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After-school program awarded \$10,000 grant

By Amanda Hickey

The restaurant, bakery, bank, salon and other businesses that operate at Jacksonville Commons Middle School's after-school program, MicroSociety, received an unexpected \$10,000 profit.

The grant from the Civic Education Consortium at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill arrived on Tuesday.

The grant, which was funded by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston Salem, will be put toward supplies and extras for the program, which allows students to create their own businesses and form real-world skills, said Mary Davis, career development coordinator for Onslow County Schools.

"It is going to provide us some of the extras we want to give them and maybe could not have, like a printer for their newspaper," Davis said. "It gives us leeway so we can purchase anything the bakery wants and the restaurant needs."

MicroSociety began in October with 100 students participating, but there are 75 students involved, she said.

Through the program, students are able to participate in "university time" - where they can study and access tutors - and have their own businesses.

Students run their own government, bank, restaurant, arts and crafts store, spa and salon, newspaper and bakery, as well as a step team, Davis said.

"They have their managers, their workers. The teachers are facilitators," she said, noting that the students are supposed to rotate their roles so all can experience the different positions in the workplace.

The students created their own monetary form - Knightville money - and use it to purchase supplies for their business, purchasing products from other businesses.

They receive their pay from the businesses in the form of a paper check, which they bring to the bank to cash. Then they are given their pay in Knightville money, Davis said.

By participating in the businesses, the students are able to learn that math and writing will serve a role in their lives.

"(We hope to) transform them from passive learners to active participants," Davis said. "We're hoping that by being involved and engaged every day, they will take it back to the classroom."

Davis hopes that community members will become involved in the program, particularly government officials, local businesses and parents.

"It's not just a place for (students) to be after school. It's its own little society," Davis said.