



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Junior Achievement of North Florida Pilot with Duval County Schools Shapes Vision for Planned Experiential Learning Center**

**Jacksonville, Fla., May 4, 2026** - Junior Achievement of North Florida (JANFL), in coordination with Duval County Public Schools (DCPS), continued a pilot initiative designed to explore how JA BizTown can be meaningfully integrated into the student experience within a large public school district when JANFL's future Experiential Learning Center (ELC) opens in Jacksonville in late 2027/early 2028.

Launched in fall 2025, the pilot combines classroom-based learning with a culminating immersive experience intended to help educators and program leaders assess where and how a model like JA BizTown fits within district priorities, grade-level strategy, and student readiness.

That work reached an important milestone as DCPS students traveled to the Junior Achievement Experiential Learning Center in Savannah, Georgia, to participate in the nationally recognized JA BizTown simulation — an immersive learning experience in which students operate a simulated economy, manage personal finances, and take on professional roles within a community setting.

There were 131 students from Chaffee Trail Elementary, Mandarin Middle, Oceanway Middle, Springfield Middle, and Twin Lakes Academy Middle who participated in the JA BizTown experience. Each student was assigned a job—ranging from CEO to customer service representative—within one of the simulated businesses, which included a grocery store, bank, convenience store, fast-food restaurant, health care center, nonprofit, college, and more. To earn their paycheck, students had to complete the responsibilities of their assigned role before they were allowed to shop in the town's stores.

"I worked as the CFO for Publix, where I helped manage the money, work with loans, and make financial decisions for the business," said a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade student from Mandarin Middle School. "We had some ups and downs during the day, but that made it feel like a real job where you have to solve problems and work as a team. The experience helped me see how jobs work, how businesses manage money, and how the economy works. I would say this was one of the best days ever."

"This is really neat to see how the economy works, and you can see people walking around, and everyone has different responsibilities," said a Twin Lake Middle School Student who served as the Director of Administration at Georgia Southern's simulated storefront. "You can see the connection of work to money to paychecks. I think it's a wonderful place to be able to learn about financial things and how to work in businesses. I would definitely recommend JA BizTown to other students."

"This pilot has given us an opportunity to thoughtfully evaluate how an experiential model like JA BizTown could support student learning in a district as large and diverse as DCPS," said Jill Fierle, Director of Career and Technical Education for Duval County Public Schools. "Our focus

is on identifying learning experiences that help students connect classroom instruction to real-world application in ways that are engaging, age-appropriate, and relevant to their futures.”

Throughout the pilot, JANFL and DCPS worked together to assess several key areas, including:

- Operational flow and pacing
- Grade-level readiness
- Effectiveness of the culminating simulation experience
- Recommended grade-level fit within DCPS

“This is exactly the kind of planning work that needs to happen in advance of opening a facility like this,” said Shannon Italia, President of Junior Achievement of North Florida. “Our goal is not to offer this as a one-off experience, but to build toward a model where programs like JA BizTown and JA Finance Park can be embedded into the student journey — reaching entire grade levels each year. That’s where you begin to see true scale and long-term impact.”

The pilot comes as interest in immersive, career-connected learning continues to grow across the region. JANFL’s planned Experiential Learning Center is being developed as a regional asset to serve students across North Florida through experiences in JA BizTown, JA Finance Park, and the JA Dream Accelerator. Once open, the facility is expected to serve nearly 30,000 students annually.

“Our intention is to build something that serves young people across North Florida — not just one school system,” Italia added. “This pilot is helping us better understand how to design for scale, how to support educators, and how to ensure every student has access to these kinds of experiences.”

For more information about the Experiential Learning Center, visit [www.janflelc.org](http://www.janflelc.org).

### **About Junior Achievement of North Florida**

Junior Achievement of North Florida inspires and prepares young people to succeed in a global economy. JA’s hands-on learning experiences focus on financial literacy, career readiness, and entrepreneurship—helping students build the skills, confidence, and mindset needed to pursue choice-filled futures and contribute to a stronger Northeast Florida. For more information, visit [janfl.org](http://janfl.org).