

\$315m goes to school upgrades

Elaine O'connor

The Province

Thursday, June 03, 2004

The Ministry of Education yesterday announced \$315 million in new money for school infrastructure and capital spending over the next three years, most of it dependent on the re-election of the B.C. Liberals.

"It's an ongoing commitment in each year to investing in new schools, to be providing schools the funding they need in terms of their capital plans and maintenance," Education Minister Tom Christensen said, following the premier's announcement at the new Heritage Woods Secondary School, under construction in Port Moody.

Christensen admitted the bulk of the promised money -- \$276 million is for the 2006-07 school year -- is "certainly based on there being consistency in the government."

The funding pledge includes \$89 million over the next three years for seismic upgrades to 11 schools -- \$11 million this year, \$8 million next year and \$70 million in 2006-07.

Vancouver Technical and Kerrisdale Elementary will receive Phase 1 seismic upgrades this year and Phase 2 upgrades next year, along with Charles Dickens Elementary. In 2006-07, the remaining schools will be upgraded.

Tracy Monk of Families for School Seismic Safety said she was encouraged by the funding, but believes the ministry should speed up the process. "I'd like to see the funding rolled forward to 2005-06," she said.

Other capital projects include renovation or replacement of 21 schools and the purchase of seven sites for schools in Surrey, Abbotsford, Sooke, Nanaimo and Kelowna.