

Date: 01 October 2014

To: Galveston City Council

Re: Poverty and PR

The GOGP Mission:

The GOGP is a government watchdog group. We investigate and critique local government and then suggest possible solutions and improvements. It is NOT our function to provide "public relations" services for local government, or to try to make the conditions that exist in the City look better than they really are. We deal in reality NOT spin.

We received a complaint from GISD, last week, about our article, "Poverty and Schools". We tried to make it very clear, in that article, that we were NOT criticizing GISD. We were trying to point out what a tough job they have educating a student body that has 38.8% of its students living in poverty and 75% of them are economically disadvantaged.

Their primary complaint was our use of the GreatSchools.com rating system. They said that it is inaccurate, because it uses outdated data, and the low score it gives to GISD makes it more difficult for them to attract new middle class families. We are more aware than most how difficult it is to attract middle class families to the Island, if they do any amount of due diligence about the City. The reality of the condition of the City is far from flattering, but it is not our function to try make things look better than they really are. We are only interested in finding ways to actually MAKE them better.

GISD schools seem to be improving, and they may continue to improve, but they will not be able to reach certain levels of performance unless the level of concentrated poverty in the City is reduced. That is our message.

GreatSchools.com:

Great Schools appears to be the only national school ranking system on the internet. It uses the same methodology to rank every school and district in the country. It is the only system, that we are aware of, that

allows a potential new resident to compare the school district in Galveston, TX to the one in Friendswood, TX , AND to compare the school district in Galveston, TX to the school district in Brookline, MA. Therefore, our use of Great Schools is in line with what millions of other people are doing as a first look at a new city.

The two national real estate sites, Trulia.com and Zillow.com both use Great Schools to score and compare Galveston's schools and GISD as a whole. If this is inaccurate and unfair, then GISD has a problem, but the bulk of the exposure to and use of Great Schools is coming from web sites, not articles written by the GOP. We do not have the resources to crunch these numbers ourselves, so we rely on Great Schools like millions of other people do.

We found two or three other web sites advertising Galveston real estate that also use GreatSchools.com.

[TEA Scoring:](#)

GISD directed us to what they consider the "more accurate" data available at the TEA web site. It does NOT provide a numerical ranking system like Great Schools, and it does NOT allow comparison to schools and districts in other states, but it does offer an alternate method to measure schools and districts.

Comparing the School Districts in Galveston County:

GALVESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS		
<u>Clear Creek I.S.D.</u> 2425 East Main St. League City, Texas 77574 281-332-2828 (A portion of Clear Creek I.S.D. is located in Harris County)	<u>Dickinson I.S.D.</u> Administration Building P. O. Box Z Dickinson, Texas 77539 281-534-3581	<u>Friendswood I.S.D.</u> 302 Laurel Friendswood, Texas 77546 281-482-1267
<u>Galveston I.S.D.</u> 3904 Avenue T Galveston, Texas 77550 409-765-9366	<u>High Island I.S.D.</u> P. O. Box 246 High Island, Texas 77623 409-286-5314	<u>Hitchcock I.S.D.</u> 8117 Highway 6 Hitchcock, Texas 77563 409-986-5514
<u>La Marque I.S.D.</u> 1727 Bayou Road La Marque, Texas 77568 409-938-4251	<u>Santa Fe I.S.D.</u> 13301 Highway 6 Santa Fe, Texas 77510 409-925-2755	<u>Texas City I.S.D.</u> 1401 9th Ave N Texas City, Texas 77590 409-942-2713

<http://www.houston-texas-online.com/galvestoncoschooldist.html>

We have never used the City of Hitchcock in our studies before, because it has a very small population compared to the seven major cities in the County, but since it is so close to Galveston, and it has its own school district, we included it in this study. We did not include High Island. We also decided to use the poverty level just for school-aged residents (under 18 years of age), instead of the level for all residents.

City	2010-2012 ACS Under 18 % Poverty (See DP03)	GreatSchools.com
Galveston	38.8	4
Hitchcock	33.1	2
Texas City	29.6	5
La Marque	27.1	2
Dickinson	20.1	6
Santa Fe	16.0	4
League City	4.0	8
Friendswood	3.7	9

The Great Schools ranking seems to clearly show that the school districts in the two low-poverty cities (less than 10% poverty), in Galveston County, Friendswood and League City, with scores of 9 and 8, respectively, score substantially better than the other six districts which score between 2 and 6.

