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## Kids and Bandz

By Lou Fancher



If you haven't heard of Silly Bandz, the silicone bracelets shaped into animal forms and so much more, then you're not hanging around at elementary and middle schools in Lamorinda.

The retro toy-when was the last time a rubber band was all the rage?-has become a hot trade, a cool reward, and a fast-food perk. Silly Bandz even have their own web page. Today, there are Justin Bieber, Barbie, Rainforest, Yo Gabba Gabba, and Hello Kitty packs. There are "retired" packs. And, as if training an entire generation to misspell "bands" wasn't enough, there are now Silly Ringz, Caribinerz and buttons. (Why it's not "buttonz", we can't explain, but school teachers around the world are thanking their lucky starz. Stars.)

Some teachers, that is.

Silly Bandz have become so popular, teachers have had to ban them from the classroom. At Orinda's Glorietta Elementary School, Principal Wendy Sparks was proactive; using the school's online newsletter to inform the community.

"We need your support so we can make certain the Silly Bands [sic, sort of,] are not disrupting the educational process," she wrote. A

bullet pointed list of guidelines followed, covering everything from sharing only during recess, wearing no more than five, and allowing kindergarten students to only wear them on Fridays.

Rheem Elementary principal Elaine Frank wrote in an email on the subject, "We are living peacefully with the Silly Band craze and have not 'banned the bands' yet." The school has a strict "no trade" policy and the students have been warned that the Bandz will be banned if they become a nuisance.

Frank reports that teachers have had to take them away from students on several occasions, but no more than any other "jewelry" or similar distraction.

Sparks, in a recent phone call, said "the problem is minor. We have great kids here, so I think common sense has really been the best policy."

With all the fervor, one has to wonder if the concern over Silly Bandz is just...silly. But when you think about kids trading while mingling in the bus lane, or becoming so consumed with Bandz acquisition that they ignore the real reason for going to school (listening to teachers and learning how to spell, amongst other things), you begin to understand the need for controls.

Sparks and Frank, and most kids, are enjoying the social aspects of Silly Bandz. For now, trading, sharing and even designing custom bands provides valuable interaction. With a few rules in place, Silly Bandz are what a toy should be: fun. And maybe, a little silly.

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