

## **FIRST NATION'S SCHOOL A FIRST: FORMER PM MARTIN INTRODUCES PROGRAM**

Nick Martin

Winnipeg Free Press - October 15, 2011

Some of Manitoba's sharpest young business people will soon be graduates of Oscar Lathlin Collegiate on Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

Who's to argue when that prediction is being made by former prime minister Paul Martin, a guy who knows finance and business?

Martin was on the First Nation near The Pas Friday to introduce the latest Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, an entrepreneurial education plan for aboriginal students that's already in nine schools across Canada and soon will be in several more.

But OCN is unique, Martin said.

"The one at OCN is the first on a reserve itself," he said.

Partnering with Scotiabank, the initiative supplies high schools with business textbooks based on aboriginal values, traditions and role models and trains teachers to deliver the programs, Martin said. The textbooks cover Grades 11 and 12 marketing, math, language, and organization.

"They're the first ones that have been developed for indigenous students by indigenous teachers," Martin said.

"The teachers are trained at the Asper school (the University of Manitoba's I.H. Asper School of Business) here in Winnipeg. We've developed a course."

Martin started the program in Thunder Bay several years ago, with students from First Nations across Northwestern Ontario attending a school there.

"Our pride and joy in many ways is Children of the Earth High School" in Winnipeg School Division, he said.

Martin said he was impressed by the new collegiate in OCN, built to take the enrolment pressure off the nearby Joe A. Ross School.

"The first school was overcrowded; that's a very good sign. I wish every reserve had to build a new school because of overcrowding," Martin said.

"So many reserve schools, because of underfunding, are a disgrace."

Martin said colleges and universities have achieved impressive "catch-up" in aboriginal education in the last 20 years but not kindergarten to Grade 12 schools.

"I've decided to concentrate on elementary schools and high schools," he said.

The Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative will soon expand to three more schools in Alberta and one in Nova Scotia, Martin said.

"We'd like to do two more in Manitoba," he said.

The schools will be identified by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Manitoba Métis Federation and the provincial department of education, Martin said.

The provincial ministry has placed aboriginal education ahead of federal/provincial jurisdiction battles, he said.

"We've had tremendous co-operation from the ministry of education. Manitobans can be very proud of what they've done and the attitude they've taken."

Aboriginal education will be turned around by the type of partnerships he's forged with Scotiabank, aboriginal leaders and the province, Martin said.