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How Junior Achievement of Greater Miami Falls Short Against Modern Financial Threats Targeting Gen-Z and What They Can Do to Get Ahead of These Threats

Introduction

A New Generation of Financial Threats

During the 2026 Super Bowl, millions of viewers, many of them teenagers, were bombarded with advertisements for sports betting platforms like DraftKings and FanDuel. Between these ads, credit card companies ran flashy campaigns offering bonus points, statement credits, and preapproval offers marketed as "won't affect credit score." Financial technology companies, including Robinhood, Kalshi, and Polymarket, ran ads for prediction markets. Fintech companies are choosing to market prediction markets as platforms similar to investing products, in reality they function based on user speculation and a binary yes or no outcome. According to the Federal Reserve, 60% of Americans hold a tax-preferred investment account such as a 401(k) or type of IRA. These investment products invest in publicly traded companies that provide intrinsic value to the investor, value anchored in real cash flows, earnings, and productive assets (Board of Governors). A prediction market contract, by contrast, has no productive value. It pays out only if a specific event occurs and pays nothing if it does not.

A prediction market is a platform where users buy and sell contracts tied to the outcome of a real-world event (Hill). This event could be an election, sports result, price of Bitcoin, and

even a celebrity's next public appearance. Kalshi, the largest CFTC-regulated prediction market in the United States, controls close to 89% of the domestic market and is now legal in 49 US states (Braun). Kalshi users can start wagering at the age of 18, a threshold much lower than the 21 year old minimum required by most sports betting platforms. Peer-reviewed research analyzing over 40,000 Kalshi contracts found that the average pre-fee return on a prediction market contract is negative 20%, meaning the typical participant loses money, not through bad luck but mathematical probability, based on the way the market is structured (Burgi et al. 2-3, 18). Researchers writing in the journal *Science* have warned that prediction markets are conducting, "a large uncontrolled experiment on users" without the consumer protections required of regulated gambling platforms (Packin & Rabinovitz 260).

Financial products are being sold to young Americans more easily than ever before. Gen-Z, broadly defined as males and females aged 14 to 25, has become the demographic these products are designed for. Apps replace casinos, algorithms replace cold calls, and social media replaces physical mail. These changes lower the barrier between young people and high-risk financial decisions, and happen before educational programs can adapt.

The Gap Between Modern Fintech Threats and Outdated Financial Education

The wicked problem of this paper is the widening gap between the financial technology landscape Gen-Z is navigating and the financial education programs meant to prepare them for it. Young people aged 14 to 25 are being forced to make high-stakes financial decisions about sports betting apps, prediction markets, and algorithmically targeted credit products, while programs designed to build their financial capability are largely written for a financial world that no longer covers these issues. Closing this gap requires a modernized, research-based curriculum that addresses the products young people encounter and uses experiential learning methods

peer-reviewed scholars identify as most effective at producing behavioral change. This problem is wicked, because its causes are interconnected and no single fix resolves it. Predatory marketing, weak regulatory oversight, social media platforms normalize speculation & gambling, schools without effective financial programs, and a generation with easy digital access to financial technology products all reinforce each-other. No single institution, law, regulation, or community service organization can get to the bottom of this wicked problem alone. This makes the problem resistant to simple solutions and implies the need for partnership to develop a solution.

High-Risk Financial Products Cause Serious Harm to Young People

The first theme drawn from a previous literature review is high-risk financial products produce documented harm beyond financial loss. Daniel et al. conducted a global review of 38 peer-reviewed studies on youth sports betting and found that the consequences extend beyond financial loss, connecting sports betting amongst young people to academic decline, depression, suicidal ideation, and range of social and psychological issues (547-548). Their findings reveal that young people are more vulnerable than adults, with a youth pathological gambling rate three times higher than that of older age groups (552-553). These risks are compounded by credit card debt. Norvilitis et al. studied 448 college students across five campuses and found that carrying high levels of debt is associated with diminished confidence in managing money, lower self-esteem, and elevated stress (1396). Whether the entry point is a sports betting app or a credit card, young people who lack a solid financial foundation are experiencing consequences that affect more than just their bank accounts.

