



The

# Challenge

April 2002



## Challenge WV takes small schools arguments to State School Board

Challenge West Virginia members from across the state took the argument for small schools to the State Board of Education in March.

“We are a statewide organization working to keep our schools small because we know that small schools work best for our children,” Challenge coordinator Linda Martin told state board members.

Challenge members from Calhoun, Clay, Fayette, Harrison, Jefferson, Lincoln, McDowell, Monongalia, Nicholas, Preston, Putnam, Ritchie and Webster counties either attended the State Board meeting or submitted statements.

Martin said small schools lead to higher achievement levels, more positive student attitudes, more positive student social behavior, higher attendance rates, higher participation in extracurricular activities, lower dropout rates, more positive teacher attitudes and higher parent and community involvement.

She said claims that larger schools cost less and offer higher quality



**Members of Challenge West Virginia brought their concerns about small schools and long bus rides to the State Board of Education in March.**

curricula are not true.

Noting that West Virginia has closed 324 schools since 1990, Martin said the state has a higher percentage of its total education budget going to busing students (6.8 percent and \$129 million) than any other state in the nation. She also said West Virginia operates the most expensive transportation program in the country based on cost per pupil and cost per mile.

She urged the State Board of Education to enforce their guidelines for maximum time students

should spend on buses – 30 minutes for elementary, 45 minutes for middle school and 60 minutes for high school.

Other speakers spoke of the effect of long bus rides on children and families.

“On a personal note, I am offended that West Virginia school policy has no respect for the life of a child,” said Jana Freeman of Preston County.

“The mandatory long rides to school and extra-curricular activities totally disrupt our family life.”

Thomas Ramey Jr. of Lincoln County said if one high school is built in his county, students from Frances Creek and Big Ugly will be on buses for 100 to 120 minutes each way every day.

“I think the thing we must remember is that most research shows that the children that are harmed the most by long bus rides are the children from low-income families,” he said. “That describes most of the children from Frances Creek and Big Ugly .”

**Please turn to page three**

# This 'n that from around the state

- The State Supreme Court refused to reinstate two ousted Fayette County Board of Education members. Fayette Circuit Judge John Hatcher had ruled that Leon Newman and Lawrence Boley were ineligible to serve on the school board because they held seats on a public service district board.



- The Fayette County Board of Education has named popular Fayetteville High School principal Charles Garvin to serve as interim superintendent. Garvin said he wants to “restore confidence, a sense of normalcy and reinstate trust” to a school system that, since last year, lost a \$39 million bond election, failed in its attempt to implement a massive school consolidation plan, lost two board members because of conflict of interest charges and bought out the contract of the former superintendent.

- The Fayette County Board has come under criticism for paying \$140,000 to buy out the contract of former Superintendent Harry Hoffer. Former Superintendent Matt Edwards said the board acted illegally when it gave Hoffer more money than the remainder of his contract allowed. But Paul McClung, a leader of a citizen group that successfully sued the board, spoke in favor of the action, saying the amount was trivial compared to what would have been spent had Hoffer been given a multi-year contract.

- In other Fayette County news, former Board member David Arritt is back on the board as an interim member. Arritt resigned as principal of Rosedale Elementary school to accept the appointment.

- Following the county school board’s vote to close Cairo Elementary, Ritchie County residents are banding together to stop closure of all their elementary schools. “We’re not just trying to save Cairo School. It’s all the schools,” said Jennifer Cottrill. Cottrill and others in Ritchie County say the closing of Cairo, an exemplary school, is just the first of what will be more elementary closings in the county.

- Eighteen Raleigh County elementary students were taken to a hospital after a car rear-ended their school bus at the last stop of the morning on March 11. The accident occurred on Sand Branch Road and involved students from

Bradley Elementary School. A hospital spokesman said the children were not seriously hurt.

- The Fayette County Board of Education would have saved only \$32,862 if it had closed Nuttall Middle School, the county’s only exemplary school, according to the school’s principal, Barry Crist. When the closure was recommended by former Superintendent Harry Hoffer, signs appeared saying Nuttall should be “cloned, not closed.” Parent Leon Cooper, a banker, said he was amazed

the county would consider closing its only exemplary school. “You don’t close down your most profitable branch,” the banker said.

- Dr. Timothy Miller rejoined the Preston County Board of Education 18 days after he left because the Legislature changed a conflict of interest law. Miller resigned after the state Ethics Commission said his part-time job in the Preston Memorial Hospital emergency room posed a conflict of interest because the board of education contracts with the hospital to do blood tests and pre-employment physicals. Under the new law, an elected official can continue to serve and vote on issues related to contracts involving a business where he or she works if the official is not a party to the contract; doesn’t participate in the writing of the contract; is not an owner or shareholder in the business; and does not receive a commission or bonus because of the contract.

- State Board of Education members are deliberating on an education reform policy that would increase graduation requirements, maximize instructional time and make high school seniors take math and science classes. The changes are part of new standards being developed as the state replaces the SAT-9 achievement test with a new statewide assessment. Board president Sandra Chapman said hundreds of comments have been received since the proposed policies were sent to schools across the state, many of them critical of a policy banning extracurricular activities during the instructional day.

- The Legislature took about \$5 million away from the School Building Authority, but gave the agency new authority to consider funding projects involving community colleges rather than just primary and secondary public schools.

# Challenge WV takes case to state board

Marsha Timpson of McDowell County said children at Bartley Elementary, which is threatened with closure, “do not have even the smallest advantages that children from other schools have.”

“It doesn’t matter at Bartley because they all are on the same footing financially and they are ‘family’ in the sense that they belong together in the community,” she said.

