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Getting Top Grades in Financial Literacy

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The steep rise in credit card debt, short-term lending and personal bankruptcies underscore the need for more effective economic education if individuals are to be empowered to achieve financial security. Without basic knowledge of how financial markets, credit, and investing work, individuals risk becoming victims of fraud and of making unsound investments.

A variety of financial education materials are available to educators, but it's not always easy to get them in the right hands. The New Mexico Coalition for Financial Education is trying to change that.

Coordinating financial education efforts

The New Mexico Coalition for Financial Education is a voluntary association of educator businesses, government agencies and individuals who believe that the prosperity of our state requires economic and financial education. The coalition's goal is to help all New Mexicans acquire the knowledge, skills, confidence and resources that can help them manage and improve their personal financial lives. The coalition formed more than four years ago to act as an umbrella group for all the financial literacy efforts under way statewide. It was the same year that a nationwide survey of adults and high school students revealed that many had not mastered the basic economic concepts they needed to successfully manage their personal finances and function as informed citizens. 2005 was also the first year since the Great Depression that Americans registered a negative savings rate, spending more than they earned.

The New Mexico Coalition for Financial Education, which began as a loose network of individuals and organizations, has developed into a formal organization with a board of directors and monthly board meetings. The organization recently applied for 501(c)3 nonprofit status.

On Friday, Sept. 25, the coalition is hosting a new-member social from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Hotel Albuquerque where members can meet state legislators and regulators and others involved in financial businesses and organizations in the state. The hotel is at 800 Rio Grande Blvd. N.W.

Information is for sharing

The New Mexico Coalition for Financial Education is best known for hosting the Lieutenant

Governor's Summit on Financial Education every spring. The daylong gathering features more than 20 workshops and presentations and draws hundreds of teachers, working adults, college students and senior citizens, as well as financial industry professionals, to share information, network and even develop ideas for policy changes that might advance financial consciousness. The theory behind the annual conference is that by bringing all parties to the table — consumers, providers and educators — information is shared and duplication of efforts is reduced.

One of the coalition's earliest members was the Focus Foundation, which presents financial information to New Mexico students through its Focus on the Future program. In the past 11 years, Focus on the Future has served nearly 100,000 high school seniors through workshops about auto and title loans, credit card debt, investments and other financial topics likely to impact their lives. The New Mexico Securities Division helped create the program and the Coalition for Financial Education.

Other early coalition members include area banks and credit unions, financial advisors, universities, business financial literacy and loan organizations, and associations such as AARP New Mexico and Junior Achievement of New Mexico.

Membership is tax-deductible and is open to people who support the coalition's financial-education mission. To attend the new-members social, please e-mail Gena Wilimitis at Gena.wilimitis@state.nm.us or Emilee New at emileenew@gmail.com. Attendance is free, but an RSVP is requested. The coalition's web site can be found at <http://www.nmfined.org/index.html>.

Finance New Mexico is an initiative of the New Mexico Small Business Investment Corporation (NMSBIC) and its partners to assist individuals and businesses in obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more about resources available to New Mexicans, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org.

