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Florida Schools Flying High On Last Year's Middle Schools Success

By Patricia Hawke

The 2005–2006 school year was a tremendous success for the Florida schools, especially at the middle school level. The Florida schools' educators across the state worked hard to improve student academic achievement levels and were rewarded for their efforts. The state of Florida awarded grades of A or B to 75 percent of its public schools. Not only did this show extraordinary progress for the Florida schools, but it also was a new record for the state.

The strongest gains were made in the middle schools. For example, Lake County has nine middle schools. Seven earned a grade of A last year, with the other two earning Bs. One of the B schools missed receiving an A by only one point. Osceola County has ten middle schools of which six earned an A, three earned a B, and one received a C grade.

Middle school is a crucial stage of academic achievement for students. It is the time when students transition from developing the basic skills learned in elementary school to learning how to put them into practice. Here, students begin to learn more in–depth content in order to develop the foundation that is needed in high school. Secondary education then builds on the foundation by digging deeper into the content and using it to help students develop their minds and become well–rounded adults.

If the middle Florida schools do their jobs right, as they did last year, then students will achieve a greater success in high school, be more likely to go on to college, and have a better chance to obtain and excel in a good career.

The major problems facing all middle Florida schools' educators are the hormonal changes that youth experience at this age and the intense peer pressure students must deal with on a daily basis. These challenges make it easy for middle school students to get off track.

Florida schools' educators are working hard to divert the students' attention away from these problems by getting them more focused on learning. Many Florida schools are looking at last year's strategies to review what worked and what did not. They plan to duplicate last year's success, with the hopes of doing even better this year.

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Seminole County schools, for example, improved the reading scores of struggling students by incorporating two research-based programs into its reading curriculum. They encouraged their Florida schools to use small reading groups with frequent monitoring of progress and goal setting for each student. This year, they plan to use this successful technique with their math curriculum.

Another example is Volusia County schools. Last year, they mapped their curriculum to set specific goals for each grade level and then assessed student progress based on achieving the goals.

It is obvious that educators in the Florida schools are committed to building this year on the progress they made last year. As with public schools across the nation, there will be no shortage of challenges facing the Florida schools. Unlike many public schools across the nation, the Florida schools are making progress for the youth of their state.

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 Florida schools visit

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

Three Boston Schools To Extend School Day For 2006–2007 School Year

By Patricia Hawke

In the fall of 2005, the Boston schools began exploring the education reform strategy of extending the school day for its middle schools. The extended school day gives students more time for learning at a crucial time in their education. The middle school years provide the much-needed preparation for students to enter high school, college and the workforce. Last year, the Boston schools applied for and was awarded a \$40,000 planning grant for three schools.

The Boston schools have been awarded grants again this year for another three schools. These three Boston schools were among ten schools across the state that included five school districts. The other four districts are Cambridge, Fall River, Malden, and Worcester, who shared with the Boston schools a total of more than \$2.2 million in implementation grants to extend the learning time at the ten schools.

The three Boston schools are:

· Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Charlestown; · Umana/Barnes Middle School in East Boston; and · James P. Timilty Middle School in Roxbury.

Beginning in September 2006, Edwards and Timilty middle schools will begin class at 7:20 a.m., Monday through Friday. They will end school at 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and at 11:40 a.m. on Friday. Umana/Barnes will begin classes at 7:35 a.m., Monday through Friday; end school at 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday; and end at 11:40 a.m. on Friday.

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As with the schools last year, the Boston schools enlisted the assistance of Boston schools administrators, union representatives, teachers, counselors, principals, parents, and community partners. They worked together to develop the plans and implementation of the extended day at each school. Additionally, the non-profit organization, Massachusetts 2020, gave support to the planning and implementation process. The 2020 group is dedicated to expanding educational and economic opportunities for children and their families within the state of Massachusetts.

The Boston schools' interim superintendent, Michael Contompasis, noted that both the students and the teachers benefit from this extra school time. Students receive more classroom instruction time in the core academic subjects that are crucial for their success in high school and college. More time also will be available to students for tutoring, the arts, and recreation. Additionally, teachers are given more time for lesson planning, setting schedules, and for professional development activities.

The Massachusetts Department of Education provides the grants from its "Expanded Learning Time to Support Student Success" grant program.

The Boston schools have more than 58,000 pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students at 145 schools. The hopes of all concerned is to continue to expand this reform strategy of extended school time; so that student achievement will continue to rise, with students being better prepared for high school, college and the workforce.

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