



The

Challenge



December 2002

Mingo County gets control of schools

The West Virginia Board of Education has returned control of the Mingo County school system to the Mingo County Board of Education.

During a joint meeting between the two boards, held in Williamson on December 11, the state officially relinquished its control over the day-to-day operations of the county's schools.

"They [the Mingo County board] have essentially complied with all the requirements that were laid out in the original documents that were compiled when the takeover occurred," said Kenna Seal, director of the West Virginia Department of Education's Office of Educational Performance Audits.

The State Board of Education seized control of Mingo County Schools in February 1998. During a surprise inspection, a 10-member review team found a total of 172 deficiencies in Mingo County school operations.

When Mingo County was taken-over the county had the third lowest test scores in the state. Now, only four of the county's 19 schools are not in compliance with state test score requirements.

Mingo County now has a budget surplus, after posting a large deficit for the four fiscal years immediately preceding the state takeover.

Prior to the takeover, the county's attendance rate was 92.8 per-

cent. Now, the rate has climbed to 94.7 percent.

Despite the many improvements, the county still faces some major problems.

Gilbert High School has been designated "seriously impaired." State officials have found that, last year's graduating class of 300 had 19 dropouts, which exceeds the state's five percent dropout requirement.

Matewan Elementary School, Williamson High School and Burch High School have been given conditional accreditation status.

Both high schools have low attendance rates, while all three schools do not meet state requirements in achievement test scores.

One Mingo County school,

Riverside Elementary, has been named an exemplary school.

During a state takeover, county school officials are stripped of control over the school system's money and operational decision. The State Board of Education appoints a superintendent who is given authority over all local officials and reports directly to the state superintendent of schools.

Lincoln and McDowell counties are currently under state control. Lincoln County was seized in 2000 and McDowell County fell to state control in 2001.

In 1992, Logan County became the first county to be seized by the state. Control there has been in local hands for the past several years



Challenge West Virginia wishes its readers Happy Holidays and a Good New Year.

This 'n that from around the state

- The Lewis County Board of Education has approved a bond issue/levy election proposal for decision by the Lewis County electorate during a March 15, 2003 election. The board unanimously approved a proposal to issue \$3.9 million in bonds to be re-paid during a term of 10 years. The proceeds of the bond issue will be used to construct a new grade school called West End Elementary. The new school will house students from Polk Creek and Alum Bridge elementary schools. Both Polk Creek and Alum Bridge schools will be closed. The board will also request money from the West Virginia School Building Authority for renovations at Robert L. Bland Middle School. The SBA had previously informed Lewis County officials that they would not receive funding for the renovations unless and until the new consolidated grade school was built.

- Voters in Tyler County have approved a five-year, \$9.1 million excess levy. The levy continues one which had been in force for the previous five years. The annual excess levy revenue for the Tyler County Board of Education will be \$1.828 million. The largest chunk of money from the levy - \$833,000 - will go toward teachers' salaries. The levy will also partially fund textbook purchases; repair maintenance and upgrading of the county's computers and maintenance of buildings, among other things. The levy was approved by an unofficial vote count of 419 to 213. Only 632 voters went to the polls. According to figures obtained from the West Virginia Secretary of State's office, Tyler County has 5,806 registered voters. The population of Tyler



County is 9,592, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Of the total population, 7,357 are over the age of 18.

- This year West Virginia had 32 teachers who earned national board certification, which is the highest achievement in the profession. The designation is awarded by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Around the United States, only 7,800 teachers earned the honor this year. West Virginia teachers who earn the title receive an extra \$2,500 in salary annually. A complete list of the winning teachers can be found on the West Virginia Department of Education's Internet site at <http://wvde.state.wv.us>.

- In Boone County, school closure hearings for Nellis and Sylvester elementary schools have been rescheduled from December 2002 until January 2003, purportedly due to a typographical error in documents submitted to the State Department of Education. Boone County officials have not elaborated on the error. The new date for the Sylvester hearing is January 12, 2002, while the Nellis hearing is set for January 23, 2003.

- During a hearing wherein several armed police officers stood

guard, the Marion County Board of Education voted to close the county's smallest school. By a three to two vote, the board decided to close Barnes Elementary School. The move met heavy opposition from 30 concerned citizens who addressed the board during the hearing. Many more attended the hearing but chose not to speak. The board also hired Greg Bailey, an attorney with the law firm of Bowels, Rice, McDavid, Graff and Love, to monitor the hearing and insure that the board followed

- The West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals has agreed to hear a case involving the practice of county boards of Marshall County dismissed a lawsuit brought by citizen taxpayers against the Marshall County Board of Education, which claimed the practice is illegal. The Supreme Court will not likely be deciding the case on the merits. The question is whether the circuit court erred in dismissing the case.

