



*(photo Selena Brock) Students from Southern Maine area JMG groups learn cooperation to balance the “Whale Watch” challenge during a recent visit to Waban’s TREE Center.*

## **JMG Students Develop Leadership Skills**

**By Selena Brock**  
**Sanford News Guest Writer**

Posted Jun. 3, 2015 at 2:15 PM

SANFORD - On Wednesday, May 20, the TREE Center hosted 70 7<sup>th</sup> grade JMG students from Sanford, Lewiston, Durham, Freeport and South Portland schools for a day long leadership event.

Jobs for Maine's Graduates (JMG) is a statewide nonprofit that works within Maine's public schools to help students reach their fullest potential. These students spent the day participating in teambuilding activities, leadership initiatives and service tasks.

When the students arrived that morning, they were escorted into the Experiential Education Center and greeted by guest speaker, Sanford Mayor Thomas P. Cote. Cote spoke about his own experience as a seventh-grader and the fact that he is now the father of one. Cote emphasized the characteristics needed by leaders: self-reflection, balance, self-confidence and humility.

After Cote’s remarks, the students headed outside for exciting activities such as the “Whale Watch” challenge, a low-ropes course initiative in which groups work together to balance a large platform on a fulcrum. During that process they learn about themselves while growing and developing as a group. Additional challenges included other low-ropes courses, blind maze, kayaking and community service.

Alicia Mendez of Memorial Middle School in South Portland had never been in a kayak before.

“It was scary at first, but when the teacher showed us how, it was fun!”

Mendez's partner in the tandem kayak, Catlyn Marcotte of Sanford Junior High School, said she'd been in a kayak a few times before and her favorite part of the day was the community service. Her group took items such as outdoor furniture out of storage and placed them around the camp. Logan Foster of Durham and Aiden White of Freeport worked together on sanding a swing structure to ready it for painting. Like Mendez and Marcotte, they didn't know each other but learned how to work together toward a common goal.

According to Tara Houle, JMG Specialist at SJHS, the "purpose of this earned event was for seventh-graders to step up as they will be the eighth-graders, role models to the new seventh-graders next year. They will be leaders and are realizing how much their choices affect the people around them. It's an opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and try something new, away from school and away from their friends. They're developing communication skills and building confidence."

Students took a mid-day break from activities to enjoy lunch by Bon Ami Catering.

Dwight Littlefield, VP of Operations for JMG at the state level observed the day's proceedings.

"This [TREE] program is a perfect place for the Southern Maine leadership day. There are events like this going on all over the state," he said.

JMG's mission is to identify students who face barriers to education, and to guide each one on to a successful path toward continued education, a meaningful career, and productive adulthood. The TREE Center's program nurtures those goals with teambuilding and leadership development.

At the end of their visit, students went away with wise words, new experiences, new friends and a memorable day to remember when faced with new challenges.

For more information about the TREE Center, call 207-636-5550 or visit on the web at [www.treecenter.org](http://www.treecenter.org).