

EDITORIAL

A better education

Positives outweigh negatives in closing Sea Isle School District

Taxpayers in Sea Isle City are spending more than \$35,000 a year to educate each grade school student in the Sea Isle School District.

Grade levels are combined in the classrooms because there are only 83 students from Sea Isle between pre-kindergarten and eighth grade.

In the next five years, it is expected there will be only 61 students in the entire school (including tuition students).

The building requires \$2.2 million in renovation and repair work. A big chunk of the school is being closed off after this school year because of structural issues and because there is no need for the extra space anyway with so few students.

There is no Child Study Team at the school; child study works with and evaluates learning disabilities and potential learning problems. Students are losing out on a lot of extracurricular and athletic opportunities because the district is so small.

School and business administrators have been in and out of the district.

Management gets harder and harder because the state limits how much can be spent on administration based on enrollment, so even though taxpayers are spending more than \$35,000 a student, there isn't enough money for proper administration (not to mention a teacher for each grade level).

When the chief school administrator retired in June, the district could not attract or afford a new administrator so the school board decided to hire an outside firm to run the school.

The county superintendent of schools suggested hiring an outside firm for a year to give the school board some time to decide the future of the district.

The firm has done worse than the district in keeping management; there has been a revolving door for administrators since EIRC (Educational Information and Resource Center of Sewell)

What awaits Sea Isle City if its school is closed and students are sent to Ocean City?

On the negative side, students will have to be bused off the island.

It won't be as convenient as having the youngsters nearby.

It is possible some teachers and staff members will lose their jobs.

There is fear of a negative impact on local businesses.

Some school board members worry home rule would cease to exist if the school was closed and the students sent elsewhere, but the school board gave up home rule when it decided to hire an outside firm to make all the decisions on everything from curriculum to personnel.

On the plus side, there is plenty of room in neighboring Ocean City primary and intermediate schools, which can easily handle an influx of students. Ocean City should be glad to get the students because of declining enrollment on the barrier island north of Sea Isle.

The primary and intermediate schools are not overcrowded, nor would they be with the relatively minor influx of students per grade level.

All the students would be educated with a teacher in a class dedicated to a single grade level and there would be a continuity of instruction because students end up in Ocean City for high school. (Upper Township and Ocean City coordinate their curriculums like this.)

There is a Child Study Team and plenty of extracurricular and athletic opportunities for all the students, plus more opportunities for gifted and talented students, more subject areas including industrial arts (like computer-aided design) and family and consumer sciences, and more music programs.

Unofficially, getting the students out of Sea Isle would eliminate or greatly diminish the outside influences causing disruptions at the tiny school.

The firm has done worse than the district in keeping management; there has been a revolving door for administrators since EIRC (Educational Information and Resource Center of Sewell) took over in July 2006. Sea Isle is the first district EIRC has run.

The firm that gets paid to run the district was also paid by Sea Isle City to do a feasibility study on the future of educating Sea Isle City students. EIRC came up with four options. One is to keep the school open. Another is to close it and send the students to Ocean City, where all Sea Isle's high school students now go. (The other two options, involving Middle Township and Dennis Township schools, won't work according to the county superintendent.)

After presenting the study, on April 24 the official from the firm that gets paid to run the district said its recommendation would be to keep the school district open for another five years. The official who did the study for EIRC and made the recommendation is the same man hired by EIRC to be the chief school administrator.

That relationship makes the study and recommendation appear a serious conflict of interest.

summer sciences, and more music programs.

Unofficially, getting the students out of Sea Isle would eliminate or greatly diminish the outside influences causing disruptions at the tiny school.

On top of everything is the cost. The tuition for the non-high school students now is about \$19,000 in Ocean City, practically half the cost of educating the students in Sea Isle. The tuition cost would decline given the few additional students per grade would not create the need for extra staff in Ocean City.

Sea Isle City taxpayers could see a 30 percent reduction in the taxes they pay for educating students.

While it may be hard for some parents and teachers to bid farewell to the Sea Isle City school, the facts add up to a better education experience for students if they are sent to Ocean City schools.

Right now, Sea Isle is spending much more to provide much less to its students.

We believe taxpayers, including parents, should convince the Sea Isle Board of Education to make the decision that makes educational and financial sense: close the Sea Isle school and send the students to Ocean City.