



The

Challenge



December 2003

SBA approves \$180 million in grants \$16 million to go to state's first regional high school

During a December 15th meeting, the West Virginia School Building Authority approved school construction grants totaling more than \$180 million.

The specific amount of grant funds - \$180,162,207 - will be divided between projects in 26 of West Virginia's 55 counties. The agency had received funding requests totaling more than \$280 million from 44 county boards of education.

The largest single grant was awarded to the Jefferson County

Board of Education. That \$19 million grant will be used in the construction of a new high school.

Two county boards of education - Logan and Hancock - received the second largest grants at \$16 million each.

Logan County's grant will help fund the state's first regional high school. The Logan plan calls for the new school to accommodate students from Chapmanville High School in Logan County and Harts High School in Lincoln County. A

request for funding of the same project was rejected by the SBA in 2002. In February 2003, voters in Logan County soundly defeated a bond issue proposal, which would have kicked-in \$5.5 million to help with construction costs.

In a notable departure from past practices, the SBA awarded a renovation grant to the smallest school in the state. SBA members voted to give a \$1.75 million grant to the

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Gov. Wise replaces two SBA members

West Virginia Governor Bob Wise has refused to re-appoint two members of the West Virginia School Building Authority, whose terms have expired.

In early-December, Wise replaced SBA board members John Wooten and Sally Holiday with Robert Holroyd and Nicholas Preservati.

After the replacements, Wise publicly said that he was unhappy with the SBA because it had "complicated" things for the West Virginia Economic Development Grant Committee's bond sale by pursuing their own bond sale simultaneously and without coordination.

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Judge won't reopen school funding case

A circuit judge has refused to reopen a legal challenge to the state's school funding system.

Ohio County Circuit Judge Arthur Recht, who was appointed by the State Supreme Court in the mid-1970s to hear the case, denied a motion to set aside his January 3, 2003 decision wherein he relinquished oversight of the state's school systems. The request was filed by Charleston attorney Dan Hedges, who has represented Lincoln County families and students since the beginning of the lawsuit.

Recht, the author of the 1982 "Recht Decision," had continuous jurisdiction over the case until earlier this year when he entered an

order dismissing it. The case presented a challenge against the way the state funds schools. In his 1982 decision, Recht ruled that the school funding formula was unconstitutional. Recht's dismissal was premised on the grounds that legislation enacted in 1998, should be given time to see if improvements are made.

A separate hearing has been set for April 15, on allegations that the state has violated a previous court order involving curriculum and other related topics.

Many education officials have been lobbying the Legislature, without success, for changes in the funding system.

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This 'n that from around the state

• Two young children, in two different West Virginia counties were left asleep on school buses during December. In Greenbrier County, a bus driver and a transportation aide were suspended by that county's board of education, without pay and for an unspecified period. On December 1st, the child's bus pulled in to the parking lot at Lewisburg Elementary School. All students got off the bus, with the exception of the three-year-old preschool student. The child had fallen asleep in a seat at the back of the bus and was secured in a child-proof safety harness. According to Greenbrier County school administrators, the county's policy calls for both the driver and the aide to walk through the bus to ensure that all students had exited the bus. Administrators say neither the driver nor the aide followed the policy on the day of the incident. The bus was driven to the county bus garage and left there until 2:00 p.m., when the driver of another bus heard the child crying and found him.



• In an incident in Lincoln County, a five-year-old kindergarten student was left asleep on a school bus. The child got on the bus at 7:30 a.m. on the morning of the incident. When the bus arrived at Midway Elementary School at 8:00 a.m., the child had fallen asleep and did not get off the bus with the other students. In this case, the bus driver claims that he walked through the bus and saw a bookbag, but didn't pick it up. The bus driver claims that he didn't see any children. Lincoln County Superintendent of Schools Bill Grizzell told the Associated Press that the boy must have fallen asleep under a seat. The bus driver drove the bus to his home and parked it there. He then took his personal vehicle to Hamlin to run errands. Eventually, the child woke up and, finding that he was alone, decided to find his own way home. The child walked out of the hollow where the bus driver lives, knocking on each door along the way, but was unable to find anyone at home. The child was picked up by the bus driver's sister-in-law, who just happened to drive by. The woman took the five-year-old to her own home and called the child's school and his grandparents. The boy's mother, who was at the dentist's office, could not be reached by the sister-in-law and did not know there was a problem until it had been resolved. A disciplinary hearing for the driver will be held in January, according to the Lincoln County superintendent.

• Incidents of children being left asleep on busses are becoming more common as West Virginia's schools are

consolidated and bus routes become longer. Some children have been documented as having bus rides of up to two hours. In February, the Mingo County Board of Education settled a lawsuit filed by the parents of a six-year-old boy who was left asleep on his bus after a morning bus run. The board's insurance company paid \$14,500 to settle the lawsuit. The incident had occurred in January 2002.

