



The Challenge



Reedy Elementary, a shining community school of place

While corporate models of business continue to destruct rural communities, there are rays of light that speak loudly about the virtue of the small.

“Children learn better in a community school. Reedy is living proof,” said Lori Gibson, principal of the 165-pupil Reedy Elementary in Roane County.

The small school has increased enrollment because parents want their children there and was the best performing school in the county this past year, according to superintendent Steve Goffreda.

Students exhibited high performance in math and reading, a problem that plagues the educational system in West Virginia.



Reedy WV school is “living proof” that kids do better in community schools; lunch hour ad-hoc football on school’s playground

“Reedy is a wonderful school the way each child is treated.”

“Beyond the subjects, they are taught respect for others, kindness, trustworthiness and responsibility. Their actions show they truly care.”

“The school has a great mission. We drive our children there every day because

we know it is a great place.”

“I think the longer our children can be in this wonderful school, the better.”

Many parents commented they would like to see the 7th and 8th grade returned to the community school.

After enrollment dropped to about 80 a few years ago and the county system re-

of commitment toward the development of the whole child, their social and mental needs.”

“We acknowledge each student has different needs at different times, and we’re dedicated to trying to meet those needs and keep the children focused on learning,” Gibson said.

“Education becomes important to them,” she added.

Reedy has achieved a reputation of really delivering, so much so that out-of-area parents started enrolling and driving their children to the school.

Now, the school system provides a designated pick-up point which allows parents to drop-off their kids for bus transportation to Reedy.

“A wonderful situation has developed,” said Goffreda.

Goffreda (pictured right) said a community survey was done related to returning the sixth grade to Reedy. “It was a real eye-opener with hundreds of comments.”

moved sixth grade in 2003 to Spencer to maintain declining numbers for the town’s



Gibson (pictured above) said “Our entire staff operates under a philosophy

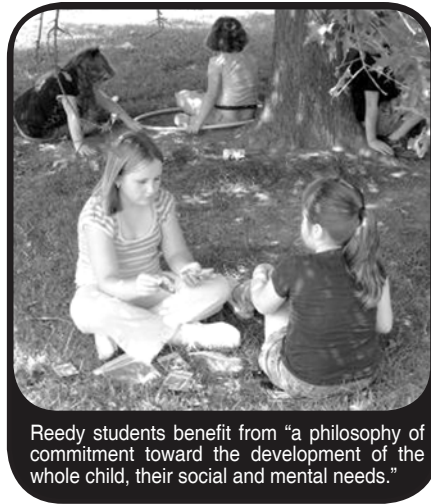


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middle school, surprisingly the community school began to flourish, including the preschool program.

"They built their own school up," said Goffreda, and now, local sixth grade students have been returned to the community.

In a time where large, consolidated schools are promoted by the state system, Gibson acknowledged it has been tough keeping the school open using the funding stream. "We've adapted all over the place and with personnel to keep the school afloat," she said.



Reedy students benefit from "a philosophy of commitment toward the development of the whole child, their social and mental needs."

The principal also teaches physical education.

Government has adopted such business models as economies of scale, merging, centralizing, consolidating, and globalizing to deliver education and virtually every other service.

They surely forget that such moves assault the social, cultural, economic and educational opportunities for people of place. Bigger cookie-cutter schools leave more children behind.

Normantown community facing-up to closure battle



Mold problem thrusts community school into closure-consolidation move

Normantown Elementary School parents in Gilmer County have gone to battle to save their community school.

Some of Normantown's elementary school students are spending a few days of school in their gym because a mold problem on the school's main floor has not been resolved.

The Gilmer County school board voted unanimously at least twice directing Superintendent Ed Toman to place a two-room modular building on the site until the problem can be rectified. That has happened.

Toman appears to have had a case of the foot-drag since the mold problem surfaced last fall, although students were allowed to use the facility during the 2006-07 school year.

This summer he wanted to close the school and bus the students to Glenville Elementary until the mold problem could be corrected.

Normantown parents revolted, viewing the unresolved mold problem as an effort to close the community school with a 100-plus student enrollment.

