



The

# Challenge

February 2000



Members of Challenge WV met with Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, center with paper, on January 26, Children's Day at the Legislature. Delegate Fleischauer is the sponsor of House Bill 2051, the Better Schools Bill. For more information about how you can contact members of the Legislature, please turn to page three.

## More buses needed in Kanawha after vote to close six schools

The Kanawha County Board of Education has voted to shut down six schools, promising the closings would save money.

Board members were surprised in January when their transportation director made a request for an additional \$763,000 for 12 new schools buses, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*.

"Every time we close schools, we have more kids to transport and to further distances," said George Beckett, who oversees transportation for the 30,000-student school system.

Beckett said the need for additional buses shouldn't surprise board members. It was spelled out in documents they received for each of the six schools they voted to

close, he said.

Most of the new buses would run in the eastern part of the county where the board voted to shut down three elementary schools in June.

School board members say they don't remember the need for so many new buses.

"It sounds to me like a lot of money," said school board member

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## Georgia research

### Small schools help students overcome effects of poverty

New research from Georgia suggests that smaller schools reduce the damaging effects of poverty and help narrow the achievement gap between students from poorer communities and students from wealthier communities.

While poverty is generally understood to have a negative effect on student achievement, researchers Craig Howley of Ohio University and Robert Bickel of Marshall University tried to discover whether smaller schools can actually reduce the damaging effects of poverty on achievement.

The clear conclusion is that they can.

The research was funded by the Rural School and Community Trust.

The researchers found that in Georgia, as school size increases, the

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## Challenge West Virginia

The Challenge is published by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization committed to maintaining and improving small community schools and reforming education policy in West Virginia so that all of our state's children have the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.

Challenge members believe state education policy, which has resulted in the closing of a fourth of West Virginia's schools during the past ten years, does not serve the best interest of many children, especially those from low-income families who live in rural areas.

Challenge West Virginia is a program of Covenant House, an independent, non-profit organization in Charleston, WV, which is not connected to any other program by the same name.

To start a chapter of Challenge WV, to inquire about the fellowship program or for more information, contact:

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<http://www.wvcovenanthouse.org/challengewv/>

# Small schools combat effects of poverty

average achievement score in schools serving children from poorer communities falls on 27 of 29 test scores.

The only exceptions were science scores in grades 3 and 5.

The study found that schools serving poorer communities in Georgia are, on average, smaller than schools serving communities that are better off. Unfortunately, they are too large to optimize achievement, according to the study.

Researchers said between one-third and two-thirds of students tested are in schools whose students' average achievement score would likely increase if the school were smaller. These schools would be at risk of lower student performance if they were enlarged.

Howley and Bikel's conclusions suggest that the poorer the community served, the smaller a school should be to maximize the school's performance as measured by standardized tests.

The study says states have generally pushed to consolidate schools into larger units in the hope of achieving economies of scale and to do so, they have sometimes defined what the minimum size school should be. West Virginia has done this, suggesting that elementary schools should have at least 350 students; middle schools at least 800 and high schools at least 1200.

But Howley and Bikel's research indicates that if improving student achievement is a policy goal, officials would be better off placing *maximum*, not minimum, size limits on schools, particularly in poorer communities.

Conclusions reached in the study:

- The poorer the community served, the smaller

a school should be to maximize the school's performance as measured by standardized tests.

- If improving student achievement as measured by standardized tests is a policy goal, states should consider placing maximum size limits on schools, particularly in poorer communities.

- States concerned about reinvesting in deteriorating school facilities should not be eager to increase school size in most instances if higher student achievement is a goal.

*This story was adapted from an article in Rural Policy Matters, the newsletter of the Rural School and Community Trust's policy program. For more information on the Georgia study, visit the Rural School and Community Trust's web site at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org)*

## Secretary of Education supports smalls schools

National Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, speaking to an audience of architects and educators, called for citizen participation in designing and planning schools, for building smaller schools where every child can be known, for new schools that serve the entire community and for schools that take children into communities for real lessons rooted in real places.

To see the full text of Secretary Riley's speech, visit The Rural School and Community Trust's website at [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org). You can also reach that website through links on the Challenge WV website at <http://www.wvcovenanthouse.org/challengewv/>

# How to contact your legislators

Challenge WV's Better Schools Bill has been introduced in both houses of the Legislature.

