

## **FORMER PM'S ORGANIZATION PROVIDES EXPERTISE TO LU**

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Former Prime Minister Paul Martin was in Sudbury April 27 to speak about his charitable organization's involvement in a pilot program that will allow aboriginal high school students to take courses at Laurentian University.

The first group of students, who come from schools administered by the Rainbow District School Board and Sudbury Catholic District School Board, started taking classes this semester in native human service.

A second group of students will start taking commerce classes in September, and another will start taking environmental science classes in 2011.

The three-year pilot project, involving up to 60 aboriginal students, is mostly funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Laurentian is the first university in the province to provide this type of program.

Martin's organization, the Martin Aboriginal Initiative, will be involved in the commerce portion of pilot project. The organization will share expertise and train staff at the university on how to provide education surrounding aboriginal youth entrepreneurship.

The students taking commerce classes at Laurentian will be given entrepreneurial experience and the opportunity for business ownership.

"This is exactly the kind of networking and sharing of learning we're looking for," Dominic Giroux, Laurentian University president, said.

When speaking to reporters, Martin wouldn't say exactly how much his organization would be spending to boost the Laurentian University program, although he said it spends \$700,000 to \$800,000 a year across the country.

The Martin Aboriginal Initiative was established by the Martin family in 2006. Its activities are currently focused in two areas: The Capital for Aboriginal Prosperity and Entrepreneurship Fund and the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative.

"I've got to tell you that the youngest and fastest growing part of our population are aboriginal Canadians," Martin said.

"The high school dropout rate (for aboriginal students) off reserve is 40 per cent. The high school dropout rate on reserve is 60 per cent. We are an aging population. When I look in the mirror, that becomes pretty clear....It's pretty clear that we cannot afford to lose a single talent."