



News Release

November 21, 2003

Surrey school district closes elementary school because of seismic safety concerns

The Surrey school board has shut down two main buildings of White Rock Elementary School shortly after receiving an engineering report that found the buildings were structurally deficient to resist an earthquake.

“The Surrey school district acted decisively, as it should, in ensuring there is no compromise of student and staff safety,” says Fred Renihan, School District No.36 (Surrey) superintendent. “A team of senior staff has worked hard to develop and implement a transition plan aimed at minimizing as much as possible the disruption for students, parents, staff and others affected by this inconvenient, but necessary school closure.”

The school district is very sensitive to the concerns and questions of those affected. The school principal enlisted the aid of the school’s Parent Advisory Council members and teachers to personally call the parents of all 410 students last evening to inform them of the decision. The superintendent, principal and senior district managers met with school staff early this morning to explain the closure decision.

Today is a non-instructional day and no classes were scheduled. Classes have been cancelled for next week while transition plans are implemented. There are several other buildings on the site deemed safe to occupy that include 10 unused classrooms. Over the next week, district staff will clean and furnish the unused classrooms as well as install temporary portable classrooms on site.

It’s expected that all 410 students can be accommodated within the existing school site once preparations are complete. Early next year, an improved, customized portable complex will be installed on site until new school construction is completed in two to three years. School replacement was already planned and in progress. The deficient buildings are being fenced-off and slated for demolition.

.../2

“It’s very important that parents through-out the Surrey school district understand that these particular White Rock Elementary School buildings are virtually unique in the district in terms of design and construction and we’ve not identified any other school structures in the same category in terms of earthquake building code deficiencies,” adds Renihan.

Seismic review funding is provided to school districts from time-to-time by the education ministry. In a special meeting last night, the Surrey school board voted unanimously to direct staff to fast-track its seismic review program and pursue the required funding with the ministry.

-30-

For more information, please contact:

Doug Strachan
Manager, Communication Services
(604) 599-7468
strachan_d@fc.sd36.bc.ca