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Houston Schools Support 2007 Goal Of Success For Mcreynolds Middle School

By Patricia Hawke

On the evening of August 31, a meeting was held for the parents, students, teachers, staff,

business partners, and other community members of McReynolds Middle School, a member of the Houston schools that is located on the east side of the city. Hundreds of people filled the school's auditorium, leaving standing room only.

McReynolds, along with Houston schools Kashmere and Sam Houston, will be closed next spring, if they do not improve their state rankings. McReynolds has been ranked "academically unacceptable" by the state for three consecutive years. It has been given the 2006–2007 school year to be rated at least "academically acceptable".

The meeting concerned the 2006–2007 plans to improve McReynolds' state rating. Speakers included school and district leaders, with Houston Schools Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra, Board of Education President Diana Davila, and First Vice President Manuel Rodriguez representing the Houston Schools district.

The purpose of the meeting was to educate the community on measures being taken to save the school from closing next year, solicit feedback from the public and all concerned, discuss what still needs to be done, and to elicit help, support and involvement from the community.

The Houston schools installed Jorge Arredondo in 2005 as the school's principal. Though his first time as principal, student progress increased significantly in the 2005–2006 school year over the previous one. McReynolds experienced a significant improvement in the areas of math, reading and writing, earning a "recognized" status from the state in both the areas of reading and writing. Additionally, the number of students increased for receiving a "commended" status from the state on their excellent performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test.

Arredondo gives credit to his staff for the improvements, but he had already implemented many changes during the 2006–2007 school year that supported both students and teachers. Some examples:

· Full-time mentors were assigned to new teachers; · The "bear (school's mascot) team time" was created to provide additional TAKS support to targeted students; and · New staff was added -- 22 new teachers, two new assistant principals, and another bilingual counselor.

During Arredondo's discussion, he reiterated his commitment to the McReynolds, saying he expects greatness from his Houston schools students. He acknowledged his belief that "how much educators care about them" is more important to the Houston schools children, citing his own experience with middle school teachers "who never gave up on him" and cared what happened to him. He also expressed his belief that all of McReynolds teachers and staff care deeply about their Houston schools students and want them all to succeed.

Houston schools superintendent Saavedra ended his speech by urging everyone in the McReynolds community to get involved as mentors, volunteers or in other equally valuable roles. Saavedra expressed his confidence in Arredondo and the success of the school during the 2006–2007 school

year under Arredondo's guidance and leadership. Saavedra finished by giving Arredondo his full support, saying, "Whatever he needs, we will do."

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 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

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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.

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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