

FFHS students tackle cardboard boat challenge

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By Ken Kellar

A handful of students from Fort Frances High School took part in a unique competition last week.

Eight Grade 7 students from Angela Petsnick's science class travelled to Dryden to take part in a cardboard boat competition.

Petsnick noted that the competition, organized by Skills Ontario, tied directly into their curriculum.

"We do structures and mechanisms in Grade 7," she explained

"So within that structures and mechanisms we're always building and planning."

As part of the competition, the school involved were encouraged to plan out their cardboard boat idea in advance of the competition, something that Petsnick said Robroy Donaldson helped the students with, in addition to serving as a chaperone.

Once the students arrived in Dryden, they were split into two groups and their work began.

"Each group got two full hours to build their boats," Petsnick said.

"They got two big pieces of cardboard, they got two big rolls of duct tape and then the teams had to bring any tools that they needed—so straight edges and box cutters, whatever—to cut it out."

Petsnick noted that once the competition started, the students were on their own.

"I was not allowed to do any coaching or talking to them during those two hours," she said.

"Which was probably harder on me than them. So basically I sat and marked work while they built their boats."

Once each of the 19 teams involved in the competition had finished the production phase, there was a quick lunch break before everyone hit the pool.

"They had a timed race challenge and then a weight challenge," Petsnick said of the event.

"They weighed all the kids ahead of time and then you had to pick your two kids to race. Then after they raced you had to be in the boat for 90 seconds with your two kids, and then you can add a third and then they had to sit for 90 seconds."

If at any point during the weight challenge the students touched the water with their hands, or tipped their boat, they were eliminated. Petsnick noted that while one of the groups of students from Fort High logged a good time in the race, the weight section proved to be a challenge.

"They were the fastest time for the race, but then their boat didn't hold any weight," she said.

"It was a combined score of both of those, so even though they won it, they didn't get a prize or recognition because they didn't hold enough weight. We gave them kudos for it and you know, we were watching their time and we are proud of them for that, but they didn't win it."

The two top teams from the competition will go on to compete in Belleville in the spring, and even though Fort High didn't qualify, Petsnick said the experience was a positive one overall.

"This was our first year, Fort High has never taken our elementary kids there," she said.

"Two years ago we were supposed to go and we got snowed out, so it was really good for us to go and actually see how it's all done because it's hard to give pointers to kids when you've never seen the actual event take place or how it all works."

She also said the students who took part had a good time.

"We had to be on the bus at 6 a.m., and so one of the comments, we weren't even in the pool yet and one of the girls said 'this was totally worth waking up at 5:30 for,'" she said.

"They just had a great time. They really enjoyed the building, they enjoyed the competition. No one was really upset that they lost. We just, you know, they built, they raced, they had a really good time."

"I would definitely take kids again. It was a really good experience for them," she added.