Traditional Financial Literacy Education Falls Short of Behavioral Change

The second theme from the literature review is the concern that traditional financial education is not changing behavior. Amagir et al. conducted a systematic review of over 60 studies and found that while programs reliably improve financial knowledge and attitudes, research measuring their effects shows retention of these gains is small suggesting that knowledge transfer alone does not produce lasting behavioral change (75-76). Mancone et al. reached a similar conclusion in their review of 80 studies: programs built entirely around lecture-based knowledge transfer without attention to behavioral change are unlikely to produce lasting improvements in how young people manage their money (10). Both sets of researchers agreed on the same solution: experiential learning methods that use simulations, project-based activities, and real-life financial scenarios consistently outperform traditional lecture-based formats (Amagir et al. 76; Mancone et al. 8). Carlin and Robinson's study of Junior Achievement's Finance Park program supports this finding directly. Examining 2,357 students who completed JA's simulated consumer finance experience, they found that trained students adopted the decision making the program taught but also had difficulty applying the concepts to new settings (308). This finding is significant because it suggests JA's experiential part of the curriculum works for specific scenarios covered in the programming but struggles when students encounter financial situations the curriculum did not anticipate.

Many existing financial literacy programs were designed before the explosion of app-based sports betting, prediction markets, and algorithmic credit card marketing. There is a significant gap in both research and practice examining how community-based organizations can adapt their programming to address these modern financial threats through experiential, behaviorally-focused methods.

Junior Achievement of Greater Miami and the Thesis of This Paper

Junior Achievement of Greater Miami exists to close the gap between the financial threats young people face and the financial education they receive. According to their website, JA is “committed to giving students opportunity-filled futures by helping them become confident, capable, competent, and connected to what the world has to offer” (Junior Achievement). JA delivers its mission through school and community-based programming across three focus areas: financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and career readiness. JA serves elementary, middle, and high school students through courses like JA Personal Finance, covering budgeting, savings, basic credit, and introduction to Investing, and; JA Take Stock in Your Future, giving students a brief introduction to the stock market. Carlin and Robinson’s research shows JA's curriculum can produce real behavioral change depending on how the content is presented. Their study compared students who completed a simulated consumer finance experience to students who did not, finding trained students had savings rates four times higher and paid down debt faster (306). Trained students engaged in budgeting, made tradeoffs, and faced financial burdens within a fictional financial setting.

The argument of this paper is that JA’s programming, while knowledgeably effective for the topics covered, has not adapted to the financial threats that most urgently face young people and in many cases is not behaviorally effective. Specifically, this paper argues that Junior Achievement of Greater Miami provides a meaningful foundation in traditional financial literacy but fails to address modern fintech threats, including sports betting, prediction markets, and algorithmic credit card marketing. These products represent the most urgent risks facing Gen-Z. Ja’s reliance on teacher-led knowledge transfer runs against peer-reviewed scholarly research on what produces behavioral change; closing this gap requires partnership and development of an experiential, behaviorally focused curriculum targeting specific products and predatory tactics.

To address this gap, this paper proposes Apex Solutions; a modernized, research-based financial technology company that provides an experiential learning curriculum developed based on research, designed to complement JA's existing infrastructure and fill the gaps in modern fintech education that JA's current curriculum currently leaves open.

Methodology

About James Gulli (jamesgulli.com)

It is important to acknowledge my position in this research. I am not a participant in JA's programs, nor am I a volunteer or staff member, which means my analysis comes from outside the organization. However, I am not an outsider to the financial landscape young people are navigating. I am an 18 year-old finance student at the University of Miami's Herbert Business School, with minors in marketing and AI for business technology. Additionally I have been involved in the world of finance since 5th grade. I bring over eight years of professional experience in stock and options trading, an experience that has taught me lessons about risk and other topics no teacher could fully replicate.

My experience also extends into entrepreneurship and business creation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, I founded my first company at age 12, Gulli Lawn, a lawn and landscape business. I later sold this business and pivoted to freelance consulting, a role I remain active in today. In my consulting practice, I help businesses with operational optimization, marketing strategy, broader business strategy, and partner with a company to offer full service investment advising services, accounting, and tax strategy. This work alongside my trading and research, falls under the umbrella of ClaytonJames Capital, my own venture engaged in options, futures, value investing, investment research, SMB consulting, and strategic business acquisition and development. Through ClaytonJames Capital I have done everything from building professional

discounted cash flow models on publicly traded companies, to building my own algorithmic trading systems. I have also researched prediction markets firsthand by participating in them directly, which has given me a better understanding than most on how the platforms actually function, and why the structure is mathematically unfavorable to most users. This combination of experience directly informs the design of the experiential curriculum proposed later in the paper.

