

BRAND-BUILDING IN THE YOUTH SECTOR

Classroom Connections chalks up school support

BY PATTI SUMMERFIELD

A new Toronto-based service hopes to give companies the chance to contribute to public education in the province of Ontario, while at the same time building brand awareness in a market that until now has been virtually closed to them — elementary schools.

Heather MacTaggart, president of Classroom Connections, says the goal of her not-for-profit operation is to provide schools with an additional source of resources and funds, in the form of private-sector support — but to do so in a

way that's aligned with current education objectives.

MacTaggart began laying the groundwork for Classroom Connections about eight months ago, and within the last month has begun approaching potential corporate sponsors.

She has presented the concept to a number of education groups, and won the support of the Canadian Education Association, the Ontario Public School Board Association, the Canadian Home and School Association and both the Canadian and Ontario Association of Principals.

Participation in the program will be limited to 1,000 elementary schools in Ontario. School principals will receive an introductory package by early March, and the first 1,000 to fax back their registration forms will be accepted.

At the end of August, the schools that have signed up will receive a package for every teacher, principal and parent council member, offering tips for fundraising and a choice of programs in which they can take part during the next school year.

Classroom Connections is being operated on a not-for-profit basis to reinforce its mandate to support

public education, and also to give it the opportunity to work with other not-for-profit groups.

One such group is Canadian Feed the Children, an organization running breakfast programs in schools, which will receive \$10,000 from every corporate partnership fee landed by Classroom Connections.

Stringent criteria for participating sponsors should defuse any objection from parents or educators to corporate involvement at the elementary-school level, MacTaggart says.

Sponsors, she adds, must demonstrate a record of good corporate citi-

zenship. And a strict no-junk policy will exclude companies that make violent toys or non-nutritional snacks.

Some of the prototype programs that MacTaggart has developed as sponsorship opportunities include "Computers for Class," "Read-A-Thon for Library Books," "Money Skills Game," "Lunch-Time Building Club," and "Young Peoples' Theatre for Everyone."

In addition to having name sponsorship of a program, participating companies will be able to deliver their message through two different publications.

Three times a year, each child aged eight to 12 attending a participating school will receive a copy of *Protecting Our Planet*, an environmental publication distributed by Scholastic Books.

The publication will feature a bound-in Classroom Connections section talking about each of the programs, with a game or activity related to each subject, along with non-advertising messages from the sponsoring companies.

The second publication, *Parent Connections*, will be created by Classroom Connections and distributed to children at participating schools, to be taken home to their parents.

Parent Connections will contain information about the programs and how parents can support them, and describe activities that they can do at home with their children.



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