

## Program aims to halt dropouts Takes comprehensive approach to problems

By: Nick Martin  
March 13, 2009 | 1:00 AM

A community-based program that's had phenomenal success reducing dropout rates in low-income Ontario schools wants to expand its program to Winnipeg School Division.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty lavishly praised Pathways to Education in published reports earlier this week about the program's success in Toronto, Ottawa and Kitchener.

Pathways's goal "is to reduce poverty and its effects in low-income neighbourhoods. We do it by trying to reduce the dropout rates," Pathways to Education president David Hughes said Thursday from Toronto.

Pathways director of research Norman Rowen said that a Pathways project takes on 150 new students in Grade 9 each year from a neighbourhood the local community identifies -- from a neighbourhood, not just one school, he emphasized -- and follows them through high school and, the hope is, on to college or university.

Hughes said that the high school program offers after-school volunteer tutors, mentoring, a support worker for the family, and short and long-term financial assistance.

Money, said Hughes, could be "in the form of bus tickets or lunch vouchers."

Students could receive as much as \$1,000 a year for each of four years in postsecondary.

Hughes acknowledged that everything Pathways offers is likely being offered in Winnipeg already, but individual elements scattered over various schools and neighbourhoods -- bus tickets at one high school, after-school mentoring from university students somewhere else, community liaison staff helping families in another area.

"What is unique is we're tying them together. What Pathways does is knit them together" into a comprehensive, cohesive program, Rowen said.

In Toronto's inner city Regent Park, Pathways to Education says, a 56 per cent dropout rate in 2001 is now down to 10 per cent.

Hughes said Pathways meets with a wide range of community agencies when establishing a program, but needs to coalesce around one local body. "The program is delivered through a local agency. Someone has to be accountable," he said.

Each mentor and tutor works with several students. In Ontario, they've been retired teachers, university students, educated people in the neighbourhood, young people studying to or hoping to become teachers or social workers.

Winnipeg School Division officials acknowledged that they're talking to Pathways to Education, but would not discuss any specific areas or organizations involved.

"The Winnipeg School Division is currently in partnership with the Seven Oaks School Division, the Winnipeg Foundation, and (the province) on a similar initiative to support students to successfully graduate from high school with post secondary scholarship dollars called Bright Futures," said a division official.

It can cost up to \$75,000 to start a program, and Pathways can cost about \$500,000 a year once it's up and running with as many as 850 students from Grade 9 through postsecondary.

Rowen said that Pathways to Education operates in Ontario through government grants, corporate donations, and individual gifts.

More information is available at [www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/home.html](http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/home.html)

[nick.martin@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:nick.martin@freepress.mb.ca)