Beyond my technical experience, I have watched peers struggle in real time with the exact products this paper analyzes. I have seen friends lose money on sports betting and tell themselves they will quit "after the next win," carry credit card debt without understanding how minimum payment structures are designed to maximize interest revenue, and have friends who pour money into prediction markets without understanding why the platforms are mathematically structured for participants to lose. This proximity to the problem shapes my analysis. I approach JA as both an outside observer of the organization and someone embedded in the financial world its students are entering, a vantage point that strengthens this research.

Research Methods

The secondary research in this paper was developed through a systematic, synthesized literature review. Multiple peer-reviewed sources were identified and synthesized to examine two central themes: the documented risks that high-risk financial products pose to young people, and the extent to which financial literacy education produces real behavioral change. Together, these sources form the scholarly lens through which Junior Achievement of Greater Miami's programming is evaluated in this paper. The scholars throughout this paper provide the context necessary to understand the scope of the wicked problem, which JA is working to address, but also what the research says about the most effective approaches to addressing it.

Primary research on Junior Achievement of Greater Miami was gathered through multiple avenues. A thorough review of JA's website, specifically their programs page, provided detailed information on their current curriculum offerings, target demographic, delivery format, and the degree to which each program emphasizes financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and career readiness. Social media analysis of JA's public channels offered additional insight into how the organization communicates its mission and engages with members of the community. Interview questions were developed and submitted to JA education executives. These questions were not an afterthought despite not receiving a response. They were the analytical drivers of the paper. Each question emerges from a gap identified in the literature review the questions submitted included:

- Does JA's current curriculum address sports betting or prediction markets in any way?
- How does JA approach teaching credit? Is it more about the mechanics of credit or about identifying predatory tactics?
- Do you feel JA's current programming keeps pace with how fast financial products targeting young people are evolving?
- Would JA be open to partnering with outside organizations that specialize in content around modern financial risks with a curriculum developed through research-backed experiential learning?

Analysis & Discussion

What JA Teaches and What it Leaves Out

To evaluate Junior Achievement of Greater Miami's effectiveness in addressing youth financial literacy, it is necessary to examine how well JA's offerings respond to the actual

financial landscape young people navigate today. JA is not a failing organization. They have national reach, corporate backing from top firms, and a curriculum that spans K-12 grade. The question of this analysis is not whether JA is doing good work, but whether they are doing the right work that is combating the scale and speed of financial threats targeting young people.

JA's programs page lists over 25 different learning experiences across three focus areas: financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and career readiness. Among the high school offerings most relevant to this analysis, JA Personal Finance covers budgeting, savings, credit and debt, consumer protection, investing, and net worth. JA Financial Capability 1 and 2 address banking, economics, risk management, and business investment. JA Take Stock in Your Future introduces students to the stock markets and long-term investment strategy. These programs represent a solid foundation in basic financial literacy. They teach the basics of money management that previous generations needed and still remain important to this day.

Applying an Asset-Based Lens to JA's Approach

Bauer, Kniffin, and Priest's framework distinguishes between asset-based and deficit-based approaches to community engagement, arguing that the language and structure of a program shape whether participants come away as empowered actors or as passive recipients of help (90). A deficit-based approach frames community challenges around what is broken and positions service providers as outside experts who arrive with solutions. An asset-based approach, differs as it first looks for strengths, resources, and capabilities with the community itself and treats knowledge as shared rather than expert driven (Bauer et al. 90-91). Applying this concept to financial literacy programming, this framework questions whether a curriculum treats young people as problems to be solved (deficit) or as active participants whose unique perspectives and experiences enrich the learning process (asset).

