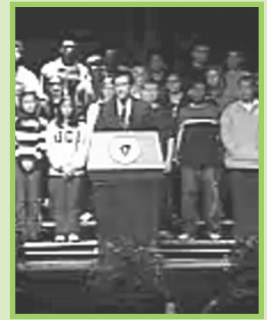


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Gov. Mitt Romney, at Somerville High School, congratulated the Class of 2003 for its performance on the December MCAS retest, see page 7.



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# Exchange

The Newsletter of the Massachusetts Title I Dissemination Project

## Helping children set goals

For the past seven years, James Desrosiers has been committed to helping students create achievable goals and then ensure that those goals are met. While Desrosiers has focused on helping middle and high school students, he initially collaborated with business executives and professional people in setting goals. Desrosiers noted that after each session, "I always heard the same comment over and over: 'I wish I had this process when I was younger.'" After some time, Desrosiers realized that his tools could more effectively target students, and wrote "Young People's Guide to Goal Setting."

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# Goal setting crucial to children's success

After working almost exclusively with clients from large corporations on setting goals, James Desrosiers, native of Fitchburg, discovered that despite all that is taught to children in schools these days, one area he found lacking was in teaching them how to succeed.

Over the past seven years, as owner of GROWTHco, a training and development company, Desrosiers has talked with over 7,000 students at the middle and high school level, as well as adults.

Prior to starting his own company, Desrosiers spent five years primarily training employees and executives at companies on setting goals. For instance, at Prudential Preferred Financial Services and MCI Communications, where he won awards as a leading salesperson, he was asked to train other salespeople. By outlining to his co-workers how he was successful, he was able to show them how to meet their sales goals.

While he still works with many adult clients, Desrosiers realized the need to teach children his 'process' after one of his three children was having problems in school. "I was told that he was not reaching his full potential," said Desrosiers. "That's when I realized, that we as a society, have it backwards."

Acknowledging the high expectations that are placed on children by parents and other adults today, Desrosiers noted, "Before we can expect success from kids, we have to teach them how."



James Desrosiers, seen here signing his book, "Young People's Guide to Goal Setting," during Children's Author Day at the 2002 Annual Title I Conference.

As a tool to teach children how, Desrosiers compiled a 31-page book, "Young People's Guide to Goal Setting." A key starting point is that, Desrosiers said, "Everyone has an individual level of success, and everyone starts off with the same equipment. It's how we choose to use that one brain and the 24 hours in a day that determines an individual's level of success."

Schools throughout the state have found his book to be such an invaluable tool that fourteen school districts have chosen to integrate it into their curriculum, through enrichment classes, guidance and enrollment programs. "The book clearly defined the reasons for, and rewards, of goal setting, and provided a step-by-step strategy to incorporate the process into everyday life," noted Westfield parent coordinator Vicki Netzer.

Even with that degree of implementation, Desrosiers said, "As far as accomplishing *my* goal, that will not be done until, minimally, every child in the Commonwealth has it in their school curriculum."

When speaking with middle and high school students, Desrosiers explains how their choices will effect them. "You are the person you are today because of what you have done with all your yesterdays," Desrosiers said. "Who you become in the future is dependent on what you do with every 24-hour day from right now."

When starting to work with students, Desrosiers asks the students to write out a wish list of goals - ranging from academic, health, fitness, financial and spiritual goals. "From there, we can start to pick short term goals to make the long term goals a reality," he said. "If we don't teach children how to dream or how to set goals, they are waiting for us to set the goals for them."

The reason for doing this, Desrosiers said, is because a large number of "goals" young people have are given to them by parents and teachers. "Young people aren't giving 100 percent of their potential when doing their homework or the dishes because they are doing them for other people, and not for themselves," noted

Desrosiers. "The only way to achieve maximum productivity, efforts, and results is to teach the children to determine how they will personally benefit as a result of achieving a goal that came from someone else. Then they will look forward to accomplishing the goal."

To get children into the practice of setting goals, Desrosiers insists on not setting the bar too high.

"I like children to choose achievable goals, because attitude means self-esteem, and if we can get young children to achieve short goals, they see that they are achieving things, and they feel good about themselves," he said. "As a result, their confidence grows, and then they begin to try to reach for more. They start increasing their goals once they understand how to achieve them."

The initial part of Desrosiers' program covers one week, with students continuing to meet once a week to review their 7-day goals, and then set new ones.

If a student's math average is a 66, for instance, the first goal the student should work toward is getting a C-, he explained, instead of aiming for an A. "If they get an 85, they would feel as if they failed (if their goal had been an A), when they should be proud of the progress they made. My motto is: "Progress is better than perfection."

He likened it to a similar situation with some of his adult clients. "When they set a New Year's resolution..they should not set a goal to exercise every day if they have not been to a gym in five years. The first goal should be to simply drive by a gym that week. A realistic goal is to then go to the gym once or twice a week, and when that becomes a habit, and that becomes easy, than add a day."

Utilizing psychologist Steven Covey's research that concluded that it takes 21 days for a behavior to turn into a habit, Desrosiers works with students to set seven-day goals, over three weeks, so that after that time, not only have they accomplished three goals, they have improved their self-esteem in the process. "Your success comes from your results. Your results

come from your behavior. Your behavior comes from your conditioning. Your conditioning comes from habits with things that you have done over and over again.”

To find out what students can change in their daily routine to help them reach their goals, Desrosiers asks students to fill out a worksheet that outlines what they did over a period of a week. Upon completion, “They can see a snapshot of how much time they spend on ‘stuff’ that doesn’t help them reach their goals,” said Desrosiers. “For someone to increase their success, they first have to understand why they are currently achieving their level of success (or lack thereof).”