In the House, the bill is **House Bill 2051**. In the Senate, it is **Senate Bill 62**.

The most important job we have now is to try to get the House bill out of the House Education Committee and the Senate bill out of the Senate Education committee.

You may want to contact members of those committees to show your support for the bill.



**After a hard day at the Legislature, Kristen Selin falls asleep as her mother, Jenny, a fellow from Monongalia County, and Keith Larew from Preston County talk with Monongalia County Del. Nancy Houston about the Better Schools Bill.**

Written correspondence can be sent to senators or delegates at the room numbers below, West Virginia Senate or House of Delegates, Charleston, WV 25305. The toll-free number for the Senate is 1-800-642-8650.

**Members of the Senate Education Committee,** with their room numbers and phone numbers, are:

Lloyd Jackson, chairman, Room 415M, 357-7937  
Robert Plymale, vice chairman, 415M, 357-7939  
Billy Wayne Bailey, Room 204W, 357-7807  
Homer K. Ball, 223W, 357-7957  
James G. Dawson, 206W, 357-7843  
Larry J. Edgell, 407M, 357-7827  
Walt Helmick, 215W, 357-7906  
Jon Blair Hunter, 225W, 357-7995  
John R. Mitchell, 204W, 357-7841  
Michael A. Oliverio, 207W, 357-7919  
Marie E. Redd, 209W, 357-7831  
John Unger, 206W, 357-7933  
Donna J. Boley, 229W, 357-7905  
Sarah M. Minear, 441M, 357-7914

**Support Senate Bill 62  
House Bill 2051**

**Members of the House Education Committee,** with their room numbers and phone numbers, are:

Jerry Mezzatesta, chairman, 434M, 340-3265  
Dale Manuel, vice chairman, 442M, 340-3337;  
Brent Boggs, 220E, 340-3137  
Jeff Davis, 229E, 340-3158  
Tracy Dempsey, 227E, 340-3102  
Tim Ennis, 212E, 340-3130  
Nancy Houston, 4R, 340-3394  
Susan Hubbard, 204E, 340-3113  
Arley Johnson, 6A-R, 340-3167  
Brady Paxton, 225E, 340-3199  
Dave Pethtel, 6R, 340-3155  
John Shelton, 210E, 340-3119  
Joe Sparks, 223E, 340-3159  
Bill Stemple, 210E, 340-3121  
Sally Susman, 209M, 340-3187  
Larry Williams, 233E, 340-3270  
Carroll Willis, 230E, 340-3135  
Emily Yeager, 222E, 340-3116  
Bill Anderson, 151R, 340-3168  
Tim Armstead, 150R, 340-3124  
Ann Calvert, 224E, 340-3146  
Sheirl Fletcher, 224E, 340-3144  
Steve Harrison, 150R, 340-3157  
C. F. Romine, 226E, 340-3143



# Challenge West Virginia

A program of Covenant House, Charleston, WV

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### Preston County

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### McDowell County

Eddie Harman  
Caretta, WV  
304-875-4202

### Webster County

Cindy Miller  
Hacker Valley, WV  
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### Lincoln County

Thomas Ramey, Jr.  
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### Ritchie County

Patty Deak  
Ellenboro, WV  
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### Logan County

Christine Spaulding  
Madison Creek, WV  
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### Harrison County

Paul Hamrick  
Clarksburg, WV  
304-622-5664

## Transportation dilemma

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Bill Raglin. "I'm not sure what they're talking about. I'd have to see some specifics on why you'd have to have that many more buses."

In recent months, the Kanawha County board voted to close Roosevelt Junior High School and Taft, Oakwood, Chelyan, Rand and Tiskelwah elementary schools.

School administrators predicted the closings will save the school system more than \$2.4 million a year.

School board member Betty Jarvis said she doesn't believe the estimates.

"They told us we would have all these savings," said Jarvis, who voted against the closings. "Now they tell us the profits are going to be eaten up. It doesn't look like we're going to save a thing."

*This article was adapted from a story by Eric Eyre, education reporter for The Charleston Gazette.*