



The

Challenge



August 2003

Challenge conference plans set

Challenge West Virginia's Annual Fall Conference will be held on Friday, October 10, 2003, at Marshall University.

The theme for this year's conference is "Distance Learning: Bringing Education to Where Our Chil-

dren Live."

The conference will begin at 10:00 a.m. at the university's Drinko Library.

Presentations on distance learning will be given by Dr. Vicki

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Registration Form
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Hobbs of the University of Missouri and Dr. Stan Maynard of Marshall University's Rural Education Center.

Lunch will be provided with lunch-

time entertainment provided by the MU Chorus.

Challenge West Virginia Fellows Paul Hamrick, Marge Bragg and Andy Andryshak are coordinating the event and can provide more information.

Lincoln group needs help with lawsuit

A Lincoln County citizens' group that is fighting against school consolidation in that county is looking for help.

In a letter to the editor of The Logan Banner, Lincoln County Board of Education President Carol Smith makes a plea for Lincoln County citizens to join together and fight the State Department of Education's plan to consoli-

date the county's four high schools into one.

"This action by the State Board of Education does not acknowledge and include all of our students," Smith writes. "It forces approximately 400 students to either attend schools in other counties or travel three to four hours each day to and from school."

Smith is referring to the part of the con-

solidation plan that requires a number of students from the Harts area to decide whether they want to go to school in Chapmanville, or travel across 14-mile Mountain to the new school near Hamlin.

Smith's letter questions the wisdom of the consolidation plan.

"There are no substantial reasons for consolidation within our county," Smith's

letter states. "Merely because the process has been force-started does not mean it is best for us."

Smith also takes issue with the manner in which the issue has been decided.

Due to the state takeover of Lincoln County schools, the Lincoln County Board of Education has no power. The decisions are being made by the

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This 'n that from around the state

- The Harrison County Board of Education has voted to close no less than four schools. The closures include Van Horn Elementary School, Harden Elementary School, Salem Middle School and Gore Middle School. The closures are planned to take effect at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. A new consolidated school will be built for the students from Gore and Salem middle schools. The students from Van Horn and Harden elementary schools will move into the Salem Middle School building after approximately \$1 million in renovations. The new consolidated middle school is expected to cost at least \$10 million. Challenge West Virginia Harrison County Fellow Paul Hamrick appeared at all four school closure hearings and spoke at each. Hamrick told the Harrison County Board of Education that it should resist consolidation pressures from the W.Va. Board of Education and the W.Va. School Building Authority. Although few members of the public actually spoke at the hearings, no one spoke in support of the closures. Gore Middle School was recently named a West Virginia School of Excellence by the State Board of Education.



- Members of the State Board of Education could get a hefty raise under a plan proposed by a sub-committee of the board. During the BOE's August meetings, the sub-committee suggested increasing the pay of board members to \$9,000 per year. Currently, State BOE members are paid \$100 per day for each day or portion thereof actually spent working on board business. Members of the board recently came under fire for accepting pay for questionable activities such as attending conferences, preparing for meetings, answering e-mail, giving media interviews and attending funerals, among other things. Last year, State BOE member Howard Persinger charged \$100 for speaking at the Williamson High School graduation ceremonies. BOE member Barbara Fish charged \$200 for giving interviews to the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. Members of the board who now only charge for attending meetings receive approximately \$2,400 per year. County board of education members are currently paid for each meeting they attend. The maximum pay allowed by law is \$160 per meeting. The maximum annual pay for county BOE members is \$8,000. Some legislators are calling for decreases in pay for the State BOE members. In order for the pay system to be changed, the West Virginia Legislature will have to act.

- The State Board of Education is considering a new pol-

icy, which appears to limit community involvement in local schools. The proposed policy is numbered 2250 and is called, "Community Involvement to Complement Education." If the policy is implemented, people who wish to be involved in educational programs will have to fill-out an application form, called an "educational impact form." The request will then have to be approved by the school principal, the county board of education and the county superintendent of schools. Section 3.8 of the

proposed policy provides, "schools may cooperate with organizations, agencies or individuals to promote activities in the general public interest which are non-partisan and non-controversial." Challenge West Virginia Coordinator Linda Martin is critical of the policy. "It is a clear effort to prevent free speech to those who would disagree with them," said Martin. "The state board should be trying to involve more communities in schools, not trying to prevent people from being involved. The research is clear — the more communities are involved in schools, the higher achievement of its students." The policy can be reviewed on the State Department of Education's website at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies>.

