

New fund available to educators to help needy students

Posted By SAMANTHA CRAGGS, Niagara Falls Review

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Principals who reach into their pockets to buy shoes and mittens for students in need will soon have a little help. The Education Foundation of Niagara is establishing a new poverty and emergency relief fund, which will help impoverished students with lunches, gym clothes or warm hats, things teachers and principals already quietly provide when they see a student in need, said Julie Densham, the foundation's executive director. Principals with the District School Board of Niagara will be able to apply for money from the fund to help students. "Principals have the ability to identify students (in need of help) in their schools," Densham said. "I know principals who have sent home bags of groceries with kids."

The foundation is an arm's-length charity supporting public schools in Niagara. It provides funding for projects designed to enhance the curriculum. The new poverty and emergency relief fund was established in response to a report from Niagara Region's social services department last year that highlighted an increasing problem of child poverty in Niagara, Densham said. "I thought, 'That's where we should be going, as well as program and teaching support,'" she said. "We need to support our kids in that way." The report said one in seven Niagara families lives in poverty, "a large percentage of which are DSBN students," Densham said.

The fund, which will be supported through donations, will also be for emergency relief. Seventeen of 37 people who lost their homes in a Roehampton Avenue apartment building fire last year were public school students, she said. The program's first fundraiser will be Toonie Tuesday, a donation box effort May 6. The fund will be officially launched at a wine and cheese reception at the Quality Hotel Parkway Convention Centre on Feb. 21. Brian Hutchings, Niagara Region's commissioner of community services, will be a guest speaker.