

4 students get incentives for success

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STAFF WRITER

That some philanthropist would pay students \$5 a day plus bonuses for getting to class on time, staying out of fights and keeping their grades up might strike some as the makings of a great reality show.

Yesterday, four eighth-graders at Weldon E. Howitt Middle School in Farmingdale were assured that the deal was no show, but rather, reality itself.

"I started thinking, 'Wow! I could do really good in school,'" said one of the selected students, Matthew Delano, 14, of Farmingdale, who said one of his goals was to lift his test grades this year from the 70s, to the 80s or 90s.

The program, "S" for Success, is the idea of Jeffry Rosmarin, a Plainview developer, who has tried other incentives in the past. In 1992, Rosmarin promised 46 middle schoolers in Westbury that, if they graduated from high school, he would pay their college tuition — a pledge that eventually cost him a reported \$500,000.

Under the terms of Rosmarin's latest venture, the four Farmingdale students will receive \$50 every two weeks, plus bonuses of \$125 every five weeks. In return, they must meet all rules of the Success program, which include earning C grades or better in every class, showing up on time for bi-weekly mentoring sessions with Rosmarin, and getting positive progress reports from all their teachers. Recipients who fall short of the requirements will have their "pay" docked at Rosmarin's discretion.

"Last year was chaos, but since September, I've been pretty good," said a selected classmate, Bernandine Jean, 14, also of Farmingdale. "So this is kind of a reward for what I'm already doing."

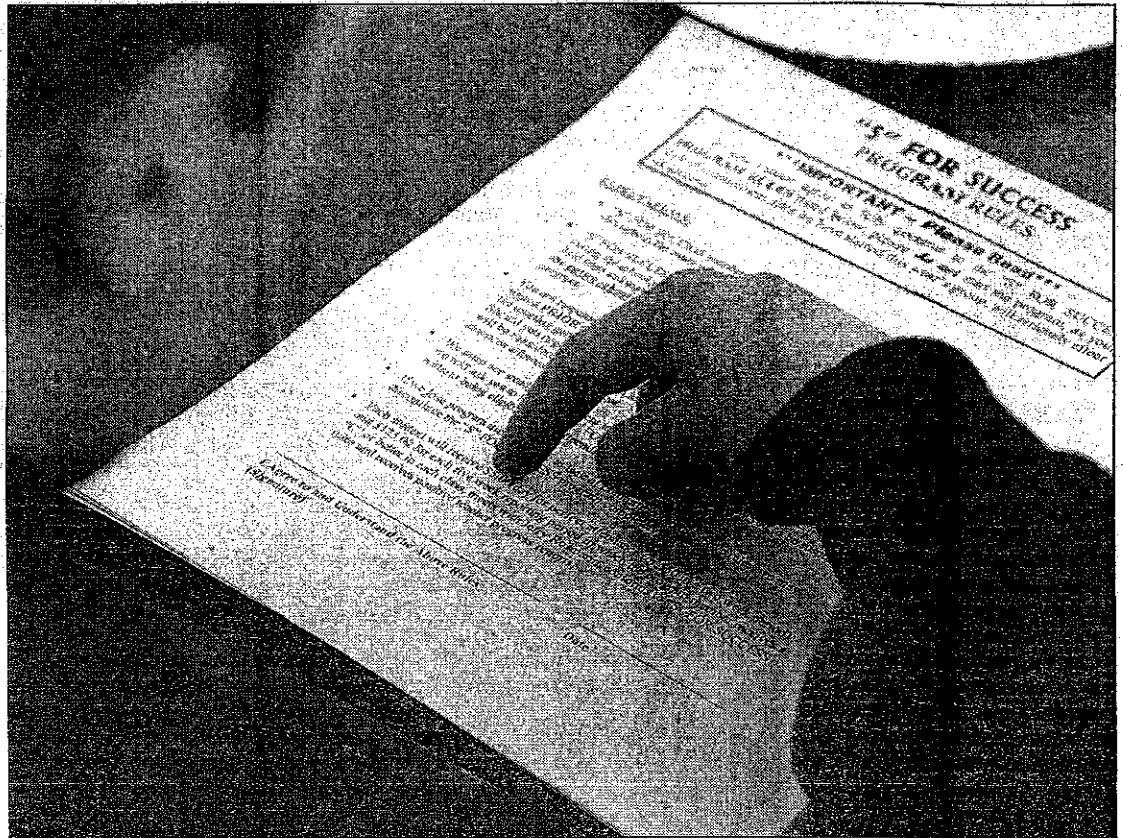
Other students picked for the unusual incentive program are Matt Ryan and Kevin Blyman, both 13 and Farmingdale residents.

Meeting over pizza yester-



NEWSDAY PHOTOS / JIM PEPLER

JEFY ROSMARIN, center, goes over the program with Matthew Delano, left, his mother Jennifer Wagner, Kathy Blyman and her son Kevin. Below, a student reads over the contract.



day with the eighth-graders and their parents, Rosmarin assured them that failure to meet the program's standards would result in quick dismissal — but a quiet one, not the ceremonious kind featuring extinguished torches or lectures from a boss they might have seen on TV.

"This is not the Donald Trump show," Rosmarin said. "I'm not going to get you in a board room with a lot of people and say, 'You're fired.' But if you can't do the job, I'm going to get someone else."

The Farmingdale Four didn't entirely escape the limelight, however. Rosmarin had invited news reporters and photographers to yesterday's session, saying he hoped publicity would encourage other business owners to get involved in the program and provide students with internships and other mentoring. "I'm kind of nervous — my legs are shaking," Delano said.

Rosmarin acknowledges that the program's chances of success are uncertain, and not all students offered the cash incentives have accepted. Originally, school counselors came up with a list of 20 teens they considered good prospects — not severe troublemakers, but rather, students who looked as if they might succeed with extra encouragement. The list gradually was whittled down, as some eighth-graders muffed their interviews with Rosmarin and as others simply pulled out.

"Students often want to be in control of their own lives," said Ellen Krammer, administrative director for the Farmingdale district, who helped put together the program. "They don't want anybody else to control it."
