

Toonie Tuesday at Princess Elizabeth School Welland

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Welland

Students at Princess Elizabeth School got to wear a little something extra to school yesterday. "They paid \$2 to wear their hats for the day," said vice-principal Cindy Kohinski. But really, she said, Crazy Hat Day was a way to raise money for the Education Foundation of Niagara's first ever Toonie Tuesday fundraiser. "We wanted to provide an incentive for the students to participate in such a worthwhile fundraiser," she said. The kids jumped on board "because it's obviously against the rules to wear a hat indoors," Kohinski said.

From the school's 280 students, they raised \$302. At \$2 each that would account for 151 students, or more than half the student body. "We feel that connection to support the cause we have benefited from the foundation," Kohinski said. "The education foundation has provided Princess Elizabeth with grant money to support our snack program."

Toonie Tuesday raises money for the EFN's Poverty and Emergency Relief Fund. The relief fund helps students who are experiencing situations that might restrict their access in any way to equalized education, said the executive director of the foundation, Julie Densham. Students dealing with low income in their home and the stress and stigma that go along with living like that on a daily basis can be very hard for them, she said.

The relief fund can help these students by providing funds for shoes, backpacks, winter boots, coats, class trips and lunches. It's not always poverty, however. Sometimes, Densham said, it's about kids whose house has burned down or who have met some other tragedy. Other school boards in Ontario hold Toonie Tuesdays to raise funds for the same sort of programs. "What we're trying to do is engage the public of what the reality is out there that kids face every day," Densham said. "Also with Toonie Tuesday, a lot of times you're out there in the schools fundraising from the families that you're actually going to be inevitably supporting."

About 50 per cent of Niagara's public schools participated in the event, Densham said, many of them using incentives like crazy hat day or crazy dress day to engage the youths. "It also allows for the children to come in with their toonie and physically be putting toonies in boxes and mentally understanding they're helping their peers at times when they need it most," she said.

"Besides schools, we have corporate folks that are also donating." Local businesses helped out, people brought in cans of coins and one employer even pledged a coffee fund.

"There's so many things that we can do on a small level that we don't realize," she said.

"What's wonderful in our Niagara community that's happening right now is we have many associations and organizations like (ours) that are deciding to take action on what's going on in our region. You don't have to leave Niagara to find starving children."

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