JA's mission language passes this test in some respects and falls short in others. The language of "confident, capable, competent" students positions young people as an "agent" of their own development, aligning with asset-based framing. Scholars find that effective financial education thrives when students can actively experience the impact of their decision through lessons that align with their specific "life event" (Amagir et al. 76). Where the research emphasizes student's personal experiences , JA's high school curriculum is structured around a one-way transfer of knowledge from teacher-led courses to students. This means little space for students' own observations of the financial landscape they actually navigate impairing thinking. A student who has already encountered sports betting ads on social media, watched a friend lose money on a prediction market, or received a preapproval for a credit card brings real, current knowledge into classrooms. JA's curriculum does not currently involve or build on that knowledge. From an asset-based perspective, this is a missed opportunity. Students are positioned as recipients of financial information rather than as participants in the current system which is the financial landscape shaping their generation.

Bauer et al.'s framework matters for the analysis that follows because the gap this paper identifies is not only the content gap but also the delivery gap. Adding curriculum modules on sports betting, prediction markets, and credit marketing without changing the actual delivery model would still produce a deficit-based experience. The argument of this paper is that closing the gap requires both modernized content, but also a shift towards an asset-based, experiential curriculum design. This asset-based framework works because it treats students as knowledgeable participants in the financial world rather than as uninformed subjects. While a shift in delivery is essential, this change cannot happen without content that actually reflects the financial landscapes students inhabit.

The Gap in Modern Fintech Education

Currently, none of JA's listed programs mention sports betting, prediction markets, or specific advertising tactics fintech companies are using to entice and target young consumers through social media and other digital marketing efforts. This absence is not a minor oversight. Daniel et al.'s review of 38 studies on youth sports betting found that the consequences of youth gambling extend far beyond financial loss, connecting it to academic decline, depression, and suicidal ideation (547). Their finding that young people have a pathological gambling rate three times higher than adults makes clear that this is not a minor concern; it is one of the most pressing financial and psychological threats facing the exact demographic that JA serves (Daniel et al. 552-553). A student could complete every financial literacy program JA offers and never encounter a single lesson on sports betting odds, why parlays are designed to lose, the house edge, and what a prediction market actually is.

Algorithmic Credit Card Marketing

JA's financial literacy program does teach students about credit card usage and debt management; yet this instruction remains confined to the mechanics of credit, such as how interest rates work and how to build a credit score. JA's programming fails to mention how credit card companies are algorithmically targeting young consumers on social media and enticing young people with enticing offers that are hard to pass up. All of this happens before young consumers have a good financial foundation and understand the dangers of credit cards. Norvilitis et al. found that students in debt face multiple challenges, including unrealistic income expectations, bad spending habits, and concluded that addressing credit card debt among young people requires more than a brief lecture (1409). While JA's programming addresses some of

these gaps, they don't engage with predatory marketing tactics, which actually creates conditions for debt accumulation in the first place.

This analysis is not meant to diminish JA's contributions. Teaching foundational financial concepts at the K-12 level has value, and JA's reach across Miami-Dade County means thousands of young people receive at least some financial education, versus others who might receive none. That being said, JA needs to upgrade its programming based on research; otherwise, students are not getting as much benefit as they could, which is a waste of time and money.

How JA Teaches: Delivery Method Matters

The question of participant impact requires examining not just what JA teaches, but whether the way it teaches produces the kind of lasting behavioral change the research says is necessary. This is where evidence plays a critical part as an evaluative lens. Amagir et al. found that studies measuring the effects of financial education on actual financial behavior are scarce and show hardly any effect, but that experiential learning methods with a variety of teaching approaches yield the strongest gains (57, 73). Mancone et al. extend this argument by identifying the specific instructional drivers of success; finding that simulations, project-based activities, and real-life financial scenarios consistently outperform traditional lectures (8). The research is clear. In order for a financial literacy program to successfully influence behavior and provide lasting benefit, the delivery method must be treated with the same importance as the content itself.

