



The

Challenge

January 2001



School systems fail to meet standards

One fourth of West Virginia's county school systems – 14 in all – fail to meet minimum state standards, according to a report presented to the State

Board of Education in December by the State Office of Education Performance Audits.

The report, which measured the performance

of schools against state standards, said schools in Lincoln and Mingo counties were given "non-approval status." The state took control of Lincoln County schools in June 2000. Mingo County has been under state supervision since 1998.

School systems in Boone, Grant, Hardy, Lewis, Logan, McDowell, Nicholas, Pendleton, Raleigh, Wayne, Wirt and Wyoming counties were given conditional approval, meaning they are below par but have a solid plan for improvement.

Seven schools statewide have been labeled "seriously impaired" by the

auditors, down from eight last year.

They are Enslow Middle in Cabell County; Powellton Elementary and Meadow Bridge High in Fayette County; Mount View High in McDowell County; Richwood High in Nicholas County; Woodrow Wilson High in Raleigh County and Crum Middle in Wayne County.

While one state board member said he feared the term "seriously impaired" would hurt morale of teachers, students and employees, Superintendent David Stewart said the term has proven to be "a significant prod for

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We goofed. . .



In last month's issue, we reported that Buffalo Grade School in Logan County, top photo, was targeted for closure if the County Board of Education is able to complete plans to construct a new K-8 Man Middle School. We were wrong. Buffalo Grade is not going to be closed at this time. However, Christian Grade School, shown in the bottom photo, will be closed, along with Amherstdale Grade, Mallory Elementary and Man Junior High School. We regret the error.

SBA awards \$28.5 million to county school systems

The State School Building Authority spent \$28.5 million in 20 minutes in December, but Lincoln County only got about a fifth of the approximately \$20 million needed to build a new consolidated high school.

Newspaper reports had predicted the SBA would provide the full funding for proposed

Lincoln County facility. Instead, Lincoln got \$4 million.

Mason County received \$3.7 for a new elementary school; Hampshire County got \$6.5 for a new middle school; and Marion County was awarded \$3 million for a new middle school.

Other awards included **Please turn to page two**



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.

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SBA allocations . . .

\$2.8 million to Raleigh County for an addition to Daniels Elementary School; \$2 million to Berkeley County for a new middle school; \$2 million to Mercer County for two new elementary schools; \$1.5 million to Mineral County for a new elementary school; \$1.3 million to Pocahontas County for renovations for Pocahontas County High

School; \$650,000 to Monroe County for an addition to Mountain View Elementary/Middle School; \$500,000 to Wetzel County for an addition to Long Drain School; and \$500,000 to Marshall County for a roof replacement at John Marshall High School.

The SBA rejected Putnam County's request for \$15.6 million to build a new high school which would have consolidated Buffalo and Poca high schools.

SBA executive director Clacy Williams said Putnam school officials failed to present a "legitimate" financial plan to pay for the new high school. He also criticized the school's proposed location, less than four miles from Winfield High School. He urged Putnam officials to include Winfield in the consolidation plan.

The Charleston Gazette reported that SBA members plan to ask the Legislature for extra money to pay for the proposed Lincoln County High School.

Senator Byrd on small schools

In a column sent to state newspapers in October, U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd extolled the virtues of small schools. Wrote Byrd:

"In the beginning of my school years as a boy in Mercer County, I attended small, two-room schools. In my graduating class at Mark Twain High School in Raleigh County, there were only 28 students. It was there, in those small classrooms, where I started to receive the education that prepared me for a long career of public service and an even longer devotion to learning.

"In this new school year of 2000-2001, my thoughts turn to a meeting that I had this past spring with students from throughout West Virginia. At that Youth Summit, which West Virginia University hosted with me, students were asked to identify the main causes of youth violence. Among the responses, students pointed to large classes and schools as major contributors because they lead to a feeling of isolation and disenchantment."

Byrd said he supports congressional funding measures that will allow school districts to decrease class size. He did not offer an opinion about small schools.

Standards . . .

improvement."

While the number of counties failing to meet minimum standards increased from six in 1999 to 14 in 2000, officials say the number more than doubled because of an increased emphasis on evaluating schools since that time.

The report said only 49 schools statewide failed to meet the minimum standards for the Stanford 9 student achievement test, down from 98 in 1998.

Only three schools failed to keep its dropout rate below 6 percent, down from 7 schools in 1998. Next year the maximum standard will drop to 5 percent, which 12 to 15 schools statewide don't meet, the *Charleston Daily Mail* reported.

Although attendance standards rose this year from 91.5 percent to 92.5 percent, the number of schools failing to meet the standard did not increase.

