



The Calgary Sun (Calgary, AB)			Order/Commande
			60363
Date 11.07.2006	Circ. 80000	Page 5	1 / 1

School bucks anted up

Tories earmark \$180M to help ease pain of besieged schools

By **DARCY HENTON**
and **TODD SÆLHOF**

Sun Media

The Ralph Klein government has opened up the purse strings for education, dumping \$119 million to fix leaky roofs and crumbling schools.

Caucus approved the infusion and also handed out \$61 million to ensure school boards across the province meet current budgets without falling into deficit.

The money — which comes out of last year's \$8.7-billion surplus — is expected to stem a funding crisis and repair problems caused by delayed maintenance, Education Minister Gene Zwozdesky said yesterday.

"This will help move along some projects that we know are necessary in order to continue having excellent schools facilities throughout the province," Zwozdesky said. "These new dollars today will deal with the more serious situations that we have and will prevent other, more serious situations from developing."

He wouldn't say how the money will be divided amongst the school boards.

But no matter the share for the Calgary Board of Education, trustee Pat Cochrane said the announced amount can't cover all the repairs needed to bail out city schools.

"It's a start, but it doesn't come close to what we need over the long-term," Cochrane said.

"And I don't think it's what the minister seemed to want, which is some kind of a three- to five-year plan that gives \$100 million each year, so we can carefully address these issues over time."

The announcement, which came out of the Tory party's annual Stampede caucus at McDougall Centre, is also expected to keep school boards from slipping into the red.

It also includes \$9 million for plant operations, Zwozdesky said.

The new money brings the total education budget to nearly \$5.5 billion.

The minister said he plans to announce additional funding for new school construction projects and portable schools later this fall.

Liberal education critic Dave Taylor said \$119 million is "a drop in the bucket" compared to what is needed to address a \$1.2-billion school infrastructure problem.

He said he can't understand why the governing Tories couldn't get the funding right in the March budget.

"I would like to think there's a good reason for this, but I can't imagine what it is," Taylor said.

"It's not that difficult — it's applied math. We can do this — we have the money."

todd.saelhof@calgarysun.com



ZWOZDESKY

