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## Detroit Schools Has A Difficult Start To The 2006–2007 School Year

By **Stacy Andell**

Detroit Schools' Teachers Delay School Starts with Strike

There has been a slow and turbulent start to the Detroit Schools ' new school year. In a battle over contracts, some 7,000 teachers and 2,000 staff members refused to start school in September. These contract disagreements lead finally to a court battle. The contract disagreement began on August 28 after the Teachers Union rejected a two year contract that included salary cuts of 5% and increased health insurance co–payments. Detroit Schools wants an \$88 million concession from the Detroit Schools' Teachers' Union to help with the \$105 million deficit to its \$1.36 billion budget.

On September 16, Detroit Circuit Court Judge Susan Borman ordered that the 7,000 striking Detroit Schools' teachers return to work. After this order, Detroit Teachers' Union president Janna Garrison read the order aloud to 3,000 Detroit Federation of Teachers members but did not comment or give any instructions as to whether the order should be obeyed. The vast majority of the teachers did not return to work.

Detroit Schools' spokesman Lekan Oguntoyinbo stated that under state law teachers who defied the order could face penalties which include fines and other actions. Oguntoyinbo said that Detroit Schools would go back to the courts and request that the order be enforce. As of the 18th of September, teachers had not returned and Detroit Schools has not decided what action it would take.

On the official first day of school, the 130,000 students in the Detroit Schools were greeted by their teachers not in the classroom but protesting outside. The picketing teachers were most of the teachers, only about 9% of Detroit Schools had returned to work. The Detroit Schools Board of Education worried that the strike would cause students to pull out of the Detroit schools and that their families will leave the city, however most parents support the teachers.

## Detroit Schools' Teachers Return to Work

Even though the contract issues have not been fully resolved but the Teachers' Union has announced that the teachers returned to work on September 20. This was mainly due to pressures from the court and not due to reconciliation between the Detroit Schools and the teachers.

Many Union members, parents and other supporters of the teachers do not want the issue to remain tabled. These supporters want the Detroit Schools system revised. They claim the administration is top heavy and each position should be justified in some way. Others want the Detroit Schools to consider the consolidation of schools. This idea has fewer supporters because it would involve school closures that would greatly affect parents and neighborhoods. Even though this would be the most drastic of the possible ways to change the Detroit Schools, it may be the most cost effective. Like all issues there are many sides. Some wish the Detroit Schools top be run more like a business, which would include offering teacher buyouts, others believe education should be the main focus no matter what the costs.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on Detroit schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk–12.com/michigan/detroit/index.html>

## **Three Houston Schools In Trouble... Public Upset Over Possible Closings**

**By Patricia Hawke**

Three Houston schools have been persistently rated as unsatisfactory by state guidelines for three or more years. As with most school closing warnings across the nation, the parents, community, and elected officials with a political stake in the area are up in arms over the possibility.

Though parents want their children to attend schools within their own neighborhood, I believe the community must look at the cost of keeping these three schools open — the students are failing, unable to meet the bare minimum requirements of the state! With their futures at risk, I would think that parents would want their children at better performing schools.

The Houston schools' ratings are based on statewide student achievement tests and the overall dropout and graduation rates of each school. If a proposed policy by the Texas Education Agency is adopted, then the state education commissioner will be able to close in the near future any school that is rated unsatisfactory for four consecutive years. Thus, Houston schools Superintendent Dr. Abelardo Saavedra is only preparing the public, in case the schools do not gain a satisfactory rating at the end of the 2006–2007 school year.

In 2005, Saavedra warned that Kashmere High School, Sam Houston High School, and McReynolds Middle School needed to improve their ratings or drastic measures would be taken. Privatization of the schools was mentioned then; however, the Houston schools currently are preparing for closing the schools, if they again are rated unsatisfactory.

## Detroit Schools Has A Difficult Start To The 2006–2007 School Year

During the last school year, the Houston schools changed administrators at several chronically unsatisfactory schools and a large percentage of the teaching staff at each school. Though tremendous improvement was seen at Kashmere, Sam Houston, and McReynolds, there was not enough progress made and they were again rated as unsatisfactory.

For the 2006–2007 school year, the Houston schools have developed a year–long campaign in hopes of saving the three schools. School hours will be extended in order to provide more instruction time to the students, top–rated teachers have been hired to co–teach in problem classes, and an educational achievement plan will be created for each student. All three schools for this year will be under the supervision of Dr. Karen Soehnge, the Houston schools' chief academic officer.

The Houston schools have looked at several strategies to save these schools. The ones they have implemented up–to–now have failed. If this current campaign fails as well, then the schools will be closed. It is a "improve immediately" or "close the doors" situation for the schools, the students, and the educators.

All students deserve a quality education, and it is obvious that schools, which continue to be rated unsatisfactory, are not providing such. The Houston schools must do better for these children.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more information on Houston schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/Texas/Houston/index.html>

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