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**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.

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

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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.

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 Boston schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk-12.com/Massachusetts/boston/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.

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



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