

Rally presses for progress on Regina's Connaught School



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Maya Marsden-Beck, left, and Zoe Martin, right, play on rocks and a monument during a Connaught School Rally held at the new school's future site in Regina, Sask. on Saturday Nov. 21, 2015. The rally's intent was to draw attention to the lack of progress on the rebuilding of the school. *MICHAEL BELL / REGINA LEADER-POST*

On a muddy vacant lot where École Connaught

Community School once stood, parents and children lined up, as if in classroom rows, to press for progress on a rebuild.

"Where's our school?" about 30 people shouted, holding up their hands.

"They were really quick to tear it down ... then in no rush to build," Debbie Wozniak-Bonk said Saturday, looking over the corner lot in the Cathedral area. She's a parent of two children who attend Connaught. After the building closed at the end of June 2014, students moved to the former Wascana Community School to await the planned reopening of Connaught in September 2017.

But as time has passed without any visible progress, worry has crept in for some parents. "We just want to see a start," said Wozniak-Bonk.

Regina Public Schools spokesman Terry Lazarou said "there's a lot going on" — even if it's not immediately visible at the site. An update on the school's [website \(http://www.rbe.sk.ca/news/2015/11/project-update-connaught\)](http://www.rbe.sk.ca/news/2015/11/project-update-connaught), notes planning for the rebuild "is almost completed and is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Education to proceed to tender. Once that approval is received, a builder can be selected and machinery can start digging on the school property on 13th Ave. and Elphinstone."

In an interview, Lazarou said, "As of right now, we're not behind schedule."

Sarah Truszkowski, chair of the school community council, organized the rally and has been involved in the design process. She said the provincial ministry has been requesting changes and cut backs to the design plan.

"I want a safe, strong beautiful school," said Truszkowski, whose three child attend Connaught. "These delays are unacceptable."

A spokesman for the ministry couldn't be reached for comment on Saturday.

NDP MLA Warren McCall, who attended the rally, worries the province is dragging its feet. "If it's a priority, why haven't we seen more progress?"

Connaught School, 102 years old, was demolished in the fall of 2014, with plans to rebuild on the same site. The province's budget this year allowed

\$157.4 million to start construction on nine joint-use schools in Martensville, Saskatoon, Warman and Regina as well as rebuilds of Connaught and Sacred Heart schools in this city.

Some attending the rally worry that if the provincial coffers fall with an economic downturn, Connaught could get pushed down a list of priorities.

"It's going to get delayed and delayed," said Jennifer Richards, attending the rally with her spouse and their two youngsters. "I hope they don't just scrap it," she added.

But Lazarou said the school division remains "absolutely committed to Connaught School on 13th Avenue." He appreciates parents may have wondered about the progress, which is why the update was given and plans are underway to erect a sign at the site, affirming plans to rebuild.

"We can't wait for the next stage," said Lazarou. "It's coming; it's going to be a great school."

Student Atreyu Zevallos, a Grade 6 student at the relocated Connaught, said being bused to and attending school at the temporary site is "OK."

"But I really want them to build the school again," he added.

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