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By Michael Goot

Students learn about life expenses



Lorinda Gandrow, a math teacher at Schalmont Middle School, is teaching her eighth-grade students about monthly budgets, including the factors involved in home purchases. Here, Julianne Moan picks a random down payment voucher.

ROTTERDAM — Schalmont Middle School eighth-grader Olivia Desmond was trying to decide what kind of house she could afford with the pay of a hypothetical job as a department store manager.

She estimated that she could afford a house in the range of \$77,800 to \$99,750.

"I've got to watch my spending. You've got to look at the taxes and the finances and everything else," she said.

It was all part of a "Game of Life" lesson in teacher Lorinda Gandrow's math class. During the three-week program, students learned about budgeting and statistics. They rolled dice to determine their career. Then, they learned about paying taxes and making major purchases such as a house and a car.

Gandrow adapted the lesson from one a colleague had given to her. She is a national board-certified teacher and said she is always looking for lessons to improve student achievement.

On the house lesson, Gandrow told the students that their price range for a house should be between 2 and 2½ times their annual salary. Most people need to seek some type of financing for a house.

"I don't have \$180,000 lying around in the bank to buy a house," she said.

"The way the economy is today, most people have to put down some down payment even if they have great credit," she added.

Also, people have to take into account closing costs, which include fees for real estate agents and lawyers, who are needed because it is a legal transaction, and they must conduct a title search to make sure no one else owns the house.

She said it is important to get a house that fits their needs. A family with a lot of children will need many bedrooms.

People also need to research the age and condition of the house: "Would you want to buy a house that's got a cellar that's sinking? Probably not."

Also, people have to factor in the cost of electricity, gas and furniture.

Students searched through real estate magazines to find the house they wanted to "buy."

Alex Chiaravalle, 13, "worked" in a restaurant, so he estimated he could afford a house in the price range of \$129,840 to \$162,300. He said he enjoyed doing the exercise. "It prepares you for the real world," he said. "There's no shortcuts in this. Not everything is easy. You have to budget your money. You can't get whatever you want."

Thirteen-year-old Lauren Chrysler said she had more fun doing this than just regular schoolwork.

"I like it because it really shows you how it's going to be in your life when you get older," she said.