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Students must learn economic survival



From Where
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The school year may be starting a few days late this September, but they'll be getting down to business a week or so earlier at one local learning institution.

Thanks to the initiative of Unionville resident Gay Eastman, a business and accounting teacher at Stouffville District Secondary School, that school will be the venue of a special entrepreneurship luncheon this Tuesday. In an age when some are expressing concern about the lack of drive and future orientation of teens, this gathering has been convened to outline a plan that would turn students into go-getters.

According to Eastman, who has sandwiched a career as a teacher around a stint as a micro-computer sales person, it's time high school students were taught the principles of economic survival in a world in which career changes have become a way of life. To help make her point, she has invited Mitch Lenko, head of the entrepreneurial centre at Scarborough's Centennial College, to speak to the gathering of school board officials and area business types at the luncheon.

What Eastman has in mind is a pilot project where five groups of roughly five students each are sent out from her school into the community this fall to take part in an entrepreneurial endeavor. Cooperation will be required from the local business community to help come up with projects for the teens to tackle. For instance, a sports clothing manufacturer could get the students started on developing a line of t-shirts, which the group would then market.

The concept would not be part of the board's already successful co-op program. It would see the students taking the bull by the horns after being given a push start by local business. Next year, if all goes well, the scheme would be doubled to include 50 students.

The idea, said Eastman, is to try to teach a mindset instead of a standard curriculum. Students must come to understand that the bottom line rests with them, not teachers, parents, or bosses. They must take the initiative. They must learn that they must do whatever it takes to get the job done. Gone, she said, are the days of the job description. Flexibility is essential, and it is vital for students to think like entrepreneurs.

She intends to set up an advisory board to help ensure the success of the plan. Centennial's Lenko has said he'd be happy to participate, and Eastman is looking to include some of the local business people as well.

After all, she said, the community should take responsibility for preparing its young people for the world they are to inhabit after graduation.

Eastman said this isn't merely an exercise in alternative education. It is the school board's role to educate the students, she said, and it is imperative to help them develop the skills that will be essential for them to survive in a quickly changing world.

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