- The Mercer County Board of Education has voted to keep Bramwell Elementary School open. The school was targeted for closure after enrollment fell to 87 students in 2000-2001. Bramwell was once recognized as being the wealthiest town in the state.

- The Raleigh County Board of Education will close Beaver Elementary School effective with the 2003-2004 school year. During the school closure hearing, only two people addressed the board. Both were in support of the closure.

The Best Schools in West Virginia

The following schools have been awarded exemplary status by the West Virginia Department of Education. A school is eligible for exemplary status based on Stanford Achievement Test results, attendance, dropout rates and writing exam scores.

Berkeley County: Rosemont Elementary and Tomahawk Elementary;

Brooke County: Franklin Primary, Lauretta B. Millsop Primary and Wellsburg Primary;

Cabell County: Cammack Elementary, Davis Creek Elementary, Geneva Kent Elementary and Meadows Elementary;

Clay County: Valley Fork Elementary and H.E. White Elementary;

Fayette County: Divide Elementary;

Gilmer County: Glenville Elementary and Troy Elementary;

Greenbrier County: Lewisburg Elementary;

Hancock County: Broadview Elementary and Weirton Heights Elementary;

Harrison County: Johnson Elementary, Norwood Elementary, Simpson Elementary, Van Horn Elementary, Bridgeport Middle and Bridgeport High;

Jackson County: Evans Elementary;

Jefferson County: Shepherdstown Elementary;

Kanawha County: Holz Elementary,

Lakewood Elementary, Montrose Elementary, Overbrook Elementary, Shoals Elementary, Weberwood Elementary, John Adams Junior High and George Washington High;

Logan County: Omar Elementary and Justice Elementary;

Marion County: Fairmont Senior High,

Marshall County: Cameron Elementary, Sand Hill Elementary and Washington Lands Elementary

Mineral County: New Creek Primary;

Mingo County: Riverside Elementary;

Monongalia County: North Elementary, Westover Elementary, Cheat Lake Elementary and Suncrest Middle;

Morgan County: Greenwood Elementary and Pleasant View Elementary;

Nicholas County: Glade Creek Elementary and Mount Nebo Elementary;

Ohio County: Bethlehem Elementary, Steenrod Elementary, Woodsdale Elementary and Warwood School;

Preston County: Fellowsville Elementary;

Putnam County: Hometown Elementary, Scott Teays Elementary, Winfield Middle and Winfield High;

Raleigh County: Crab Orchard Elementary, Crescent Elementary, Daniels Elementary, Hollywood

Elementary and Maxwell Hill Elementary;

Randolph County: Pickens Elementary/High;

Ritchie County: Ellenboro Elementary;

Taylor County: Flemington Elementary;

Tyler County: Arthur I. Boreman Elementary and Sistersville Elementary;

Wayne County: Kellogg Elementary, Kenova Elementary, Wayne Elementary and Ceredo-Kenova Elementary;

Wetzel County: Paden City Elementary;

Wood County: Blennerhassett Elementary, Greenmont Elementary and Neale Elementary;

Wyoming County: Pineville Elementary.



Challenge Fellows enjoy a holiday meeting and luncheon.

Fayette County gets reprieve - for now

After a performance audit, which was considered by some to be retaliatory, the West Virginia Department of Education has given Fayette County Schools temporary accreditation status, thereby avoiding the state takeover which Fayette County's small school advocates had feared.

Earlier this fall, officials from the state Office of Education Performance Audits announced an inspection of Fayette County's school system. Many in the county believed the audit was scheduled in

order for the state to retaliate against the citizens of the county for winning court battles over school consolidation this year.

Fayette County citizens successfully challenged the legality of a school closure hearing, wherein the Fayette board voted to close several of the county's schools. The Fayette Board appealed the court decision, but lost.

Citizens' groups were also able to have two members of the Fayette board removed from office for illegally and simultaneously serving in

other public offices.

After winning seats on the board during the 2002 Primary Election, small school supporters were able to gain control of the board.

The battle for control of Fayette County schools is not over, however, State officials have given the school system six months to correct alleged deficiencies found by the review team. After that time period expires and the issues are not corrected, the state could seize control of the school system.

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

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