

## **PAUL MARTIN AND FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS PARTNER UP FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION**

Vancouver School Board

Can aboriginal teens really be inspired by a 74-year-old former prime minister? For First Nations students at Britannia Secondary School, the answer is a resounding yes.

On Thursday, Nov. 22, 2012, former Prime Minister Paul Martin joined with Vancouver School Board trustees to celebrate a new aboriginal education partnership with staff and students at the school. The partnership relates to the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program (AYEP), which is currently running at Britannia.

First Nations students participating in the program as well as the general student body assembled in the auditorium to listen to Martin and several other guest speakers discuss the importance of keeping First Nations youth engaged in education. Students then took the opportunity of asking Martin several tough questions, keeping the former politician on his toes. Questions ranged from the Attawapiskat housing crisis to the proposed Enbridge pipeline to the NHL Hockey lockout.

Martin appeared to take it in stride.

“So I believe your question was ‘How do you feel about all the weather here in Vancouver?’” he joked.

Students were impressed with the former prime minister’s appreciation for and involvement in Aboriginal affairs and education.

“Before today, I really didn’t think politicians and people in power really did a lot for us. It was a real eye-opener for me,” said Elsie Yucesoy, a First Nations student participant in the AYE program.

“Like he said, you can’t go anywhere without education. If you have that then anything can happen and that’s really exciting,” she added.

The AYE program partnership focuses on teaching students in Grades 11 and 12 business skills at the same time as it fosters the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed after graduation. Featuring Aboriginal content, including case studies of successful Aboriginal business leaders, the program also includes a mentorship program with the business community, including Aboriginal business owners.