Thomas Ramey, a fellow with Challenge WV, said "The ploy to allow safety and health problems get so bad that a school must be closed, is well-known to community school activists around the state."

"Mr. Toman won't directly tell Gilmer residents this is a closure and consolidation issue," Ramey said.

Toman, speaking to Metro News in Charleston, said "I'd like to see a whole new plan for the county," alluding to the possible closure of three rural elementary schools.

Toman says all buildings need upgrades or possibly replaced. But a survey taken a few years ago showed county residents don't want consolidation, they want their community schools repaired.

Toman believes that may not be what's best for the students, according to MetroNews.



Parents and community members have donated hundreds of hours preparing for mobile classrooms

Misty Pritt, spokesperson for a Normantown parents group and a Challenge WV fellow, said "This seems like a long and difficult road, but is has been worth traveling for our children."

Pritt has helped organize several community meetings to save the school and has helped the group speak-out at school board meetings.

Normantown alumni president Wilda Jenkins said "It is a case of foot-dragging and hiring consultants over and over," reminding the school board that the alumni group has raised over \$200,000 in scholarships for local graduates.

School board member Phyllis Starkey said "Mr. Toman has been throwing up barriers to get the mold problem fixed. School Building Authority, president, Mark Manchin says he

has no problem with fixing the school's first floor."

Three studies have said the building is structurally sound. "Now Mr. Toman wants another study for the Fire Marshal. What part of structurally sound does he not understand?" she asked.

"The bottom line, he wants Normantown closed," said Starkey.

Starkey contends Mr. Toman is bogging the process down with procedural process. "I have said all along, and the state has generally agreed, this is an emergency. Get Normantown fixed now!" she said.

Toman says he's received several estimates on what it would cost to remove the mold from the Normantown building. He says he is looking at an option of requesting funds from the state School Building Authority later this year for a new school.

Toman told Metro News earlier "I'd like to see a whole new plan for the county," alluding to the possible closure of three rural elementary schools.

Gilmer County is the smallest school system in the state with less than 1,000 students.

The School Building Authority recently approved \$8 million for building a new elementary school at Hacker's Creek in Webster County for 55 students.

Cindy Miller, a Challenge WV fellow in Webster, has led a long effort to save that county's community schools.

SBA head Mark Manchin, speaking at the Webster groundbreaking, asked "Now do you believe we are committed to small schools?"

On the same day the state closed a 400-plus student, high school in Gilbert, causing students to have long bus rides over several mountains to the proposed Mingo County consolidated school.

Mingo is closing five high schools to a proposed consolidated school near Red Jacket, with local school board members dumb-founded on where they'll get the money.

Challenge WV Fall Conference October 19

Challenge WV will hold its annual Fall Conference - A Community Conversation "Challenge For Educational Equality" on October 19 beginning at 10 a.m. at Covenant House, 600 Shrewsbury Street, Charleston, WV.

The guest panel will include, representatives from Gov. Joe Manchin's office, the School Building Authority, State Board of Education, WV State Senate and House of Delegates.

A registration fee of \$10, which includes lunch may be mailed to Thomas Ramey at PO Box 146, Harts, WV 25524. Any questions may be referred to Mr. Ramey at 304-784-0007.

Only 36 percent of school bonds are passing

Convincing voters to cast a ballot approving a school bond is a formidable task. A total of 208 school bonds have been presented by the state's 55 counties between 1971 and 2006, according to statistics released by the West Virginia Department of Education School Finance Office.

During that 35 year period, only about 36 percent of the proposed bonds were approved by the voters.

In 1982, an amendment to the state constitution dropped the percentage of votes needed to pass a bond levy from 60 percent to 50 percent.

Mark Manchin, executive director of the WVSBA, said the agency has doled out \$1.1 billion in school construction funds since its inception in 1989.

During that time, \$500 million was raised at the local level.

With raising construction costs, an incredible number of schools in need of repair and a finite amount of money, local funds are going to have to make up a larger part of the construction funding pie, according to school officials.

Mark Manchin has said there is no set percentage or amount of money the SBA can offer a county board of education. That decision is based on the BOE's Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan, which is updated regularly.

