

Students cheer anti-bullying message

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Scott Halasz | Greene County News | Kevin Szawala, aka Mr. Peace, performs an anti-bullying rap for Cox Elementary School students on Friday.

XENIA — Cox Elementary School students received a strong anti-bullying message on Friday. “The impact of your actions can last forever in someone’s heart,” Michigan-based motivational speaker and youth minister Kevin Szawala, aka Mr. Peace, told the assembled youngsters. “You can say I’m sorry. It still takes time to heal.” Szawala, who travels the country speaking about bullying, inclusion, diversity and peace, made a stop in Xenia to share his stories and sing some anti-bullying hip-hop. Through anecdotes and interaction with the students, Szawala hopes to eradicate bullying, which is becoming more and more commonplace around the country. “One word can leave a mark forever,” Szawala said. “Don’t let it happen in the first place.” Nothing was more emblematic of that than a short story Szawala told about a friend who is 100 years old. That friend said she remembers being bullied when she was just 10-years-old. He also recalled a recent speaking engagement in a California school where a girl with a pronounced limp told her 2,000 classmates during an assembly she was in love with the star quarterback. As fellow students—and teachers—started laughing, the quarterback walked to the front, swooped the girl into his arms and hugged her. That caused the laughter to cease and one-by-one, for three hours, the students and teachers followed the QB’s lead. “You can’t even begin to imagine what type of impact that has,” Szawala said. He encouraged Cox students to have courage and take a stand instead of being a bystander. Szawala himself was a bystander once as a friend was being teased after accidentally causing his team to lose a football game during recess. “I was too afraid,” Szawala said. His friend told him years later, “I needed you and you weren’t there for me.” “It hurt so much to hear that,” Szawala said. His message was heard loud and clear Friday. “Bullying is not good,” said fourth-grader Dominick Shinkle. “We have to be kind to others and be friends.” Added fifth-grader Megan Lewis, “The most important thing was that no matter how much somebody is picked on, they’re still worth the same as the people picking on them. Both said when they encounter someone being bullied they will step in. “I should stand up and let them know that’s not cool,” Lewis said. “And tell the person being bullied they shouldn’t listen to them.”

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