

Gulf Shores School Split

700 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

August 16, 2017

Gulf Shores School Split

“Gulf Shores having independent schools is an interesting premise,” I thought.

Curious about the fate of neighborhood children I wrote the State Board of Education asking, “What are the theoretical consequences for Orange Beach students, if the City of Gulf Shores forms their own school system?”

The students from Orange Beach must have a school where they are comfortable and can grow, assuming they will not be able to attend the newly formed schools in Gulf Shores, living outside the attendance zone.

“I have to dig further,” I thought.

The school initiative is not new, having fallen twice before, overwhelmingly battered in voter referendums in Orange Beach and Gulf Shores. Perhaps Gulf Shores will go it alone, succeeding without Orange Beach.

I wish the City of Gulf Shores all the best with their new project, trying to understand how a fair and equitable arrangement can be reached for Orange Beach’s students is the conundrum. Living on the eastern end of the island in a geographically segregated school system hurts the local children, adding more apprehension to their puberty. Blame will fall squarely on the shoulders of city managers, if favorable terms are not negotiated.

“The separation is usually effected by means of a negotiation between the school systems. The negotiation usually culminates in a separation agreement which governs issues such as attendance zones [and](#) other matters,” said the Communications Office of the State Board of Education in an email.

Planning for a new school system takes people with vision. I applaud the tenacity of the Island Education Task Force, working to see an independent-school initiative succeed, knowing they must convince their neighbors to vote in a referendum, increasing property taxes, possibly to the 29 mil level of Saraland, also a city-run school system.

Orange Beach has not been standing still, working with Eddie Tyler, Superintendent of the Baldwin County Board of Education, eliciting a promise to build a \$15 Million Middle School in Orange Beach as part of the county’s pay-as-you-go \$60 Million loan program with no direct-tax burden on local residents, possibly starting construction in 2018.

Taxes are the key issue. Perhaps some families will move from Orange Beach to Gulf Shores in response to the dedicated school system, perceived as having the advantage of smaller classes and personalized tutoring, outweighing the burden of higher taxes. Choosing to pay the added property tax is a parental choice for better education. The only alternative for some Orange Beach students is transporting to the next available feeder system.

Gulf Shores School Split

My counter proposal is about taxes, specifically lowering property taxes in Orange Beach from 4 mil to zero, using this school initiative as an opportunity to start an economic boom, driving the investor class to our city, compared to a possible 29 mil property tax in Gulf Shores to zero property tax in Orange Beach. "The city took in \$3,461,385 in Ad Valorem Taxes (on 4 mil) in 2016," according to Finance Director Ford Handley.

I argue. This loss in revenue is nominal compared to the possible economic growth, spurred on by lowering the tax rate, incentivizing business investors. The Gulf Shores City Schools initiative is an opportunity for Orange Beach to create a property boom, increasing revenue, pushing up real-estate values and attracting investor-class people to a beach town with no property tax.

I digress; the issue is about the children. The Communications Department of the State Board of Education said negotiations were necessary to determine the attendance zones. What happens to Orange Beach students if Gulf Shores Middle School and Gulf Shores High School are not open to them?

Saraland has posted on the website for people living outside the attendance zone: "The policy requires tuition payment of \$1500.00 as well as academic, behavior, and attendance eligibility requirements. Additionally, admission is based on space availability". Perhaps Gulf Shores will offer a tuition-payment plan or scholarships for the best Orange Beach students, padding their student-body's performance.

Gulf Shores will control their educational destiny by forming their own school system. Orange Beach could choose to control their economic destiny by eliminating property taxes.

ENDS.