

Executive Summary

Work-Readiness Impact of JA Program Participation

Introduction

JA Worldwide® (Junior Achievement) is the world's largest organization dedicated to educating students about workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy through experiential, hands-on programs. Since 1919, more than 93 million students have participated in Junior Achievement. In partnership with businesses and educators, JA Worldwide seeks to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy.

JA Worldwide is committed to commissioning independent, rigorous evaluations that assess the efficacy of Junior Achievement programs in their development and implementation phases. In the past five years, JA Worldwide's investment in student-outcomes research has exceeded \$3.1 million. As evidenced by more than 60 evaluation studies, Junior Achievement programs have a significant impact on students' knowledge, skill development, and attitudes.

Through a portfolio of age-appropriate curriculum, Junior Achievement programs equip youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in an ever complex and changing global economy. JA's programs have a focus on teaching youth skills that will be required of them in the 21st century, including critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and teamwork. Of the 4.2 million students who participated in Junior Achievement in the United States during the 2007-2008 school year, more than 3.7 million took part in at least one of JA's work-readiness programs.

**Ninety-six percent
of JA's programs
have been
independently
evaluated within
the past four
years.**

To ensure JA program relevancy and effectiveness, independent evaluations are regularly commissioned to determine the short- and long-term benefits associated with student participation. The evaluations follow strict educational research guidelines, measuring the impact of the programs on important variables, such as knowledge of key work-readiness concepts and applied skills associated with program content. In addition, evaluators visit program sites to observe classrooms in action, hold focus groups with participating students, and interview teachers and volunteers.

The evaluations enable JA Worldwide to ascertain the value of program participation among diverse student populations. Key findings demonstrate that JA program participants exhibit statistically significant gains in content, skill development, and self-efficacy relative to work-readiness concepts and tasks. Furthermore, ample anecdotal evidence exists to support the claim that JA students are more prepared to enter the world of work.

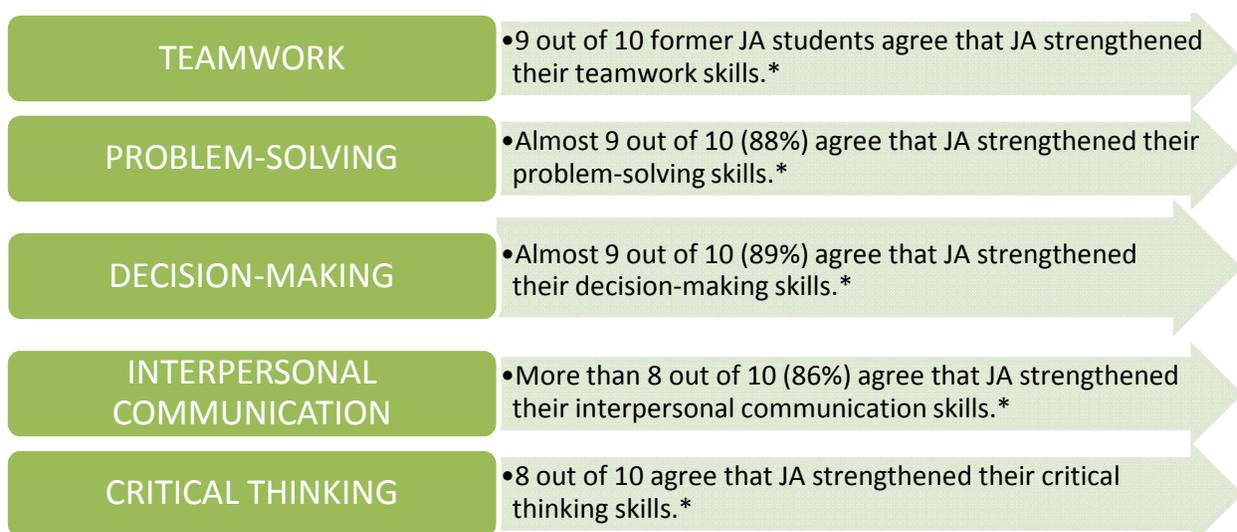
Skill Development

Students who participate in JA programs develop skills necessary for future success.

With the ever growing competitive global economy and the growing gap of youth prepared for the workforce or post secondary education, work-readiness skills need to be taught at a younger age. According to a U.S. survey, more than 40 percent of employers say incoming high school graduates hired are deficiently prepared for the entry-level jobs they fill (The Conference Board, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and Society for Human Resource Management, 2006). Most youth are entering the world of work and bypassing post-secondary education by the age of 18; in many parts of the world, they are entering the work world even younger. If students aren't taught the skills necessary to be successful in the workforce early, then it may be too late.