“You take those children and consolidate them into another school and they will be pushed aside and lost. The are wonderful, precious children, and I do not want to lose them through this system.”

Martin also addressed the issue of where education policy decisions are made.

“Please do not tell us that it is up to our local boards of education to make decisions about school closures.

“Many of us tried to participate in the comprehensive facilities planning process, but try as we might, the message was clear: if you don’t consolidate schools, the state will not give you money,” she said.

Cindy Miller of Webster County said the only plan the School Building Authority would approve in her county was one which included a \$12 million middle school.

“We are over 558 square miles of mountains,” Miller said. “It simply isn’t geographically safe to transport our students over

‘Small community schools brought me and my family back home to West Virginia, and I believe that small community schools will bring other families here to call West Virginia home.’

– Paul Hamrick, Harrison County

these mountains, but that didn’t matter.”

Jon Frist of Monongalia County echoed the concern. “The local school board has no control of the process,” he said. “Let the people in the county make the decision how to spend the money locally.”

If the decisions are made locally, those decisions will support small schools, said Challenge WV coordinator Beth Spence.

Spence said in Lincoln County “no one who openly supports one high school will ever be elected to the board of education and neither will a bond be approved that will result in one large high school.”

If the state doesn’t listen to what taxpayers are saying, support for education will continue to erode, warned Tim McCoy of Putnam County, who said “your School Building Authority” tells counties they must close schools or get no state money.

“This heavy-handed approach is one of the main reasons that local boards of education are having problems with public support,” McCoy said. “Voters have and will continue to voice their

displeasure with public education; failed bond calls and failed levies will continue.”

Carolyn Arritt of Fayette County said her county’s \$39 million bond levy was defeated last May because of the threat of consolidation, not the increase in taxes.

“In the 1970s was the only other time a Fayette county bond was defeated and that again was because the money was to be used to consolidate schools,” she said.

That doesn’t have to occur, according to Amelia Anderson of Webster County, who said people are willing to vote to raise their taxes if they believe the resulting educational programs will benefit their children.

Other issues addressed by Challenge members include accountability, the closing of exemplary schools and the appeal of communities which have schools.

Marge Bragg of Clay County said she had spent the better part of a year trying to find out how county levy dollars had been spent. “The school board asks people to

continue to approve a levy, but is unwilling to provide an accounting of levy dollars,” she said.

Patty Deak of Ritchie County said Cairo Elementary, which the school board has voted to close, was recognized as an exemplary school.

“It is schools like Cairo that we need to keep and improve if we really want the best school system we can provide for our kids,” she said. Seven of the state’s 50 exemplary schools are targeted for closure.

Dr. Lori Stilley of Jefferson County said even growth counties need more schools, but can’t get funding. “I do know that long bus rides and losing the neighborhood schools is not best for the children,” she said.

Paul Hamrick of Harrison County retired from a career in the Air Force and came back to West Virginia in large part because he and his wife wanted their children to attend schools where they would be known by name and identified as individuals.

“We recognize that no building stands forever, but we just ask that more consideration be given to the school’s role in the community,” Hamrick said.

“Small community schools brought me and my family back home to West Virginia, and I believe that small community schools will bring other families here to call West Virginia home.”

# The Challenge

The Challenge is published monthly by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization committed to maintaining and improving small community schools.

Challenge West Virginia's goal is to reform education in West Virginia so that citizens have a voice in policy decisions and every child has the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.



# Challenge West Virginia

A program of Covenant House, Charleston, WV

600 Shrewsbury Street  
Charleston, WV 25301-1211

Non-Profit Organization  
US Postage Paid  
Permit 2673  
Charleston, WV 25301

**We Support Small Schools!**

**ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**

## Challenge WV County Contacts

[www.wvcovenanthouse.org/challengewv/](http://www.wvcovenanthouse.org/challengewv/)

<b>Calhoun County</b> Eric Rogers 304-655-7134 Skiddy19@hotmail.com	<b>Jefferson County</b> Paul Burke 304-876-2227 NumbersInstitute@Juno.com	<b>Nicholas County</b> Bob Henry Baber 304-846-6644 (no email)	<b>Raleigh County</b> Lorelei Scarbro 304-854-1016 candlelight29@aol.com
<b>Clay County</b> Marge Bragg 304-286-2655 ijram98@hotmail.com	<b>Lincoln County</b> Thomas Ramey Jr. 304-855-3930 tprameywv@hotmail.com	<b>Preston County</b> Jana Freeman 304-735-3411 Janaf11@hotmail.com	<b>Ritchie County</b> Patty Deak 304-869-3462 pdeak@dot.state.wv.us
<b>Fayette County</b> Carolyn Arritt 304-484-7919 Carritt-McCune@citynet.net	<b>Logan County</b> Chris Stratton 304-752-3258 cstratton@mountain.net	<b>Putnam County</b> Tim McCoy 304-586-9823 tmccoy@dictaphone.com	<b>Webster County</b> Cindy Miller 304-493-6369 KCACMiller@juno.com
<b>Hancock County</b> Roberta Taylor TDTaylor63@yahoo.com	<b>McDowell County</b> Marsha Timpson 304-875-3418 marshatimpson@hotmail.com	<b>Coordinators</b>  <b>Linda Martin</b> 304-744-5916 LBM94@aol.com  <b>Beth Spence</b> 304-756-9191 bandb58@aol.com	
<b>Harrison County</b> Paul Hamrick 304-622-5664 LITCCHC@AOL.com	<b>Monongalia County</b> Jon Frist 304-292-9599 jon.frist@pwc.ca		