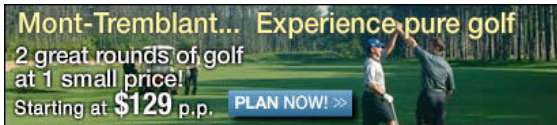


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Assumption kids are frontline fighters for the environment

By Don Fraser, Standard Staff
Posted 4 days ago

The green-gloved kids at Assumption Catholic School stand primed — a frontline of eco-warriors. Before them, the remains of Thursday's lunch.

Assorted banana peels, empty pudding containers and plastic wrap lie in a heap.

The mission for these Grade 2's and 3's presents its smelly challenges.

They must sort out the recyclables from trash. Then, see how they stack up.

In various piles, the mishmash is sorted into landfill, reusable, compostable and recyclable categories.

"We've been getting down and dirty with our garbage," said Vicky Wright, a teacher at the St. Catharines school. "We've been weighing it all together, separating it and weighing it."

The result, to the children's obvious delight, was a big decline in landfill waste for this classroom.

Among the most enthusiastic in this troop is Bradley Zemaits, 8.

At one point, he was determined to "reuse" tiny plastic sticks in an empty soft-cheese package.

"I think students should learn to actually start composting things they don't know are compostable, like Kleenexes," Bradley said.

This day's big sort-off is part of Waste Free Lunch Challenge week at the school.

As part of a provincewide initiative, staff, students and their parents are going all-out to make their lunches environmentally friendly.

The effort can also encourage eating healthier, and helps reduce the expense of bags and wrap by encouraging reusable containers.

All week, lunch eaters are encouraged to use reusables, with suggestions of cloth napkins and cutlery to cut down waste.

Frowned on are bags, single-use containers and anything overpackaged.

At Assumption, the class with the week's top waste-reduction results gets the honour of a "golden garbage pail."

The Ontario program for elementary schools is sponsored by the Recycling Council of Ontario, in partnership with the Metro Ontario supermarket chain and Tetra Pak Canada.

The effort is spurred by statistics showing the average student's lunch generates 30 kilograms of waste every school year. That's equal to the weight of a typical Grade 2 student.

In the challenge, each school tracks and weighs their waste through the week. The lightest-waste schools compete for \$1,000 cash prizes for school environmental projects.

The project has engaged 200,000 students in Ontario. Almost 12,500 are involved in Niagara in three school boards and 13 schools are taking part in St. Catharines and Thorold.

Kim Macgregor, an educational assistant at Assumption, is co-ordinating the waste-free effort there.

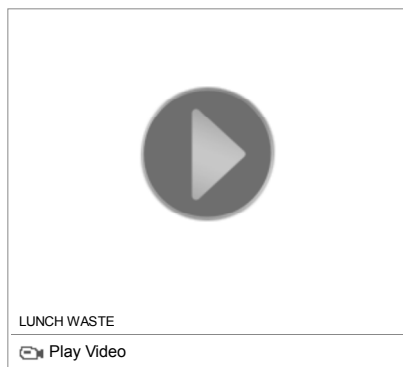
Macgregor is jokingly referred to at the school as their "eco diva."

She said efforts to reduce waste in general at the school have already borne fruit.

A one-day April audit produced seven bags of garbage and eight bags of recyclable material.

A recent one this month has it down to four bags each of garbage and recyclables.

"This really shows people are bringing reusable containers and waste-free lunches," she said, adding the week's lunch



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