



Editorial: Teach finance

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In an effort to prepare children for career paths they have yet to choose and jobs that may not exist yet, not to mention making them well-rounded citizens, schools fill young brains with knowledge they may later find esoteric or irrelevant. Schools teach algebra, English literature, ancient history, modern geography and foreign languages more for their theoretical value than their practical application.

But students need practical knowledge as well, especially when it comes to personal finances.

Some students will borrow money to buy a car while still in high school. They need to know what interest is, and how to calculate how much interest payments will add to the sticker price. As soon as they hit college, they will be deluged with credit card offers many won't know how to weigh. Most will end up borrowing money for college - the average student graduates owing \$20,000 - and many will be surprised when the bill comes due.

Later, they may be expected to manage their retirement accounts, but few will have been taught anything about investment strategies. They will have to make decisions on insurance and mortgages - and we've seen in recent years how easy it is for people to make poor decisions when buying homes.

That's why it is long past time Massachusetts incorporated financial literacy into the public school curriculum. We do no service to our children by sending them out into the world knowing all about geometry and history, but nothing about how to balance a checkbook.

A bill to remedy that omission is again moving through the state Legislature. Sponsored by Sen. Jamie Eldridge, D-Acton, the bill would require the state Department of Education to develop standards and objectives for incorporating financial literacy into the K-12 math curriculum for all public schools.

The bill was approved unanimously by the Senate in the last session, but never came to the House for a vote. This week, the Education Committee approved the bill. It deserves a full vote in both chambers, the sooner the better. Consumer education should begin in grade school.