

Program gives kids advice on safety

◆ PROGRAM

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school assembly, all have children attending the school.

"We are here today because we love you and there's absolutely nothing you can do about that," Brower told the students.

"Thank you," a little boy shouted back.

Brower said later that the S.M.A.R.T. program — Smart Means Abduction Registration and Training — has reached 52,000 children across the state, some in every county, since the program started in May 2000. The goal is to reach as many as possible.

During the time it takes to conduct the hour-long program, 12 children are abducted across the nation, he said.

He and Martin, who offer the program free of charge, will talk to any groups who seek them out, including schools or Indian reservations.

"Anywhere there's kids, anyone who calls," he said.

The program is funded by the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association, the union that represents the region's state corrections officers.

Identification kits given

The corrections officers introduced their use of digital cameras for taking photographs of the children, a change from the Polaroids they used to use, saying the photos will fax better when sent to investigative officials following a suspected abduction.

Each child received a folded sheet of paper containing a printout of his photo and a thumbprint.

A spot on the paper was reserved for a hair sample, which could be used for DNA comparison. There was also room for information about the child.

Parents are the only ones to keep the papers. Police do not keep them on a database, Brower said.

More than 400 students in Whitehall's grades kindergarten through sixth grade saw the program on Friday in two sessions.

"Just because of the nature of society, we need to protect our kids against the worst," Principal David St. Germain said.