

THE LABOR FORCE

By

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Teacher: Madison Central High School

Grade: 12th

Course: Economics

Number of Participants: 120

Length of Project: 3 days

Economics is a required course for all graduating seniors. It is a semester course. In my class, I try to encourage students in the study of Economics. I try to make the class interesting, breaking away from the traditional way of teaching every now and then as to encourage them to participate and get involved in the course. With 1404 students enrolled in grades 10-12, MCHS is one of the four largest public high schools in the state. In addition to a strong college-preparatory curriculum, Madison Central offers the following extracurricular activities: 22 varsity sports, varsity band program, varsity dance, AFJROTC and over 40 clubs. Madison Central is recognized as one of the "Top Ten Best High Schools in America" by Redbook magazine, which considered such factors as superior academic and extra-curricular achievement coupled with parental and community involvement. Madison Central is the home of the State Champion Academic Competition Team, the State Champion Economic Council Team, and the Academic Decathlon State Champion Team. The Academic Decathlon Team also brought home to Madison Central the National Academic Decathlon Championship. Madison Central boasts two All Superior Marching Bands and an All Superior Choir. The highest all around sports honor that can be bestowed upon a school is the All Sports Award. The Jaguars were winners of this prestigious All Sports Award for 2005-2006.



ABSTRACT:

“Labor Force” is one of my favorite units to teach. Not only is this one of my favorite units to teach but I feel as if this is one of the most important units for the seniors who are in my classes—majority who are either entering into the labor force/work field after high school or continuing their education. This unit focuses on the labor force – characteristics of the labor force, definition of the labor force (this is important for the next unit as well when the students study unemployment rate), and characteristics of unions. Within this unit, I stress the correlation between skilled jobs/wages versus unskilled jobs/wages. With Mississippi leading the nation in high school dropout rate and dependency on government aid, I feel as if my role as a teacher, especially with this unit, has increased dramatically. I want the students to take away with them the appreciation of education – rather they continue education at a vocational/trade school or continuing education at a university. I stress the need of a skilled work force in our state, which would hopefully bring jobs to our state, thus improving our state economically. I do not teach content; I teach students. I must remember that not all my students will attend a four year university but some will be the plumbers and electricians whom I will hire one day to complete a job at my house.

There are a variety of skills incorporated within this unit. First, the students will have to analyze various examples and determine if the person is or is not included in the labor force. Beginning with this unit until the end of course the students must know the definition of the labor force. Second, students correlate previously studied material (U.S. History) with economics concepts. The students have studied much of the material in this unit; however, the material is usually taught more from a history perspective without much emphasis placed on economic concepts. Many students have their “ah- ha” moment as we study the labor force, “seeing” that connection between the two subjects. Last, the students participate in a simulation where they have to collectively bargain a new contract. Even though this simulation is nowhere near the difficulty in the real world, it gives the students a glimpse into the technicalities of collective bargaining.

There are various activities I have included in this unit which breaks up the monotony of class. After studying the definition of the labor force (who is included and who is not included...which is important in calculating the unemployment rate) and characteristics of the labor force, we focus on the history of labor unrests (child labor, government legislation, etc.), the rise of unions, and effect of unions today. This is done through the

PowerPoint. I try to present the material in an interesting, entertaining way. After the PowerPoint, the students participate in a collective bargaining simulation. The last part of the unit, other than the unit test, is a computer research activity done in class where the students research the career they are considering. Within the research, the students will learn if there is a need for that particular field (labor demand) and approximate salary they can expect to earn. The students always ask to keep this assignment because it includes a plethora of information that they feel is important for their future studies.

I feel this unit is very successful. Not only do students do well on the test but great discussions are held in class. Through later discussions, I have realized the effectiveness of this unit through the remembrance of details such as the labor force definition. When studying how the unemployment rate is calculated, the students remember that only those ages sixteen years or older who are actively seeking work are considered to be unemployed.

LESSONS:

Day 1:

Lesson Description:

On the first day of the “Labor Force” unit, the students learn the specifics parts of the labor force definition. I do not teach the definition from a “vocabulary” standpoint but rather teach it in a methodical way. I break the definition down into five parts: 1) all non-institutionalized individuals, 2) ages 16 years or older, 3) who are actively seeking work, 4) working for pay, or 5) awaiting recall from temporary layoff (within 90 days). I have found it to be more successful breaking the definition into five parts. It is crucial that students know who is considered part of and who is not considered part of the United States labor force because with the next unit, they will use this definition to calculate unemployment rate. After a discussion of the labor force definition, I review the students by telling them various examples and they have to tell me “yes, part of the labor force,” or “no, not part of the labor force.” For example, I may tell them that Mac is prisoner #2349875 and works on the penal farm. The students should reply that he is not part of the labor force because he is institutionalized. Once I have evaluated the students on the labor force definition, we discuss the characteristics of the labor force – skilled versus unskilled jobs, blue-collar versus white-collar jobs, and so on. The last part of this lesson is the analysis of wages in the labor force. The students recall former definitions they have studied – law of demand and law of supply – to determine wages in particular industries. We compare wages in an unskilled job market versus wages in a skilled job market. I also emphasize the importance of becoming skilled in a job because a skilled workforce attracts businesses to our state, helping the overall economy of our state.

Grade Level: 12th

National Economic Content Standards and Benchmarks:

Standard 13: Role of Resources in Determining Income

Income for most people is determined by the market value of the productive resources they sell. What workers earn depends, primarily, on the market value of what they produce and how productive they are.

Mississippi Economics Framework:

Standard 1. Identify and apply basic economic concepts.

- a. Describe how the laws of supply and demand interact.

Standard 6. Demonstrate the ability to apply and interpret social studies tools.

- d. Utilize primary and secondary sources.

Student Objectives:

Students should be able to...

- Define labor force.
- Distinguish difference in wages between skilled jobs and unskilled jobs.
- Apply Law of Demand and Law of Supply to the labor force when determining wages

Time Required: 90 minutes

