



The

Challenge

July 2001



Fayette Challenge Chapter

Residents of the Meadow Bridge area formed the Fayette County chapter of Challenge WV at a meeting in June. Some of the new chapter members are shown in the photo at left.

SBA has \$47 million for this year

The School Building Authority will have more than \$800 million to distribute for school building projects during the next 13 years, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*.

SBA officials said county school systems will compete for \$47 million this year – more than twice as much as has been available during the last two years.

The SBA will receive \$25 million each year in additional revenue from a tax on gray machines.

Executive Director Clacy Williams said the increased funds will not take care of all the state's school building needs. "We've got \$1.9 billion needs out there," he said. "So we're still a long way from solving all of our school facility problems.

We're going to try to fund the needs that require the greatest attention."

At a meeting in June, the SBA also gave Williams a \$15,000 raise,

increasing his salary from \$85,000 to \$100,000. The agency's eight other employees received raises of 8 to 15

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Tiny Buffalo High shows how small schools can be excellent

Tiny Buffalo High School, with only 268 students, was named a West Virginia School of Excellence by the state Department of Education. Buffalo is one of only two high schools named this year.

Buffalo High would have been closed had Putnam County voters approved a \$35.8 million school bond in May.

Despite its small size, Buffalo

offers students a variety of classes, from advanced chemistry to human physiology, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*. The Bison Block, a special 43-minute period has been carved out of the day to provide advanced and remedial classes.

Principal Joyce Vessey said teachers have to prepare for more

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This 'n that from around the state

- For the first time in four years, West Virginia students' scores on the Stanford-9 Achievement Test did not improve over the previous year. In total basic skills, 3rd through 8th grade scores and 10th grade remained the same. Statewide scores dropped from 61 to 60 percent among 9th graders but increased from 61 percent to 62 percent among 11th graders. State officials did not calculate a county-by-county ranking.



WV fellow Tim McCoy, an opponent of the bond, said his group would fight consolidating the middle schools. McCoy proposed a plan to rebuild and renovate schools that he says would cost \$17.5 million and not require a bond. If board members approve Linville's plan, a \$10 million bond levy could be put before voters the week of Sept. 24 so the county could have a proposal prepared for the School Building Authority, which meets in October to

distribute school construction funds.

- No West Virginia school was among the 264 schools nationwide named national Blue Ribbon Schools. Four state schools were among 453 nationwide considered for the honor. The four state winners were Winchester Avenue Elementary, Martinsburg; Liberty Elementary, Weirton; McNinch Elementary, Moundsville; and Roosevelt Elementary, Point Pleasant.

- The West Virginia Kids Count Fund said while West Virginia's rates for infant mortality, high school dropouts and births to teenagers all improved during the 1990s, the state continues to rank near the bottom for unemployment and child poverty. "We have the third-highest poverty rate in the nation and we share that distinction with five other states," said Margie Hale, executive director of the state Kids Count Fund.

- Tiny Paw Paw High School in Morgan County graduated 11 students in June. The school's valedictorian had transferred from Berkeley Springs High School during his sophomore year. "I like the small classroom size and the teaching staff's one-on-one personal attention," said David Walter Stansbury of Great Cacapon. Stansbury plans to major in electrical engineering at West Virginia University Institute of Technology in Montgomery. Margaret Zembower, vice president of the Morgan County Board of Education, urged graduates to remember their roots. She pointed out that the percentage of Paw Paw graduates who go on to become professionals is higher than that of many larger schools.

- Following the defeat of a bond that would have consolidated Buffalo and Poca High Schools, Putnam County School Board President Sid Linville now proposes combining two middle schools on the north side of the Kanawha River. Linville's plan would close Poca Middle School and George Washington Middle School in Eleanor and build a new middle school in Red House. Challenge

- Lincoln County's state-appointed superintendent said he is looking at sending Harts 11th and 12th graders to Guyan Valley High School and Hamlin juniors and seniors to Duval High School, according to a report in *The Lincoln Journal*. Bill Grizzell said a new consolidated high school should be completed in 2004, but Harts and Hamlin students may have to be relocated to "complete graduation requirements."

