides support to Northern Virginia teachers using the game. "Anything you can tie to money, kids can learn. It's a game to them, but at the same time, they are absorbing so much content."

Mayfield computer lab teacher Ruth Hollander brought the game to the school this year. She said that now is a particularly interesting time to play because of the struggling economy. Students must stay abreast of current events and put extra thought into investments as they work to keep their portfolios afloat, she said.

The unstable markets might make it a more exciting time to invest, Powell said.

"Whenever the market is volatile, it makes the game more interesting, because students are going to see more changes in their portfolio," Powell said. "When the market is at an even pace, it's not always as interesting to follow."

For the game, students are divided into teams of four and given \$100,000 of virtual money. Teams use the Internet and news updates to monitor and research stocks, invest and determine when to buy and sell.

"This is about entrepreneurship, taking risks and calculating numbers," Hollander said about the game, started in 1977. "Students also have to come to a consensus when buying and selling stocks. It's not very easy for kids or adults to do that."

Stocks and mutual funds in the game must be listed on the [American Stock Exchange](#), Nasdaq Stock Market or the [New York Stock Exchange](#) and have traded in the past seven days. A 7 percent interest rate is charged on debt, and a 5 percent interest raid is paid on cash balances.

"I joined this game to learn how to invest so I will have a better future," said Mayfield sixth-grader William Geddes. "Right now, I'm happy this is just a game and a way to experiment, because it's the worst time to invest."

William's team's total equity stood at about \$93,300 Saturday. Group members said they decided to invest in four groups: food, clothing, technology and necessities. That way, they said, if one industry is failing, another will help keep their portfolio strong.

"One stock I'm pulling for is Hasbro," said Anthony, who is on William's team. "As we get closer to Christmas, I'm thinking toy companies and food companies will jump. We will see the effect of everyone getting gifts and food for their big parties."

Although Anthony is banking on the holiday season to help his stocks, fellow club members and fifth-graders Jace Moore and Connor Howard said they think [Nike](#) is the hot stock. Their team's total equity stood at about \$96,500 Saturday.

"Nike is cool, and lots of people buy Nike," Connor said. "We've been researching it on the company's Web site and at places like Moneycentral.com. The problem is stocks can go up or down really fast, so you have to be careful."

The duo also invested in [Disney](#), [Costco](#) and [Hershey's](#), said Jace, who joined the game to follow the economic situation with his family and in hopes of becoming an investor.

"My parents kept saying the Dow is going down and the economy is bad, and then the Dow is going up," he said. "I wanted to learn what they were talking about, and now I know. I also learned you can't just click and buy things. You have to study the stocks first and make wise decisions."

Jace is on one of five teams at Mayfield. About 280 teams are playing in Northern Virginia, and about 1,200 play throughout the state, according to statistics from the Virginia Council on Economic Education, which helps coordinate the game in schools.

Students compete on a regional and statewide level, Powell said. The top three teams in the state, selected based on total equity in their account as of 4 p.m. Dec. 5, will be invited to a ceremony in Richmond. Powell said GMU will also recognize the top three elementary, middle and high school teams in the Northern Virginia region, inviting them to the campus for a reception.

Anthony said he has high hopes for his team and is ready to invest real money down the road.

But when asked about a career in investment, he said: "We'll figure that out in the future. For now, it's just for fun."