

## **FORMER PRIME MINISTER PAUL MARTIN LAUNCHES BUSINESS TRAINING PROGRAM AT SCOTT COLLEGIATE**

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Former prime minister Paul Martin is betting \$70,000 that 22 aboriginal students at Scott Collegiate can beat the odds, graduate from high school and succeed in business.

The Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative (MAEI) is helping fund a pilot project at the inner city high school, which will see aboriginal students receive specialized training in business and related disciplines, starting in January.

The partnership between MAEI, Regina Public Schools and the Regina & District Chamber of Commerce will also provide a dedicated teacher and business mentors to the First Nations and Metis students.

“The basic thesis of the course ... is essentially that (aboriginal) kids want to know about business and there’s a greater chance that they’ll stay in school if they have the opportunity to absorb it,” Martin told reporters Tuesday.

Martin reeled off the depressing, but all-too-familiar, statistics about aboriginal students in Canada: a high school drop-out rate of 60 per cent for on-reserve aboriginals and 43 per cent for off-reserve, compared with 9.5 per cent for non-aboriginal Canadians.

But when MAEI, which was founded by the Martin family, launched its first program in 2006 at a First Nations school in Thunder Bay, the graduation rate shot up to 75 per cent.

“The program been a real success,” Martin told a chamber-sponsored luncheon Tuesday. “Because of that success, we decided to expand the program out west.”

And it was Martin’s former finance minister, Wascana MP Ralph Goodale, who suggested Scott Collegiate, with an enrolment of almost 100 per cent aboriginal students, as the location for the first MAEI project in Saskatchewan.

Rod Allen, principal at Scott, said 22 aboriginal students in Grades 11 and 12 were selected for the program, while a number of Grade 9 and 10 students have also expressed interest in the program.

With Regina Public Schools providing funding for one teacher, the program was off and running.

“In many ways, the Martin Foundation opportunity was a marriage made in heaven for Scott Collegiate,” said Don Hoiu, director of education for Regina Public Schools.

“We’ve been planning for the last three years to implement a project-based, service-learning model of education that will make students get practical experience, in this case in the business world...”

Of course, providing the mentorship and real-world learning experiences for students requires participation from the business community.

“This has got to be in partnership with the business community,” Martin added.

“What’s unique about it is bringing in business,. When you’re talking about banking, you bring in a banker. When you’re talking about marketing, you bring in a marketer.”

John Hopkins, CEO of the Regina chamber, said the business community is backing this initiative in two major ways. The chamber will contribute \$10,000 annually to the project for the first two years, as well as provide mentors for the students.

“The future of Saskatchewan is, in large part, going to depend on how we get this relationship right. Either we’re going to have a great future together, or we’re going to pay the price for it,” Hopkins said.

“Now is the time for action.”