



The Challenge



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The world is flat in Lincoln County?



Lincoln County's new consolidated high school is the most expensive school built in West Virginia, creating long bus rides for students

The world is flat in Lincoln County, following the closure of the county's four high schools and consolidating them into Lincoln County High School at Hamlin.

The new school admittedly cost \$32 million, but the price tag is much more to open the most expensive school ever built in WV. Challenge WV has contended it may be the most expensive school built in the USA for the number of students attending, about 1000.

Lowell Johnson, the president of the state Board of Education says it will be the best high school in all of West Virginia.

"The opportunities there are unbelievable and I am really looking forward to that school opening and I think the citizens of Lincoln County are going to be extremely happy," he said, after acknowledging a long battle over consolidation.



During the open house, large flat-screen TVs in the commons area re-played a WV Department of Education video, educating parents and students that they are now "Citizens of a Global World."

A graphic sweeps down for a world view to a map of West Virginia, indicating students must embrace global concepts of competition in a world now dominated by lightening-fast technology. They must become 21st century learners.

State Superintendent of Schools Steve Paine has embraced the concepts of Thomas Friedman's book "The World is Flat," which advocates preparing students for competition in a globalized economy.

Friedman argues that production is dominated by complex supply chains, with China and India being the big winners by 2040. WV students are already on a track of choosing a career by the time they are freshman, to be either blue-collar workers or college graduates.

Paine, after returning from a China trip this summer, is a believer in globalization, saying virtually all Chinese students are learning English, but only 24,000 USA students are studying Chinese. He thinks we need to change that, starting in West Virginia.

Challenge coordinator Linda Martin said "Whatever happened to giving children a broad-based education toward becoming critical thinkers? Time to learn, grow and decide?"

"This sounds like corporate education," she said.

Admitting global catch-phrases have a good ring, Martin said "I would argue that a global citizen is a citizen of nowhere."

"Merging, centralizing, consolidating and globalizing are economic movements that destroy our communities, our schools and our institutions that we value as Americans," Martin said. "We're now told we'd better get with the program or be left behind."

"Not only gone is placed-based education, but more control is being surrendered to the government and its bureaucrats," she said, mentioning No Child Left Behind.

"Things are not like they sound," Martin said. "Like 'choice' has wide appeal, but the implementation destroys local school systems and community schools."

See **The world is flat...** on Page 2

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The world is flat in Lincoln County? continued from page 1

BIG UGLY TO HAMLIN



The world is not flat when you're trying to get over Big Ugly Mountain

Lincoln County is not so flat for students who live near Big Ugly Mountain and a half-dozen other remote communities who are now required to board school buses for a nearly two-bus ride to the globalized school.

Like tens of thousands of WV students affected by the elimination of their community schools, Big Ugly kids will rise before dawn to board a school bus that will wind its way down a tortuous highway with hair-

pin curves, with few spaces to pull over for on-coming traffic.

"The state's School Building Authority has been given awesome power by the WV legislature," said Thomas Ramey, Challenge fellow and a member of the Lincoln County Board of Education.

Ramey said there is great disparity in what counties are getting for school construction, in what appears to be a political "who's on first" distribution of funding.

"Now, in Lincoln County, with the glamorous new school, our rural school buildings have been disgracefully left behind," he said.

"This makes me ill for every other county and every other school in this county," said Hamlin art teacher Christine Thompson, "It would be nice if every school could look like this and have everything this one has."

The economies of scale model has been devastating to poor, rural WV students, with the promise of saving taxpayers money and providing a

quality education.

"Hasn't happened," Ramey said, "But what is happening, parents, taxpayers and county school board members have little say over the education of their children."

Ramey said former Lincoln county resident and gubernatorial candidate Loyd Jackson continued to say consolidation has always been made by local school boards. "In fact, school boards have mostly been held hostage," said Ramey. Jackson was a principal architect of WV school consolidation.

The State Board took over both Lincoln and Mingo County schools where there have been major consolidation battles. The board cited poor management and poor performance, problems that still exist in Lincoln County after six years.

Superintendent Paine, shortly after he was appointed, blamed the Lincoln school board for low scores although the state has managed the system for six years.

Crack-of-dawn kids facing bus ride woes

West Virginia's bus transportation system has been described as the most expensive in the USA, and that was before rising gasoline prices.

An even a bigger problem - long bus rides.

Challenge WV continues to dispute the WV Department of Education statistics about long bus rides exceeding the state's guidelines.

In McDowell County, Superintendent Mark Manchin appeared to solve the early to rise problem, announcing that no school will be open before 8 a.m. and several won't open before 8:45 a.m.

Previously McDowell schools opened at 7:30 a.m.

Manchin's solution is in response to many students getting out of bed at 5:30 to 6:00 a.m. to be standing along the highway before the crack of dawn.

This can now include pre-school kids, some as young as four.

McDowell is a county that has fought some bitter battles over the closing of their community schools.

Manchin says students do better in school if they get a little more sleep, but he fails to mention the county's school day will extend into the evening and how that will affect the student's life, certainly making it difficult to return for extracurricular activities.

The most recent example of long bus rides is with the opening of the new consolidated high school in Lincoln County, with many students on a bus to Hamlin for up to nearly two hours, one-way.



Logan's Chapmanville school is being built to attract southern Lincoln students

Students in southern Lincoln County have been encouraged to cross the county-line into Logan County to shorten the ride and attend the under construction complex at Chapmanville.