When measured against this standard, JA of Greater Miami's delivery model is mixed. Some programs incorporate experiential elements. The JA Company Program, for example, empowers high school students to conceptualize, capitalize, and manage their own business venture. JA Personal Finance is described as allowing students to experience the interrelationship

between today's financial decisions and future financial freedom (JA Website), language that suggests a degree of applied learning. While these promising elements align with what research identifies as most effective, this progress is undermined by a significant content gap regarding the predatory products currently harming youth. Further complicating the delivery method is the fact that JA's high school offerings are "teacher-led courses" delivered in classrooms or virtually. Programs like JA Economics, JA Financial Capability 1 and 2, and JA Business Communications are thorough; their semester-long structure risks falling into the knowledge transfer model both Amagir et al. and Mancone et al. warn has limited behavioral impact. This distinction matters enormously. Teaching a student what interest is does not stop them from carrying a credit card balance. In contrast, a simulation that requires a student to decide how to manage compounding debt when only minimum payments are made provides a different educational experience and a greater behavioral benefit.

Recommendations

The Apex Solutions Curriculum

Our analysis is not an argument against Junior Achievement of Greater Miami but for what JA could become with partnerships and curricular improvements focused on the financial technology content gap and research-backed experiential learning. JA possesses key assets that many organizations do not have: a brand parents and educators trust, relationships with major financial institutions, and programs with Miami-Dade County K-12 schools. These assets make JA the ideal delivery method for modernized financial literacy content, as long as the content can be developed and integrated based on the research. The gaps this paper identifies, including the absence of programming around sports betting, prediction markets, credit cards, and predatory fintech marketing, the reliance on knowledge transfer and delivery models in its high school

courses, and the lack of curriculum targeting the 18 to 25 young-adult demographic, are not failures. They are failures of adaptation. The financial landscape has evolved faster than JA's programming has, and closing that gap requires a deliberate, research-informed intervention. That intervention is what Apex Solutions is designed to provide.

Apex Solutions is a modern, research-based financial technology company that provides an experiential financial literacy curriculum built specifically to address the curricular gaps that community organizations such as JA currently leave open. Apex does not seek to replace JA or compete with other community organizations' programming. Instead, Apex operates on a partnership model designed to enhance and strengthen existing organizations through modernized, behaviorally focused content that community organizations lack. At Apex, we understand that community organizations already have strong infrastructure that we, as a company, believe we can bolster to solve the problem young people are facing today. The foundation of Apex's approach is based directly on the scholarly research examined throughout this paper. Amagir et al. found experiential learning with a variety of teaching methods yields the strongest gains in financial knowledge among students (73). Mancone et al. confirmed that programs that incorporate simulations, project-based activities, and real-life financial scenarios consistently outperform traditional lecture-based formats (8,13). Every element of Apex's curriculum is designed with these findings in mind. Where traditional programs teach students what compound interest is, Apex is putting students in simulations where they experience how quickly credit card debt spirals when only minimum payments are made, and how fast interest stacks up against them. Where traditional programs skip sports betting entirely, Apex walks students through how betting odds are structured, why parlays are mathematically a way to lose, how writers make money, and what prediction markets actually are. This is done not to

encourage participation but to build the analytical skill necessary to recognize when a financial product is designed to exploit them and put them in harm's way.

Modules Targeting High-Risk Products

The Apex curriculum is organized around twelve modules that move students from foundational financial concepts through increasingly complex and modern financial decision-making scenarios. Rather than treating financial literacy as a set of principles to memorize, the curriculum is built around the real financial products and decisions young people actually encounter. Early modules establish core concepts including income, budgeting, saving, and the psychology of spending. Rather than lectures, we offer interactive research-based exercises. Students do not just learn that they should budget; they build budgets based on realistic entry-level salaries in Miami-Dade County and face simulated financial decisions. Unexpected car repairs, a friend's invitation to a concert, and limited-time sale ads for brands people like entice them to spend. Then students are forced to make tradeoffs in real time. This approach reflects what Mancone et al. describe as incorporating real-life financial scenarios into educational content to significantly enhance program effectiveness (13).

