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HISD board president raps Saavedra's budget

■ Citing a 'broken process,' he lists his frustrations

By **ERICKA MELLON**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The president of the Houston school board said Tuesday he is prepared to vote against Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra's \$1.6 billion budget in part because it does not provide enough money for school programs that principals and parents desire.

Harvin Moore also blasted Saavedra for giving trustees only three weeks to digest the

360-page budget summary before having to approve it on Thursday.

"I won't support a budget that doesn't get enough money to our schools, and I won't support a broken process either," Moore said. "I'm frustrated by three things: The superintendent, first, he doesn't collaborate. He doesn't communicate, and he presents this board with done deals and expects us to approve them."

The harsh words from the board president indicate that Saavedra's budget proposal is on shaky ground for the second time in three years.

Moore said he's unsure

Please see HISD, Page B4

HISD: Plan offers raises and no tax increase

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

whether he has the votes to defeat Saavedra's budget — as trustees did in 2006 — but a few board members have publicly criticized the process and what they considered a lack of creativity in the salary plan.

Saavedra's proposal, which does not call for a tax-rate increase, includes \$36 million for across-the-board raises, with all employees slated for at least a 3 percent boost.

On average, teachers would get a 4 percent raise, principals would get 8 percent and assistant principals would earn 7 percent. The lowest-paid workers also would get a one-time \$250 bonus to help offset gasoline prices.

The budget also includes extra money to be shared among the schools: \$10 million for library updates; \$10 million for fine arts; \$20 million for computers, furniture and other capital items; and \$10 million in extra per-pupil funding.

Trustees Greg Meyers and Carol Mims Galloway said they plan to support Saavedra's plan. The other six board members could not be reached.

"I've been one that always wants to make sure we have money for our schools, but we have to balance that with the needs of one of the most important assets — our teachers," Meyers said.

"Was there a lot of input? Maybe not," Meyers added. "But that's something that we as a board could provide all year long."

Moore said there shouldn't have to be a trade-off between giving extra money to teachers or schools.

"The schools, they're crying out for programs all over town," Moore said. "They don't just

need a little bit more money in their budgets. They need a lot more money."

HISD spokesman Terry Abbott defended the budget plan.

"It's a tremendous surge of money into the schools, and we're very proud of that," he said. "But obviously the board can make changes at the last minute if they like."

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