



Valley View Public Schools

*Serving portions of Bolingbrook, Romeoville, Lemont,
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School violence expert tells conference 'people change people, not programs'

Schools don't need metal detectors. They need student detectors.

So says world renowned speaker Steve Sroka who challenged more than 200 educators and public safety officials at the second annual Valley View School District Safe Schools Conference to "be there for the kids."

"This is a cruel society. Kids do not know how to cry for help." said Dr. Sroka, a school violence expert who has appeared on the Oprah Show and CNN. "The greatest gift we can give our kids is hope. If they don't have hope, they have nothing."

The key, said the former teacher, is teaching kids to make good decisions.

"Kids are people. They need people who care for them. If you work with kids, you have to get to their hearts before you get to their heads. School safety is about relationships. People change people. Programs don't.

"We need to put kindness back in schools," he added, pointing out that kindness disappeared from the nation's schools with the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act. "That's when we stopped talking about people and started talking about test scores."

Sroka told attendees "it's a whole different world out there. Today the unthinkable is doable."

Today's youth, he said, live in a world where half of their peers are being bullied on the Internet; many are sexting; cell phones and flip cameras can record video that can be posted on the Internet in the blink of an eye; and sex, drugs and violence are everywhere.

"We don't care about kids. We have an epidemic of violence. And few people care," he said. "Adults have their heads in the sand and in other places. People don't think these types of problems exist in their town.

"Schools are the safest place for our kids right now," the self proclaimed ghetto rat added. But that could change, he said if parents, educators and the community don't work together.

Crucial to that effort, he said, are three things: learning as much as you can whenever you can, helping each other and telling the people you love that you love them.

"You can make a difference. You're the real heroes. You can save lives."