

School board, minister sign agreements for West Shore schools



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Agreements signed Tuesday (Dec. 18) solidify the work toward a pair of new high schools to be built on the West Shore.

Don McRae, Minister of Education stopped to sign an agreement, alongside Sooke board of education chair Wendy Hobbs, to build two new secondary schools in Langford and Colwood.

"We know we're a unique school district because we're growing and progressing," Hobbs said. "These two new schools and neighbourhood learning centres will only add to the opportunities for both students and the community as a whole."

"The next time you see us hopefully the shovels will be in the ground," she added.

Budgets are \$50.8 million for Belmont secondary while Royal Bay in Colwood is slated at \$38.6 million. The schools are set to support a wide range of education programs, including opportunities to expand skills and trades training for students. Both schools will also have neighbourhood learning centres to provide various services to communities, such as a family support centre, health and wellness screening office, child-care facility and a multi-purpose room with a community kitchen.

Before signing, McRae addressed the students gathered. He spoke to the Grade 10 students first.

"I understand you will be the last class to graduate from this building. That is a great opportunity and a great responsibility. Those who have come before you have done great for Belmont and the area. You have a strong tradition," he said. "Even though this school, the venue we're in today, will not be here forever, Belmont will. It's important that you celebrate the greatness that is Belmont ... be strong athletically, be strong in extracurriculars, be strong in the arts because the school has a great tradition and you will set a legacy for those that follow behind you."

Grade 9 students, who could make up the first class of the schools expected to open in fall 2015, were also

on hand.

"A new school is a great asset in any community. It isn't anything without positive students, teachers, principals, aids and parents. It's so important that you take the good that is Belmont, and take it to the new school. Because tradition is so strong and the pressure will be on you Grade 9s to make sure the school stays that way."

Jocelyn Gauthier, 14, spoke on behalf of the Grade 9 students who could make up the first graduating classes of the new schools.

"I'd like to express our excitement at having the possibility of being the first graduating classes in the new schools. In spite of being so new at Belmont, we've become quite fond of the duct tape," she said, getting a response of chuckles. "We feel honoured to hopefully be the senior classes, to set the tone of the new high schools ... not only will the students attending these schools benefit but also the entire West Shore community."

With the project agreements now in place, the school board will invite architectural and construction firms to submit their design-build proposals.

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