



THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Champions of Public Education Across Canada

THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP IS **GROWING** NATIONALLY

The 2008-09 school year promises to be a busy one for The Learning Partnership, a not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to bringing together business, education, government, labour, policy makers and the community to develop partnerships that strengthen public education in Canada. Since its inception, in 1993, more than four million students and educational leaders have participated in at least one of the organization's programs.

The Learning Partnership was originally known for its national *Take Our Kids To Work*™ program. Each year, close to 250,000 Grade 9 students across Canada participate in a job-shadowing day at over 75,000 workplaces.

"*Take Our Kids to Work* enables the whole country to showcase the career possibilities available to students," stated Veronica Lacey, president and CEO of The Learning Partnership. "This is a unique opportunity for employers to demonstrate future career possibilities to a group that will soon be planning their paths for the future."

From preparing students for the workforce to preparing pre-school children for their introduction to the education system, The Learning Partnership has a number of programs that help students get excited about education.

One of the newer programs is *Welcome to Kindergarten*™. Youngsters and families of these children entering the public school system are provided with valuable tools that are a fun and educational introduction to learning.

The program first started in Toronto. It was geared to immigrant families that were new to the country and perhaps knew little or nothing about the Canadian school system. The program grew and program sheets are now available in many languages other than English and French. *Welcome to Kindergarten* is now available in a number of provinces in Canada.

Families enrolled in the program, through participating schools, receive a *Welcome to Kindergarten* bag that includes magnetic letters and numbers, crayons, play-dough, a picture book and other items. For many of these children, this is the first time that they have owned any of these learning supplies. Participating classes are also given guides and a *Welcome to Kindergarten* CD that was produced by The Learning Partnership along with Juno® award winning children's songwriter Bob Schneider. The CD is available in both official languages. Veronica Lacey stated:

The Welcome to Kindergarten™ program is an opportunity to introduce children entering kindergarten and their families to lifelong learning skills. The CD component is an important learning tool. Participating in music teaches literacy, promotes self confidence and helps children to learn how to interact with others.

In 1993 The Learning Partnership concentrated on the Toronto area. Over the years, as response to and participation in programs increased, a number of the organization's programs have achieved national status. Among these are *Entrepreneurial Adventure*, *Investigate! Invent! Innovate!*™ and *Canada's Outstanding Principals*™.

Entrepreneurial Adventure brings students, teachers and volunteer business and community partners together throughout the course of the school year to develop and implement a venture that benefits their local and global communities. The program is now entering its 13th year.

Jeremy Hill, director of programs for the organization commented:
Kids by nature are entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial Adventure and the Showcases, which are held in the spring to allow the students to show us what they have developed, give students the opportunity to be creative and innovative because it encourages them to develop the necessary skills, which will help them prepare for future

challenges in both their school and work environments.

An added benefit for the students is the opportunity to win one of the BMO Financial Group National Student Innovation Awards. Judges from BMO and the business community look at each of the registered ventures and then choose the winners based on different criteria. Each school receives a plaque as well as a cheque for \$500.00. This past year the amount of awards was doubled to ten because of the increased participation from cities across the country.

Investigate! Invent! Innovate! is affectionately known as *I Cubed* and began 12 years ago. It is an integrated science and technology program for Grades 7 and 8 students. The goal of *I Cubed* is to instil passion in all students for learning science, mathematics and technology, and to foster their entrepreneurial spirit.

The process starts in January with students from participating schools identifying a problem in their own life and inventing a product based on the concepts they have learned in class to solve the problem. The culmination of the program is the *Invention Convention*, that is held in each city where there are schools participating. The convention is held in a local public building and allows students to showcase and demonstrate their inventions. This past year students from Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary and Toronto were featured on both national and local television news broadcasts.

As Jeremy Hill pointed out, "When students brainstorm and put their minds together, they can create almost anything."

The Learning Partnership realizes that one of the most important aspects of public education is its leadership. That was how the *Canada's Outstanding Principals* and leadership programs came to be. Early in the school year nominations are requested from anyone who thinks that their principal is outstanding. The process includes letters of reference from parents, teachers and community leaders as well as a letter describing why their principal should be considered one of the nation's best.

Each February, approximately 30 winners are brought to Toronto to participate in a weeklong leadership-training program that

is held at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. Winners represent the best in leadership and come from every province and territory in the country.

The leadership training, however, does not stop there. Principals can be invited to continue their training and join the National Academy of Canada's Outstanding Principals. Many of these leaders take on superintendent, director or other supervisory roles so The Learning Partnership has developed leadership programs that are geared to those educational leaders as well.

When the program began Veronica Lacey said, *Every child in our country deserves a quality education and these men and women are ensuring that they receive it. Next to teachers, these are the most important people in our education system.*

In recent years The Learning Partnership has been involved in research. One area of study has been how a child's environment affects the ability of a child to benefit from our education system. This study has worked its way to understanding why some children in adverse situations are at risk while others are resilient.

To this end, November saw the first National Dialogue on Resilience in Canadian Youth. Held in Winnipeg, the conference was hosted by The Learning Partnership, The Canadian Council on Learning and partnered with eight provinces and territories that had held discussion roundtables examining issues such as children with mental health issues, Aboriginal children, immigrant children and children living in poverty, among others.

Delegates from across the country participated in discussions and listened to lectures from some of the leading experts in their fields on these topics. The goal is to take the information that was gathered and prepare policies and initiatives to ensure that children have a better chance at succeeding in school.

When asked why all of these programs have been developed and why The Learning Partnership constantly looks for new ways to work with children and their families, Veronica Lacey said, "It is up to all of us to ensure that our children succeed. The future of our nation depends on it."

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