

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

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Rebecca Pratt, a Grade 11 student at Scott Collegiate, examines some of the new business clothing that was donated to the school by the community.

When Kaitlin Bird was eight years old, she knew she wanted to open her own coffee shop some day. But the 16-year-old student at Scott Collegiate never realized those dreams could be turned into reality until she began taking a new class that encourages students to discover their entrepreneurial spirit. Bird spends her time in the classroom working on her latest invention -- magic markers that make other colours disappear.

Once her micro-business plan is complete, she plans to pitch the idea to Crayola, or perhaps incorporate it somehow into her plan to open a coffee shop.

"I just thought it would be helpful to erase mistakes," she said about her magic markers. "I've learned a lot about inventions and how to present them."

Bird is among 19 aboriginal students at Scott Collegiate who are enrolled in the entrepreneurship class. The year-long class began in February and teaches students the ins and outs of planning and running a business.

The class is part of the Martin Aboriginal Entrepreneurship Initiative, which aims at reducing the aboriginal youth dropout rate and increasing the number of aboriginal students attending post-secondary institutions.

The initiative, lead by former prime minister Paul Martin, began in Thunder Bay, Ont., and has since spread to several schools throughout the country.

Rod Allen, principal of Scott Collegiate, traveled to Thunder Bay to observe the program in action and immediately liked what he saw.

"It's wonderful. You have kids who are in some way disengaged from school in a traditional setting. Through this program, they become engaged and learn real life skills," he said. "There's just numerous success stories from the students themselves. It's great to see them excited about school and what they are doing."

Soon, the students will not only be able to play the role of a businessman, but will look like one, too.

Entrepreneurship teacher Chris Beingessner said the school is "drowning in clothing" after putting out a call to the community for donations of business clothing.

Beingessner said the clothing will give students a sense of belonging in a community they never pictured themselves being a part of.

"It tends to take them out of their world and put them in a lot of different situations they are not used to being in," he said. "It relates to something that's in the real world."

The school has been working with the Regina and District Chamber of Commerce to bring in speakers from the business community to share their experiences with students.

Once they've finished the class, the students will be provided with \$500 to help follow through with their micro-business plan. Discussions are also taking place with the Royal Bank to open business accounts for the students.

Jamie Robinson had never given any thought towards being an entrepreneur until she began taking the class in February.

Now, she's realized she can turn her school project -- which creates individual handbags, purses, clutches and men's wallets -- into a full-fledged business.

"This class has really opened my eyes that there's a lot of opportunities out there for entrepreneurs," said the 18-year-old, who's looking forward to donning her new business attire.

"When you are all dressed up like that, I think people will definitely take you more serious."