

## Province to build new Argyle secondary

[Jane Seyd](#) | North Shore News

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Grade 11 Argyle student David Wilson helps out as Education Minister Mike Bernier tries on a pair of virtual reality goggles at Argyle's digital media academy, where students have been creating 3-D images of what a new high school might look like. photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

Education Minister Mike Bernier announced Thursday a new Argyle secondary school will be built in North Vancouver to replace the current seismically risky high school.

The new school is expected to cost just more than \$49 million. Of that, the Ministry of Education will provide \$37.6 million in provincial funding. The school district will provide about \$11.4 million towards the new school, money which came from the sale of former Keith Lynn and Monteray school sites.

The new school will be built for a capacity of 1,200 students, said Bernier. School district officials expect it to open in September 2020. That means students now in Grade 4 will start high school in a new Argyle.

School district trustees and administrators expressed relief Thursday that the long-awaited funding announcement had finally been made.

“I’m really excited about it,” said Argyle principal Liz Bell.

But they also acknowledged the funding announced Thursday will not be enough to build the version of a new school that parents and trustees had hoped for. That would have included a large performing arts space, a capacity for 1,300 students and community fitness areas, washrooms and change rooms that could be accessed from Argyle’s school fields. But that version of the school came with a price tag of more than \$52 million – over \$3 million more than the school district currently has for the project.

School board chair Christie Sacré said that doesn’t mean those items are off the table – but some of them will likely have to be scaled down in size and others will have to wait until more money is found.

Schools superintendent John Lewis said the project agreement the school district signed with the Ministry of Education does provide flexibility to add the desired parts of the project back in if the school district or other community partners come up with extra cash.

“We will be designing with the future in mind,” he said. For now, a scaled down version of a multipurpose arts space will substitute for a performance theatre. Outside washrooms and change rooms will likely not be included in the initial design but those areas will have plumbing, electrical and heating systems in place so that an addition is possible in the future, said Lewis.

“If the possibility came that we had more money, we could proceed with that work,” said Lewis. “Or if a partner group came in to support those facilities adjacent to a field, we may be able to build them while the project is underway.”

Heather Skuse, chairwoman of the Argyle parents advisory council, said she was torn about the school funding announcement. “Am I happy there’s going to be a new school? Absolutely. Am I happy it’s going to be safer than it is? Absolutely,” she said. But Skuse said she is disappointed some of the amenities the community had hoped for won’t be included. She said she is also concerned the school won’t be big enough for the future student population.

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The current enrolment at Argyle is about 1,350 students, including 90 international students.

Bell said she’s hoping the design of the new school will be innovative enough to provide space needed for all students. “Schools look different than they used to. I think we can’t get too hung up on it’s built for 1,200 and we have 1,300 (students),” said Bell. “I would hesitate to say it’s too small just based on those numbers. The space will be utilized in a different way.”

She added that “It’s going to get very busy,” at Argyle over the next few years as the project goes ahead.

Replacement of the earthquake-risk prone school has been a top priority of the North Vancouver School District for the past decade. Approval of funding for a seismic upgrade was announced in 2012, before the last provincial election.

Three of Argyle's seven "blocks," comprising roughly 75 per cent of the school, were constructed in the 1960s from un-reinforced concrete blocks, which perform badly during earthquakes.

But the project was delayed after the school district opted instead to request a complete school rebuild. The province would not approve that project until the school district had raised the extra money required.

In 2015, both Argyle and Handsworth schools were among 38 schools identified as being at high risk for serious damage in an earthquake that had been approved for seismic funding, but did not have signed project agreements in place with the province.

The school board has indicated it would also like to see a full replacement of Handsworth instead of just a seismic upgrade.

Bernier said Thursday the province has earmarked \$1.7 billion in funding for seismic upgrades to schools over the next three years.

*Students in the Digital Media Academy at Argyle used virtual reality technology to design their vision of the Argyle rebuild, specifically the front entrance and the Digital Media wing. See their video below.*

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- See more at: <http://www.nsnews.com/news/province-to-build-new-argyle-secondary-1.2274088#sthash.EpLUQBv1.dpuf>