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NEWS

Teachers' strike paying off for city schools

By Naoibh O'Connor-Staff writer

Millions of dollars in unpaid wages saved during last year's teachers' strike are being given to B.C.'s schools.

During the October 2005 strike, the B.C. Ministry of Education reduced operating grants to schools as teachers walked picket lines. Now the ministry has decided to put the money saved back into the education system.

Savings amounted to \$126 million, \$56 million of which is being pumped into public schools this month. Vancouver's portion of the financial windfall is \$5.5 million, which will be divided among city schools based on student population. Van Tech, one of the larger secondary schools, netted \$154,211. Part of that figure was based on a funding formula allotting \$50 per student for a total of \$84,150, which went to books and equipment. Further district allocations doled out another \$45,498 to the high school for learning resources and \$24,563 for its library.

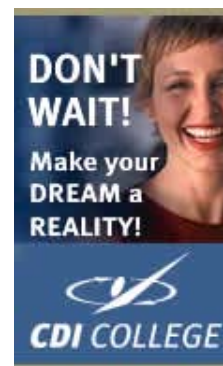
Principal Dave Derpak welcomed the unexpected cash influx, but said it doesn't make up for the millions of dollars of budget cutbacks endured over the last decade.

Schools were notified about the money at the end of December. To qualify, they had to spend it before the end of January and their purchases must be in the schools by the end of March.

The tight deadline meant decisions were rushed. "It was a bit of a blur in terms of spending," Derpak said, adding parents and teachers were consulted about where the grants should go. Van Tech bought science equipment, software, textbooks, 42 computers for a computer lab, a new server for the school and library books.

"It's exciting to get that, but it's not going to replace 15 or 20 years of cutbacks," Derpak said. "School funding has been so low over the years, the money could have been absorbed in many areas."

He noted Van Tech has \$5 million worth of capital assets, including sewing machines and drills, that require ongoing



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upkeep or replacement.

Grants for other district schools varied greatly-from \$8,000 to \$180,000.

King George secondary landed just over \$47,000, Kerrisdale elementary more than \$43,000, MacDonald elementary \$16,430 and Garabaldi Annex \$8,240. Churchill, meanwhile, got \$183,978.

On Monday, the Vancouver School Board approved the one-time grants. "It was welcome funds absolutely, to buy these items like textbooks and learning resources," said board finance manager Rick Krowchuk.

Aside from the \$56 million, the province injected \$20 million of the \$126 million into districts to reduce class sizes-a recommendation from industrial inquiry commissioner Vince Ready and endorsed by the government and B.C. Teachers Federation; \$40 million in one-time funding for the BCTF's long-term disability fund and \$8 million for other education initiatives.

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