

### **THREE FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS SEE THE PROGRAM AS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY**

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Ask the three Beal secondary school students what they want to do with their lives and they have no idea.

“I kind of wanted to be an author, but now I don’t know,” says Leah Blackbird-Riley, a 14-year-old Grade 9 student at the London school.

Montana Summers, in Grade 10, says he’s not leaning toward a particular career.

“I’m trying to experiment with what I want to do.”

Adds his classmate, Stina Lavalley, also 15 and in Grade 10: “I like science but I don’t know what I want to do.”

That’s where accountants from the London office of Deloitte come in.

The Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, started by former prime minister Paul Martin, are sponsoring a mentoring program for First Nations youth.

“We choose three high-performing students and the accountants help them stay the course, be informed about different career choices as they go through school and help them with university or college,” said Beal principal Don McPherson.

“How the mentoring works is pretty wide open, but it’s about relationship building, figuring out what the kids want and need and creating opportunities for them.”

The students and their families have met Deloitte’s two organizers of the program, as well as some other employees. They’ve had an orientation session, a tour of Deloitte’s offices and had pizza before going to a London Knights game.

“The accountants are pretty chill,” said Lavalley, whose mom is a principal and pushes her to stay motivated.

Lavalley lives on the Oneida reserve.

“We don’t really get that many opportunities so to think that I got this opportunity is awesome,” she said.

The students don’t have to become accountants at the end of the program, but the accountants can show them a career they may not have considered. They can also help open doors or introduce students to contacts.

There will be job shadowing, workplace and co-op placements and help with developing career-related skills.

“It’s really helpful,” said Summers, who lives in London. “Most native students don’t get this opportunity so we’re really lucky. It can help us in the future to exceed our goals.”

The mentors and students keep in touch until after university or college.

“I think this is really helpful because it helps you look at your future, helps you to focus and it’s good to have an adult to talk to sometime,” said Blackbird-Riley, who lives on the Munsee-Delaware reserve.

The Deloitte accountants are excited to get to know the students, said Curtis Temple, who along with Doug Marshman co-ordinates the London program.

“We thought it was a good and worthy cause, to help graduation rates and their careers. They seem really enthusiastic,” Temple said.