The good news is that GISD scores pretty well for the district with the highest poverty level. It scores higher than two districts with lower poverty (Hitchcock and La Marque) and as well as Santa Fe. The bad news is that GISD doesn't score nearly as well as the elite schools, but it is dealing with 10 times the poverty!

The best TEA ranking measurement seemed to be the "Student Achievement Index".

The TEA "Student Achievement Index" ranking appears to confirm the fact that the school districts in the two low-poverty cities (less than 10% poverty), in Galveston County, Friendswood and League City, with scores of 93 and 88, respectively, are substantially better than the other six districts which score between 54 and 76.

City	2010-2012 ACS Under 18 % Poverty (See DP03)	TEA Student Achievement Index
Galveston	38.8	68
Hitchcock	33.1	63
Texas City	29.6	71
La Marque	27.1	54
Dickinson	20.1	76
Santa Fe	16.0	75
League City	4.0	88
Friendswood	3.7	93

Once again, the good news is that GISD scores pretty well for the district with the highest poverty level. It scores higher than two districts with lower poverty (Hitchcock and La Marque). The bad news is that GISD doesn't score nearly as well as the elite schools, but it is dealing with 10 times the poverty!

The TEA data seem to present a similar picture to the Great Schools data.

First Look:

When savvy middle class parents take a first look at Galveston, on the Internet, to see if they are interested in moving to the Island, this is what they might typically find:

They go to Trulia.com and it uses GreatSchools.com to tell them that GISD is rated 4 out of 10.

Galveston Independent School District

Know your school choice options in Texas.

Some districts allow students to transfer to schools either in or outside their district. Children can also attend charter schools. Low-income students are eligible for scholarship funding to attend private schools.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind law, students attending a Title I school designated as "in need of improvement" have the right to attend a higher performing school in the district.

[Know the system: Key terms](#)

Notice an inaccuracy? [Let us know!](#)

GreatSchools
District Rating

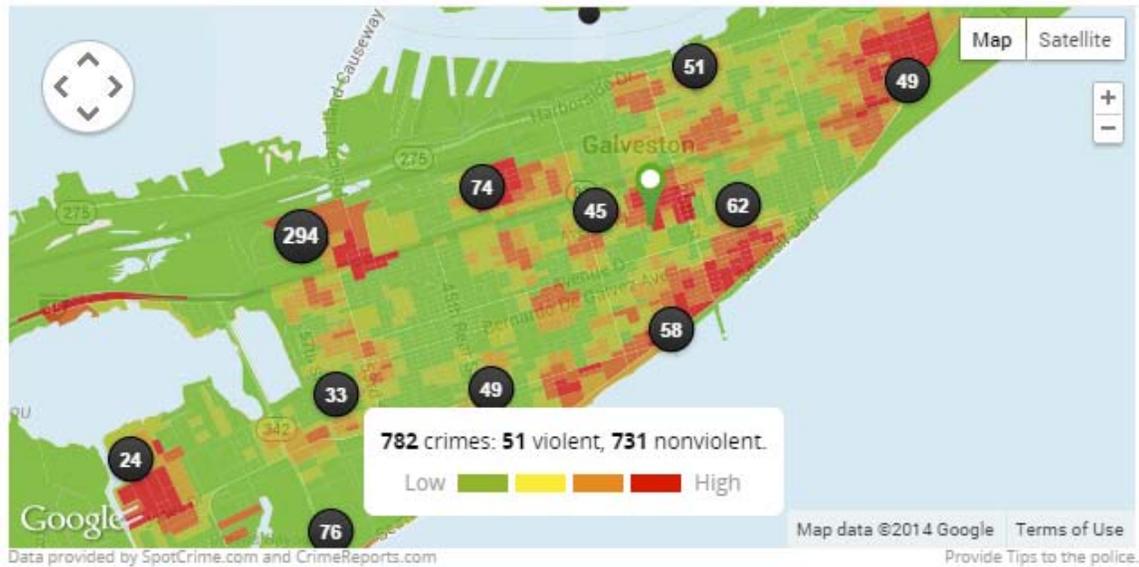
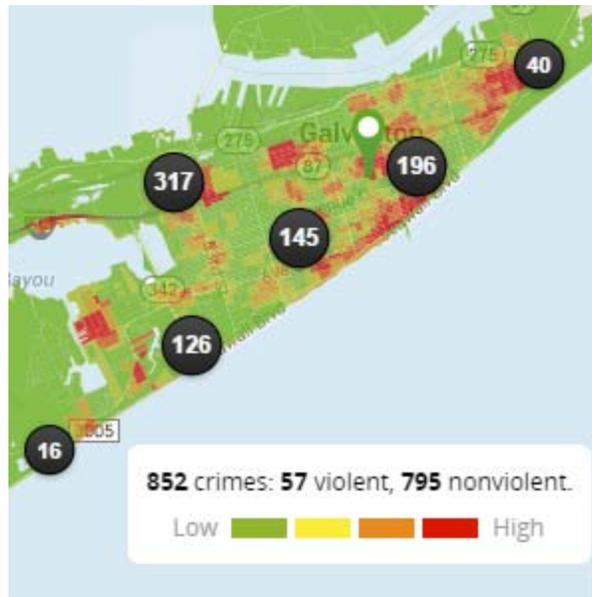
4
out of 10

