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Houston Schools New Budget Brings Needed Money For Teachers And Improvements

By Patricia Hawke

Houston schools teachers have not had significant pay raise in seven years. The new Houston

schools budget plans for an average 8.6 percent pay raise for teachers for the 2006–07 school year, with a total of \$49.2 million in funding. The state is providing \$31 million for the pay raises, and the Houston schools are providing \$18.2 million from their own revenues. An additional \$8 million increase also is included for teacher performance pay.

This is all part of the Houston schools proposed \$1.4 billion budget for the 2006–07 school year, and the Houston schools will NOT increase school tax property rates by the allotted four cents per \$100 of property.

The Houston schools believe the pay raises should make their district more competitive to attract more teaching talent. Newly recruited teachers will start at \$40,268, an increase from last year's \$36,050 starting pay.

The Houston schools proposed budget also includes the following:

- \$1.9 million for principal and assistant principal pay raises of 5.1 percent. Again, the Houston schools intent is to make their district more competitive. This also includes additional incentives for principals of larger schools and/or those with higher numbers of disadvantaged students and gifted and talented students, which require more oversight and innovation to educate.
- \$3 million to help academically struggling Houston schools.
- \$4.8 million more for elementary and middle schools.
- \$12 million for small-sized Houston schools that do not receive as much per-student funding but need the revenues for instructional improvements.
- More than \$10 million to help bring school buildings up to standard.
- \$25.1 million for overall school building maintenance.
- \$927,300 (nearly \$1 million) to maintain the increased police and K–9 presence at the Houston schools.
- Four percent raise across the board for school bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians and hourly employees.
- Four percent raise for Houston schools administrators.

This is all from the proposed budget's General Fund, which increases by 5.7 percent under the Houston schools new plan. The Houston schools additional revenue for the coming school year comes

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from the increase in local property values and the state's newly adopted school finance system, which shifts more of the funding of public education burden to the state. This decreases the cost of education for the local taxpayers from the 87.1 percent last year to only 77.6 percent for school year 2006–07.

Separate from the General Fund is a special appropriation from the state legislature for the Houston schools. It will place \$11.8 million more next year into improving high schools, with each receiving an extra \$187 in per student funding. The Houston schools intend to add an additional \$39 per student to this special appropriation, based upon the types of students and specific needs of each school.

Lastly, the Houston schools put aside extra money this year to cover the cost of fuel for school vehicles and electricity. The Houston schools have a total of 1,000 buses and other vehicles in its fleet. They expect the cost of fuel to increase by \$3 million. The cost of electricity for Houston schools is expected to increase by \$9.1 million over last year's expenditure.

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 on Houston schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk–12.com/Texas/Houston/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.

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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

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