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Prepping for success

Chyten Educational Services
tutors in the fine art of test-taking

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NEWTON — In its current radio campaign, one of the country's largest educational testing services sounds the call for instructors, making its pitch to students who have aced admissions tests in the past.

It may well work for that company. But Neil Chyten maintains that his refusal to hire such students as instructors sets his test-preparation business apart from the pack.

Instructors at Chyten Educational Services Inc. are all experienced educators and include people like Martin Himmelfarb and Alex Chung.

Himmelfarb, who tutors English at Chyten, has both a law degree and a master's degree in journalism. He has taught journalism at Boston University and also trains new attorneys, paralegals and interns in writing. Chung, a math, chemistry and physics tutor at Chyten, boasts a master's degree in chemical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he graduated third in his class. He is currently an eighth-grade teacher.

"We do not send college students in," said Chyten, 45, who formalized his one-man test-prep business in 1999 by opening shop in his hometown of Newton.

The formula has worked so well that Chyten Educational Services has since expanded to its second location, in Wellesley, and this summer plans to open additional offices in Brookline and Lexington. The business includes both test-preparation services — which are based on Chyten's own formula — and individual tutoring.

Its founder now has about 20 full- and part-time personnel and last year generated close to \$1 million in revenue.

For the business's 1,000 or so students, the expertise does not come cheap, however.

Chyten charges between \$125 and \$165 an hour for tutoring, depending on the instructor, and Chyten's personal tutoring services go for \$265 an hour.



SANDIE McDADE-ALLEN / BUSINESS JOURNAL

Neil Chyten is founder of Chyten Educational Services, a test-preparation and tutoring company based in Newton. Chyten says his company's emphasis on reading and study skills, as well as its staff of education professionals, sets it apart from the competition.

Students prepping for such admissions tests as the SAT or SAT- II usually require between eight and 10 individual sessions, Chyten said.

Group classes cost from \$375 to \$645, depending on the test for which students are preparing.

"It's about a \$2,000 insurance policy on a \$150,000 education," Chyten tells clients, although he does offer discounted services to certain economically disadvantaged students.

Many are buying it — both literally and figuratively.

"A number of students in the area have relied very successfully, I think, on his services," said Marlyn McGrath Lewis, an admissions officer at one local college.

"I've never heard anything but very high praise and gratitude from both students and their parents," she said.

Arthur Segel, a lecturer at Harvard Business School, said two of his children have benefited from Chyten Educational Services. "Neil's terrific in building skills

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As he prepares to open his Brookline and Lexington locations, as well as double his tutoring staff, Chyten's already looking beyond Massachusetts. But as the company grows, he has no plans to change its successful formula. From Connecticut to California, he says, "we'll never hire graduate students."

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for the kids and teaching them real solid test-taking techniques," he said.

Chyten's own formal education credentials end with the bachelor's degree in English he received from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in 1980.

Not long after graduating, Chyten answered an ad in the newspaper and accepted a job with a company that offered

reading and study-skills classes throughout the country. The skills classes he taught were popular, even though he and colleagues barely had any training as teachers.

"I realized they had something important to offer, yet they were sending unqualified teachers across the country," he recalled.

Chyten believed he had a "pretty good flair for teaching" and in 1984 decided to write his own study-skills curriculum based on "readings, common sense and traditional theory and dogma."

It's that curriculum, as well as his insistence on hiring trained teaching professionals, that Chyten says continues to set his company apart.

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