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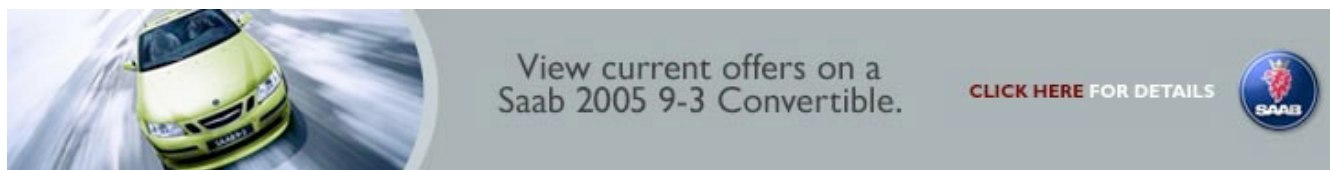
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Sudden School Closing Outrages Mayor, Parents

Our Lady Of Presentation School Suddenly Closes Two Day Early

POSTED: 12:24 pm EDT June 9, 2005
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BOSTON -- In a move that angered parents and city leaders, the Boston Archdiocese abruptly shut down Our Lady of Presentation School in Brighton two days before classes were scheduled to end.

Video



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The school was slated to close later this week, but the archdiocese did not want to wait because of the possibility that parents might stage a vigil in the closed school, as has occurred at eight other parishes targeted for closure.

NewsCenter 5's Amalia Barreda reported that parents and teachers quickly organized a makeshift graduation ceremony for 60 students locked out of the school in Oak Square Common Thursday morning. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino offered Faneuil Hall for a ceremony for the rest of the students Friday morning.

"My grades, my ribbons, everything is inside the building. When I left here (Wednesday afternoon), I thought I was coming back here today," teacher Jennifer Doyle said.

"I think it is sad the school is closing," said fourth-grader Aisling Hewson.

The archdiocese said it had learned parents had planned a protest Friday after school and issued a statement from Bishop Richard Lennon that said, "We simply could not permit the school year to continue based on the information we had received." The statement claimed the decision was based on safety concerns.

"When you start to hear rumors about people moving sleeping bags and supplies and items into a school before it closes, that is irresponsible. We understand, I am a parent, I understand the frustration the parents are feeling today. The archbishop is saddened and heart-wrenched. It is a

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very sad event for him to make this decision. If he hadn't had made the decision and someone goes in and takes over the school, people would have said, 'Why didn't you do something?'" asked archdiocese spokesman Terry Donilon.

"It wasn't going to happen. Every collective memory, everyone (the children) know and care about in life have gone through these hallways at one point or another for some reason. They love this school," said parent Kimberly Smith.

The Archdiocese of Boston has been in the process of shutting down 80 of 357 parishes and schools in the past year. The parents had offered to buy the Brighton school and keep it open, but their offer was rejected by church officials in January. The offer to buy the school was supported by several local politicians, including Menino and Secretary of State William F. Galvin, who attended the school as a child.

"It is outrageous. It doesn't make a lot of sense why you would close a school two days before it was scheduled to. The thing I am concerned about is the children. Kids were all hyped up about getting their diplomas. Their grandmothers, grandfathers are going there, the parents. It should have been a day of celebration, now it is a day of sorrow. I think it will have an effect on the children," Menino said. "It is just like when we talk about mergers and this is cold-blooded, just closing the school down. It is like a corporation saying, 'We don't want to you. Shut the door and go someplace else.' That is wrong. My church is built on compassion and caring. What they did didn't show any compassion or caring with a decision like this."

The school was originally scheduled to close last year, but remained open in part by a personal \$100,000 line of credit from Galvin.

Dozens of students huddled outside the building in the rain Wednesday night with their parents, some of them sobbing. They said they still had all their belongings inside the school and came to retrieve them.

"To get in their school building that they've been locked out of. This is an outrage by the archdiocese. Insensitive, arrogant move by the archdiocese. Have they no shame?" parent Kevin Carragee asked. Carragee is chairman of a foundation that's been trying to keep the school open.

They will also proceed with their planned protest on Friday afternoon.

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