This 'n that from around the state

- State and federal authorities are intensifying their investigation into former State Schools superintendent Hank Marockie's use of public and private money, according to a *Charleston Gazette* story by Eric Eyre.

Eyre reported that FBI agents and state investigators have interviewed high-ranking state Department of Education officials and Marockie's former secretary. The questions focus on Marockie's use of a discretionary account established by the nonprofit Education Alliance.

- A study by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education has ranked West Virginia and Louisiana as tied for last place in college learning, according to *The Charleston Gazette*.

Among the study's findings: West Virginia is the worst educated state, with only 17 percent of residents holding bachelor's degrees. Public schools are doing a poor job preparing youths for college because few take the advanced math and science courses required for higher education. Just 38 percent of West Virginia's high school graduates go directly to college, compared with 54 percent in top-ranked states.

- More than half of West Virginia's high school graduates who go on to college have to take at least one remedial course their freshman year, according to a state Higher Education Policy Commission report.

Statewide, 51 percent of all first-time college freshmen had to take one or more remedial courses in the fall semester of 1999, according to a report by the Associated Press. College math classes posed the greatest challenge for the state's high school graduates, the report said. Monongalia, Ohio and Morgan counties had the fewest graduates in remedial math classes, while Mingo, McDowell and Fayette counties had the highest percentage.

- Saying students don't get enough classroom days, the State Board of Education has instructed State Superintendent David Stewart to develop a legislative proposal to add instructional days to the 180-day school calendar. Board members will examine the proposal at their January 11 meeting. State Board member Jim McKnight said the time teachers spend with students has gotten shorter and shorter. Stewart told the Associated Press he is not sure how many additional days he'll propose. The Legislature has to approve the additional days because they



must provide additional funding.

- Barbara N. Fish of Parkersburg has been appointed to the West Virginia Board of Education by Gov. Cecil H. Underwood. She was appointed to replace Jim McKnight, whose term expired November 4. Mrs. Fish will serve until November 4, 2009.

- Putnam County Board of Education members have selected a 49-acre site at Red House for the proposed North Putnam High School, which would consolidate Buffalo and Poca high schools. Board members plan to put a bond proposal before voters as early as next spring to help pay for the new school and for improvements at other county schools, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*.

- The Logan County Board of Education selected a site on Huff Creek for the proposed new Man Middle School. The board announced plans to begin condemnation proceedings to acquire the property, according to a report in *The Logan Banner*. Superintendent Ray Woolsey said the Board was unable to come to terms with property owner Gary Craft on a fair price for the property.

- The Lincoln County Board of Education will ask the state Board of Education to choose a replacement for long-time board member Fred Curry, who resigned. The Lincoln Board deadlocked while trying to make a choice between Phoebe Harless, a social worker from Griffithsville, and Mark Bourassa, a psychologist from Alum Creek. The State Board also has been asked to fill a vacancy in Mason County, where the Board couldn't pay its electric bill because the spouses of two board members work for the power company.

- Kanawha County school officials have proposed housing St. Albans High School students in an elementary school building and 34 portable classrooms in order to complete a total renovation of the school as early as January 2003. The plan originally called for keeping students at the high school while renovation was done around them. A construction supervisor for the school system said students would be disrupted less and the system would save money by completing the work more quickly. The plan would require closing Belvil Elementary and sending its 124 students to Central Elementary, less than a mile away. Belvil's closing had been scheduled for 2003.



Challenge West Virginia

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Challenge WV heading back to the Legislature

Challenge West Virginia will return to the State Legislature in 2001 to work toward passage of a bill to limit the times children can spend on school buses.

The bill, which has not yet been numbered, will be introduced in both the Senate and House of Delegates.

Although the bill has widespread support in both the House and Senate, it has died in the House and Senate education committees without allowing legislators as a whole to vote on it.

The bill, known as the Better Schools Bill, would

“The busing hours are too long. When I get to school, I’m just knocked out.”

– Preston County third grader

“(My daughter) figured out that traveling to and from the high school for four years, she went more than the distance around the world two times.”

– Webster County parent

limit transportation times to those guidelines established by the School Building Authority.

Those guidelines call for elementary students to be on school buses no more than 30 minutes one way; middle school students 45

minutes one way; and high school students 60 minutes one way.

Because these times are recommended in guidelines, not state law, they are often ignored. Challenge WV is aware of elementary students

traveling at least 90 minutes each way to school and high school students traveling two hours each way.

The bill also would give the House Rules committee oversight over the School Building Authority. At the present time the SBA does not have to submit rules to the legislature as to how they will distribute school building funds.

The bill also would allow any school included in a countywide facilities plan to be eligible for SBA funding.

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