

Peace Talks

IN JOEL LEVY'S WORLD, H.E.R.O. MEANS "HELP EVERYONE RESPECT OTHERS"

Joel Levy (GSE'94) looks into a sea of 200 noisy students seated on the floor in front of him at Greenwich School in Stewartville. "Repeat these five rules," he begins. "Hands and feet to yourself. No extra conversations. Focus your eyes, your mind, and your body." Once the students have recited the rules back to him, he claps rhythmically and asks them to repeat that, too.


The group management strategy is Levy's way of getting restless kids to settle down for his 45-minute workshop on ways to defuse peer confrontations without violence. Labeled "Bully Education Theater," the workshops tie into the focus and self-discipline that the 37-year-old former actor and English teacher have used to become a sixth-degree black belt, Grandmaster, and member of the USA Martial Arts Hall of Fame.

Greenwich school counselor Diane Stickel (DC'85)—on hand to offer Levy support—points out that educational studies have linked social comfort to learning, and that those findings have led the New Jersey Department of Education to mandate behavior training. "But

they leave it up to each district to implement their own plan," she says.

In his workshop, Levy writes strategies on a whiteboard highlighting ways to avoid confrontations and then devotes the rest of the workshop to bringing two students at a time to the front of the room to role-play. "Compliment, agree, or offer to share with the bully, and he or she will not know how to respond," advises Levy, founder of his own American freestyle karate school in Highland Park. "And if that doesn't work, tell an adult."

Patrick, delighted to be role-playing the part of the bully, shouts at fellow student Bailey, "Do my homework!" Bailey peeks at the whiteboard and calmly retorts, "But Patrick, you're smarter than me! Let's do our homework together." As Patrick searches for the words to respond, 400 little hands applaud knowingly.



A sixth-degree black belt and member of the USA Martial Arts Hall of Fame, Joel Levy teaches kids in New Jersey schools how to make peace with bullies.