• On December 19th, Governor Bob Wise appointed two new members to the West Virginia Board of Education. The new members are Lowell Johnson, of Greenbrier County, and Burma Hatfield of Mingo County. Johnson was appointed to fill the seat vacated after the resignation of Howard Persinger. Hatfield will replace Lloyd Jackson, who resigned from the board in order to run for governor. Hatfield has been the principal at Gilbert Middle School for the past 21 years. Prior to her appointment as principal, she taught in the Mingo County school system for an additional 15 years. She is a member of the Gilbert Town Council and a member of the West Virginia Women's Commission. She holds a Master's degree in education from Marshall University. Johnson holds a doctorate in psychology and reading from West Virginia University. He has teaching experience in the Greenbrier County school system, at Bluefield State College and at Fairmont State College. Johnson is a former president of the West Virginia Education Association. He is currently employed by the West Virginia Department of Transportation. Hatfield's term will expire on November 4, 2011, while Johnson's term will expire on November 4, 2012.

• In Mercer County, the board of education voted 3-2 to close Bramwell Elementary school at the end of this school year. The State Board of Education must also approve the school closure before it becomes final.

• At least three more county school systems passed excess levies during the month of December. Those counties include Ritchie, Wayne and Morgan.

• Despite promises to the contrary, Governor Bob Wise is looking for ways to cut spending on public education in West Virginia and has asked the State BOE to find areas that can be cut. Of the state's \$1.6 billion public education budget, only \$28 million is controlled by the BOE. The remainder of the money is distributed to the counties through the state aid to schools funding formula.

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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SBA

Randolph County Board of Education for renovations at Pickens elementary/high school. Pickens was built in 1920 and it currently has an enrollment of 39 students, four of which are high school seniors. The grant is for the replacement of the school's existing coal-burning heating system, the replacement of electrical wiring and the remodeling of six classrooms.

A grant award to the Mingo County Board of Education promises to be the most controversial of the 26 funded projects. The SBA awarded \$6.2 million for funding a new consolidated high school. Mingo County asked for \$22.7 million to build the school. The school is on the multi-year project list and will likely receive more money next year. The Mingo County board plans to consolidate the county's five high schools into two. The consolidation is scheduled to take place in two phases. In the

first phase, Burch, Matewan and Williamson high schools will be combined into a "Mingo South" high school. In the second phase, the remaining schools will be combined into a "Mingo North" high school.

Mingo County citizens, with the assistance of Challenge West Virginia are currently organizing an effort in opposition to the sweeping consolidation proposal.

Other counties set to receive SBA funding include:

- Doddridge - \$6.12 million for a new Doddridge County High School
- Lincoln - \$4.35 million for a new consolidates high school
- Marion - \$3.95 million for a new middle school.
- McDowell - \$6.4 million for renovations to Mount View High School
- Clay - \$500,000 for a new Valley Dale Elementary School
- Mineral - \$10 million for a new Keyser Middle School
- McDowell - \$4.5 million to be used as a local

match for grants from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood recovery which includes a consolidated Iaeger/Big Creek high, a consolidated Iaeger/Panther elementary, a consolidated Bradshaw/Bartley elementary and a consolidated Berwind/War/Bartley school

- Wood - \$7.5 million for renovations to Parkersburg, Parkersburg South and Williamstown high schools.
- Berkeley - \$5.5 million for a new middle school
- Braxton - \$2.23 million for renovations to Braxton County High School
- Hampshire- \$7.25 million for a new Capon Bridge Middle School
- Hancock - \$16 million for a new Hancock County High School which will be a consolidation of Weir and Oak Glen high schools
- Harrison - \$8 million for a consolidated Gore/Salem Middle School
- Jefferson - \$19 million to fund renovations to Jefferson County High School and build a second

new high school

- Kanawha - \$8 million for a new Sissonville Middle School
- Mason - \$13.4 million to consolidate Point Pleasant Middle School and Point Pleasant High School
- Monongalia - \$12 million to fund a new University High School
- Pleasants - \$1.4 million to renovate St. Marys Elementary School
- Putnam - \$2.2 million for renovations at Winfield High School
- Raleigh - \$10.6 million to renovate five schools
- Randolph - \$1.75 million to renovate Pickens School
- Taylor - \$2.75 million for a new elementary school to replace Pruntytown and Hepzibah elementary schools
- Wayne - \$2.9 million for renovations at Kellogg Elementary School
- Wetzel - \$1.4 million to renovate Short Line Elementary School

The bond issue is expected to be completed in January.

Replacements

dination.

"You can't have one group going up to New York for one bond issue and then have another group traipsing up for another without coordination," Wise said. "It makes the state look bad."

Wise complained that the SBA failed to inform him that it was sending representatives to New

York last month to work on the bond sale. Wise claimed ignorance of the SBA's activities, despite the fact that the SBA's bond issue had been highly publicized for months as being the biggest single issue ever by the agency.

Wise also claims that the SBA's visit caused problems for the committee in obtaining insurance for its bond issue.

Ironically, when the committee was defending against a legal challenge in the State Supreme Court, the SBA filed a brief in support of the committee.

Wise blamed SBA Executive Director Clacy Williams for the problem.

"I don't appoint the director," Wise told *The Charleston Gazette*. "I do appoint the board."

Williams and Wise bumped heads earlier this year, when the governor attempted to divert \$18 million per year in lottery revenues from the SBA to fund "economic development" grants.

Wooten had served on the SBA since it was created by the Legislature in the early 1990s. Wooten represented the agency at the New York meetings.