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**LAS VEGAS SUN**

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**EDUCATION:**

# High school junior state's savviest on finance

## Clark High student is going to national economics contest

By [Emily Richmond](#)

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Izack Tenorio, a junior in Clark High School's Academy of Finance, understands the roots of the nation's economic crisis, its effect on world markets and the potential risks of the government's bailout and recovery plans.

Tenorio is arguably the most financially literate high school student in Nevada. He won a statewide competition that tested his knowledge of business and economics and will represent Nevada at the national championships for the event sponsored by DECA, an association of marketing students.

Tenorio knows not all of his peers share his enthusiasm for business, but he supports proposed legislation to require Nevada high schools to teach financial literacy.

At a minimum, teenagers should graduate "understanding how to save, invest and spend money wisely," he said.

Tenorio, along with freshmen Pablo Mercado and Kyle Barnes, has demonstrated a knack for investing. At a recent regional mock stock market competition for high school students, the Clark High team earned first place with a 92 percent rate of return.

The benefits of financial education go beyond mock dividends, academy teacher Vincent Farese said. He's seen students leverage their financial literacy into college scholarships, summer internships and even seed money grants to launch their own businesses.

"It validates everything we're doing," Farese said.

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Although the Nevada Legislature is focusing on promoting financial literacy for high schoolers, Las Vegas teacher Allison Gardner wants to start even earlier — with first graders at Gragson Elementary.

A \$1,600 grant from the Nevada Public Education Foundation and Wells Fargo Bank will allow Gardner to buy calculators, cash registers and other supplies for a pretend store where students will learn how to shop, sell, spend and save.

Chanda Cook, director of community initiatives for the foundation, said Gardner's project is an example of how teachers can incorporate real-life lessons into daily instruction.

Gardner said the grant will allow all 10 first grade classes at Gragson to participate.

"It gives students the chance to see how money is really involved in their everyday lives," Gardner said. "They really respond to hands-on learning and role playing, so this should be a lot of fun for them."

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A few weeks ago the Clark County School District was hopeful there would be no need for further budget cuts. That's no longer the case.

"It's really very gloomy," said Clark County Schools Superintendent Walt Rulffes, reporting Thursday to the School Board following his visit to Carson City. "The legislators today were in despair. We need to be prepared for more cuts than we already identified."

The district plans to cut \$120 million from its operating budget over the next biennium, on top of \$130 million that was previously eliminated. Employees are bracing for potential layoff announcements.

"The real trauma," said Rulffes, will be the second year of the biennium. Lawmakers are not expected to authorize any increase in per-pupil funding.

"We're in for a bumpy road," he said.

There is help on the way in the form of federal stimulus money, said Jeff Weiler, the district's chief financial officer. But it's not clear how quickly that money will be available or exactly how much Clark County will receive, he said.

School District officials have long griped about the state's education funding formula, which they say has shortchanged students. Hundreds of millions of dollars in local tax revenue earmarked for education has instead reverted to the state's general fund.

That issue apparently wasn't far from the mind of School Board member Sheila Moulton, who sought reassurances at Thursday's meeting that the stimulus dollars wouldn't meet a similar fate.

"I want to make sure this money is specifically earmarked for education," Moulton said. "I want to know there's no way the state can get this money and do something else with it."

The feds are requiring that 81 percent of the so-called "state stabilization funds" be used for education, Weiler said. However, he added, that percentage applies to both K-12 and higher ed, with no mandate as to how it's divided.

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