This district's rating is based on its schools' test results; 10 is best.
[Learn more >](#)
[This district's stats >](#)

P O Box 660
Galveston, TX 77553
Galveston
[Map >](#)
PH: (409) 766-5121
FAX: (409) 762-8391
[District Web site >](#)

▶ Grades n/a
▶ 6,813 students
▶ 16 schools
[View all schools in this district >](#)

Then Trulia shows them a crime map generated by SpotCrime.com and CrimeReports.com. There is a whole lot of red between Ferry Road and 76th Street!



Is this data old or inaccurate? We don't know, but this is what potential residents are going to see.

They might also look at City-Data.com for more crime data:

City	2010-2012 ACS % Poverty (See DP03)	2012 Crime Index
Galveston	24.7%	375.3
La Marque	20.3%	434.7
Texas City	20.5%	281.6
Hitchcock	19.7%	268.9
Dickinson	14.2%	247.2
Santa Fe	10.8%	178.6
League City	4.1%	186.2 (2006)
Friendswood	3.8%	65.1
East St. Louis, IL	45.6%	1750.2
Camden, NJ	42.6%	1133.6
Flint, MI	41.8%	1075.2
Detroit, MI	40.7%	1009.7
Youngstown, OH	40.2%	644.8
Cleveland, OH	36.9%	787.2
Buffalo, NY	31.4%	642.1
Newark, NJ	30.4%	604.8
Ferguson, MO	23.9%	381.1

Considering the level of poverty, in the City of Galveston, the crime rate isn't too bad, but remember that the 569 public housing units were not in the city in 2012 when this data was generated. (2012 is the most recent data available from this source.) (The 2012 data for League City is missing?)

Poverty levels and crime data from some of the most notorious cities around the country are included for comparison to the City of Galveston and other cities in the County. If the poverty level keeps rising, these cities provide a preview of how bad things can get. A poverty level of just 30%, in Newark, results in a crime index over 600!

Conclusion:

When potential middle-class residents take their first look at this city, on the Internet, they are very likely to get scared off! If they go a step further, and visit the Island, they will quickly see and add the decaying public infrastructure and private-sector blight to their two

other major concerns. And, they will also find it very difficult to find a large selection of "modern" ranch houses at reasonable prices.

Unless they have a strong desire to live near the beach, or they are in love with historical homes, it will be very difficult for them to get past the crime rate, the high-poverty schools and the state of the infrastructure and blight! They have so many other choices in the County, including two low-poverty cities.

Until the City LOWERS the poverty rate substantially, there is nothing that can be done about the three major hurdles to attracting new middle class residents. Galveston is the poorest city in the County, so it cannot generate the kind of crime rates and school performance numbers that low-poverty cities can. It is decades behind in its infrastructure maintenance and repair, and its only "solution" to that issue, so far, is to take on more poverty in return for government handouts. A short sighted and suicidal approach!

From this very simplistic analysis, it looks like both GPD and GISD are doing an excellent job dealing with the population that currently lives on the Island!

That is why this series is focusing on the fact that our only hope is to get YOU to develop and implement a sensible plan to stop increasing our poverty level and then actually shrink it. It is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, and that of the GHA Boards, and the Mayors who appoint them.

We are NOT asking you to find a way to solve the impossible task of "eliminating poverty", we are asking you to stop doing things that create and concentrate more poverty in this city, and then find a way to de-concentrate the poverty that is already here.

What do the voters need to do to get your attention?

It is time to stop pretending that this problem doesn't exist!

David Stanowski
President
Galveston Open Government Project, Inc.