While the distance to Chapmanville is much shorter, because of bus scheduling problems in Lincoln, the ride

continued on Page 3

Crack-of-dawn...continued from page 2
time appears to be about the same.

Parents in Wetzel County appeared before their school board over bus service to the Shortline School area of the county.

They said routing problems mean

students will be on the bus for over an hour, although some students live only a mile from the school.

Upshur County parents of a 5-year-old child were told by the school board "We cannot go door to door for every student in the county," the child faces a

half-mile walk.

A member of the State Board of Education once told a Lincoln County parent at a public meeting, they should sell their property and move closer to the school.

School officials testify over "Mezz Mess"

A top state Department of Education official and the Mineral County Schools superintendent have testified before a federal grand jury in Martinsburg as part of an investigation into Hampshire County's school system.

Of concern was a \$75,000 grant solicited by former House Education Committee Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta, according to Charleston Gazette reporter Eric Eyre.

State schools Assistant Superintendent Stan Hopkins and Mineral County Superintendent Tilden 'Skip' Hackworth also received subpoenas.

Eyre said the investigator wanted to know whether Mezzatesta promised to help Hackworth secure a job as Hampshire County's superintendent in exchange for favors in 2002. Mezzatesta

was a school board office administrator at the time.

Hackworth denied making any deal with Mezzatesta and later withdrew his application as Hampshire's super.

West Virginia School Board Association Executive Director Howard O'Cull, who assisted the Hampshire board with the superintendent search, said "They didn't feel like they had the quality of candidates they wanted."

The school board hired David Friend as superintendent.

"Jerry Mezzatesta shepherded Mr. Friend around during the search process," O'Cull told the investigation. "Jerry was highly promotive of Mr. Friend." Friend resigned before the state seized control of Hampshire schools.

Federal prosecutors wanted to

know about a \$75,000 grant, which was initially intended for a sheltered workshop in Romney. About \$35,000 of the \$75,000 grant was diverted to a library and volunteer fire departments in Hampshire County.

The sheltered workshop never received a dime, but Mezzatesta passed out checks to volunteer fire departments during a 2004 political rally.

Following an audit, Hampshire Schools returned \$35,000 of the \$75,000 grant to the state Department of Education.

Mezzatesta, was convicted of deleting state computer records amid other alleged cover-ups.

Mezzatesta, who was fined and reprimanded by the Ethics Commission in March 2005, said he plans to pay a \$2,000 fine.

State policy softens teacher evaluations

Teachers who have had good evaluations for at least five years will not be required to be re-evaluated on a regular basis, according to a new state policy.

Opponents suggest that teacher evaluations are going to be more like pop quizzes.

The state Board of Education de-

cidated to allow principals to evaluate teachers as often or as infrequently as they need to, instead of having mandatory evaluations every three years.

The board says the new policy brings the board in line with state law.

Board member Barbara Fish said she would like to shoot down the policy.

"What we need to do is help teachers as much as possible," she said. "And I don't think we are doing as good a job as we think we are."

The move is expected to lower the number of evaluations performed overall, with the policy intending to focus on new teachers.

This 'n' that around West Virginia

JESUS PICTURE STOLEN - The Harrison County Board of Education is standing their ground on a picture of Jesus that has hung on the wall of a local school for 37 years.

Board members initially moved to raise about \$150,000 to defend the Je-

sus picture, but encountered some legal technicalities.

Now, the Jesus picture has been stolen, but the ACLU and other groups supporting the separation of church and state are continuing to take legal action against the board.

The US Supreme Court has ruled against such religious artifacts in public buildings, saying they indicate a state-supported religion.

Several national Christian groups have joined in the affray.

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 Covenant House of Charleston, WV
600 Shrewsbury Street
Charleston, WV 25301-1211

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

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Challenge West Virginia County Contacts

Boone County

Danielle Johnston
(304) 369-2306
daniellenjohnston@yahoo.com

Braxton County

Misty Houghton
(304) 765-7927

Calhoun County

Dianne Weaver
(304) 354-6183
dianne@hurherald.com

Clay County

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

Fayette County

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

Greenbrier County

Carla Persinger
(304) 392-9842
cpersinger@frontier.net

Hancock County

Brian Handley
304-387-1709
brianhandley@msn.com

Harrison County

Paul Hamrick
(304) 622-5664
ChubnWV@aol.com

Jefferson County

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

Kanawha County

Monica Prater
(304) 548-7301
missmonicastarr@aol.com

Lincoln County

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

Logan County

Craig Manns
(304) 855-4442
cmwv2001@yahoo.com

Marshall County

Frank Longwell
(304) 232-1093

Mason County

Darrell Hagley
(304) 743-9451
DEHagley@WMConnect.com

McDowell County

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

Mineral County

Brenda Stonebraker
(304) 446-5429
bstonebraker@hotmail.com

Mingo County

Mike Carter
(304) 426-4226
hieck@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

Ohio County

Jim Mullooly
(304) 547-0699
jfm@1st.net

Preston County

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

Putnam County

Tim McCoy
(304) 586-9823
timothy.mccoy@pb.com

Raleigh County

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

Ritchie County

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

Roane County

Eric Rogers
(304) 655-7134
rpeskid98@yahoo.com

Webster County

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

Challenge WV

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

Send comments or articles for
"The Challenge"
Contact Editor Bob Weaver
HC 65, Box 120
Mt. Zion WV 26151
email dianne@hurherald.com
fax 304-354-6183