As our curriculum progresses, modules turn to the specific high-risk financial products that the analysis section of this paper identified as absent from JA's current programming. A dedicated module on sports betting does not simply tell students that gambling is risky. It walks them through statistical probabilities of how sportsbooks set odds, shows how the "house" always has an edge, and explains why parlay bets are structured to be more profitable for the platform. Students will also be shown interactive probability exercises that allow them to calculate expected value on real betting lines. This approach is essential because Daniel et al. found that advertising normalizes sports betting by framing it as an important part of the sports

viewing experience (552-553). The Apex curriculum confronts gambling normalization directly by giving students access to quantitative tools to see through the marketing and understand how gambling is not a way to make money; it is simply for fun. Similarly, our module on prediction markets introduces students to platforms such as Polymarket and Kalshi, and explains how these "markets" function. We draw a critical distinction between investing, where an individual owns an asset with value usually backed by cash flows or intrinsic value, and wagering on a specific outcome, where platforms extract fees no matter who wins and, in some cases, change rules as they go due to extreme deregulation. This content does not exist in any JA program currently offered in Greater Miami, and given that prediction markets are one of the fastest-growing fintech products targeting young people, this absence represents an urgent gap in programming.

Reframing Credit Card Education

Credit card modules in the Apex curriculum go beyond the mechanics of interest rates and credit scores that JA's existing programs already cover. Instead, Apex focuses on the predatory landscape, including how credit card companies use social media algorithms to target college students with pre-approved offers that don't affect their score, and why introductory zero percent APR offers are designed to create bad habits, and how minimum payment structures are calculated to maximize interest revenue over time. Norvilitis et al. found that students in debt carry multiple overlapping risk factors, including knowledge gaps, unrealistic income expectations, and ingrained spending attitudes, and that solving credit card debt among young people requires more than a brief informational session (1409). Apex's credit modules are designed to address all risk factors of credit, building knowledge, stress testing income expectations through simulation, and challenging spending attitudes through discussion and reflection. Students do not just learn that credit card debt is bad; they experience through

simulation what it feels like to carry a balance that continually grows while covering rent, food, and other expenses from a part-time income.

Building Long-Term Wealth

Later modules in the Apex curriculum address wealth-building and preservation. Rather than warning students what to avoid, Apex teaches students how to build toward compound growth through investing, the mechanics of employer-matched retirement accounts, the difference between speculative trading and long-term investing, and how to evaluate financial products before committing funds. This is where Barone and Graffigna's research becomes relevant. Their finding that financial ethics and personal values around wealth can be a stronger protective factor against problematic gambling than financial knowledge alone (508) suggests that effective financial education must go beyond mechanics and engage students in deeper questions about their relationship with money, risk, and long-term goals. Apex's later modules are designed to do exactly this. We don't just teach students how to invest or tell them what to invest in; we help them build a personal financial philosophy backed by research and history, and grounded in long-term thinking rather than short-term get-rich-quick.

Delivery Model

The practical question is how this curriculum reaches students, and the answer is through partnerships with organizations that have a similar infrastructure to what JA has built. Reiterating, we are not looking to compete with JA; we believe our product is supplementary to what JA has built and is already offering. Our curriculum operates on a three-tier delivery model. This first tier is curriculum licensing, where schools and organizations like JA can license individual modules and integrate them into existing programming. We believe there is no reason for JA to completely overhaul its curriculum. We believe JA should adopt certain modules,

mainly the sports betting module, prediction markets module, and predatory credit module, as a supplement to its current financial literacy curriculum. Our goal is to bolster JA's offerings because we believe the benefit is much greater than money, which is why we operate as a not-for-profit organization. The second tier is direct delivery, where Apex facilitators deliver programming on-site at partner schools, community centers, and university campuses. This tier is particularly important for reaching the 18 to 25 young-adult demographic that JA's programming does not serve. The third tier is a digital platform that offers self-paced modules accessible online, designed for individual learners, campus organizations, and partners who want a hybrid model. Our online model offers an AI LLM that we trained ourselves based on our own data, which is a very powerful piece of programming that JA is missing entirely. Our tiered approach means Apex can meet organizations where they are and focus on their needs. Let's say a JA chapter wants to add a module on sports betting; they can do that through tier 1 licensing without disrupting their programming structure. A university student office wants to offer a full semester of modern financial literacy content so they can easily contract us for delivery through Tier 2.

Measuring Behavioral Change

Finally, Apex was created to address what may be the most critical gap in the current financial literacy landscape: impact measurement that tracks behavioral change rather than just knowledge gain. The research is extremely clear on this point, and many scholars have contributed to this conversation in which Amagir et al. identified the scarcity of studies measuring behavioral outcomes (57). Most programs, including JA's, measure success through completion rates, multiple-choice assessments, or participation surveys. Apex's measurement framework includes pre and post-knowledge assessments, which establish baselines, but then goes further with behavioral intent surveys that capture actions participants plan to take.

