



The

Challenge

June 2002



Challenge WV, Mountaineer Food Bank work together on book distribution

Challenge West Virginia has distributed another tractor-trailer full of books to eight West Virginia counties, including flood-ravaged McDowell.

Challenge worked in partnership with the Mountain State Food Bank in Gassaway, which offered storage space and volunteer help in unloading and sorting the 32,000 pounds of books, valued at \$250,000.



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Challenge WV members and Mountaineer Food Bank volunteers sort books

Another new chapter



Calhoun County residents, represented by Dianne Weaver and Eric Rogers, received a charter certificate from Challenge WV coordinator Linda Martin after forming a Challenge chapter in May.

Students are high achievers at state's smallest school

A good argument for small schools may be found at the state's smallest school – tiny Pickens in Randolph County.

The 2002 graduating class has only three members, but all three are going to college.

In fact, the school has sent all graduates to college for six straight years, according to a report in The Charleston Daily Mail.

With just 37 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, Pickens was named

an exemplary school last year, based on attendance, Stanford Achievement Test results and writing scores.

More than three-quarters of the students were above the 50th percentile on standardized tests with none in the bottom quartile. The school hasn't had a dropout in years.

Principal Jim Biggs, also a social studies teacher, said he's never encountered

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This 'n that from around the state

- Challenge West Virginia coordinator Linda Martin was part of a panel supporting small schools that appeared before a group of grantmakers attending the annual conference sponsored by the Council on Foundations in Chicago. Martin listed the advantages of small schools – including smaller class sizes and increased community involvement. She was quoted in Education Week as saying the loss of small schools “is more than the loss of a building. It’s the loss of our community.” The grantmakers were told the federal “Elementary and Secondary Education Act may be “the most important federal act in two decades.”



- The act, also known as the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,” calls for schools to meet certain academic standards and offers federal dollars to help it happen. The Associated Press reports that West Virginia’s federal funding will increase to \$325 million next year. Those funds are to be used to ensure that every child reads at grade level by third grade; that the quality of education is improved for students from low-income families and that talented teachers can be trained and retained. All students would have to meet the benchmark in math and reading in ten years. If schools aren’t meeting the standards, parents can choose to send them to schools that do.

- Marion County voters approved a \$4.5 million bond to build a new West Fairmont Middle School. The School Building Authority will provide funds so that a \$14 million school can be built. County superintendent Thomas Long and D. D. Meighen, a member of the committee that promoted the bond, said affordability was a key to the bond’s success, together with a central location for the school. The Fairmont Times-West Virginian said Clacy Williams, executive director of the School Building Authority, “as much as promised” the state funding if the bond passed. Lewis County residents rejected an \$8 million bond.

- When parents and teachers at Alum Creek Elementary complained about the late start of the school day, the situation was addressed, not surprisingly, by the county’s transportation director, according to The Charleston Daily Mail. Transportation director Geroge Beckett gave the school the option of keeping the current 9:15 a.m. start time or switching to a 7:15 a.m. time. Teacher Patricia

Wooten said parents are concerned that the early time is too early. She and parents think an 8:15 to 3 p.m. school day is ideal in terms of children’s ability to learn. Beckett said it would cost \$250,000 a year to buy four new buses, hire drivers and maintain a schedule that parents and teachers feel would be best for young children.

- Court appointed commissioners have set the value of the site for the proposed consolidated Lincoln County High School at \$425,000. An appraiser hired by the County Board of Education had set the value at \$252,000.

- Charleston Gazette education reporter Eric Eyre has won a national Fellowship in Child and Family Policy from the University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism to work on a six-month project on rural schools.

- Candidates who support small community schools took three seats on the Fayette County Board of Education. Incumbent Steve Pilato will be joined on the board by Missey Jayne Smith and Carolyn Arritt.

- McDowell County schools were closed for the remainder of the school year following massive flooding on May 2 that damaged 13 of the county’s 19 schools.

