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National expert promotes safe environments in Hawaii high schools



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When Dr. Steve Sroka asked Farrington High School students if they'd ever had a bad day, hands shot up all across a packed auditorium.

Sroka called one student to the stage. Instead of talking about his bad day, Sroka asked if he'd like \$20.

The student nodded.

Sroka crumpled the \$20 bill in his fist and asked if the student still wanted it.

"Yes."

Dropping the bill to the ground, Sroka stomped on it. The student still wanted it.

"Yes, because you're very smart," Sroka said. "You know this \$20 bill, even though it got dropped, crumpled and stomped on, it never lost its value."

Giving the student the \$20, Sroka reminded everyone present that a bad day can't rob them of their value.



Sroka, an award-winning educator from Ohio, visited several Hawaii public high schools this month, teaching students about the "Power of One" and encouraging them to take action to make their campuses safer through knowledge, kindness and hope.

"I try to deliver life skills – skills that help you live a little longer and hope that life is going to get better so you can learn more and live more," he explained.

The fast-paced, high-energy presentation had students repeating Sroka's mantra with increasing passion: "My body. My choice. I am not your toy. I am the power of one."

Being a teenager is tough, he acknowledged, but each student can improve the school culture –

to create a safer and healthier environment where students are better equipped to take on the academic challenges of the classroom and in their lives.

“Sometimes you have to step up,” he told them. “We’re not about how to ‘just say no’ today. We’re about how to say yes.”

He emphasized that knowledge is power and teenagers need to “Just say KNOW.”

Sroka brought up many challenges high school students face: Bullying now extends into cyberspace. Some hurt people because they’re mean, others because they’re hurt themselves. Students might be so overwhelmed by their own pain that they don’t have the strength to ask for help themselves. In some cases, teens who turn to sex, drugs or alcohol want to be noticed, not to be bad.

He called on all the assembled students to watch out for each other, and to take action when they see something isn’t right.

“We have to take care of each other,” Sroka said. “We don’t need bystanders anymore. We need upstanders that are going to say, ‘Hey, not at my school... You’re not going to mess it up.’ That’s how you make a difference.”

Sroka speaks to teenagers across the country – often in inner-city schools – drawing on personal experience to impress on students that education can change lives.

Raised by a single parent in public housing, Sroka faced learning challenges including dyslexia and ADHD. He showed Farrington students his third-grade report card, which labeled him “retarded.” He also shared a photo of a pin that was inserted into his hip in ninth-grade after he was beaten so badly his doctor warned him he might never walk again.

As a freshman, Sroka put his hope in education – and continued to do so after getting out of his wheelchair. “Today they call me Doctor,” he quipped.

In addition to teaching, Sroka has become a nationally-recognized motivational speaker for at-risk youth. He was named the Walt Disney Outstanding Health Teacher of the Year and was inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame. He even appeared on “Oprah.”

Sroka reminded students to always be humble.

“As soon as you think you’re hot, you’re not,” he warned them. “The key is to keep moving forward, no matter what life throws at you, and to extend a hand when you can.”

“You’re more important than you will ever know and little things you do make a big, big difference,” Sroka continued. “School safety needs you. School bullying and violence – it’s all about relationships and how you treat each other.”

Updating a common childhood retort, he recited, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will break my heart and crush my spirit.”

Words have power, he said, adding that a simple “hi” could be a kindness that’s remembered forever. Telling loved ones how much they mean to you can be a life-changing opportunity, he stressed.

Then Sroka added, “The sad thing is, you cannot unsay a cruel word. Words have a way of lasting forever.”

He offered students some words to live by: “Love everyone. Trust few. Harm no one.”

For more information on Dr. Sroka, visit his website <http://www.drstephensroka.com>.

Related News

In an ongoing effort to promote safe, caring and orderly public school environments, the DOE has added cyberbullying to its comprehensive student misconduct and disciplinary regulations (Chapter 19). The revised administrative rules governing student behavior and response to school and criminal violations have been translated into more than a dozen languages and are posted on the [DOE website](#)...

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