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Province OKs 2 new schools for West Shore

'We don't want to see kids spending their entire school careers in portables': education minister

The West Shore is getting a new elementary school and middle school, Education Minister Rob Fleming announced Monday.

The province is giving the Sooke school district \$23.3 million to buy 6.5 hectares (16 acres) of land for both schools in the Westhills development, off West Shore Parkway in Langford.

"We don't want to see kids spending their entire school careers in portables," Fleming said.

"We're committed as a government to reducing the need for portables right across the province and meeting demand with new capital investments in fast-growing areas." Sooke is the fastest-growing school district in the province. It is projecting an increase of 1,800 students in the next five years.

Dunsmuir Middle School in Colwood and Spencer Middle School in Langford are operating with 13 portables and seven portables, respectively.

School board chairman Ravi Parmar said the district is preparing a report that will look at the costs of building the new schools and the size of the buildings. It will need additional funding from the province to build the schools.

The new schools together will host about 1,000 students, replacing 20 to 25 portables.

Parmar called it a "very exciting announcement," but said the growing district will need even more capacity.

"We'll hopefully have announcements in the future about purchasing other sites in North Langford, South Langford. This is just a pocket of the growth in Langford — it's growing all over. So we're really excited," Parmar said.

Fleming said that while it typically takes about four years to build a new school, he expected it would be quicker in Langford, where the municipality's close relationship with the school board and developers means projects are typically completed with speed and little red tape in mind.

Fleming said he plans to make another announcement in the new year regarding expansion of Royal Bay Secondary School.

"We don't have an announcement right now, but I can tell you we're working with the district on latter stages of looking at what the design and tendering cost might be should we go ahead with a project like that," Fleming said.

He said the province is also looking at changing the capital rules for building schools in fastgrowing districts such as Sooke, saying the previous government failed when it built Royal Bay without space to meet projected growth.

Langford Mayor Stew Young said new schools have been longawaited in the municipality.

"This is an early Christmas present from this province, to come here today and do this. We're very excited and I've got to say thank you very much to the premier and everyone who's taking notice of Langford and the way we're growing the economy, jobs for people. Now more people are going to come here," Young said.

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