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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Choctawhatchee High School Students Gain Real-World Skills at 4th Annual Reality Check Event

Yesterday, approximately 80 Choctawhatchee High School students participated in the Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation's (OPSF) 4th Annual Reality Check, a hands-on financial literacy simulation designed to equip students with essential money management and decision-making skills. During the event, students stepped into the role of working adults, complete with assigned careers, salaries, and family scenarios. They navigated stations such as Housing, Utilities, Insurance, Transportation, Communications, and more, making virtual payments and building budgets. The experience offered students a meaningful look at the realities of financial responsibility and the impact of everyday choices.

This year's Reality Check event was generously sponsored by Origin Bank, whose support helped make this learning opportunity possible. Principal Michelle Heck said the event made a powerful impression on her students. "Seeing our juniors and seniors participate in this incredible event reaffirms the importance of connecting classroom learning with real-life experiences. Our students stepped up, asked thoughtful questions, really took this experience seriously, and represented our school and their teachers with excellence. I'm very proud of them." Students also shared how impactful the experience was:

- **Ryan Taporco, Senior:** "It was an eye-opening experience to have to make practical decisions on wants and needs with the given salary and budget."
- **Abby Heck, Junior:** "It was a great real-world experience for opportunities and decisions we will encounter once we graduate high school."

The Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation coordinated the event with tremendous support from community partners and volunteers, including: Okaloosa County School District, Doolittle Institute, Modern Technology Solutions, Inc. (MTSI), Okaloosa County Teachers Federal Credit Union, Origin Bank, Eglin Federal Credit Union, CareerSource Okaloosa Walton, Okaloosa County Tax Collector's Office, Niceville Starbucks, Members of the U.S. Air Force at Hurlburt Field, Mr. Mike McMMain, Sarah Cato, Quanz Peters, Fort Walton Beach Women's Club, U.S. Army Recruiters, and Mortgage Apex.

"Events like Reality Check align perfectly with the Foundation's mission to support student success," stated John Spolski, OPSF Executive Director. "We are deeply appreciative of our community partners who give their time and expertise to make this simulation both impactful and memorable for our students. Together, we are shaping financially responsible and informed young adults."

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