

Parents at Kingston school incensed over behaviour rewards system

BY MEAGAN FITZPATRICK

At a quiet elementary school in Kingston, a boycott is under way by a group of parents who are forbidding their children from wearing a tag around their neck with hole punches to prove they are well-behaved.

Pupils at Monseigneur Rémi-Gaulin must accumulate a certain number of hole punches to be eligible for rewards such as tomorrow's Halloween activities in the gymnasium.

While the rest of the school enjoys the day, those pupils whose parents disapprove of the disciplinary approach introduced in September will stay in their classrooms — and that has their parents incensed.

"You can be sure that this Friday, the 31st, I will be at the school. I want to know what will happen," said Louise Meunier, one of seven protesting parents.

The purpose of the punch card, carried in a plastic pouch and tucked behind an identification tag, is to help shift the focus from reprimanding bad behaviour to encouraging and recognizing good behaviour. When pupils follow the rules, teachers use their discretion and either verbally compliment them for doing so, or give them a hole punch in their card.

The dissenting parents have a long list of reasons why they disapprove of the system. They claim it's unnecessary at a



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Adele Mercier wears a replica of the card children wear around their necks at a Kingston school that has implemented a reward system for good behaviour.

school where there were no major behavioural problems; they say it incorrectly focuses on rewards.

"Our children were coming home in tears, they were very stressed out," said Adele Mercier, another parent who is leading the charge against the new system.

According to the parents, children are so worried about getting enough holes to receive a reward that it's distracting from their studies.

"This system is de-

stroying the moral autonomy of our children by obligating them to seek public recognition of their self-managed behaviour," said Ms. Mercier, who teaches philosophy at Queen's University.

The school stands by its decision to implement the punch-card system and Principal Andre Dostaler said it needs to be given a chance.

"The intent down the road is that the student will appreciate the good behaviour and won't necessarily be soliciting the reward," he said.

Mr. Dostaler said changes have been made to the program based on parent feedback and that while he respects the boycotting parents' decision, it does come with repercussions for their children, such as missing the Halloween festivities.

CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Off-Citizen J-A8 - 3000-08

School reward system has Ont. parents livid

Boycott means 'well behaved' kids to miss school Halloween party

Meagan Fitzpatrick

Canwest News Service



Wednesday, October 29, 2008

OTTAWA - At a quiet little elementary school in Kingston, Ont., a boycott is underway by a group of parents who are forbidding their children from wearing a tag around their neck with hole punches to prove they are well-behaved.

Students at Monseigneur Remi-Gaulin must accumulate a certain number of hole punches to be eligible for rewards such as this Friday's Halloween activities in the gymnasium.

While the rest of the school enjoys the day, those students whose parents disapprove of the new discipline approach introduced in September will stay in their classrooms - and that has their parents incensed.

"You can be sure that this Friday, the 31st, I will be at the school. I want to know what will happen," said Louise Meunier, one of seven protesting parents.

The purpose of the punch card, carried in a plastic pouch and tucked behind an identification tag with the child's name and photo, is to help shift the focus from reprimanding bad behaviour to encouraging and recognizing good behaviour. When students follow the rules, teachers use their discretion and either verbally compliment them for doing so, or give them a hole punch in their card.

The dissenting parents have a long list of reasons why they disapprove of the system. They claim it's unnecessary at a school where there were no major behavioural problems; they say it incorrectly focuses on rewards; and that it does more harm than good.

"Our children were coming home in tears, they were very stressed out," said Adele Mercier, another parent who is leading the charge against the new system.

According to the parents, children are so worried about getting enough holes to receive a reward that it's distracting from their studies. It's also causing competition among students and some children are now asking their parents how they will be rewarded for making their bed or for cleaning their room, chores they previously did without incentive.

"It's encouraging not the commission of good behaviour, but the desire to be

recognized for doing it," said Mercier. "This system is destroying the moral autonomy of our children by obligating them to seek public recognition of their self-managed behaviour," said Mercier, who teaches philosophy at Queen's University.

The school stands by its decision to implement the punch-card system and Principal Andre Dostaler said it needs to be given a chance.

"The intent down the road is that the student will appreciate the good behaviour and won't necessarily be soliciting the reward," he said.

Dostaler said changes have been made to the program based on parent feedback and that while he respects the boycotting parents' decision, it does come with repercussions for their children such as missing out on the Halloween festivities.

The principal likens the system to an air miles program, where people aren't punished for not collecting points but aren't eligible for the rewards offered unless they are participating in it.

Meunier and Mercier, whose sons are in Grade 5, disagree and say their well-behaved children - a description the principal supports - deserve to go to the Halloween activities, and will view it as a punishment if they aren't permitted to attend.

"In the mind of a child, being excluded from even a small activity like this is significant," said Meunier.

The punch-card system is based on a model called Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Normand St-Georges, the program's coordinator for the school board, provided training on the approach to Remi-Gaulin.

