

Surrey to get largest share of \$353 million to build new B.C. schools

JANET STEFFENHAGEN, VANCOUVER SUN : Monday, October 31, 2011 6:51 PM

British Columbia will spend \$353 million to build six elementary schools, one middle school, two secondary schools and four school additions while also purchasing six new school sites, Premier Christy Clark announced today.

Surrey, the province's fastest-growing school district, will get two new elementary schools, in South Newton and East Clayton, and additions at Fraser Heights and Panorama Ridge secondary schools. The province is also purchasing four school sites for future construction in the Clayton and Grandview Heights neighbourhoods.

Vancouver, the second largest district, will get one new elementary school in the International Village near False Creek.

The province also announced a new elementary school and a middle school for Langley's Willoughby neighbourhood and an addition for Richmond's Henry Anderson elementary school. Central Okanagan school district will get one new elementary school in West Kelowna and an addition for Okanagan Mission secondary; Sooke gets money for a new school to replace Belmont secondary and a new Royal Bay school while the Conseil Scolaire Francophone has approval to build a new school near False Creek.

Laurae McNally, chairwoman of the Surrey board of education, said her board was thrilled with the news.

"Surrey trustees have worked very hard in communicating a solid business case to the province and in engaging the community and our partners, who have all been wonderfully supportive," she said in a release. "Our board looks forward to building on our experience and success to see that these schools and additions are up and running ASAP."

Patti Bacchus, Vancouver's chairwoman, described the news as terrific, saying a new International Village school has been the district's No. 1 priority since 2009. The new school is expected to ease enrolment pressures at Elsie Roy elementary.

Clark said the capital plan responds to pressures in some parts of the province. "There are school districts in our province that have experienced tremendous student enrolment growth in recent years and are in need of funds to expand current schools or build new ones," she stated. "This investment will also create more jobs, which is great news for B.C. families."

Overall, enrolment in B.C. public schools has been declining for years. But student numbers in Surrey rose by eight per cent between 2007 and 2011, and the district has had to accommodate students in 255 portable classrooms.

The Surrey board has committed about \$23 million to these projects while Sooke has offered about \$30 million, the release says.

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