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NORTHJERSEY.COM NEWS

Somerville School assembly addresses bullying

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2009
BY DOLORES ALFIERI
STAFF WRITER
THE RIDGEWOOD NEWS

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Somerville School students learned strategies on how to "stamp" out bullying on Tuesday.

Through a grant from the [Ridgewood Education Foundation](#), the school hosted Jay Banks, an animated, energetic lecturer who strives to help children avoid bullies and bullying.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007, the last year major data was collected, "about 32 percent of 12- to 18-year-old students reported having been bullied at school during the school year."

Banks, owner of Jay Banks Productions, begins his presentation by earning the students' trust through humor, which is also how he keeps it. Each letter of the acronym STAMP (Stay away from bullies; Tell someone; Avoid bad situations; Make friends; and Project confidence) was discussed at length through the use of anecdotes, statistics and silliness.

"Jay Banks was engaging and exciting for the students," said Dr. Lorna Oates-Santos, principal at Somerville. "Regardless of how much fun [the students] had during the assembly, which they did, the goal is taking away a message about how to deal with bullying. I believe virtually every student left the assembly with a toolkit that he/she did not have before.



CHRIS PETERS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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Jay Banks asks students to raise their hands if they are New York Giants fans during an assembly on bullying at Somerville School on Tuesday.



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"One of the things that our students are learning about is how to develop positive relationships, work out issues among their peers and stand up for themselves," Oates-Santos added.

Those themes are at the heart of Banks' performance. Dressed in an innocuous black sweater and dark jeans, he is part stand-up comedian, part clown, part educator. To illustrate the need to project confidence, for instance, Banks teased the students, naming several football teams, purposely excluding the New York Giants, and asking them which one was their favorite team, knowing he would elicit boos and energy. When he finally mentioned the Giants, the children cheered, and he asked them how the team runs out onto the field before each game. Then he imitated a meek player, head hung low, shoulders hunched. The children yelled, "No!" and Banks ran across the gym floor as if pumped for a game.

"Have your game face on," he told the students, adding, for the benefit of the educators present, that research shows when bullies look for targets, consciously or unconsciously, they look for those who do not project confidence.

Studies find that bullying increases as students get older, and the worst bullying occurs in middle school and high school.

"Education is the best form of prevention," said Dr. Daniel Fishbein, superintendent of schools. "Teaching our youngest students the importance of respecting others, the need for maintaining boundaries and the definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors will better equip them as they grow and are faced with more complex challenges and decisions."

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