"People in the school are torn with this scenario. They don't like to have kids not go to an activity but at the same time, they are stuck between a rock and a really hard place because they have to manage the system," he said.

Dostaler and St.-Georges said despite not wearing the tag the children are getting recognized verbally for their good behaviour.

Meunier and Mercier are convinced the school is taking the wrong approach and have taken their fight to the school board.

"The way I see it, it's a mistake," Meunier said. "I'm sure we can resolve it. We need to keep the pressure on because so far, we have not been heard."

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All the rage in Tokyo

Two Ottawa brothers are behind one of Japan's hottest pop bands

BY MATTHEW PEARSON

No one here knows Blaise Plant is a rock star. He sits near the back of a ByWard Market café, sipping blueberry tea on a rainy Saturday afternoon. The women behind the counter serve up warm, frothy drinks, while a few people chat quietly or read newspapers. Pop music plays faintly overhead.

This idle scene in an Ottawa café is a world away from the Korean stadium where — a few short months ago — Plant and his band performed for more than 40,000 screaming fans on the same bill as Death Cab for Cutie and Marilyn Manson.

The band is called Monkey Majik and the story behind their rise to fame in Japan and throughout Asia is, in a word, magical.

"It blows my mind," Plant says, a few of his blond curls peaking out from underneath a grey, knitted tuque.

"I don't have this whole, 'Hey man, we're famous,' or anything like that. I'm just a regular guy who wears jogging pants. To have this all coming toward us, it's unbelievable."

Plant, 28, and his older brother Maynard grew up on Carillon Street in Vanier. The Plants were a musical family

— their father, Gary, was a folk musician who once jammed with Paul Anka.

The Plant Brothers both went to Samuel Genest High School. Maynard was president of the student council while Blaise played Kenickie in the school's version of *Grease*. After graduating from Queen's University, Maynard went to Japan to teach English. Blaise, a University of Lethbridge graduate, followed a few years later and the pair soon formed a band.

Monkey Majik was not an overnight success. The band released two independent albums before being signed by Asia's largest record label in 2005. Their breakthrough 2006 single, *Fly*, was heard on some Japanese radio stations up to 20 times a day.

A year later, the band's fourth album, *Sora wa Maru de*, peaked at No. 3 on the Japanese charts. It's gone on to sell almost 400,000 copies.

And last month, Monkey Majik released another album, *TIME*, which reached No. 2 on the charts.

Plant says the band owes part of its success to its name and the curious story behind it. It's a nod to a song called *Monkey Magic*, which was performed by the popular Japanese band, Godiego, and used as the theme song for a 1970s television show called *Saiyuki*.

When a remake of the television show and a film version were released a few

years ago, Monkey Majik — the band before you now — performed the theme song.

The band's music has also been heard frequently on Japanese television commercials. Plant says almost every song on the new album has been featured in TV spots selling everything from beer to car tires.

On this side of the Pacific, Monkey Majik has barely made a squawk.

In fact, Plant says this is his first English interview. And tonight's appearance at Zaphod Beeblebrox will be Monkey Majik's first of two debut shows in North America (the second is in Vancouver on Monday).

The band was recently named a cultural ambassador for Japan in conjunction with the 80th anniversary of Japanese-Canadian diplomatic relations. The initiative's slogan — Miles Apart, Minds Together — perfectly captures the band's East-meets-West vibe.

Their music fuses Japanese and Canadian styles and sensibilities. The melodies are sweet, but not saccharine, and the lyrics are a clever, fluid motion between Japanese and English.

"We're a Japanese band first and foremost," Plant says. "You can't be a Japanese band by singing in English, you have to join the family. You have to speak Japanese to relate to the culture."

Plant, who has spent most of his adult

life in Japan, says the ambassador gig is a great honour and adds that it's often in Canada, not Japan, that he feels a bit foreign.

His parents travelled to Japan a few years ago to see Monkey Majik perform, but that was before they hit it big. His brother Gerard joined the band on the road this spring and got a totally different view.

"He freaked out, he couldn't believe," Plant says of his brother's reaction to the band's notoriety.

He recalls with a laugh Gerard's tense reaction to a crush of 500 or 600 fans trying to get close to the band as they left a radio station after an interview.

"I think that was the first time he realized Monkey Majik was a little more than he had imagined," Plant says.

The band will take a much-needed break after the two Canadian shows before hitting the road in January.

Plant, who visits Ottawa about once a year, says he is busy catching up with friends and family and enjoying some of the local cuisine he misses most — poutine and Beaver Tails.

He also made a special trip to the bank last week to pay off his parent's mortgage.

Now that is magic.

Monkey Majik plays Zaphod Beeblebrox (27 York St.) tonight. Tickets are \$8 in advance from Ticketmaster (613-755-1111), \$10 at the door.