

PAUL MARTIN SUPPORTS ABORIGINAL YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS IN VANCOUVER

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A partnership between the Aboriginal community, the Vancouver School Board, and the Martin Aboriginal Education initiative to pilot an Aboriginal youth entrepreneurship course was officially recognized at Britannia Secondary School this morning with a signed agreement and visit from former prime minister Paul Martin.

The Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program (AYEP) piloted at Britannia in 2011/12, was an initiative of the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative. AYEP teaches Aboriginal youth in Grades 11 and 12 to run businesses, as well as introducing them to post-secondary options in their area.

"I get to work with students in a different way than I get to work in traditional classrooms," said AYEP teacher Kim Leary.

"We're out of the classroom off to business conferences, we're touring universities, we're applying for scholarships, and most of all we're building our own businesses and showing how we can build entrepreneurship into the business community and into education, and into successful futures."

AYEP isn't just about teaching Aboriginal youth to be business people, however. Shaniece Angus, a First Nations Grade 12 student at Britannia who took the course last year says it helped her prepare for life after high school.

"This business gives youth the courage to get out there and be just as successful as anyone else--we're not any different. It provides us with leadership skills, the ability of budgeting our money, and helps us figure out what we want to do," she said, adding she plans to go into nursing after graduation.

Martin echoed Angus by saying the course is about teaching Aboriginal youth "you can do anything you want."

"It says that there is no limit to your potential, there is no limit to what you can accomplish," he said.

AYEP was developed in coordination with the Metis Nation of BC, the Musqueam people, the Vancouver School Board, the Royal Bank of Canada, and the Martin Aboriginal Initiative, who signed a formal partnership agreement at the assembly.

The program, now used in schools across the country, is partially funded by the Royal Bank of Canada, which announced a gift of \$300,000 towards teacher training and material development for the course.

After the signing, the floor was opened to a student Q&A with Martin. Questions ranged from his views on the Canada-China Foreign Investment Protection Agreement (FIPA) (he's pro-trade, but against the secrecy under which it was signed), inequality (it's government's job to redistribute income, but a good education is necessary to get ahead), and the Enbridge pipeline (it's up to the environmental commission and the people affected whether it should be built.)

But the last question came from an Aboriginal student who Martin said raised one of Canada's biggest issues today: "I wanted to know what your thoughts were also on how we can work together with non-Aboriginal communities, especially in business," she said.

"A lot of times that's where the problems lay in building healthy partnerships, because the perception is that we're unable to have the ability to further ourselves and our communities, and there's a lot of paternal hand holding, people not being sure that we're able to do it and not allowing a lot of not allowing us to take that back."

Martin, who is not of Aboriginal descent, said too many Canadians have internalized the colonialist idea that Canadian culture is better than Aboriginal culture.

"Canadian business, in dealing with Aboriginal Canadians, (it) never crosses their mind that they have a different cultural background and they do things a little differently," he said, adding most Canadians were ignorant of the feelings of paternalism among Aboriginal people in the country.

"The best answer in the world is that people like you speak out, because it's important for the students who are here, who are not Aboriginal, to understand that. Because to be quite honest, it's going to be your generation that really is going to make this change occur."