At Overlook Middle School in Ashburnham, for instance, he worked with a group of 27 students, with each student devising three goals over three weeks. Only three students were unable to meet all their goals and that was due to circumstances not within their control, (as Desrosiers states, not scoring a touchdown or a soccer goal). Guidance counselor Cathy Keene said, “I consider this a success for a majority of the class.” Even for those who did not meet their goals, Desrosiers said, “Failure is not a bad thing if you learn from it. Every time you don’t reach a goal, you can learn from the experience... did I set the bar too high? Did I not track my progress? So that in the future, you can avoid making the same mistakes.”

Even more impressive was what occurred at the Shaw Middle School in Millbury. “Two months after they started my program, the school chose to set a school-wide goal to have every child score above 90 percent on a math test,” said Desrosiers. “When the test was completed, the entire school averaged a 96 on the test!”

Even with these results, Desrosiers exclaims, “This program isn’t magic. We are simply teaching young people how to succeed.”

Part of why Desrosiers has increased his involvement in schools is because middle and high school students are a ‘clean slate’ in regards to setting goals. “Young children are yearning to learn this game and they are looking for the answers. It is a perfect time to teach them, before they go on to high school, or begin their careers, or become (an adult member) of society,” Desrosiers explained. “With young people it is often easier, because they usually don’t have a current system. I don’t have to recondition them, or con-

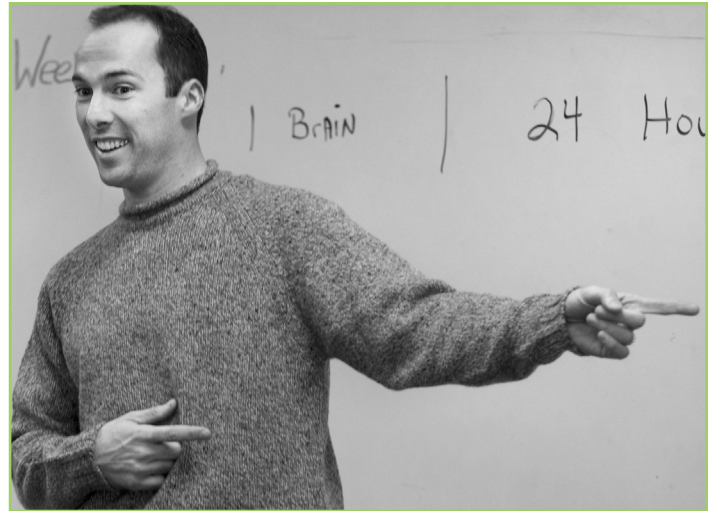
vince them that the system they are currently using is not as good...they are looking at it with fresh eyes.” He then added, “We just learn too late what the rules of the game are, and I am hoping to reverse that trend in this country.”

Even if the children he meets are enthusiastic about setting goals, Desrosiers noted that support must come from adults, particularly teachers. “For the teachers who understand the potential of this program, and get excited by it, and commit to it, their students achieve a dramatic amount of success and reach full potential. For those who feel intimidated by my tools, their children will likely be unable to reach the same level of success.”

While much of his work has been done in the Bay State, Desrosiers has found people around the world who are interested in his expertise. “I have been contacted by a non-profit organization in Kenya that wanted my help to organize a goal-achievement system for homeless children on the streets.” Their goal is to try to help the children in a way to give them the tools so that they can work to get themselves out of their current situation.

With his commitment to spreading his program through the schools and across the world, there are many who find his efforts to be extremely helpful to students. “I strongly agree that the skills he offers through this program are important and that our students will benefit greatly from learning how to set and achieve their goals and dreams,” wrote Sen. Robert Antonioni, who serves as the chairman of the Senate’s Education, Arts and Humanities Committee.

Despite the many accolades, what really drives Desrosiers is the students he helps guide towards achieving their goals. One example he noted was Lisa. “She wanted to become a nurse, but to do that, she had to go to college. But to go to college, she had to graduate high school. To graduate high school, she had to improve her grades. In order to improve her grades,



*James Desrosiers at the Southeast School in Leominster talks to children about setting achievable goals, noting that everyone starts with one brain and 24 hours in each day.*

*Photo courtesy of the Leominster-Fitchburg Sentinel & Enterprise.*

she had to do her homework. To do her homework, she had to schedule 30 minutes a day, Monday through Friday.” It all started with Lisa choosing to set a goal of scheduling a daily half-hour of homework during the school week, and then following it up with additional goals, accomplishing each, and in the end, accomplishing her long-term goal, and becoming a nurse.

Desrosiers continued, “I have children who have gone from detention, smoking and swearing, where they initially set seven-day goals to quit those activities, and then move on to set positive goals. It’s a matter of seeing today’s choices do lead to tomorrow’s results.”

To those children who may have been told by adults that they were not reaching their full potential, as he heard from one of his son’s teachers a few years ago, “If a young person hears from a parent or teacher that they are not reaching their full potential, the young person is probably thinking, ‘I’m doing the best with what I know.’”

Desrosiers likened it to Monopoly, stating that it is much harder to play the game without the rules or instructions than if you had them. He then added, “A lot of times, when adults read my book, they say that they need it for themselves... If adults don’t have these principles and concepts, how can they expect children to be able to reach their full potential?” ★

*James Desrosiers will be presenting at this year’s Annual Title I Conference in Hyannis, or you can visit [www.jamesdesrosiers.com](http://www.jamesdesrosiers.com).*