

CROMARTY ENTREPRENEUR PROGRAM

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A former prime minister helped launch a major new initiative Thursday to guide aboriginal students into the business community.

Paul Martin was in Thunder Bay to usher in the new program which among other things, aims to combat the high levels of aboriginal student drop-out rates. If the student business initiative is successful here it could also serve as a blueprint for a Canada-wide effort. As the former prime minister looked on Thursday afternoon, the 15 students taking part in the entrepreneur pilot program he sponsors were introduced at Denis Franklin Cromarty High School. It's the first of what Paul Martin hopes will be many business successes from the aboriginal community.

The students will be taking part starting January in a new business-based curriculum at the school learning how to be successful entrepreneurs. Through the program they will make partnerships with the business community laying the groundwork for their future. Martin says he chose the Northwest to test his new personally-funded program because of the high aboriginal population.

If this new initiative proves itself, there are plans to expand it across the country, building on the Thunder Bay model. Martin hopes that in the long run they are able to lower the high dropout rates plaguing the aboriginal population with this program and in turn improve the overall quality of life for many of the country's First Nation's people. So the task falls on the shoulders of these 15 students to do all they can to be a success and be the role models the former Prime Minister hopes and believes they can be.