
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

Safer school, tsunami evacuation tower coming to Haida Gwaii

MASSET – Students in Masset will soon have a safer, unified school that will include Canada’s first-ever tsunami evacuation tower to better protect the community in an earthquake.

“Every family deserves to know their children will be safe at school, especially in coastal, remote communities like Masset,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education. “Our government’s Seismic Mitigation Program is investing in schools and communities throughout our province, and I can’t wait to see this one-of-a-kind project completed to protect the health and safety of the school community.”

The Government of B.C. is providing \$16.5 million for seismic upgrades and a new tsunami evacuation tower at Gudangaay Tlaat'sa Naay (GTN) Secondary school, while the Haida Gwaii Board of Education is providing \$250,000. Once complete, the school will be home to both GTN and Tahaygen Elementary students as a single-site K-12 facility that will serve Masset families for generations to come.

“Masset is a unique community, which is why our local families need a unique school to ensure students can be successful and safe, especially if a major disaster were to occur,” said Jennifer Rice, MLA for North Coast and Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Preparedness. “We are proud of this collaboration with the Haida Gwaii Board of Education on a solution that will benefit this community and provide a safer learning environment for students.”

In addition to safety improvements, the project will also include renovations to ensure the school is suitable for students in every grade. This includes the addition of a new main entrance, special education room and the creation of a secondary Xaad Kil Haida language learning space.

Construction on GTN and the tsunami evacuation tower is expected to begin in summer 2021 and to be completed by fall 2022. The new tower will be a 10-metre tall steel structure built on school property that includes storage for emergency supplies. This will be a significant improvement, as the current evacuation safe zone is more than 10 kilometres away from the school.

“We are so thrilled to be moving forward with this project as it will embody many things for our students,” said Dana Moraes, chair, Haida Gwaii Board of Education. “Most importantly, a safer learning environment, but also it will provide additional educational opportunities and will house our students in one location, which will offer many remarkable opportunities. School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii) also recognizes the uniqueness to having the first tsunami evacuation tower in Canada and the additional safety this offers to our students and families. Haawa to everyone for work that has gone into bringing this project to fruition.”

A single, amalgamated school will also allow the district to save nearly \$350,000 in annual operating costs, so more resources can be put into classrooms to support student success.

In the last three years, the Province has invested nearly \$1.1 billion to upgrade or replace 51 schools through the acceleration of the Seismic Mitigation Program. This investment creates 29,000 safe seats that will protect students in an earthquake.

Quote:

Keshia Chutter, member, Haida Gwaii School District Parent Advisory Committee –

“The tsunami evacuation route currently recommended for our students and community is around a 10-kilometre drive down the highway. The majority of this drive takes place at sea level along the Masset Inlet. As a mother who has had to evacuate her family multiple times over the past eight years, I can tell you it is frightening and beyond stressful. During an evacuation, time is precious. A tsunami evacuation tower on the grounds of our local school will ultimately reduce the time it takes to evacuate from the current 20 minutes or more to the time it takes to walk across the road. All parents, staff and community members can agree that the safety of our children is of the utmost importance. This tsunami evacuation tower will provide a safe location for our children to gather during an evacuation and help ease the minds of many families.”

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