Additionally, we follow up with 30-day surveys that track whether participants followed through, and optional future check-ins for research partnerships and behavioral tracking. We aim to be a financial technology company that provides modern curriculum resources as well as a research division to complete research on the constantly shifting fintech landscape, in order for programs like JA or other community organizations to stay ahead of these products, further benefiting youth. Our approach will respond and close the gap that scholars identify, positioning Apex as a curriculum provider and contributor to the broader research conversation about what actually works in youth financial education.

Conclusion

JA's Foundation is Real, but Its Reach Is Not Enough

Junior Achievement of Greater Miami is not a failing organization. It is an organization doing important work within a framework that has not kept pace with the financial reality young people now face. JA's institutional reach across Miami-Dade County, its corporate partnerships, and its programming from kindergarten through twelfth grade represent a genuine asset in the fight to protect young people financially. The foundational skills JA teaches, including budgeting, saving, basic understanding of credit, and career exploration, are necessary and will remain necessary. The argument of this paper has never been that JA's work lacks value. The argument is that value alone is not the same as effectiveness, and effectiveness must be measured against the actual threats targeting the demographic JA exists to serve.

The Gaps That Define the Problem

When evaluated through that lens, JA's current programming leaves significant gaps. It does not address sports betting, prediction markets, or the predatory marketing tactics fintech companies are using to target young people. Its high school curriculum leans heavily on teacher-led

knowledge transfer, which peer-reviewed research consistently identifies as insufficient for producing lasting behavioral change. JA's programming stops at twelfth grade, leaving the 18 to 25 demographic, the group most actively navigating credit cards, betting and prediction market apps, and financial independence for the first time on their own, entirely unserved.

Key Research Synthesis

The scholarly research synthesized in this paper provides both the diagnosis and the direction forward. Amergir et al. and Mancone et al. state that experiential learning methods produce the strongest outcomes in financial education (73; 8). Daniel et al. find the severity of youth sports betting as a financial and psychological health crisis (547, 552-553). Norvilities et al.'s research finds that credit card debt among college students carries consequences reaching far beyond finances into self-esteem, stress, and overall well-being (1396). These research findings point toward a clear conclusion: the next generation of financial literacy programming must be experiential in its delivery, modern in its content, and focused on building real capability rather than surface-level knowledge. Apex Solutions is designed to be exactly that, not a replacement for community organizations like JA, but the modernized curricular partner that can help organizations close the gap between what they currently teach and what young people actually need to know.

Research Gaps

It is also essential to acknowledge what this analysis and the broader research do not yet answer. Prediction markets remain a relatively new fintech product, and scholarly literature examining their specific effects on young people is limited. The peer-reviewed evidence cited in this paper, including Burgi et al's. Analysis of over 40,000 Kalshi contract prices, establishes that prediction markets are mathematically structured to produce systematic losses for most

participants (2-3, 18). Packin and Rabinovitz warn that these platforms are conducting "a large uncontrolled experiment on users" without the consumer protections required of regulated gambling (257). However, neither study isolates effects specifically on Gen-Z which means the connection this paper draws between prediction markets and youth harem rely on the correlation between gambling and prediction markets. This is a limitation and one future research should address as more data on young prediction market users become available. Further evaluation of partnership-based curricular interventions against alternatives, including policy reform, regulatory enforcement, or internal JA curriculum updates, would also strengthen the case for a path forward.

The Stakes

The stakes of this problem are generational. Young people who develop poor financial habits, whether through credit card debt, sports betting, or reckless speculation on prediction markets, carry the consequences for decades. Research consistently shows that financial instability produces stress, limited opportunity, and cycles of inequality that extend beyond individuals. The question is whether organizations like Junior Achievement of Greater Miami will adapt quickly enough to meet young people where they actually are: not in a financial landscape of checkbooks and savings accounts, but in one defined by predatory fintech products. This paper argues that JA cannot close the gap alone and that partnership represents the most promising path forward. The work is far from finished. Understanding the full scope of what young people are up against, and evaluating whether organizations tasked with protecting and teaching youth are equipped to do so, is a necessary first step.

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