



The

# Challenge

April 2000



## Superintendent Marockie resigns

West Virginia State Schools Superintendent Hank Marockie resigned under pressure on March 9, as investigations continue into his use of public and private money.

Marockie, who served as superintendent for eleven years, said he wanted to put an end to the "relentless acrimony directed at the state education establishment."

"There was no use staying in the position when so much attention was

focused on the superintendent, when the superintendent's office was a lightning rod," Marockie told *The Charleston Gazette*.

Members of the State Board of Education unanimously approved Marockie's decision to resign after meeting with the beleaguered superintendent for more than an hour in a closed-door session.

Assistant Superintendent David Stewart

was named interim superintendent while the state board continues its search for a replacement for Marockie.

The Board's top candidate, Richard Laine, a former Illinois assistant superintendent, withdrew his name from consideration after it was reported that he lacked the credentials for the job.

State Sen. Donna Boley, who had called for Marockie's resignation, commended the Board.

"This has been an embarrassment for the state of West Virginia," Boley said. "I have been disappointed that board members haven't taken action before. I'm glad they finally stepped up to the plate."

Board president Cleo Mathews thanked Marockie for his service, saying the "state school system and this board will be forever grateful," according to a report in the *Charleston Daily Mail*.

Mathews declined to say whether the board pressured Marockie into resigning. "I don't think we need to go there," she said. But Mathews acknowledged that the public controversy swirling around Marockie played a role in the decision to accept his resignation.

Marockie will stay with the Department of Education as an administrative assistant and continue to be paid at his \$100,000 salary until April 17 while he works as a consultant on the school funding case being heard by Judge Arthur Recht.

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Challenge West Virginia fellows for 2000 stand behind coordinators Beth Spence and Linda Martin. They are, from left to right, Christine Spaulding, Basil White (standing in for wife Joyce), Clara Sears, Eddie Harman, Jana Freeman, Jenny Selin, Mike Lushbaugh, Terri Weiford, Thomas Ramey Jr. and Paul Hamrick. Not shown are Patty Deak, Joyce White and Cindy Miller. (Photo by Cheryl Cline)



# Challenge West Virginia

The Challenge is published by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization committed to maintaining and improving small community schools and reforming education policy in West Virginia so that all of our state's children have the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.

Challenge members believe state education policy, which has resulted in the closing of a fourth of West Virginia's schools during the past ten years, does not serve the best interest of many children, especially those from low-income families who live in rural areas.

Challenge West Virginia is a program of Covenant House, an independent, non-profit organization in Charleston, WV, which is not connected to any other program by the same name.

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## This 'n that from around the state

• State School board member J.D. Morris received a reimbursement of \$152.21 to attend visitation services when the wife of House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta died, according to a report in the *Charleston Daily Mail*. The state also paid for Morris to stay three nights at \$237 per night at The Greenbrier resort when he attended a reading conference. Board president Cleo Mathews was reimbursed for a trip to address a county group of Democratic women. Board member Jim MacCallum received \$1,080 for attending a conference in Oxford, England.



• *The Charleston Gazette* editorially called for state board members to follow the example of Hank Marockie and resign, saying a good case can be made for incompetence and neglect of duty.

• State School Board members told the *Charleston Daily Mail* they may not meet their June 30 deadline for naming a new superintendent. The Board's top pick, Richard Laine, withdrew his name from consideration the day before Superintendent Hank Marockie resigned

• *Charleston Gazette* reporter Eric Eyre has won a national award for his stories about state School Superintendent Hank Marockie's use of a little-known expense account known as the "superintendent's discretionary fund." Eyre also won a second-place award in the 1999 Education Writers Association for his story about a deaf student in Lincoln County.

• Harrison County Superintendent Robert Kittle is retiring as of July 1. Kittle formerly served as superintendent in Kanawha and Randolph counties.

• The Lincoln County Board of Education rescinded a decision to keep the county's four high schools and opted instead to keep Harts High School and build one school for the rest of the county.

• Public school enrollment in West Virginia fell from 331,921 in 1998 to 299,557 in 1999, according to the West Virginia Research League's 1999 Statistical Handbook. During the same time the number of schools decreased from 1,098 to 867.

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# Montana study supports small schools

A new study released by the Rural School and Community Trust suggests that the state of Montana appears to have derived substantial benefits from its historic decision to maintain small schools and small school districts.

Results from the Montana research are consistent with results in four other states – small schools and smaller school districts reduce the harmful effects of poverty on student achievement.

The latest research is based on data from nearly all of Montana's public schools.

While it is generally understood that poverty has a negative effect on student achievement, researchers Craig Howley of Ohio University and Robert Bickel of Marshall University, wanted to learn whether smaller

schools can weaken that relationship.