Junior Achievement programs introduce students to the skills needed to be competitive in the workplace and in post-secondary educational institutions, and allow them the opportunity to apply the skills through hands-on activities. To assess which skills students acquire through their participation in JA's work-readiness programs, evaluations typically require students to rate their proficiency in skills prior to and following program participation. To substantiate the findings, teachers and volunteers also rate their agreement to the skills students acquire through a program. In addition, evaluators ask students in focus groups to share which skills, if any, they believe they have developed through their participation in a JA program. Across these evaluations, students, teachers, and volunteers consistently share with evaluators the enhancement of skills important for future success.

In a recent alumni study, the connection between participation in JA and the enhancement of key work-readiness skills was further validated.



* JA Worldwide alumni study findings as of May 15, 2009. (N=239)

Increases in students' work-readiness skills realized from their participation in specific JA programs include the following:

- On average, elementary school students who participate in JA programs scored significantly higher (16%) than their counterparts on assessments that measure critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Eight out of 10 high school students who participated in *JA Exploring Economics* agreed that the program made them think about how important it is to set personal goals and work toward them.
- More than 9 out of 10 high school students (94%) who participated in *JA Business Ethics* agreed that the program made them feel more prepared to make ethical business decisions once they join the workforce.

Self-Efficacy Enhancement

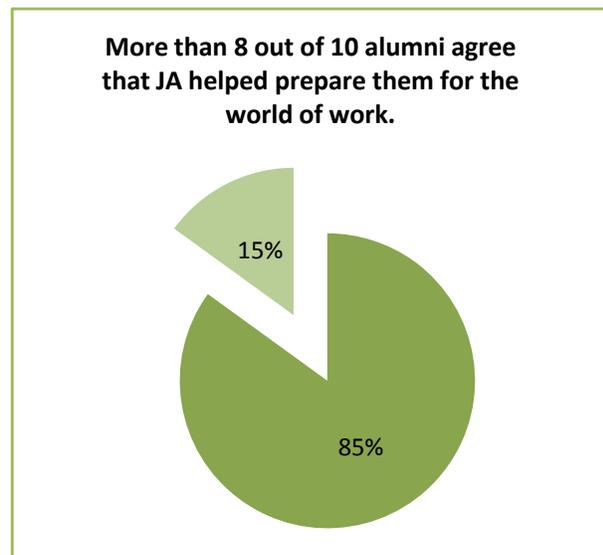
Students who participate in JA's work-readiness programs demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy represents an individual's confidence in her or his ability to accomplish a particular task. Research has shown that young people with a higher generalized sense of self-efficacy set more challenging goals for themselves, try harder, persevere in difficult times, bounce back more quickly after failures, and ultimately are more successful.

Junior Achievement programs provide students with the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills needed to feel more prepared for the future. Consistently, students report higher levels of career-related self-efficacy after participating in JA programs.

[Junior Achievement] has inspired me to set much higher goals for myself and really think about my future plans.

– JA Job Shadow student



Increases in students' career-related self-efficacy realized from their participation in specific JA programs include the following:

- More than 7 out of 10 students (77%) who participated in the elementary grade after-school program, *JA More than Money*, said the program helped them in feeling positive about their future, with 72% indicating that the program helped them think about job and career opportunities.
- Nine out of 10 middle school students who participated in *JA Finance Park* agreed that they are more confident about their ability to be successful in the future.
- Eight out of 10 high school students who participated in *JA Success Skills* stated that they felt better prepared for the world of work.
- More than 7 out of 10 high school students (75%) who participated in *JA Job Shadow* agreed that they now know how to prepare for a future career.

Relevance

Students who participate in JA's work-readiness programs have a better understanding of the connection between school and the world of work.

Junior Achievement's programs focus on connecting the dots between what is being taught in the classroom and the relevance of the information for the future. In a study of recent high school dropouts, four out of five agree that schools can help improve the dropout rate by having more opportunities for real-world learning and enhancing the connection between school and work (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). JA helps to bridge this gap. Consistently, JA students share that the program provided them with the opportunity to learn information that will help them be successful in the future.

I just think that it's really cool to be learning things at school that actually apply directly to my future. – Student

Increases in students' awareness of the real-world connection from their participation in specific JA programs include the following:

- More than 9 out of 10 students (92%) who participated in the fifth grade JA program, *Our Nation*, stated that they have a better understanding of the job market and the skills they will need to be successful in the future.
- More than 9 out of 10 teachers (95%) report that elementary school students who participated in JA are more likely to understand how the real world operates.
- More than 8 out of 10 (83%) of alumni agreed that JA connected what they learned in the classroom with real life.

Conclusion

Across numerous evaluations, evidence is clear that Junior Achievement programs equip youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for future success.

Students who participate in Junior Achievement's work-readiness programs are more prepared than their peers for the future workforce. Increasing the number of students who are offered the opportunity to participate in these meaningful programs will further prepare tomorrow's leaders to successfully participate in a global economy.

References

- The Conference Board, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Society for Human Resource Management. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce*. Retrieved from, http://www.conference-board.org/pdf_free/BED-06-Workforce.pdf.
- Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Morison, K.B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Retrieved from, <http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf>.