- Judge Fred Fox upheld the Marshall County Board of Education’s decision to close Union Junior High School. Supporters say they will appeal the decision to close Union, which is on the state’s exemplary school list.

- Five elementary schools have been named West Virginia Blue Ribbon Schools for 2002: Berlin McKinney, Wyoming County; Riverside, Mingo County; West Teays, Putnam County; South Jefferson, Jefferson County; and Washington Lands, Marshall County. The state’s 2002 Schools of Excellence winners are Robert C. Byrd High, Harrison County; Wheeling Park High, Ohio County; Belington Middle, Barbour County; Warm Springs Middle, Morgan County; Anna Jarvis Elementary, Taylor county; Kellogg Elementary, Wayne County, Marlinton Elementary, Pocahontas County; Rivesville Elementary, Marion County; Kenova Elementary, Wayne County; Elk Center Elementary, Kanawha County; Atenville elementary, Lincoln County; Daniels Elementary, Raleigh County; and the Wyoming County Career and Technical Center.

Education policy based on obsolete model, Challenge coordinator tells future leaders

Today's students are stuck in a transition – they live in the 21st century age of information, but education policy decisions are being made by people stuck in the 20th century industrial age, Challenge West Virginia coordinator Linda Martin told students attending the Hugh O'Brian Leadership Program in Charleston last month.

"The industrial model that guides them includes economies of scale, and that's what they use to decide where they will build larger schools while moving you further and further from the communities where you live," Martin said.

The O'Brian Program, in its 25th year in West Virginia, is dedicated to the recognition and development of leadership potential. Sophomores from every high school in the state are selected by their principals to attend.

Speaking on a panel with House

“. . .what enables us to make (good) selections is being connected with and involved in the real life and work of our communities.”

Education Committee chairman Jerry Mezzatesta and Karen Larry, an assistant superintendent with the West Virginia Department of Education, Martin suggested that the state use 21st century technology to offer a first class education for the children of the state.

"State officials cannot be so uninformed as to not know what all the research shows – small schools provide a better education, higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, higher achievement," she said.

"The research piles up showing small schools are better. Yet they continue to plan and operate under an obsolete system."

"Today information is the predator and we are the prey," Martin said. "There is more information available than any of us needs or can consume. Much of it is inaccurate and sometimes even harmful to us."

One goal of a 21st century education is to enable students to learn how to separate the good from the bad, she said.

"What enables us to make those selections is being connected with and involved in the real life and work of our communities, surrounded by people who know us and interact with us," she said.

"They are the people who will not allow us to be alienated from ourselves and our communities.

"Rather they can help us read our reality so that we can write our own history and improve our world in the 21st century."

Challenge, Food Bank sort, distribute books

The Food Bank also is delivering the books to McDowell County.

Other counties receiving books are Preston, Fayette, Webster, Clay, Nicholas, Harrison and Braxton.

The books are sent to Challenge WV from the Kentucky-based Christian Appalachian Project. They range in price from \$7 to \$125 and cover a range of subjects, including health care, science and cooking, but are not religious in nature.

This load of books, most of which are for adults,

will go to clinics, women's shelters, senior citizen centers, as well as schools.

Challenge WV distributed \$1.5 million worth of books in 2001. The majority of those books went to schools and children's centers.

Paul Hamrick of Harrison County and Marge Bragg of Clay County coordinated the book distribution.

Challenge West Virginia is grateful to Food Bank director Carla Nardella, and the staff and volunteers who assisted with the project.



Marge Bragg, Clay County, Paul Hamrick, Harrison County and Carla Nardella of the Mountaineer Food Bank coordinated the distribution of \$1.5 million worth of books throughout West Virginia.

Pickens. . .

a problem with drugs or weapons in 27 years at Pickens.

"The teachers actually know your name and you're not just a number," said

valedictorian Sarah Jones.

Biggs said the school exists because of geography. Closing Pickens would put children on a narrow mountain road with huge logging trucks.

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 West Virginia 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 Covenant House, Charleston, WV

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