

[HOME](#) > [FINANCE](#)

[NEWS](#) > [ENews](#) > [FEATURED](#)

# Local Groups Invested in San Diego’s Future

BY KAREN PEARLMAN

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3

SAN DIEGO – It’s never too early to teach financial literacy — the knowledge and understanding of financial concepts, tools and practices necessary to make informed decisions about money management — that helps people understand and leverage money to meet their goals.



Sidd Vivek  
President & CEO  
Junior Achievement of San Diego County

The importance of teaching financial literacy to the younger set is something Sidd Vivek, president and CEO of Junior Achievement of San Diego County, is squarely focused on.

“Like any competency, financial literacy is best learned in an experiential capacity, especially for young people,” Vivek said. “We’ve found the knowledge sticks better when kids can apply (and) experience the lesson, and not just hear and read about it.”

Junior Achievement is a worldwide movement, founded 100 years ago in the United States, and serving San Diego and Imperial counties for more than 70 years with a mission to empower young people with the tools and knowledge to be economically successful.

In addition to its grade-school rite-of-passage BizTown, a simulation experience that includes in-class economy curriculum and a day-long field trip to BizTown’s mini-city headquarters in Grantville taken by more than 15,000 fifth graders annually, JA San Diego also houses Mission Federal Credit Union’s JA Finance Park, runs the Take Stock in Your Future and Stock Market Challenge and has a JA Fellows program.

JA Finance Park provides personal finance and career exploration curriculum and simulations that engage thousands of teens and adults in experiential learning about FICO scores, debt, compounding interest and more, and then building a monthly budget based on factors that include median salary based on industry and job. (Every student who completes the simulation receives a deposit of \$25 or \$50 to seed a savings account, courtesy of MFCU.)

## ‘Value of Saving Money’

Debra Schwartz, president and CEO of MFCU, said it’s never too early to teach financial terms and concepts like savings, debt, credit, budgeting and investing. “It’s important to teach kids the value of saving their money and how an economy works,” she said. “The hope is that by investing in our kids now, we’ll have a better and more competitive San Diego workforce of tomorrow.”



Debra Schwartz  
CEO  
Mission Federal Credit Union

She said the financial institution’s relationship with JASD extends to 15 years of supporting BizTown and as the title supporter of Finance Park, and that both are important in shaping financial literacy at a young age that will lead to a brighter future for San Diego business.

“Through JA, they can start learning in elementary school concepts such as earning a paycheck, budgeting, and paying bills,” Schwartz said. “Our Mission to Save program teaches kids in elementary school the importance (and fun) of saving money. Financial literacy for kids is crucial as it equips them with essential skills to make informed decisions about money. It also helps provide a sense of responsibility. Smart financial habits early on will help them navigate the increasingly complex financial world as they get older.”

Junior Achievement San Diego’s Take Stock in Your Future and Stock Market Challenge is a multi-week investing curriculum and simulation that starts with the basics of investing – like what is a stock or bond, what are mutual funds and what are the risks/rewards – and understanding what a diversified portfolio might mean, “and ultimately ends in an energy-filled experience of ‘90 Days-in-90 Minutes’ investing with a \$500,000 portfolio through a fully-simulated stock market,”

Vivek said.

## ‘Real-World Exposure’

The JA Fellows program works in partnership with Lincoln High and Chula Vista Community Learning Charter schools, providing nearly 100 students with an intensive, semester-long course on financial literacy, including investing simulations, career exploration and workforce development, followed by the practical application of those lessons such as money management through paid internships with partners like Vertex Pharmaceuticals (NASDAQ: VRTX), Cox Communications and Maya’s Cookies.

The program offers nearly 200 hours of work-based learning and paid experiences during which students earn both academic credit and tangible, resume-and-network-building experience – a true boon to those who often do not have access to either, Vivek said.

According to a study by American Student Assistance, more than half of the students confirmed their interest in a career they previously wanted after completing an internship. These programs provide students with an inside look at business operations, empowering them to make well-informed decisions about their future. Students can establish a solid foundation for uncovering their professional passions through exposure to different aspects of a company’s business.



Britt Davis  
Director & Head of Human Resources  
Vertex Pharmaceuticals San Diego Research

“Vertex Pharmaceuticals is making a meaningful impact through its Learning Labs and its commitment to STEAM Education outreach programs like its high school summer internship,” said Britt Davis, director and head of Human Resources at Vertex Pharmaceuticals San Diego Research. “High school students receive invaluable real-world exposure during the summer internship program at Vertex. They work alongside some of the industry’s most brilliant scientific minds and seasoned professionals, actively contributing to a wide range of authentic business projects. These internships sharpen their skills, boost their confidence and expand their professional network significantly.”

This past summer, Vertex’s San Diego Research site hosted 15 high school interns from San Diego Unified School District schools, allowing the students to delve deep into the intricacies of the entire drug discovery process. They gained invaluable insights into the multitude of operational aspects essential for running a research site.

Vivek said that developing a diverse and inclusive local talent pipeline is critical in filling the jobs of tomorrow and building a robust economy “in which all community members can thrive.”

“By providing social capital and experiential learning opportunities to young people early, students cultivate the skills and mindset that propel them into future success and reaching their professional goals,” he said.

**Junior Achievement of San Diego County**

FOUNDED: 1950

PRESIDENT and CEO: Sidd Vivek

HEADQUARTERS: Grantville, San Diego

BUSINESS: Nonprofit

EMPLOYEES: 25

WEBSITE: [jasandiego.org](https://jasandiego.org)

CONTACT: 619-682-5155

SOCIAL IMPACT: JA San Diego County is a nonprofit that focuses on workforce development for youth.

