

Region's schools crumbling

Deferred maintenance reason why, superintendent says

By Michael Tutton
The Canadian Press

Principal Gordon Young draws his keys lightly along the exterior wall of his high school and watches as the concrete chunks cascade from between the bricks.

Inside the doors of Halifax West High School, the gym's parquet flooring is lifting off the floor. Classrooms sport gaping holes in the walls where environmental experts are removing the toxic fungus stachybotrys.

"I don't care how much money they throw at this building. I don't want to come back. I'm afraid to," said teacher Debbie Richardson, wiping her eyes reddening from a short walk through the school's musty corridors.

Widespread proliferation of the mould, which can cause respiratory illnesses, forced the school's teachers and 900 students to share classroom space at another facility this year.

While Halifax West may be the school in the worst condition, it's not the only one in the city showing its age. A recent report from the Halifax school board — the largest in Nova Scotia — suggested half of its 147 schools should be replaced, shut down or massively renovated.

"We are suffering from between \$200 and \$300 million worth of deferred maintenance and with some exceptions our schools are in marginal condition," says Dave Reid, superintendent of the board.

"We have to hold our breath each day that another school

down from \$1,300 in 1992. In Nova Scotia per capita funding for schools fell four per cent during the past decade.

But provincial governments' argue capital spending on new buildings and renovations is a priority.

Nova Scotia will nearly double its capital spending next year to almost \$60 million from \$24.1 million, says Cathy Shaw, a spokeswoman for the province's education department.

In Newfoundland, where hundreds of aging denominational schools were merged into a public system in 1997, the province defends its record of tackling the air quality problems.

"We've put \$125 million into maintenance and air quality in schools since 1997," said Andrea Maunder, spokesperson for the Education Department. "I think our story is quite the reverse of that going on in other places."

Elizabeth Beale, head of the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council — a regional think-tank — says the crumbling school dilemma is the type of silent issue that's holding the region back.

"Spending your time coping with moisture and mildew ultimately compromises the acquiring of science equipment, computers and other technology that are available in provinces with better endowed economies," said Beale.

She says the federal Liberal government should consider long-term solutions to the funding woes in the eastern provinces, rather than concentrating on "one-shot" deals such as recent



dent of the board.
"We have to hold our breath each day that another school doesn't tip over."

As he concludes the conversation, Reid notes he's just had to order the closure of another school's basement due to mould problems.

Mouldy schools have also forced students out of classrooms this fall in New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Last week, in Sydney, a fire inspector closed an elementary school after finding asbestos in the furnace room and substandard sprinkler systems.

Parents point the finger at federal and provincial funding cutbacks for the failing physical condition of schools. They say school boards, facing tighter budgets, were forced to concentrate on maintaining classroom programs, not classroom walls.

That neglect is now showing up in schools that are environmentally unsafe and requiring costly repairs.

"I was on a radio show earlier this month with an educator from Calgary who argued their kids needed more educational options," said Richard Tilley, president of a Halifax parents' lobby group.

"I found myself saying 'We'd love to talk about choice, we just want an education.' We're just on a whole different playing field and that's pretty frightening."

Young, a former school board superintendent, said the Halifax board spent \$2.6 million in 1996 fixing up 40 schools. "Now we spend less than that on 140 schools," he said.

In Newfoundland last year, the province spent approximately \$1,160 on educating each resident,

term solutions to the funding woes in the eastern provinces, rather than concentrating on "one-shot" deals such as recent announcements to inject \$400 million over five years into Atlantic Canadian universities and high technology firms.

"It speaks to a fundamental imbalance. We're such a small player at federal-provincial tables. Our interests have just vanished off that table as something to address," said Beale.

Until the Conservative government came to power last June, Nova Scotia had touted public-private partnerships as the preferred way to build new schools.

Private sector companies would build and own the schools, then lease them back to the province. By doing so, some of the debt was supposed to be lifted from the provincial ledgers.

But the Tories said creating so-called education landlords in the private sector hasn't saved money. The system also created some schools with expensive extras at a time when others are unsafe and lacking modern technology, such as computers.

Meanwhile, the crumbling Halifax West school is expected to re-open next year now that the province has decided — much to the fury of parents — to spend \$8 million on renovations rather than replace the 42-year-old building.

Gerald Walsh, a parent of three future Halifax West students, wonders what it will take for the board to permanently close the school. "You have teachers who are dropping like flies, a school that's been condemned and an environmental expert has said this school isn't fit for human occupation. How many schools in Canada can say that's the case?"

FIRE EXTINGUISHER

A firefighter carrying his flashlight walks away from a Dartmouth fire inside.

Portuguese unveil monument to explorer

By Kelly Shiers
Staff Reporter

Think of the earliest European visitors to Nova Scotia and some names spring to mind: Cabot, Champlain, Cornwallis.

Chances are you may never have heard of Joao Alvares Fagundes, who's believed to have visited this coast more than 200 years before 1749's founding of Halifax.

Today at 11 a.m., a monument celebrating the Portuguese nobleman and explorer and the early connection between this province and Portugal will be unveiled at Purdy's Wharf on the Halifax waterfront.

"From early days in our history — I was never much of a historian myself — I had heard of him as one of those that went in these small ships across the ocean, but I never actually paid that much attention," said Jack Leitao, president of the Portuguese Society of Nova Scotia. There are up to 500 Nova Scotians of Portuguese de-

cent. "It's obvious for us as a matter of pride in our history and it's obvious an enrichment of our Canadian history."

Although Portuguese and Spanish sailors were known to have fished Newfoundland's waters, little is known about the exploration of Nova Scotia. Still, history suggests indicate that Fagundes came from the Azores, settled in Breton and stayed for five years, said Mr. Leitao.

"Although little is known about Fagundes's Azorean colonization, evidence there is supporting the establishment of a fishing station on Cape Breton Island in 1520," historian Brian

son wrote in a report for the Halifax Regional Municipality. The monument project has been ongoing for about 10 years. Spearheaded by Edmond Spearhead, a Massachusetts resident, along the North American coast with a connection to Portuguese explorers, many of whom have similar monu-



Dalhousie University

Faculty of Medicine

PUBLIC LECTURE 2000

Dr. TJ Murray Visiting Scholar
in Medical Humanities

Dr. Richard Selzer

Surgeon and Author, New Haven, Conn.

"The Voice of the Body"

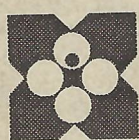
"There is no voice more eloquent than that of the human body. It has been the primary subject of painting, sculpture, and literature throughout the ages. Wounded or intact, the body speaks a universal language."

8:00 PM: Tuesday, October 10, 2000
Theatre A

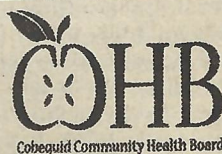
Sir Charles Tupper Medical Building
College Street Entrance

ALL WELCOME

For Further Information Contact
The Medical Humanities Program at 494-2514



Cobequid
Multi-Service Centre
Foundation



PUBLIC MEETING

The Steering Committee for the redevelopment of the Cobequid Multi-Service Centre invites the public to participate in the site selection process for the new Cobequid Multi-Service Centre.

The meeting will be held:

Tuesday, October 10, 2000

7:00 p.m.

Royal Canadian Legion
Branch 162

45 Sackville Cross Road
Lower Sackville, NS

For further information, call 864-5600 ext. 179



Central Regional Health Board
Province of Nova Scotia

6805300