To Address State's Financial Literacy Crisis, Junior Achievement of Tennessee Launches New Free Course for High Schools

Tennessee has the third highest rate of personal bankruptcies per capita in the country; filings increased 6.6% last year

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – September 1, 2026 – Junior Achievement of Tennessee (JA) today launched a new school-based financial literacy course, **JA Financial Literacy,** to help combat the state's financial literacy crisis and drive economic mobility. Through an innovative pilot program, the half-credit, turnkey curriculum is available at no cost to schools and includes direct teacher training, resources, and support.

While Tennessee adopted a financial literacy mandate more than a decade ago, the state has continued to rank at the bottom of key indicators; Tennessee has the 3rd highest number of personal bankruptcies per capita and ranks 40th in financial literacy. Personal bankruptcy filings increased 6.6% last year. **JA Financial Literacy** prepares high schoolers to graduate financially capable, workforce-ready, and prepared for long-term economic success.

Learn how to adopt JA Financial Literacy in your school

"1 in 3 people would need to go into debt to cover a $1,000 emergency expense, meaning the next unexpected medical bill, car issue, or job loss could be devastating," said Todd Counter, President, Junior Achievement of Middle Tennessee. "Improving personal finance education in Tennessee is a critical issue that should concern and motivate us all, and we are grateful for the support of Governor Lee and the General Assembly in making this curriculum available to schools at no cost."

In the course, students learn how to make informed financial decisions related to earning, spending, saving, investing, credit, debt management, and long-term financial planning. The student-centered, real-world instruction is aligned with JA's 5E Model - Engage, Equip, Empower, Elevate, and Excel - providing a structured, proven approach. Research shows that JA Alumni are more likely to have a college degree, feel confident managing money, have career success, and have started a business as an adult.

"Preparing young people to succeed is at the heart of JA's mission, and through our programs we've developed a strong network of school and community partners in 70 counties across the state," said Leigh Mansberg, CEO and President, Junior Achievement of Memphis and the Mid-South. "We are encouraged by the initial interest in this program and look forward to connecting with even more schools and districts who are interested in adopting an evidence-based, standards-aligned, scalable solution."

Educators and school leaders interested in adopting JA Financial Literacy can visit jatennessee.org to learn more and schedule a meeting. Teachers can begin implementing the half-credit course as soon as mid-semester, or may elect to start in the spring.

“One of the things we are most excited about with this course is the level of direct training, support, and resources available to teachers,” said Callie Archer, President, Junior Achievement of East Tennessee. “We know that responsibility for the financial literacy mandate varies by school and want to ensure this course can be implemented seamlessly and consistently across the state. There’s too much at stake for our students, and ultimately our state’s workforce and economy, to accept anything less.”

Junior Achievement has operated in Tennessee for more than 50 years. Through its five affiliates – Junior Achievement of Middle Tennessee, Junior Achievement of Memphis and the Mid-South, Junior Achievement of East Tennessee, Junior Achievement of the Ocoee Region, and Junior Achievement of Chattanooga – JA provides services to every county in the state to advance its mission of empowering young people to succeed in a global economy.

To learn more about JA Financial Literacy, visit jatennessee.org.

###