



The

Challenge



January 2004

Wise supports Challenge WV legislation Challenge begins lobbying effort to limit bus rides

Governor Bob Wise has given his support to a proposed change in state education law, which will limit the amount of time West Virginia school children have to spend on buses.

During his State of the State address, Wise asked the Legislature to pass a bill for which Challenge West Virginia has fought for many years.

The bill has been introduced in both houses of the Legislature. The bill numbers are H.B. 4023 and S.B. 134. The bill limits bus travel times for students. If it passes, the following one-way time limits on bus rides will be mandated:

- elementary students — no more than 30 minutes;
- junior high / middle school students — no more than 45 minutes;
- high school students — no more than one hour.

Currently, the same time limits are “recommended” by the West Virginia Department of Education’s school transportation policy. However, the current “recommendation” is in no way a requirement. The proposed legislation would make the “recommendations” mandatory.

The bill would not require the alteration of current bus routes. It would only prevent the addition of

new long routes.

Challenge has documented that some children in West Virginia face daily bus rides up to two hours.

Challenge West Virginia has begun a statewide lobbying effort

We need your help

Members of Challenge West Virginia and our supporters around the state are working feverishly to secure the passage of two important pieces of Legislation. Please contact your Legislators and voice your support for the following bills:

- **S.B. 134 / H.B. 4023** -- would limit the amount of time West Virginia public school students may spend riding buses each day
- **S.B. 150 / H.B. 4018** -- would alter the state school aid formula to remove the cap on funding for teachers in sparsely populated counties

which includes running radio commercials on the “Talkline” program on the West Virginia MetroNews Radio Network. Challenge members are also visiting the Capitol to personally lobby lawmakers.

Challenge Coordinator Linda Martin is urging all West Virginians to get involved in the effort.

“We need as much help as we can get from anyone who wants to get involved,” said Martin. “In this month’s edition of *The Challenge*, we’ve included the names of the people who need to be lobbied the most — the education committee members. We hope people will use this list in their personal lobbying efforts.”

The list, which is printed on page three of this edition, includes the names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the members of the education committees of both the House of Delegates and the State Senate. The members of these committees must pass the bill before the full houses will be able to vote on them.

Wise made public comments in support of small schools during a January 6th meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education. Wise appeared at the meeting for the swearing-in of two new appointments to the state board. Wise said the two new appointees — Burma Hatfield of Mingo County and Lowell Johnson of Greenbrier County — personify his commitment to small schools.

“Research has shown that smaller

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Visit Challenge West Virginia at www.challengewv.org

Challenge releases new publication

'A Decade of Consolidation: Where Are the Savings?'

The long-awaited results of a Challenge West Virginia sponsored study have been published and are now available for distribution.

The new study, entitled *A Decade of Consolidation: Where Are the Savings*, was released this month and the first recipients were members of the West Virginia Legislature.

The study, conducted by Cynthia Reeves, Ph.D., finally proves that, despite promises to the contrary, school consolidation in West Virginia has failed to reduce the costs of providing a "thorough and efficient" education to our state's school children.

The study brands school consolidation as a failure. The study



documents a number of problems which have been created by school consolidation and offers no-nonsense solutions to those problems.

During the exhaustive research for the document, Reeves made a number of important findings,

including:

- Between 1990 and 2000, more than 200 schools were closed and school enrollments declined by over 34,000 students, but West Virginia increased its education expenditures more than any other state in the union.

- Between 1990 and 2000, the cost of bus transportation for West Virginia students increased by 11 percent.

- Even though more than 200 schools were closed between 1990 and 2000, the number of central office administrators increased by 12 percent.

To obtain a copy of the publication, contact Linda Martin. Martin's contact info is on the back page.

Legislature strips more control from county boards

Challenge West Virginia is urging Governor Bob Wise to veto a bill passed recently by the Legislature.

In a little more than 24 hours after its introduction, H.B. 4111 had passed both houses of the Legislature and was sent to the Governor.

The bill will force the McDow-

ell County Board of Education to consolidate a number of schools in the county, by requiring the board to accept \$41.7 million, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for the construction of new consolidated schools.

Challenge and its supporters had opposed the plan and presented

a feasible alternative, which was accepted by the local board. The state-appointed superintendent of schools in McDowell is advocating the consolidation plan over the protest of community members and the rejection of the local board. The governor's office can be contacted at 1-888-438-2731.

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schools can be very effective in promoting student achievement and learning," Wise said during the board meeting. "The appointment of these two members, like my recent appointments to the School Building Authority, reflects my commitment to preserving high-quality small schools, maintaining them as vital

parts of local communities and ensuring all students in all schools receive the best possible education."

During his January 6th comments, Wise cautioned that school closures can destroy communities.

"We must turn our attention to preserving and protecting small schools and recognizing their importance," Wise said. "Schools affect

every aspect of daily life in these communities. We must be careful that what we do in terms of education policy does not adversely affect the economic and social development of these communities."

The governor has also given his support to another proposal that Challenge West Virginia is advocating. If passed S.B. 150 /

H.B. 4018 would alter the state school aid formula so the state will fund more teachers for students in sparsely populated counties. The bill would allow more teachers to be spaced across the counties so population sparsity would not promote consolidation.

Challenge urges everyone to lobby for the passage of both bills.

West Virginia Legislature Education Committees

Challenge West Virginia urges all of its supporters around the state to contact their Legislators and the Legislators on the Education Committees of each house to voice support for Challenge's legislative initiatives. Each bill must successfully pass through each committee before the full memberships of the respective houses may consider the legislation. Listed below are the names of each committee member, their office phone numbers, e-mail addresses and office room numbers. Regular mail can be sent to 1900 Kanawha Blvd., E., Bldg. 1, Charleston, WV 25305. Be sure to include the Legislator's name and room number with the above address.

