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Serving Parma, Parma Heights and Seven Hills

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September 28, 2007

I am writing this letter to express my thanks for the wonderful program that was brought to us at Hillside Middle School on September 27, 2007. The program was timely, motivating and at a level that middle school students could easily relate to and understand.

The program had the attention of the students as they were entering the gymnasium. Dan Smith and his band were playing current music that students could relate to, grabbing their attention and leaving them ready for more. Mr. Smith easily focused the group of more than 500 students with his animated delivery and his ability to talk to students at their level. His self-directed video was humorous as well as telling of Mr. Smith's personality and mission. His depiction of how difficult it has become to get a simple hug from another individual and how powerful a simple hug can be was clearly meaningful to our student body. It was not just the hug that the students were left with, but the idea that kind gestures of any type can make all of the difference in the life of others. In addition, he touched on the idea of "paying it forward". The idea of doing the right thing just because it is the right thing to do is an aspect of the character education program of Hillside Middle School and Mr. Smith's message added reinforcement to our program.

The main body of the program revolved around Mr. Smith using an analogy of Spiderman and his "spider sense", a sort of sixth sense that protects Spiderman from injury. This was an outstanding analogy that the students could easily identify with, resulting in excellent crowd attention and interaction. Mr. Smith has a clear understanding of his crowd and the ability to engage middle school age children. His overall message was that everyone has a sixth sense like Spiderman that will protect each of them if they let it. He identified this sixth sense as the students' conscience. We were able to use this concept immediately with some of our kids who made wrong choices later that day. It is a simple, yet powerful concept that allows kids to see they do have a choice when faced with difficult decisions.

Mr. Smith's program was a wonderful addition to our character education program. His message was clear to our students and it helped to reinforce the ideas that we work to instill in our students. I would highly recommend this program to anyone interested in giving students a relevant, age appropriate and engaging program.

Sincerely,

Jeff Cook
Principal
Hillside Middle School
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