- Kay Goodwin, secretary of the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, has publicly criticized the federal government for failing to adequately fund the "reforms" included in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. During a speech in White Sulphur Springs, Goodwin said the federal government has under-funded NCLB programs around the country to the tune of \$9 billion. Goodwin says West Virginia is under-funded by at least \$70 million. "The No Child Left Behind law is a major step on the partisan path toward a voucher system and charter schools," said Goodwin. "If it were otherwise, the Bush Administration would have adequately funded this mandate. I fear the NCLB law is fixed to fail."

- Danese Elementary School in Fayette County was recently incorrectly identified as a failing school under the No Child Left Behind Act. The incorrect designation caused 12 students to transfer out.

- A study by the Federal Emergency Management Agency has found that West Virginia children are at a higher risk of dying in fires than children in other states. At least 49 of 380 West Virginians killed in house fires between 1989 and 1998 were under the age of five.

HELP

state-appointed county superintendent and the state superintendent of schools, with no input from the elected board members.

"Our county elected board members are just that — elected!" Smith writes. "When their power is usurped and they no longer have a voice in decisions required by their elected positions, they are not able to voice the needs of the people who are being taxed and

who voted them in as their representatives."

Smith points out that Lincoln County has been battling against consolidation for several years and it is well-known that the majority of Lincoln County people do not want their schools consolidated, yet those in power haven't got the message.

Smith asks that people begin contacting all of their elected representatives, espe-

cially the Governor and Legislators, and demand that something be done.

The Lincoln County Board of Education recently voted to file a lawsuit against the state in order to stop the plan. The problem with the vote is that the board members can't spend any public money in the court fight, because, with the takeover, they lost their spending powers. Therefore, private

funds have to be raised for the lawsuit.

Anyone who wishes to offer assistance can contact Carol Smith at 824-7516 or Thomas Ramey at 855-3930. An account has been started at a Hamlin bank where donations can be mailed for deposit. The address is Equal Educational Opportunities, City National Bank, 8028 Lynn Avenue, Hamlin, WV 25523.

Challenge West Virginia 2003 Annual Fall Conference

October 10, 2003, at 10:00 a.m.
Marshall University Drinko Library

Our Communities, Our Shools
"Distance Learning: Bringing Education to Where Our Children Live"

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail address: _____

Total Number of Attendees: _____

Registration Fee \$10 per person

Total Registration Fee: \$ _____

List names of others who will attend with you:

Return to:

Linda Martin
801 Gordon Drive
Charleston, WV 25303

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 the Mountain State 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 Governor House of Charleston, WV

600 Shrewsbury Street
Charleston, WV 25301-1211

Non-profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Permit No. 2673
Charleston, WV 25301

We Support Small Schools!

Challenge West Virginia County Contacts

Braxton County

Sue Clifton
(304) 765-2994

Calhoun County

Eric Rogers
(304) 655-7134
rpeskid@yahoo.com

Clay County

Marge Bragg
(304) 286-2655
ijram98@hotmail.com

Fayette County

Carolyn Arritt
(304) 484-7919
Carritt-McCune@citynet.net

Harrison County

Paul Hamrick
(304) 622-56645
LITCCHC@aol.com

Jefferson County

Paul Burke
(304) 876-2227
NumbersInstitute@juno.com

Lincoln County

Thomas Ramey
(304) 855-3930
tprameyvw@hotmail.com

Logan County

Chris Stratton
(304) 752-9348
cstratton@loganbanner.com

Marshall County

Frank Longwell
(304) 232-1093

Mason County

Bill Reedel
(304) 675-2067
rr9546@dragonbbs.com

McDowell County

Marsha Timpson
(304) 875-3418
marshatimpson@hotmail.com

Mingo County

Mike Carter
(304) 426-4226
hiecc@hotmail.com

Monongalia County

Jon Frist
(304) 292-9599
jon.frist@us.army.mil

Morgan County

Andy Andryshak
(304) 947-5664
andy.peace@frontiernet.net

Nicholas County

Robin Kelly
(304) 649-5932
RocknBirdy@hotmail.com

Preston County

Jana Freeman
(304) 735-3411
Janaf11@hotmail.com

Putnam County

Tim McCoy
(304) 586-9823
tmccoy@bna.com

Raleigh County

Lorelei Scarbro
(304) 854-1016
candlelight29@aol.com

Ritchie County

Patty Deak
(304) 869-3462
pdeak@dot.state.wv.us

Webster County

Cindy Miller
(304) 493-6369
KCACMiller@juno.com

At-Large

Bob Henry Baber
(304) 846-6644
wvpoet@richwoodwv.com

Challenge WV Coordinator

Linda Martin
(304) 744-5916
LBM94@aol.com

Send Questions or comments
about *The Challenge* to
Chris Stratton
cstratton@loganbanner.com