



The Challenge

August 2000



Chicago: Small schools benefit students

A study of 150 small public schools that have opened in Chicago since 1990 adds to a growing body of research supporting

the benefits of smaller schools, according to a report in *Education Week*.

In a comprehensive report released in June,

researchers from New York's Bank Street College of Education concluded that children in schools with fewer students come to

class more often, drop out less frequently, encounter less violence in schools and get better grades than those in the district's larger schools.

Endangered School



Harts High School in southern Lincoln County is a community middle/high school serving approximately 400 students in grades 7-12. The school opened on October 2, 1954, and was built in part because of concerns about treacherous travel conditions and high dropout rates among students from the Harts area. When the State Board of Education took control of Lincoln County schools in the spring of 2000, one of the "reforms" promised was consolidation of the county's four high schools. One suggested plan is to build one county high school and send Harts students to Logan County and Alum Creek children to Kanawha County. Students also would have the option of attending the proposed Lincoln County High School. Harts area parents would be faced with a painful dilemma. They could send their children out of county where they would have no representation on the county school board that makes education decisions for their children. Or they could put them on buses for long daily trips over one of the most dangerous stretches of roadway in southern West Virginia. Residents who have fought to maintain their school in the past are preparing for yet another battle to save Harts High School.

The Bank Street researchers defined small schools as those with 350 students, according to *Education Week*, which said nationwide, the average size of K-12 schools is 741 students.

"We think there is an effect that comes simply from being in a smaller community," lead author Patricia A. Wasley told *Education Week*. "When teachers, regardless of what they're teaching, know the names of all the children in the school, that makes a big difference."

Norm Fruchter, a New York University researcher who co-wrote a study that found New York City's small high schools were more cost-effective than larger ones, said evidence is mounting in support of small schools.

"Is this convincing?" Fruchter asked of the Chicago study. "I think it is."

Chicago's newer small

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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

• Every year the state excludes the scores of more students who take the Stanford Nine Achievement Test. Last year the test scores of more than 23,000 students weren't counted in the overall results, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*. That's an increase of 1,700 excluded scores in a state where student enrollment is declining. Statewide, more than 12 percent of scores were excluded, up from 11 percent the previous year. McDowell County failed to count scores of 24 percent of its students; Lincoln County 23 percent and Webster County 21 percent. "They should be using test scores to evaluate the school system's weaknesses and focus on where change is needed to improve instruction," said Challenge West Virginia's Linda Martin. "Instead, they lie. They're manipulating the scores to try to make themselves look good."



• The Putnam County Board of Education has approved a 10-year \$90 million school facilities plan that includes consolidating Pocahontas and Buffalo high schools. Only newly elected board member Patty Thornton opposed the plan. Hometown resident Tim McCoy, a father of two, called for opponents of the plan to stand as the vote was taken. "The worst thing I think the school board can do is sit there with their arms crossed and their minds closed and not listen to what the people of Putnam County have to say on this issue."

• Only 15 percent of West Virginia children who qualify for free and reduced summer meals actually participate in the program, according to Mary Kay Harrison, director of

child nutrition for the State Department of Education. Low-income children who receive free and reduced school meals qualify for two meals daily in the summer time. The Food Research and Action Center, a private advocacy group, said only 3.2 million children participated in the federally subsidized summer food program last year out of the 14.9 million who get free or reduced price meals at school. The group said there aren't enough day camps, activity centers, schools, churches and other sites authorized to make the meals. In West Virginia 35 counties participate in the program, Harrison said.

• J.D. Morris has been elected president of the State Board of Education, replacing Cleo Mathews.

• The State Board accepted a 78-page report from the state office of Education Performance Audits that cited Wayne County schools for low student performance, poor leadership and substandard instructional practices. In all, auditors found 100 non-compliances with state standards. Crum Middle School was labeled "seriously impaired." The report said central office administrators had low expectations for Crum students.

Fall Conference

Make plans now to attend Challenge West Virginia's fall conference, "Our Communities, Our Schools," Saturday, Oct. 7, at Cedar Lakes. We'll have complete information and a registration form in the next newsletter.



Amelia Anderson, left, and Cindy Miller, right, arranged the Challenge picnic. They are shown with Elizabeth Varney, who prepared the meal.



Celebrating Challenge West Virginia

Whether exploring nature or a one-room school, sharing a wonderful meal or just catching up with friends, Challenge WV fellows and friends spent an enjoyable July day at Holly River State Park with the Webster County Challenge chapter.





Challenge West Virginia

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Chicago study says small schools benefit kids

schools have, for the most part, opened in the city's most impoverished neighborhoods and have attracted students with slightly below-average academic records, *Education Week* reports.

The Bank Street researchers used a complicated methodology which included survey data, statistical analysis and classroom observations.

They found that students in smaller high schools outperformed the school system as a whole on reading and math tests. They found the high performance of the high school students particularly noteworthy because the schools' dropout numbers were declining.

Education Week reported that the study found teachers in the small schools rated their schools higher than teachers in larger schools for openness to change, sense of professional community and the extent to which teachers, parents and administrators trust one another,

Ms. Wasley told *Education Week* the downside of the research is that some of the schools are fragile and some closed within two years of opening.

"Losing one teacher who is pivotal makes a school much more vulnerable. And if a principal is replaced by one who feels demoted because

of moving to a smaller school, that's problematic, too."

For more information

about the Chicago study, visit *Education Week's* website at <http://edweek.org>.

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