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Investing in economic literacy

Elementary school teacher received grant to start 'mini-society'

By **CAROLYN STEEVES**
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CHARLOTTE — While a society run by 8-year-olds may conjure images from *Lord of the Flies*, Eva Graves has helped her elementary students create a society where they learn economic principles along with other life lessons.

Graves, a 35-year veteran of the classroom, teaches third-grade at Elizabeth Traditional Elementary School in Charlotte. She heard about mini-society concept and had been anxious to implement it in her classroom. Earlier this year, she received a financial literacy grant for \$200 from ING Direct in order to start the program.

"As a teacher I read and go to a lot of workshops and talk to a lot of people and I have heard about mini-society," Graves said. Mini-society is a national program that many schools have. Each society is different depending on the class objectives and the grade level.

Graves explained that the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for the third-grade has a goal about teaching students various economic principles. These principles include scarcity and supply and demand.

Graves started the mini-society at the end of September. She said the students "are enjoying it very much. They look forward to our weekly lessons."

The mini-society mimics society as a whole. The students use money that they designed called "scholar dollars." They perform jobs in the classroom for money. There are 24 students and only 12 jobs, so Graves rotates the jobs weekly.

In the future Graves will create a store and a bank in the mini-society so that students can choose to save their money or buy products in the store.

"There will be some items that will be scarce and I'm going to do that on purpose to re-enforce the

concept of scarcity," Graves said. She explained that the prices will fluctuate due to students buying items and a lack of items to buy.

One of the things that appeals to

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Graves as a teacher is that she can incorporate various methods of learning in the mini-society.

"Within this society, you're able to teach students through their preferred way of learning," Graves explained. She sent home questionnaires to the parents to learn how their children prefer to learn.

"Me knowing these things about my students has helped me design some learning opportunities so

they can learn through their preferred modality," Graves said.

Apart from economics, students are learning about responsibility, using problem-solving skills and developing social skills. She also includes elements of math, reading and art. Students designed their money and will be creating the store front when the store is introduced.

Graves is even getting the parents involved. One parent is an accountant and he will come into the classroom to talk to the kids about what he does. Another parent has volunteered to help with the classroom bank.

Graves plans to continue the mini-society until the end of May.

"I'm very excited about having the opportunity to receive this grant and incorporate this learning strategy." ■



MecklenburgTimes photo by Carolyn Steeves

TEACHING THE FUNDAMENTALS: Eva Graves shows students some of the economics material they will use as part of her class' mini-society.