

GISD Response

by Jul Kamen and
Jacquelyn Tarpay
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It was not the GOP's intention to criticize or malign the GISD in our [recent article](#). We were trying to use objective facts, derived from what we believed to be reliable sources, to get a picture of the overall condition of the school district. In our opinion, this cannot be done by visiting the campuses or classrooms for an hour or two, and developing a subjective impression from that experience.

The only reasonable tools available are web sites that specialize in evaluating all the districts in the State, or the entire country, using the same methodology, and ranking them accordingly. These are the tools that families use, as we did, in preparing [the article](#), to decide whether or not to move to this city. If these measures are inaccurate or unfair, that is not our doing. GISD needs to see that they are corrected, as they are already doing, as a result of our [previous article](#), and we applaud their effort!

Probably the most relevant information that we presented was the fact that **69% of the district's population is "Economically Disadvantaged"**. It is well settled that "Economically Disadvantaged" students require additional academic support and services which results in additional costs, placing an added burden on the school system. The purpose of [our article](#) was not to cast GISD in a bad light; on the contrary, we were trying to demonstrate that it already has a very difficult task to educate a large "Economically Disadvantaged" population, and we were trying to keep it from getting even more difficult due to an increase in "Economically Disadvantaged" students.

Forcing more "Economically Disadvantaged" students to attend a school district that is already 69% "Economically Disadvantaged",

when there are better choices within the County, will probably be ruled a violation of the Fair Housing Act by a federal court.

We received a lengthy response from Mr. Johnston Farrow which follows this introduction. At the end, he says in part that, *"... misinformation hurts everyone in Galveston. It is easy to pick out the tidbits of information to make your argument, but its information out of context. It does not look at the big picture and that leads to an inaccurate message."*

We would like to point out that [our article](#) was written in an effort to "look at the big picture" using objective evaluations and rankings of the entire district. By contrast, the response from GISD seems to be highlighting exemplary programs in an effort to cast the entire district in a better light. We do not dispute that there are excellent teachers, administrators, and programs offered at GISD, but the overall data is what the middle income families with school-age children will be looking at when they consider a move to the island.

He then goes on to criticize us because we *"haven't stepped foot on any of our campuses."*

"The Mayor, who has spent much time in our schools, sees the steady improvement in our work to educate all children, which is most likely the origin of this comment." We are very happy that the Mayor spends a lot of time on GISD campuses, and that GISD is showing steady improvement, but these are subjective, isolated observations that have nothing to do with an objective evaluation or rating of the entire District.

We appreciate Mr. Farrow's response to [our article](#), so that we can provide our readers with all available information about this very important issue. We reproduced his comments in their entirety, and will let you decide whether GISD can easily cope with a few hundred more "Economically Disadvantaged" students who are slated to live in the rebuilt 569 public housing units.

The Mayor has told us that he is going to build “first class” public housing by following the East Lake model. This model includes an on-site charter school for each development. We have insisted that the Mayor deliver on that promise and build new charter schools for the new public housing, which would give those students extra help, and not place additional burdens on GISD. We are still waiting to see those plans.

Galveston Open Government,

I have to correct some of your statements as facts as well as explain the details even further to enlighten the public to the big picture. I would appreciate it if you sent this out to your mailing list.

- 1) GISD was rated Acceptable in 2008-2009, not Unacceptable as GoodSchools.com says. I have corresponded with them to update the incorrect information they have posted on their website. You can confirm this information with the Texas Education Agency web address I have posted below.

Website: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker>

- 2) GISD was rated Unacceptable in 2009-2010 due to non-completion rates (drop-outs, displaced students), not academic figures. In fact, we were close to being a Recognized school district if you did not factor in non-completion rates.

I will send you the actual 2009-2010 TAKS figures as soon as I track them down from the testing office here at GISD so you may take a look at the actual data. I've attached the 2008-2009 AEIS Ratings figures so you can look that over.

- 3) Please view the powerpoint presentation I have attached documentation compiled by our district testing coordinator that shows our improvement on the TAKS test across the district. Ball was rated Unacceptable last year due to drop-out and non-completion numbers, not academics. It is because of this that the district was rated Unacceptable. We would have been Academically Recognized if not for drop-out numbers. Rosenberg Elementary was unacceptable in reading scores and math, but has now been incorporated by KIPP and other schools for the 2010-2011 school year. AIM Middle School was incorrectly coded as Unacceptable. It should not have been rated since it has Alternative school status.

- 4) Keep in mind, when you talk about non-completers, you talk about those students who either dropped out or simply stopped going to school. There are several reasons for that: 1) they are actual drop-outs; 2) they moved away and did not inform the district where they were going.

After Ike, we had 1800 displaced students, many who did not leave their forwarding addresses. Even if those students go to another state and graduate, they are still counted against us as non-completers, leading to the district being listed as Unacceptable.

While the AEIS system that rates schools Unacceptable, Acceptable, Recognized and Exemplary are based off the most current TAKS scores, the non-completion and drop-out numbers are counted from the year before. Therefore, for our rating in 2009-2010, the non-completion numbers are based on the 2008-2009 school year, the year many of our students were displaced. Academics has nothing to do with our rating this year.

- 5) There is a perception that Galveston schools aren't up to par, but the truth is we have many opportunities for children to succeed and we actually have set national standards as stated by Mayor Jaworski. Ball High has received two ACT Awards in a row for number of students taking the test, and has been recognized by *Newsweek* magazine for three years in a row as one of the top six percent best schools in America for its Advanced Placement program. Austin recently received a National Title I Award (one of fifty in the U.S.), and is nominated for a Blue Ribbon Award, considered one of the most prestigious awards given to a public educational institution. Please keep in mind, we have three Exemplary campuses at GISD as well (Austin, Galveston Early College High School, and Oppe Elementary).

Newsweek

<http://www.newsweek.com/feature/2010/americas-best-high-schools.html>

[ACT Award](#)

It is this perception that we are working very hard to eradicate and it often based on thoughts that come from individuals who haven't stepped foot on any of our campuses. Posts such as this do damage to our hard efforts. The Mayor, who has spent much time in our schools, sees the steady improvement in our work to educate all children, which is most likely the origin of this comment.

Misinformation hurts everyone in Galveston. It is easy to pick out the tidbits of information to make your argument, but it's information out of context. It does not look at the big picture and that leads to an inaccurate message.

We would most appreciate it if you were to accurately depict the state of GISD going forward.

Thank you,
Johnston Farrow

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[ACT Award](#)

[2008-2009 AEIS Ratings](#)

[2010 TAKS Results](#)

[Ball High Ratings](#)