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# Helping kids through testing maze

By Sean Sullivan  
Staff Writer

Success, it's often said, is 99 percent perspiration and one percent inspiration. But for students preparing for college, a better formula for success might be 99 percent preparation.

After all the years of K-12 classes and exams, college admission tests are the final rite of passage for students seeking to take the next step in their education. Understandably then, fewer are willing undertake that task without a heavy dose of preparation.

A legion of letters stands between students and acceptance to some schools and colleges, the SAT, SSAT, ACT and ISEE among others. Behind the big letters are some even bigger tests - the Scholastic Assessment Test, Secondary School Admissions Test, American College Test, Independent School Entrance Examination.

For many students, the tests are a final and stressful obstacle in moving on to the next phase of their education. And with the powers-that-be coming up with new tests to challenge prospective students, college hopefuls are finding more hurdles on their way to college or university.

In addition to the well-known (and widely-dreaded) SAT exams, students now face another round of testing, the so-called SAT subject tests. These are more focused versions of the SAT, on specific subjects like literature, languages science and history. Many colleges now require potential students to take at least two of these.

If studying up is the name of the game in getting a leg up over the competition, local students might consider another name toward that end - Chyten Educational Services.

Based in Lexington, the company offers private tutoring to help students navigate the twists and turns of those testing labyrinths. The firm specializes in test preparation, as well as more general tutoring such as help with specific school subjects and homework.

Test-prep classes for the general SATs runs about \$895, and the subject test class \$500. Considering the stakes involved, parents and students may consider it money well spent.

"It's definitely helped me to be more prepared," said Caitlin de Cristo, who has been prepping with Chyten for the SAT she'll take this Saturday. The 16-year-old Dana Hall School junior attended one-on-one Saturday tutoring sessions at the Lexington office.

"It's definitely helpful with that new writing section. Hopefully, I do well enough that I don't have to do



Becca Licht, 17, of Lexington takes notes in her book during her SAT prep class at Chyten Sunday.

Staff photos by Shawn Lynch

*'It's definitely helpful with that new writing section. Hopefully, I do well enough that I don't have to do it too many times.'*

Caitlin de Cristo, Dana Hall School junior

it too many times," she said.

Students can take the SAT as many times as they want. But perhaps lesser known is that colleges tend to regard three as the magic number. Fewer may indicate a lack of ambition, while four or more might seem obsessive.

Chyten's Lexington location serves as the firm's headquarters, but is also a major tutoring site itself. The company now has centers in Concord, Newton, Wellesley and Westwood in addition to its Lexington location.

Neil Chyten, the firm's owner and founder, said the key to the company's success has been its students' success. The key to that, in turn, is Chyten's tutors.

"We set out not to be like other tutoring companies out there," he said. Running the firm like a teacher - not a businessperson - has been the golden rule.

"We knew that we'd have to have

the best teachers," said Chyten. The company's formula for attracting and keeping them on board, he added, has allowed the company to make the grade in the tutoring industry.

But as a businessman, what does Chyten know about what teachers need and want?

The answer is simple - he spent years as an instructor himself.

Chyten started tutoring privately in 1986, and knows first hand about the woes of a traveling teacher. The workload in addition to time spent house-hopping to students' homes took its toll after a few years, a common ailment for those in the profession, he said.

"I was a tutor for many, many years," he said. "I just couldn't do it anymore."

But what he could do, Chyten realized, was teach others how to tutor, minus the daily commute of course. So in 1999, he opened his



Erik Sullivan, who has a master's degree in American literature, teaches students how to be better test takers at Sunday's Chyten class.

first tutoring center, based in Newton. From his 50 or so students as a private tutor, Chyten's new center soon grew to roughly 1,000 clients. The firm now has between 2,000 and 3,000, spread among the other centers that have sprung up since.

But Chyten hasn't forgotten his days as a former private tutor. That experience, in fact, has shaped the firm's guiding principals.

Lesson number one: no home tu-

toring.

Endless hours behind the wheel traveling to and from students' homes (to say nothing of gas prices) are the surest way to burn out even the most dedicated tutors. Instead, Chyten's tutors meet with their students at any of the firm's locations to ply their trade. It is just one aspect, said Chyten, of trimming away the responsibilities that

normally come with the territory in tutoring. All that's left is teaching, the very reason educators embark on the career in the first place.

Lesson number two: You get what you pay for.

While central tutoring centers mean an additional expense for Chyten, so does offering its teachers competitive salaries. A small expense, said Chyten, for keeping the firm's turnover rate to a minimum.

"They don't want to be traveling. They want to be teaching and they want to be paid for their teaching. That means they're earning a great living and not wasting time driving from home to home. That formula has allowed us to keep the best tutors in the industry," he said.

Having a convenient location is a major asset in working for Chyten, said tutor Marty Robinson. A former lawyer, he has been with the firm

for eight years.

"The in-office tutoring is nice because all our resources are right there," he said.

Robinson said the job has few drawbacks, one of them being the weekend evening sessions when he might miss a Patriots game. But that's a small sacrifice, he added, for a job he finds both enjoyable and rewarding.

"There aren't many people who get this combination," he said. "It's really nice to see the students succeed."

Chyten's Lexington office has proof of that pride and success on display - triangular banners grace a wall of its lobby, each of a different college or university its students have been accepted to.

But although teaching is his first love, Chyten no longer personally does any tutoring. The company and his many teachers occupy most of his time.



**Kim Harvey, 16, takes notes during her SAT prep classes at Chyten Sunday.**

"There's always something having to do with my teachers that keeps me busy," he said. "Teaching is something that gets into your blood and never leaves."