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Kemper Elementary School Divas win 1st place at Colorado Stock Market Game

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Whoever said today's youths don't have financial savvy hasn't met the Kemper Elementary School Divas.

The Divas - Christian Bennett, Destiny Blackwater, Laryssa Main, Jenna Melton, Sierra Rotsaert and Katie Wilson-Rhodes - won first place in the elementary division of the Colorado Stock Market Game this spring.

The Colorado Stock Market Game, sponsored by the Colorado Council for Economic Education, offers students the opportunity to learn about the stock market and invest in a variety of companies.

"It is a competition for fourth- through 12th-graders throughout the state," said Toni Hover, gifted facilitator at Kemper and Manaugh elementary schools. "They have a fall, early spring and late spring competition. This spring there were 684 teams."

The competition started in January and ran through April 23. Teachers were offered numerous lesson plans and support materials to teach their students the basics of investment and the stock market.

Twenty-seven fourth-graders at Kemper participated in the competition, a total of six teams.

"You teach kids about basic economics then it goes pretty quickly into the stock market," Hover said. "It covers what are stocks and what is a company. We do research and team them how to do research on the computer, looking at charts and at company profits and losses."

Each team was given a virtual \$100,000 to invest according to the competition guidelines. Teams were not allowed to purchase penny stocks, those worth less than \$5 a share, and had to commit to at least 100 shares of any stock they bought.

"I talked to them about diversification," Hover said. "I encouraged them to invest \$20,000 in five different industries."

Students invested in a wide variety of companies. The Divas chose to invest their money based on their interests, prompted by teacher Debbie Garner.

"Deb talked to these girls about what are the things they like to buy," Hover said.

Garner encouraged her students to invest in companies that reflected their own personalities. That led the group of girls to begin researching fashion companies.

"They started looking at what they were wearing and began researching those companies," Garner said. "They they asked if they could buy makeup, so they went that direction, too."

The girls had fun with their investments.

"We got to buy all kinds of clothes and makeup," Destiny Blackwater said.

The Divas invested in companies such as Aeropostale and Maybelline, which they learned is a subsidiary of L'Oreal.

Each group spent a great deal of time researching various companies. Groups were required to make purchasing decisions together as a team.

"We only had four computers to work with, and we had the six teams," Garner said. "They would have to take turns. Some would be researching stock then they would have to come back and work in a cooperative group."

The educators were impressed how quickly the students learned investment skills and how much they enjoyed the activity.

"We learned to take care of our money," Jenna Melton said. "If you buy bad stocks, you have to get rid of them. You have to spend wisely."

The girls also learned the value of future planning.

"If you spend wisely, you may be able to get stuff you may have wanted all your life," Sierra Rotsaert said.

Though the activity was advanced for their age, the youths adapted to it well.

"One little girl said: 'I'm a sophisticated kind of girl and I can be very complicated, and I don't like children's games of tag and hopscotch. This was just so much more for me,'" Garner said.

When the competition ended a month ago, Garner, Hover and their students were overwhelmed to learn The Diva Girls' portfolio had earned well over \$28,000, placing them first in the state in the elementary category and 31st out of all 684 participating teams, including high school and college students.

"Deb and I were sort of in shock," Hover said.

The girls were incredibly excited to learn their work had paid off in such a high-profile manner.

Two weeks ago, the team traveled to Denver to attend the competition's awards ceremony. On May 12, the girls were presented with their prize, a \$2,000 scholarship from CollegeInvest that the girls will split. Hover and Garner also received special recognition for their work with the group.

Hover and Garner intend to participate in the competition next year, citing the activity's educational benefits.

"It has such a positive effect on their academic achievement," Garner said. "It is a higher level of work. We're really into having high expectations so we need to give them higher-level skills."

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