

Hi, my name is Debbie Scarpelli and I am a 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Math Teacher at Slater Junior High in Pawtucket, RI. I have been taking my students for the past 7 or 8 years to the best hands-on “field trip” that I have ever encountered – EXCHANGE CITY. About 8 years ago I was asked if I was willing to take our students to New Hampshire to a “city” that my students could run – we were given two weeks to train our students and raise money for the bus ride – we did it and have been doing it ever since.

Exchange City is the most realistic opportunity for my students to see what it is like in the “real world.” Every year we train our students on the skills and understanding of what it is like to run a city from all angles. We have an election for the Mayor and Judge. One year we actually renamed the city after a student that was killed during our April vacation. The students love the experience and will ask if they can attend it again – the following year they actually come and want to sneak on the bus. I was so excited when Exchange City’s new location was at Johnson & Wales facility – what a spectacular facility.

The students learn about profit, loss, expenses, taxes... the list goes on. Student must go through an application and interview process to be placed in their desired jobs. That in itself is a great eye opener; they want their resume to be the best. They go online and ask family members to help them create one. The election is another great opportunity for them to go through – campaign managers, speeches, and the actual election. They also learn about how a checking account works – WOW – they get frustrated but LOVE having their own checkbook.

Once the students get hired they work in teams to run their businesses. They realize the importance of being a team member and how hard it can be to work with different people. Their biggest complaint to me is how to get their “co-workers” to do their job – what a reality check. They create newspaper ads, signs, a web page, a radio ad, and they have been creating business cards as well. They create a budget to run their business and then apply for a loan.

After all of the planning – the day is here. To see their eyes when they see the city is a reward in itself. They cannot wait to get in and get to work. They surprise me every year – even those that seemed to be not paying attention during the training RISE TO THE OCCASION!!! They all want to pay back their loan and make a profit – very competitive. The real world experience really hits them and hits them hard. Their responses and seeing how hard they work makes me so proud to be a part of it. There are tears, some of happiness and some of frustration, they want to succeed and do not like that some people do not pull their weight.

The problem solving that goes on that day is unbelievable, the students have to really think of what they have to do – “think on their feet.” They gain a respect for the adults in their life and what they have to go through on a daily basis.

**“I liked being able to step into the real life in terms of acting like an adult and knowing and realizing what pay day is and how much stress your job can sometimes cause. It was FUN!!!”**

**“It was hard to keep up with what people want and it was hard to keep the workers doing their job. But other than that it was really FUN!!!”**

**“I think that it was a good opportunity to see what our parents go through. The only thing that was hard was being the owner and paying off our loan.”**

**“It was very stressing because too many customers would come at once but it was good because it kinda gave us an idea of how our parents’ life isn’t all fun and games. It took work to get where they got. Like other people said (Big Reality Check)! But it was fun.”**

**Exchange City was a great experience for my students. I loved listening to their conversations when they were working in their shops. Two great conversations were – *“Mrs. Scarpelli, some workers take too many breaks and don’t pull their weight.”* And *“I really appreciate being thirteen. No one wants to work and they don’t listen.”* This experience also helped our students that were very quiet because they decided to be owners and take positions that I would never have thought they would – they were successful in those positions!!! Some teachers approached me at the beginning of the day and could not believe that I placed students in the jobs that I did – they applied and qualified and that is what they wanted to do – and they proved themselves worthy of their positions.**

As an educator, I feel that the hands-on and real world experience is the best opportunity for learning. Our students need to have a purpose for learning and if we do not give them that they will not work as hard as they should. I love their experiences before, during and after Exchange City because that is how I run my classroom – “real world” CONNECTIONS!!! Just seeing their faces when we enter the city is the biggest reward. This program is so well known in my school that the incoming 7<sup>th</sup> graders ask when we are going and when will they start working on their business – students that have attended in the past get the new students interested by just talking about it.

I would recommend this to anyone that wants their students look at the importance of education and what the purpose is for them to succeed in school.