The clear conclusion is that they can, according to the Rural School and Community Trust.

The researchers used the same methodology in Montana as they used in Ohio, Texas and Georgia to measure the achievement levels of students in various grades and the relationship to the level of poverty in the school and district. The results also mirror results Howley found in an earlier study in West Virginia.

Many of Montana's smaller schools serve lower income rural communities. The study concludes that small schools and small districts in that state do an excellent job of cutting poverty's power over student achievement. Researchers found that poverty has three to four times as much power to weaken student

achievement in larger schools and districts than in smaller schools and districts.

They also found that while not all of Montana's small schools are "good" schools, the smallness of these schools is an asset to student achievement and consolidating them into larger schools would likely produce lower achievement scores.

## SBA approves renovation grants

The West Virginia School Building Authority has approved \$5.1 million for school improvements throughout the state.

The SBA awarded \$500,000 grants to:

- Fayette County for renovations to Gauley Bridge Elementary
- Barbour County for renovations to Belington Elementary
- Cabell County for renovations to Cabell Midland High
- Hampshire County for renovations to Hampshire High
- Jefferson County to replace the heating and cooling system at Page Jackson Elementary
- Mason County for an addition to Ashton Elementary
- Mineral County to replace the heating and cooling system at Frankfort High
- Randolph County for renovations to Tygart Valley High

Other grants include:

- Roane County, \$228,000 for renovations to Spencer Middle School
- Taylor County, \$363,000 for renovations to Taylor County Vocational-Technical Center
- Wirt County, \$449,500 for renovations to Wirt County High
- Calhoun County, \$70,000 for renovations at Pleasant Hill and Arnoldsburg elementaries

# Rising fuel prices putting strain on school budgets

Rising fuel prices are putting a big strain on school budgets, according to a report by the Associated Press.

Patty Pauley, who oversees Cabell County's fleet of 102 buses, said the price she paid for bulk shipments of diesel fuel increased 30 cents a gallon in just three months.

"You just have to pay what you have to pay," Pauley said. "In the end, I'm going to see my budget consumed faster. It's not something I really have control over."

Ted Shupe of Tyler County said he started the school year paying about 88 cents per gallon for fuel, but by the end of February, the price was up to \$1.30 a gallon.

Shupe said he is trying to come up with ways to save money so he has more to spend on fuel. Other than fuel, "we're only buying what we need,"

he said.

According to the AP report, diesel-powered 40-foot-long yellow buses average less than nine miles per gallon. Gasoline-powered buses get only about half as many miles per gallon.

West Virginia counties aren't in a crisis, but some boards are worried that increased diesel and heating fuel oil costs may break their budgets by the year's end, according to Wayne Clutter, who oversees facilities and transportation for the State Department of Education.

"We know the costs have significantly increased since school began," Clutter told the AP. "We're fearful that some of these fuel costs could push budgets into deficits."

He said counties are being encouraged to limit the number of empty bus runs and lower thermostats.



# Challenge West Virginia

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## Superintendent resigns as investigations continue

Challenge West Virginia's Linda Martin said it was "outrageous" that Marockie should remain on the public payroll. "He's a dishonest person who misused funds for educating West Virginia's children. He should not stay another day," she said.

Since January, Marockie has been under investigation by the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Legislative Commission on Special Investigations and the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney for the way he spent more than \$90,000 from an expense account set up by the nonprofit West Virginia

Education Alliance.

The FBI also has launched an investigation into Marockie's distribution of federal funds through the public school system, according to a Las Vegas education official who was questioned by an agent.

In addition, Charleston resident Wanda Carney filed a complaint with the state Ethics Commission after she obtained telephone records showing that the superintendent made at least 1,700 long-distance personal phone calls at taxpayer expense.

At the end of 1999 Marockie had announced his plans to resign in June

and was in the running for a \$250,000-a-year job as superintendent of Clark County Schools in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Clark County Board members said Marockie claimed his salary was \$146,000 — \$46,000 more per year than he actually was paid — and that private sources provided him with a housing allowance, expense account and country club membership. Marockie said Las Vegas officials misinterpreted what he said.

When the *Gazette's* Eric Eyre broke the story about the "superintendent's discretionary fund," Mar-

ockie refused for weeks to release details of how he spent the money that was to have been used to pay for teachers and students to travel to special events.

Records that were finally released showed Marockie spent the money to buy flowers for funerals of employees' relatives, for dozens of trips from Charleston to his home in Wheeling and for expensive dinners, including one costing \$323 for himself, his wife and one other person. He also paid his dues as a member of Sunrise Museum and made a donation to a soup kitchen.