Senate Education Committee Members

<u>LEGISLATOR</u>	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>E-MAIL</u>	<u>ROOM</u>
Robert Plymale	357-7937	grays@mail.wvnet.edu	415M
Larry Edgell	357-7827	edgell@mail.wvnet.edu	413M
Billy Wayne Bailey	357-7807	bwbailey@mail.wvnet.edu	214W
Donna Boley	357-7905	donnboley@charter.net	213W
Edwin Bowman	357-7918	jwazell1@mail.wvnet.edu	214W
Anita Skeens Caldwell	357-7957	ascaldwe@mail.wvnet.edu	229W
Tracy Dempsey	357-7939	tracyd@mail.wvnet.edu	206W
Jesse Guills	357-7959	jguills@mail.wvnet.edu	200W
Jon Blair Hunter	357-7995	senhunter@mountain.net	200W
Michael Oliverio II	357-7917	cglagola@mail.wvnet.edu	209W
Vic Sprouse	357-7901	vic@vicsprouse.com	245M
John Unger II	357-7933	unger@mail.wvnet.edu	216W
Randy White	357-7906	crwhite@mail.wvnet.edu	204W

House of Delegates Education Committee Members

<u>LEGISLATOR</u>	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>E-MAIL</u>	<u>ROOM</u>
Jerry Mezzatesta	340-3265	jmezztstmail.wvnet.edu	434M
Larry Williams	340-3337	1willia1@mail.wvnet.edu	442M
Robert Beach	340-3119	rbeach@mail.wvnet.edu	210E
Ray Canterbury	340-3131	rcanter1@mail.wvnet.edu	6UB
Gerald Crosier	340-3188	gcrosier@mail.wvnet.edu	230E
Walter Duke	340-3151	wduke@mail.wvnet.edu	150R
Ron Fragale	340-3392	rfragale@mail.wvnet.edu	219E
Bill Hamilton	340-3167	bhamilt@mail.wvnet.edu	4D
William Hartman	340-3396	whartman@mail.wvnet.net	230E
Greg Howard	340-3121	ghoward@mail.wvnet.edu	6UB
Earnie Kuhn	340-3192	ekuhn@mail.wvnet.edu	213E
Marshall Long	340-3120	mclong@mail.wvnet.edu	231E
Brady Paxton	340-3199	bpaxton@mail.wvnet.edu	225E
David Perry	340-3159	dperry7@mail.wvnet.edu	223E
Mary M. Poling	340-3102	marypoli@mail.wvnet.edu	227E
Donna Reid Renner	340-3146	drenner@mail.wvnet.edu	218E
Roger Romine	340-3226	wromine@mail.wvnet.edu	6D
Stan Shaver	340-3160	sshaver1@mail.wvnet.edu	223E
John Shelton	340-3176	jshelto1@mail.wvnet.edu	224E
Kelli Sobonya	340-3175	ksobonya@mail.wvnet.edu	6UA
William Stemple	340-3112	wlstempl@mail.wvnet.edu	216E
Linda Sumner	340-3180	lsumner@mail.wvnet.edu	150R
Randy Swartzmiller	340-3138	rswartzmiller@hotmail.com	220E
Robert Tabb	340-3274	rtabb@mail.wvnet.edu	231E
Christopher Wakim	340-3177	cwakim@mail.wvnet.edu	2D

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

A program of Governor House of Charleston, WV

600 Shrewsbury Street
Charleston, WV 25301-1211

**Non-profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Permit No. 2673
Charleston, WV 25301**

We Support Small Schools!

Challenge West Virginia County Contacts

Braxton County

Sue Clifton
(304) 765-2994

Calhoun County

Dianne Weaver
(304) 354-6183
dianne@hurherald.com

Clay County

Marge Bragg
(304) 286-2655
ijram98@hotmail.com

Fayette County

Carolyn Arritt
(304) 484-7919
Carritt-McCune@citynet.net

Harrison County

Paul Hamrick
(304) 622-5664
LITCCHC@aol.com

Jefferson County

Paul Burke
(304) 876-2227
NumbersInstitute@juno.com

Lincoln County

Thomas Ramey
(304) 855-3930
tprameyvw@hotmail.com

Logan County

Chris Stratton
(304) 752-9348
cstratton@loganbanner.com

Marshall County

Frank Longwell
(304) 232-1093

Mason County

Bill Reedel
(304) 675-2067
rr9546@dragonbbs.com

McDowell County

Marsha Timpson
(304) 875-3418
marshatimpson@hotmail.com

Mingo County

Mike Carter
(304) 426-4226
hiech@hotmail.com

Monongalia County

Jon Frist
(304) 292-9599
jon.frist@us.army.mil

Morgan County

Andy Andryshak
(304) 947-5664
andy.peace@frontiernet.net

Nicholas County

Robin Kelly
(304) 649-5932
RocknBirdy@hotmail.com

Preston County

Jana Freeman
(304) 735-3411
Janaf11@hotmail.com

Putnam County

Tim McCoy
(304) 586-9823
timothy.mccoy@pb.com

Raleigh County

Lorelei Scarbro
(304) 854-1016
candlelight29@aol.com

Ritchie County

Patty Deak
(304) 869-3462
pdeak@dot.state.wv.us

Roane County

Eric Rogers
(304) 655-7134
rpeskid98@yahoo.com

Webster County

Cindy Miller
(304) 493-6369
KCACMiller@juno.com

At-Large

Bob Henry Baber
(304) 846-6644
wvpoet@richwoodwv.com

Challenge WV

Coordinator
Linda Martin
(304) 744-5916
LBM94@aol.com

Send comments or questions about *The Challenge* to
cstratton@loganbanner.com