



## *Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston*

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*Office of the Archbishop Emeritus*

March 27, 2014

Letter to the Editor:

The decision of the Houston Independent School Board to keep Port Houston School open was critically important to the surrounding community. The closure of the school would not only force its children to attend a far distant school, but it would have eliminated an institution which gives vitality, stability, a sense of confidence and well-being to the community.

I want to thank the HISD Board for this decision and congratulate the parishioners of Divina Providencia Church, its pastor, Father Chris Plant, the parents of the children, and Neighbors in Action for working with The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) to keep Port Houston open.

They have demonstrated Pope Francis' exhortation for parishes to get involved in the community. As Pope Francis stated, "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."

When I read in the paper that Port Houston Elementary was on the list to be closed, I immediately thought of the children as well as the negative impact on the community. The families who live in this community are hard-working, economically poor but rich in spirit. Evidence of this is the over 400 parents and community leaders who attended the briefing session by school officials notifying them of the school closure.

TMO called a meeting with member congregations Resurrection Catholic Church, Fifth Ward Missionary Baptist Church and Trinity United Methodist Church and also Neighbors in Action. They developed an action plan and began meeting with school board members and initiated a petition calling on the school board to vote No on the school closure.

When the leaders met with Ms. Juliet Stipeche, HISD Board President, she committed that she would remove Port Houston Elementary, Fleming Middle School and Henderson Elementary from the closure list. I want to recognize Ms. Stipeche for her work in keeping the three schools open. Her leadership is a blessing for the children and their communities.

Over 100 parents and TMO leaders attended the March 13 HISD Board meeting to deliver over 1,000 signatures to the Board and the Superintendent.

TMO has long been involved in education and other community projects. I thank them for their help in keeping Port Houston School open.

Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza