

# Junior Achievement

*Elementary Grades Pilot Program*

*Our Nation*

**Executive Summary**

**January 2008**



Submitted by  
Evaluation and Training Institute  
12300 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 420  
Los Angeles, CA 90025

## Introduction

Junior Achievement (JA) Worldwide® is a not-for-profit organization financed by businesses, foundations, government, and individuals. JA's programs are designed to help students assess their personal skills, interests, and values, understand the economic benefits of education, explore career options, learn job-seeking skills, and practice personal and family financial management. JA's core purpose is to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy. Developed by JA Worldwide Education Group, *Our Nation* is a five-session, interdisciplinary program for elementary school children in grades four through six. The curriculum supports the attainment of academic standards in social studies, reading, writing, science, and mathematics.

*Our Nation* was piloted in selected schools around the nation and abroad in the fall of 2007. At that time, JA contracted with the Evaluation and Training Institute (ETI) to conduct an evaluation of the pilot version of *Our Nation* to assist JA in improving the program's content before implementing it on a larger scale.

## Methodology

ETI relied on surveys in both online and paper formats as the principal method of data collection for the evaluation of the *Our Nation* pilot program in elementary schools. Specifically, ETI developed surveys for participating teachers, volunteers, and students to be completed after each of the five sessions. Teachers were instructed to administer the paper and pencil surveys to their students within one day of each session. Teachers, volunteers, and JA Member staff were asked to complete similar session-specific surveys online. To supplement the surveys, ETI made site visits to schools where *Our Nation* was being piloted. ETI researchers gathered qualitative data about *Our Nation* by observing JA volunteers as they presented the material in the classroom and conducted focus groups with students, volunteers, teachers, and JA staff.

## Demographic Profiles

Listed below are the demographic profiles for students and teachers who participated in the evaluation. Percentages and numeric ranges present those reported across the session-specific surveys.

### Students

- As the majority of students participating in the *Our Nation* pilot were in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 84 to 91 percent were ten or eleven years old.
- Slightly more male students participated in the pilot than female students, but the difference was not noteworthy.

- Most students identified themselves as White/Caucasian (36 to 50 percent). African American students represented 27 to 33 percent of participants and Hispanic/Latino students represented 22 to 29 percent.

## Teachers

- Teachers participating in the evaluation were most likely to have taught at their current school for one to two years (from 35 to 40 percent).
- Thirty-three to 42 percent of teachers reported being in the teaching profession for 11 to 20 years.
- Most teachers responding to the surveys were Caucasian/White (84 to 93 percent). The percentage of African American and Hispanic/Latino teachers ranged from three to 10 percent.

## Volunteers

- Volunteers with previous JA experience tended to have volunteered from one to five times prior to the *Our Nation* pilot.
- Most volunteers responding to the surveys were Caucasian/White (84 to 90 percent).
- Volunteers of Hispanic/Latino heritage represented 12 to 17 percent of the respondent pool. African American, Asian, and Pacific Islander volunteers ranged from three to seven percent collectively.
- The number of volunteers from participating JA areas submitting online surveys ranged from 42 to 61 respondents. Professional titles among the volunteers varied widely from banker, manager and loan officer to engineer, secretary, and retired executive.

# Findings

Students, volunteers, teachers, and JA staff completed five session-specific surveys and a post-pilot survey. Using a five-point scale ranging from “*strongly disagree*” to “*strongly agree*,” the survey questions were designed to assess the extent to which respondents were satisfied with the *Our Nation* content, materials, and activities. The post-pilot survey instrument also included open-ended queries asking each group of respondents to describe what they liked and disliked about the program as a whole, and invited them to make recommendations for improvement. Highlights of these findings are presented on the following pages:

## Students

- Ninety-two percent of the students agreed that interaction with the *Our Nation* program gave them a better understanding of the job market and the skills they will need to be successful in it.
- Eighty-percent of the students agreed that the volunteers made the learning experience interesting for them.
- Seventy-one percent indicated that the length of the sessions was just right. Twenty percent reported that the activities were too short (20 percent).
- Seventy-six percent of students reported that the difficulty level of the information they learned through the program was just right.
- In terms of what students liked most about the program, the responses most frequently cited were the classroom activities and working in groups (44 percent and 30 percent, respectively).

Students' description of what they liked most about *Our Nation* included playing the board games, being entrepreneurs, figuring out how to start and run a business, and being challenged to think about their futures.

The post-pilot survey contained an open-ended question asking students to list two things they learned from *Our Nation* which they thought were important. Students' responses to this question ranged from one-word answers to surprisingly astute insights about themselves, their aims in terms of personal development and skill building, and a newly gained perspective on the business world and its global impact.

## Teachers

Teachers completed five session-specific surveys following the lessons and the post-pilot survey. Highlights of their responses include:

- Seventy-two percent of teachers rated the overall quality of the program as “good” or “very good.”
- Seventy-nine percent of teachers indicated that students enjoyed the program overall.
- Seventy-one percent reported that students were engaged by the material.
- Eighty-five percent of teachers found the Guide for Volunteers and Teachers helpful to them.
- Fifty-seven percent of teachers felt that the content of the sessions was age-appropriate.
- Across the five sessions, 66 to 79 percent of teachers reported that the session content met the standards required by their state, district, and school.

In terms of what they liked most about *Our Nation*, teachers praised the program's materials and manipulatives, the JA volunteers' enthusiasm and skill, the exposure students received to career options, and how the lessons' interactive format successfully engaged students in the business world.

## Volunteers

- Seventy-five percent of volunteers rated the overall quality of the *Our Nation* program as “good” or “very good.”
- Eighty-two percent reported that overall, students enjoyed the program and that students were interested in and engaged by the program's topics.
- Fifty-five percent of volunteers indicated that the *Our Nation* curriculum was age-appropriate.
- Sixty-two percent felt comfortable teaching the program, with 66 percent indicating that the Guide for Volunteers and Teachers was helpful to them.

Volunteers indicated that what they liked most about the program was its focus on technology, future career options, and the changing nature of the global marketplace.

## JA Staff

Although less than half of the eight JA Staff members who responded to the post-pilot survey indicated that they liked the Guide for Volunteers and Teachers, 50 percent of this group did like the Student Workbook. JA staff also reported that they liked how *Our Nation* stimulated students to think about the connection among education, skills, and success in high-demand jobs.

# Recommendations

- Increase the curriculum's relevancy to students' daily lives and experiences.
- Increase the program's interactivity and reduce its complexity.
- Reinforce the learning of key terms and concepts through review across the sessions.
- Allocate more time for class discussion to ensure students' comprehension.
- Improve the material's visual and graphic elements.
- Retool game design to make learning, rather than competition, the primary focus.
- Reorganize the Guide for Volunteers and Teachers to facilitate lesson presentation, including more tips and examples to support lesson content.