

Group urges schools to lobby for seismic upgrades

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Families for School Seismic Safety will present a report to the Vancouver School Board today asking trustees to lobby the federal government for infrastructure or disaster-mitigation funds to upgrade B.C.'s schools.

The report calls on educators to write letters to federal politicians stressing that school earthquake-readiness "is not an educational issue; it is a safety, infrastructure, public-health and human-rights issue and should not be competing . . . for the same funds as the day-to-day educational needs of children."

"That's not an acceptable choice,"

Dr. Tracy Monk of the parent group said yesterday as she prepared to take the report to the board's planning and facilities committee tonight.

"This is an infrastructure project and it should be competing with pavement and \$150-million skating ovals and \$1.6-billion RAV lines, and not with textbooks."

Monk is asking educators to write letters to all MPs and MLAs "asking for federal funding for this work as an infrastructure and disaster mitigation project like Manitoba's \$60-million Red River floodway."

The parent group is also proposing to raise awareness with a symbolic safety contract-signing this fall, which would see educators and citizens pledging to ensure all schools are upgraded in 15 years.

Monk said the idea of federal funding for seismic upgrading received support from MPs Ujjal Dosanjh, Hedy Fry, Libby Davies, David Anderson, Stephen Owen and David Emerson during the federal election.

But since then, parents' letters to Anne McLellan, the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness, have so far fallen on deaf ears. Parents received "very disappointing" letters on Friday directing them to discuss funding with provincial Education Minister Tom Christensen.

The B.C. government's \$2-million school seismic safety assessment is expected this October.

Meanwhile, experts at the World Conference in Engineering in Vancouver this August drew attention to the fact 800 B.C. schools housing up to 450,000 students in the earthquake zone are in need of upgrading.

Andy Mill, chairman of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C.'s Seismic Risk Task Force, said that could cost \$1 billion.

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