

FORMER PM LAUNCHING ABORIGINAL YOUTH PROGRAM

By Jordan Thompson, TODAY STAFF

Former prime minister Paul Martin will be in Fort McMurray on Wednesday to help officially launch the Catholic School District's Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program.

The program is already underway in one high school, but superintendent Kim Jenkins says Wednesday will be recognized as the official launch day of the business-focused program for aboriginal youths.

"It started this September, when school opened," Jenkins said. "A teacher, Mike Hull, is running the program for us, but Wednesday is the official launch, it was the first day we could have former prime minister Paul Martin come out and speak to the kids and have a look at the school in general."

The program is slowly being implemented into the Catholic School District's two high schools, and Jenkins says he is expecting to see the program expand significantly.

"It's geared for high school, so for us it would be limited to Father Mercredi and Holy Trinity," Jenkins said. "We're going to start at Father Merc, and we'll see how it goes. We anticipate that it will grow rapidly. The idea is to keep the class fairly small. Our first group is of 12 students, but there are different levels to it, so as we add more levels, there will be more students. If the need is there and the interest is there, we could expand it to Holy Trinity. I anticipate that happening, but right now it's just Father Merc."

The kids will interact with the program during school hours, and receive credit for it as they would any other subject.

"It's in conjunction with the Paul Martin Foundation, and it's a way to encourage our aboriginal youth to get involved in entrepreneurship, banking, what it is to set up a business, and being able to step up in front of people and deliver a pitch," Jenkins said. "Mr. Martin has often said that the aboriginal youth are under-represented in that area, and it's a way to encourage them and give them opportunities to strike out into that field and to maybe someday have a successful business, or at least be aware of how business works.

"This is a chance to let them shine; an opportunity to give them the skills and to have them think about banking, and loans and what it is to start a business. You'll see in the program that after they go through the training they are given money. It's sort of like Dragon's Den, where they pitch their ideas and then they're given \$500 to try and make that idea come alive. So it's to give them a leg up in an area where they perhaps have not had opportunities that other people have had."