

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Ex-PM: Schools must meet aboriginal needs; Paul Martin's education initiative aims to keep students in classes, offer business opportunities

The Toronto Star

Thu Apr 29 2010

Page: A18

Section: News

Byline: Leslie Ferenc

Providing better education in the early years for aboriginal Canadians - the fastest-growing segment of the population - is key to improving their social and economic well-being and this country's future.

That was the message from former prime minister Paul Martin, who told the **Aboriginal Human Resource Council Inclusion Works** and Voice of Change conference that his goals include bridging the gap in education for First Nations youth starting in the elementary and high school years.

"I believe if Canadians understood the discrimination in aboriginal education and child welfare, I don't think they'd stand for it," Martin said in an interview.

In 2006, he and his family set up the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative - a not-for-profit organization working with First Nations communities, governments and the private sector to improve education opportunities for young people.

So far, the initiative has established three programs aimed at stemming the dropout rate among aboriginal youth - 60 per cent of students on reserve and 43 per cent off reserve, compared with 9.5 per cent in the non-aboriginal population.

"Think what it means in large parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba where Statistics Canada projects that in seven years, aboriginal children will account for up to half the students entering school," he told the conference, attended by 400 people Wednesday.

"Think what that means in the City of Toronto, which unbeknownst to anyone here, has the largest aboriginal population of any city in the country."

One program is operating at primary schools on two reserves in southwest Ontario where the focus is improving student literacy and math skills, as well as providing more professional development for teachers. The plan is to eventually implement the program in First Nations schools across the country.

Two high school programs are also up and running. The first is a partnership with the Institute of Chartered Accountants and is a mentorship program for kids who want to get into the field.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Project gives Grade 11 and 12 students the opportunity and funding to start a business while earning high school credits.

All the projects include aboriginal content. Meanwhile, the Promising Practices in Aboriginal Education website is bringing educators together online to share their programs and best classroom practices.

For Autumn Eaglespeaker of Calgary, the work being done at schools on reserves is important, but considering more than 50 per cent of aboriginals don't live there, more needs to be done for children attending urban schools.

Local success topic of discussion at national aboriginal conference

Cape Breton Post

Fri Apr 30 2010

Page: A7

Section: Business

Byline: Greg McNeil

A local success story was shared with the country as part of a national aboriginal conference this week.

Details of the business-like approach to economic development by the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office were detailed during **Inclusion Works 10**, a National **Aboriginal Human Resource Council** conference in Toronto.

"Part of the discussion was around how you negotiate policies or get the government and industry to put policies in place that can open the doors for aboriginals," said Owen Fitzgerald, the executive director of the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office (UEBO) when reached by phone in Toronto.

"Once you develop a relationship with somebody they get to know you and what you can do."

As part of Wednesday's panel discussion, Fitzgerald spoke about the Unama'ki success which has resulted in job creation through contracts with such companies as Emera and organizations like the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency.

"Initially it started with the tar ponds. That was the real opportunity that Membertou initially started, but then all the five communities, which we refer to as Unama'ki, started very aggressively pursuing the tar ponds project as an opportunity."

Today, First Nation communities in Cape Breton are involved in some \$71 million worth of tar ponds contracts, he said.

During the discussion, Fitzgerald also had the chance to learn from other Canadian success stories.

"We still have a lot to do, but we are pleased and people seem to be very open to what we had to say."

Alex Paul, the director at the UEBO, also attended the conference.

"We wanted to share our success in creating jobs and growing businesses and learn from the success of other First Nation communities across Canada," Paul said in a press release.

The conference theme was Voices of Change and featured keynote speaker Paul Martin, the former prime minister of Canada.

Both Fitzgerald and Paul had the opportunity to meet Martin, whose speech was about such issues as aboriginal youth suicide and the impact of residential schools.

Fitzgerald said the former prime minister received a standing ovation from a crowd of about 400 in recognition of various educational and aboriginal investment initiatives he and his son David have established.

Education system still failing natives

The Toronto Star

Sat May 1 2010

Page: IN6

Section: Editorial

The following is excerpted from the text of a speech delivered Wednesday in Toronto by former prime minister Paul Martin to the **Inclusion Works** conference on **aboriginal employment** issues:

On virtually every indicator from infant mortality to shortened life expectancy, Canada's first peoples are too often the forgotten in our country and that's wrong. It's wrong morally and it's dumb economically.

Indigenous Canadians represent the youngest and fastest-growing segment of our population. Half are under the age of 24. In the next 10 years the number of young aboriginal adults entering the labour market is expected to grow by over 40 per cent, compared to 9 per cent for the general Canadian population. That means within a decade there will be a million aboriginal Canadians of working age.

At a time when Canada's population is aging dramatically and we are staring down the barrel of new and tough competition from the gigantic populations of China, India and Brazil, it is clear we cannot afford to let one talent fall by the wayside, and yet that is what we are doing in the case of thousands upon thousands of young aboriginal Canadians.

By whatever standard one would apply, this is beyond comprehension.

Wherein lies the answer?

Well, ask the aboriginal leadership anywhere in Canada and they will tell you without hesitation that it begins with better education, and the good news when you look at the increased openness of Canada's colleges and universities to aboriginal needs over the last decade is that you can see the progress made.

The bad news, however, is we have not made the same progress in terms of the nation's primary and secondary schools.

There are two statistics that tell it all. First: 40 per cent of First Nations students living off reserve do not graduate from high school, let alone university. Second: that 40 per cent dropout rate becomes 60 per cent if they live on reserve.

Think what that means in the City of Toronto where, unbeknownst to anyone here, lives the largest aboriginal population of any city in the country. Think of what it means in large parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where Statistics Canada projects that in seven short years aboriginal children will account for up to half the students entering school.