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Preparing for "Back to School"

By Lisa M. Hendey

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Moms all over the country are counting the days until "back to school", while kids are busy packing in every last minute of fun and relaxation available. The following are a few tips to ease your family's transition to the school day schedule.

·School Supplies - Many schools publish lists of needed supplies early. Save time by shopping now, while stores are less crowded and prices are low. Buy in bulk - you will likely need paper, pencils, and pens for many years to come, so go ahead and stock up now.

·Clothing - Plan to take each child shopping well in advance of the first week of school. I prefer, when possible, to take each child individually. I'm fortunate that my children wear uniforms for school, so we don't have many disagreements over style. Prior to leaving on your shopping trip, assess your child's current clothing. Determine what fits properly, is still in style and will last through the season. Donate clothing your child has outgrown to a charitable organization's thrift store. Then, make a list of your needs and shop only for items on your list. Prior to shopping, be sure to check with your school with regards to dress code regulations and do not purchase items which do not meet the school's dress code.

·Hair and grooming - Most children, especially boys, will need haircuts after the lazy days of summer. Do yourself a favor and take them now rather than waiting until the last minute and facing long wait times. Also, now is a good time to stock up on personal care products for the coming year, to restock toothbrushes, and to determine the pecking order for shower schedules.

·Sleep schedule transition - Most families allow a later bed time routine during the less busy summer months. Children's sleep schedules become shifted, staying up later and sleeping in later in the morning. A few weeks prior to the start of school, begin to have children go to bed earlier and begin waking them up earlier this morning. I am learning that this is particularly important with my pre-teen

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son, who is suddenly requiring more sleep. If children fight this earlier bed time, allow them to read in bed to ease the transition.

·Meet your teachers - If possible, drop by your children's school in the weeks prior to the first day to meet your child's teacher. Most of these dedicated professionals will can be found organizing and decorating classrooms in anticipation of the start of the new year. If you are fortunate enough to arrange such a meeting, introduce yourself and your child and offer your help. Most teachers will welcome this type of volunteer work and your child will be the beneficiary.

Many additional details will remain to be taken care of prior to the first day of school, but time spent in the weeks prior will help to ease the transition for your entire family. Speak with your child now about his or her goals for the coming school year. Obtain the school calendar and work to arrange vacations,

doctor's appointments and other meetings during off school time. Do your best to face the school year in an organized fashion and before you know it, you'll be counting the days until summer!

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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

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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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