"We look at the total bond call, what they're trying to do, the local effort, and the health and safety of the students," Manchin said.

SBA considering sale of school bonds

A West Virginia elementary school that cost \$6 million to build in 2004 now costs \$10 million, according to Mark Manchin, the state School Building Authority's director.

Manchin says that's reason enough to explore other ways to raise money for school construction.

Members of the authority's finance committee have considered selling bonds on Wall Street. Manchin is working with the New York-based financial advisers Public Resources Advisory Group to consider options.

Mark Manchin, the governor's cousin, believes a bond sale could provide \$125 million to \$200 million in proceeds every five years, starting in 2009, for school construction.

That's in addition to about \$27 million the state provides for school construction from its general coffers each year.

The life of the bond likely would extend 15 to 20 years, and would require the SBA to invest its \$19 million yearly allotment in excess lottery funds toward debt service, the money needed to pay the principal and interest on a debt.

"I think it is the most critical thing we can do to compete globally," he said, using the latest catch-phrase.

The approach would help counties that

are struggling to pass local bonds and keep up with the rising cost of construction, Manchin said.

Harrison County voters recently rejected an ambitious school bond package. The SBA says that counties need about \$1.72 billion in local and state funds to meet their current building goals.

Lowell Johnson, a state Board of Education member and SBA member, believes such a measure would require approval from the legislature.

Johnson wants any decision reached by the SBA to be in line with state board members, Gov. Manchin and the legislature.

Based on West Virginia's bond rating, Mark Manchin is confident leaders could sell the bonds.

He said he's learned from the SBA's past mistakes, and would not flood the market the first year the state earns its proceeds.

By spending more than \$200 million in one year, for instance, a construction firm in Martinsburg offering more attractive, lower bids is too swamped to handle more than two or three projects at a time.

He expects to have a report to the governor's desk by Oct. 1.

This 'n that from around the state

LOW SAT SCORES - The lowest math and reading SAT scores since 1999 are being reported by the College Board. Last spring's high school seniors scored on average 502, out of a possible 800 points, on the critical reading section of the country's most popular college entrance exam, down from 503 for the class of 2006. Math scores fell three points from 518 to 515.

The declines follow a seven-point drop last year for the first class to take a lengthened and redesigned SAT, which included higher-level math questions and eliminated analogies. In West Virginia, 20 percent of students took the exam in 2007. Test scores dropped in every category, as compared to 2006: 3 points in critical reading, 3 points in math and 10 points in writing. In 2007, the average West Virginian taking the test scored 516 in critical reading, 507 in math and 505 in writing.

COOK NAMED BOARD PRESIDENT - A retired teacher from Boone County is the new president of the West Virginia Board of Education.

Board members elected Delores W. Cook, replacing Lowell Johnson, who served as president for two years. Cook has served on the board since 2002. Her nine-year term ends November 2010.

Cook served in the House of Delegates from 1989 to 1994. She is a former president of both the Boone County Education Association and the Boone County Retired School Employees Association.

BOARD REVIEW NUTRITION GUIDE-

LINES - The State Board of Education could vote as soon as this November on new nutritional guidelines for food provided in West Virginia's schools.

"This is just one way we're hoping we can make some really good changes to benefit kids," said State Board member Barbara Fish. The guidelines set the rules for what is allowed to be served as part of school breakfasts and lunches along with what kind of food is available elsewhere at a school site. Fish says some schools are complying with the current rules and others are not.

Fish says every school in West Virginia has a responsibility to do the best it can for the students who attend it.

VALLEY HEAD SCHOOL'S FATE UNCERTAIN - Parents weren't happy. "It's just like we're beating our heads against a wall. We're getting nowhere."

Neither was the state Fire Marshal or the Superintendent of Randolph County Schools. The controversy is over the future of Valley Head Elementary School. The state Fire Marshal Sterling Lewis gave the Randolph Superintendent some time for an acceptable plan to fix the numerous fire code violations by October, or he would shut down the building.

That would force the 48 students to attend other schools until the problems are fixed.

If the gym is not a viable option, Lewis said the school has until October to meet the fire code and could ask for an extension if the work is not complete.

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

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