
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

Safer school with mental health programs under construction in Saanich

SAANICH – Children and youth in the Saanich School District will soon benefit from a new, seismically safe school with expanded mental health resources, as construction on the replacement of the Children’s Development Centre is underway.

“So many students will continue to benefit from the unique, tailored programs at Saanich Children’s Development Centre, now in a seismically safe, modern and inspiring learning environment,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education. “That’s why we’re taking action to prioritize safe and supportive learning environments for B.C. students.”

The Government of B.C. is providing \$3.7 million for a full replacement of the Children’s Development Centre, which will also be home to the district’s Alternate Learning Program. The Saanich Board of Education is contributing an additional \$500,000 to the project.

“The Children’s Development Centre offers vital programs for children and youth who are struggling in our community,” said Lana Popham, MLA for Saanich South. “I’m thrilled these students will soon be supported in a seismically safe building and a modern setting that’s designed to help them learn and grow.”

The project also includes the addition of a Neighbourhood Learning Centre. The centre will provide new space for Beacon Community Services and the Saanich School District to provide mental health supports for children and families in the community.

“Every child is unique. We want to ensure the right services are in place to meet their specific needs – whether that’s helping them with learning challenges, mental health issues or connecting them to family counselling or specific therapies if they have extra-support needs,” said Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development. “By offering a range of supports in one location, we can surround children and their families with a community of caring, giving them access to the help they need, when they need it.”

The programs offered by Beacon Community Services at the facility will be primarily funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). This includes programs to strengthen families, support youth, provide fetal alcohol spectrum disorder support and early years programming.

In addition, MCFD staff are often at the Alternate Learning Program supporting students. MCFD funds programming through Beacon Community Services, which supports many of the same children and parents who attend the Childhood Development Centre's programs.

“This new centre’s mental health services will support the well-being of young people and families in the community,” said Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

“The pandemic has added immense pressure on students, so more than ever, B.C.’s young people need quick access to supports. That’s exactly what this centre will do.”

Students who attend the Children’s Development Centre are in Kindergarten to Grade 5 and find a traditional school setting does not always meet their needs. Students attend the centre for a 20-week school experience designed to support social and emotional growth, while preparing them to reintegrate into their neighbourhood schools to continue their education.

The Alternate Learning Program is designed for middle school students.

“We are delighted to continue supporting the social and emotional growth of students and families in a new building that is safe and that we are able to further enhance programs through a new partnership with Beacon Community Services,” said Tim Dunford, chair, Saanich Board of Education.

With construction underway, the replacement facility will open its doors to students, families and staff in September 2021.

“This is an exciting partnership,” said Carla Robinson, chair, Beacon Community Services Board of Directors. “We’re looking forward to opening up the new Neighbourhood Learning Centre and helping build a brighter future for local children and families.”

This investment is part of government’s commitment to provide every B.C. student with a seismically safe place to go to school. Since September 2017, government has announced more than \$1.1 billion for seismic upgrades or replacements at 54 schools, which is providing a safer place to learn for over 30,000 students. This also includes \$7.9 million for seismic upgrades at Keating Elementary in Central Saanich.

Budget 2020 provides a record \$2.8 billion for school capital investments, including \$925 million to continue accelerating the Seismic Mitigation Program.

Quick Facts:

- The Children’s Development Centre is a 53-year-old school. In 2018, it was found to be at risk in an earthquake.
- Children’s Development Centre staff also participate in outreach at Saanich elementary and middle schools to help build capacity and support students struggling with mental health.

Learn More:

For more information about the Children’s Development Centre and the Saanich School District’s Alternative Learning Program, visit:

<https://www.sd63.bc.ca/about-us/our-schools/childrens-development-centre>

For more information about Beacon Community Services, visit: <https://www.beaconcs.ca/>

For more information about major capital projects at B.C. schools, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/capital/major-capital-projects>

For more information about the Seismic Mitigation Program, visit:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/capital/seismic-mitigation>

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