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CONNAUGHT STRONGSTART CENTRE HUB FOR FAMILIES

NEW WESTMINSTER - Tucked in the far west corner of New Westminister, the StrongStart BC centre at Connaught Heights Elementary has been host to more than 50 families, many of whom were on hand today to celebrate a successful first year of operation.

"The StrongStart BC program is an important resource for early childhood learning," said Education Minister Margaret MacDiarmid. "By working together with school districts and communities, our government is helping preschool-aged children start school with the skills they need to succeed."

StrongStart BC is a free drop-in early learning program for preschool-aged children accompanied by a parent or caregiver. A qualified early childhood educator leads activities, including stories, music, and arts, to help children grow linguistically, emotionally and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like setting.

The Province is investing \$43 million to expand StrongStart BC, with 316 programs now operating. StrongStart BC programs help fulfil government's commitment to use underutilized school district space to deliver early learning services. Last year, there were more than 475,000 visits to StrongStart BC programs across the province.

The New Westminister school district received \$20,000 to prepare in-school space at Connaught Heights for their StrongStart BC centre. Each year they receive \$32,000 to fund operating costs, including staff, professional development, supplies and healthy snacks.

"We are well aware of the importance of Connaught Heights Elementary to the community and the StrongStart BC program here has been a welcome addition," said New Westminister board chair Michael Ewen. "Our school

district is happy to have again partnered with the Ministry of Education to support early learning in our schools."

Since 2001, the Province has invested \$1.4 billion in literacy and literacy-related initiatives, such as StrongStart BC early learning programs, almost \$18 million to operate the kindergarten-readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and \$2.7 million for LEAP BC resources that encourage literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

Government has committed \$280 million over three years to implement full day kindergarten for all five-year-olds in B.C. Full day kindergarten is now available for 50 per cent of kindergarten students and will be available to every five-year-old starting school next fall.

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