

Province-wide engagement of youth in the minerals industry: a New Brunswick gemstone contest

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Community outreach for earth sciences and the minerals industry is a critical component of public education and the continued sustainable development of natural resources. New Brunswick in particular has a great wealth of mineral resources, which has been and is a key contributor to the development and prosperity of the province. While today's youth may be absorbed in, and demand, the many products of the minerals industry, they have little knowledge or awareness of who has produced them or how. At the same time, unaware of their dependence upon the mineral industry, they are acutely aware of the negative imagery surrounding it—images that seem to fly in the face of the “sustainable environment” language that they have learned in primary school. Youth are also taught that with a strong foundation of STEM, and a pocket full of smartphones and other technology, they will become the next generation of innovators, command high paying jobs, and become the new and effective leaders of society. In contrast, mineral industry experts and elders suggest a somewhat different reality, whereby it is our natural resources that provide the major threads that create the fabric of our society. It has been this way for the past 5000 years or more and will continue in the future.

It is suggested that there is a major knowledge gap in our education system; in society's quest for a sustainable future, it fails to explain that the needs of society and those of the minerals industry cannot be separated. Messaging to our youth needs to be elevated beyond the current STEM focus and the employment needs of industry, to include a better understanding of societal issues in the sustainability conversation around the minerals industry.

The New Brunswick Branch of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (CIM NB) is working on educational outreach initiatives to address this need. At the provincial scale in New Brunswick, CIM NB is engaging with the provincial government to develop a Provincial Gemstone Contest for youth to propose a gemstone that best represents the province. The criteria for the gemstone contest include significance of the gemstone to the province, as well as the social influence, impact, and interest of the gemstone on or by the public. The contest winners will be invited to and featured at the New Brunswick Energy, Mining, and Petroleum Conference where they will have the opportunity to meet members of the provincial mineral resource community. CIM NB hopes this contest will engage teachers and students across the province to get involved with learning about minerals from multiple perspectives and how they relate in a truly integrated way to the fabric of our society.