

As we head into the New Year, the issue that is at the forefront of many Dunwoody residents' minds is the recent action that SACS took, putting the entire DeKalb County School System on probation, just one step above loss of accreditation. Loss of accreditation would be harmful, not just to our children, but also to property values county-wide, including Dunwoody. So, what do we do?

One very bold approach would be to form an independent school system for the City of Dunwoody. This has been made as an official request (unanimously passed by the City Council) as a high priority issue for the next legislative session. With that said, this would require amending the State Constitution to allow another school system to form, a process intentionally designed to be difficult.

Let me cover a little history on this. Decades ago, the Georgia Constitution was amended to cap the number of school systems in Georgia at 180. This was a move by the then county-controlled General Assembly to eliminate competing systems statewide. Currently there are 159 county systems and 21 city school systems, like Atlanta and Decatur, which were grandfathered in.

The process that we will have to go through to get there is analogous to the process that we went through to form the city, but unlike cityhood, it is a Constitutional issue and has to pass with supermajorities in both the House (120 votes of 180 members) and Senate (37 votes of 56 members), be signed by the Governor, AND THEN must be voted on statewide as a referendum in a General Election. I have been asked by many residents how long this could take and I want to reflect realistic expectations to the community. The earliest that this could be on a statewide ballot for a vote, if everything goes perfectly, is November 2014.

So, how do we get started? The first thing that your legislative team needs is a Carl Vinson Institute study showing all of the financials. The State has indicated that they will not fund one, so either the City of Dunwoody or another independent group would have to commission that. After the study is complete, I would drop a bill and ask for hearings. As with all Constitutional issues, we would have hearings on it in year one (2013) of the Biennial session and could possibly vote on it in 2014. If it passed everything in the General Assembly, we would need to mobilize a statewide marketing effort, because again, it would be on every ballot in the state and we would need to be convincing someone on the other end of the state why Dunwoody needs our own school system and why they should vote for it.

I was at the "point of the spear" in the legislative efforts that successfully got the incorporation of Dunwoody done and later on the transfer of the parks for \$100 per acre. We were fighting just DeKalb County at that time. I expect a lot of other counties to join them in opposing this legislation fiercely. This will be harder than cityhood to accomplish, so I just want to manage the expectations for the community of the amount of time, money and effort this will entail.

The Georgia General Assembly convenes on the January 14th, and I remind all constituents that the Capitol is open to all citizens. I invite you to access the General Assembly website during session to read about current events and view live hearings and to come down to observe and participate in the legislative process in person.