- Parents of Harts High students are protesting the lengthy bus rides that consolidation will bring. Although county transportation officials estimate the longest bus ride will be approximately one hour and 40 minutes, parents say those times just aren't accurate. One parent said his child already is on the bus for an hour and a half to get to Harts. "How are you going to get them to Hamlin in the same amount of time," he asked.

- Despite protests from some principals and school board members, Gov. Bob Wise signed legislation that would prohibit administrators from suspending students who routinely skip classes. "It passed 34 to zip," Wise told a group of principals. "It's a pretty strong statement from the Legislature."

- Among other education bills passed: A video poker bill giving teachers and school service personnel raises; a bill requiring all county school boards to develop character education programs; a calendar bill creating a committee to study the use of instructional time in public schools; a home schooling bill which extends the provision that a home school instructor is not required to have more years of education than the student he or she is teaching; a Promise Scholarship committee, which allows a board of directors to set standards for the program; a bill that requires county boards to establish policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying.

Lawmakers challenge facilities proposal

Lawmakers say a policy change proposed by the state Department of Education could cost billions of dollars, according to a report in *The Charleston Daily Mail*.

The proposal would require existing school facilities to meet tougher standards set for new facilities.

Senate Education Chairman Lloyd Jackson, D-Lincoln, said the Department's proposal would omit a section of policy dealing with existing school buildings in the "Handbook on Planning School Facilities."

This omission would require existing buildings to meet the stricter standards for new school buildings, he said.

"I'm really concerned we're heading down the wrong philosophical path,"

Buffalo . . .

classes because of the Bison Block, but that they don't complain about the additional work.

Buffalo also offers after-school tutoring for elementary and secondary students.

To be named a School of Excellence, Buffalo had to meet certain criteria, such as good test scores and attendance, a rigorous curriculum and community involvement.

Editorialized *The Gazette*: "If you listen to

Jackson told the *Daily Mail*.

House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta, D-Hampshire, said making existing schools comply with standards for new buildings could cost \$6 billion to \$7 billion.

Jackson said that if the highest-performing high school in West Virginia were 20 years old, it wouldn't meet the standards set for new buildings. He said it wouldn't make sense to spend money to bring it up to those tougher standards.

It would make more sense, he said, to spend the money on schools "where teachers aren't getting the job done."

Delegate Bill Anderson, R-Wood, said he's concerned the policy change could be the impetus toward more school

consolidations.

"Once you put these things on paper, it would drive appropriations of funds or closing schools," he said.

Bill Elswick of the department's Office of School Facilities told members of the Legislative Oversight Commission on

SBA funds . . .

percent.

SBA officials discussed two proposals for paying for new schools and renovations.

Under one proposal, the agency would spend \$47 million to \$70 million each year in revenues generated by existing bonds and the gray machine profits.

The second proposal calls for issuing additional bonds backed by gray

Education he is not in a position to defend the proposed change.

Lawmakers said they have no power to change the department's policies, but they told Elswick to let his superiors know they think the department is going in the wrong direction.

machine money. This plan would generate \$197 million for the SBA to distribute in 2005, but less money in later years. The plan would tie up more money in interest payments, according to *The Gazette* report.

The SBA's board will vote on a financing plan within a year.

The Gazette reported that Williams and board members are concerned that there are not enough architects and skilled construction workers to handle a school building boom.

They say only five architectural firms in the state design schools and that there is also a shortage of bricklayers.

"If we dumped a big pot of money out there, we might have a hard time getting the schools designed and done," Williams said.

The SBA distributed more than \$647 million for school construction from 1990 to 2000, during which time West Virginia lost a fourth of its public schools.

possible, even in the smallest schools.

"Sometimes consolidation makes sense. Sometimes it does not. Some megaschools are excellent, some are not. Some tiny schools, like Buffalo, are excellent. Some are not.

"The state Department of Education recognized Buffalo's excellence. Perhaps that will teach other education officials and critics in this state that big is not always beautiful."

The Challenge

The Challenge is published monthly 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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