

## SIMPSON: Cash for Surrey schools is sweet but ultimately, it's just a Band-Aid

\$217 million is indeed an “amazing start,” but let's not kid ourselves – we'll be right back where we started in another three years

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### BeauKnows

### Beau Simpson

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It goes against the grain to look a \$217-million gift horse in the mouth and smack it down.

But whatever. Let's go with it.

Last week, the province earmarked \$217 million in funding for Surrey's schools over the next three years, to accommodate 5,200 more students.

Education Minister Mike Bernier, who made the announcement at the Surrey Board of Education Office in Newton, also said a “Surrey Project Office” will be set up, comprised of “experts” including engineers, ministry staff and Surrey School District officials to steer the development.

- **SEE ALSO:** Province announces \$217M in funding for Surrey schools

Let's put aside the fact that it's an election year – after all, we could fill this paper with columns slamming the provincial Liberals, who had 15 years to properly fund education in Surrey.

Rather, let's follow Cindy Dalglish's suggestion and crunch some numbers.

“It's simple math,” the education advocate told the *Now* last week.

“Currently 7,000 students are in portables. We get approximately 1,000 new students a year. In three years, that's 10,000 students in portables. Subtract the 5,200 (rounded down for ease to 5,000) seats and we have 5,000 still in portables. Now add in the SCC



ruling for class sizes and we're back up around 6,000 to 7,000 in portables, all in that three years.

"With no plan in place. All in an election year."

So, as Dalglish points out, \$217 million is an "amazing start" and the cash infusion was bigger than expected. But we'll back where we started in another three years.

So what's needed?

As we've written here many times before – and as Dalglish emphasized last week – the province needs to overhaul the way it funds B.C.'s educational system.

"We need a policy change that states our district will not be paying for portables out of the operating funds," Dalglish told us. "We need a policy change that indicates a continued funding model for Surrey's huge growth pattern. We need a policy change between the city and province to work better together on development and infrastructure."

Yet, no such policy change was announced last week. Neither was specifics on capital projects that the district identifies as high priority.

And what about this project office? Will it actually expedite things or is it just another line of bureaucracy? Our trustees seem stoked about it, so perhaps this will turn out to be a big boon for Surrey schools.

At the end of the day, a cool \$217 million is just what the doctor ordered.

But without a change to policy – and considering the Liberals' track record on education – it's easy to question the province's motives as we inch closer to May's election.

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