



# CASE study



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## **E. Lawson Brown Middle School, Thomasville, NC, USA**

An interview with Mary Hunter & Janet Cain, Grade 8 Teachers  
Thomasville, NC, USA

National Entrepreneurship Week was approaching and President Obama had just made a speech about the importance of teaching entrepreneurship to America's youth.

Two middle school teachers from North Carolina heard the speech and decided to host an entrepreneurship event at their school. Between the two of them, Mary Hunter and Janet Cain teach about 100 grade 8 students at E. Lawson Brown Middle School in Thomasville, NC.

“Janet had previously run an event in which the kids competed with each other using GoVenture business simulations,” says Hunter. “We decided to try it with all our Grade 8s here. It was right on topic for us, since we were teaching entrepreneurship skills to our Business and Marketing Technology students.”

With GoVenture Micro Business, students role-play as proprietors of a mobile business cart that sells food, jewelry, clothing, or electronics.

“The aspect of choosing the company's name and logo, and selecting products to sell, was really important for getting buy-in from the kids,” says Hunter.

As virtual business managers, students start by making some key marketing decisions. They decide where they will locate their cart, the amount of inventory they will need, whether they are going to hire employees, and what level of marketing and promotion they will use.

“Micro Business seems to have exactly the right combination of complexity and simplicity for our Grade 8s,” says Cain. Cain and Hunter give their students a few days to practice and master the game play before the competition.

“The kids learned about key business concepts like startup costs, pricing, carrying inventory, and how important it is to connect with their customers,” says Hunter.

“And that advertising is expensive,” adds Cain, who recalls some interesting cost/benefit discussions with her students during that first week.

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When competition day arrives, the students compete in sub-groups based on what they are selling.

Hot dog vendors go head-to-head with other hot dog vendors. Bling competes against bling, and electronics sellers go mano-a-mano with other electronics sellers.

“We gave out prizes for the highest sales and for the greatest profits,” says Hunter. Bags of Skittles, Starbursts, and Hershey Kisses were awarded to champions in their respective categories.

Running a simulated business doesn't always go well for the students. Misjudging their competition or setting their prices too high can hurt their bottom line, and even bankrupt their business.

**Simulated bankruptcy can be hard on a student's pride, but it flags one of the benefits of learning business using a simulation. “The kids learn how easy it is to go bankrupt if they are not making wise decisions based on the business feedback,” says Cain. “But, they learn from that. They come up with an alternate approach that they want to test by playing the simulation again.”**

GoVenture simulations can also be the source of inspiration for classroom discussions about business strategy, or for more personal reflections on business.

“We tied our GoVenture Competition to a literacy exercise,” says Cain. “The kids watched the President's speech (about the importance of entrepreneurship) and then went on to write their own essays on the topic using insights they learned from the simulation.”

The GoVenture competition also inspired outreach from a local branch of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). The FBLA high-school students invited all the Grade 8s to a high-school awards event, where four GoVenture contest winners and essay writers were called to the stage to receive cash awards.

“The students acquired true entrepreneurship strategies, enriched their math skills, and developed some real insight into public relations and marketing,” says Hunter. “Now students in my other classes are begging to try GoVenture. They want a chance to compete as well.”

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