



The

Challenge

May 2002



Challenge WV charters chapters in Marshall, Raleigh, Clay counties



Challenge West Virginia welcomes members from Raleigh, Clay and Marshall counties, where chapters of the organization were formed in March and April.

Shown accepting certificates of certification from Challenge WV coordinator Linda Martin are Raleigh County residents of the Marsh Fork area, left; Clay County residents, below right; and Marshall County residents, below left.

Challenge West Virginia now has 13 county chapters across the state.

If you are interested in becoming part of Challenge West Virginia and working to save small rural schools, please contact Linda Martin at 304-744-5916, email LBM94@aol.com, or Beth Spence at 304-756-9191, email bandb58@aol.com.



This 'n that from around the state

- Raleigh County residents won the first battle in their war to save Marsh Fork High School when Circuit Judge H.L. Kirkpatrick III granted a motion for a temporary injunction to halt the school's closure. Kirkpatrick ruled that the school board violated "not only common sense but the spirit of" the state's open meeting law when it voted to close the school after a meeting that lasted eight hours, until almost 3 a.m. The judge said the board failed to accommodate a crowd of 650 and had an inadequate question-and-answer procedure.



- Students from the state's poorest counties received the fewest Promise Scholarships, according a report in The Charleston Gazette. Of the nine counties with the smallest percentage of winners, all but one are among the state's poorest and all but two are south of the Kanawha River. The counties with the lowest percentages of students receiving scholarships are Mingo, Lincoln, McDowell, Morgan, Summers, Monroe, Webster, Wirt and Wyoming. Those with the highest percentages are Kanawha, Ohio, Pendleton, Tyler, Doddridge,

Marshall, Randolph, Ritchie, Braxton and Mason.

- The Charleston Daily Mail gave a "What Were They Thinking Award" to the Pocahontas County Board of Education after the board had police arrest a citizen who was trying to videotape a board meeting. Former Pocahontas County Commissioner and teacher Norman Alderman was handcuffed and dragged out of the meeting and charged with willful disruption of governmental process, disorderly conduct and obstructing a policy officer. "What part of 'Public meeting' do board members not understand," the newspaper asked. "They work for the public. They meet in public. Why shouldn't members of the public videotape public meetings?"

- Add the West Virginia Farm Bureau to organizations opposing forced school consolidation. In its January newsletter, the Bureau recommends that county school boards "respect the desires of and maintain communications with the residents regarding school issues." The newspaper said, "The Farm Bureau objects to the forced consolidation of grade schools in West Virginia."

- The Harrison County Board of Education has taken two schools off the consolidation list, according to The Clarksburg Exponent. The paper reported that Simpson and Johnson Elementary Schools, both in Bridgeport, will be renovated rather than closed. County Superintendent Carl Friebel said, "We found it would not necessarily be a prudent move. They're very functional, clean facilities and they serve our needs very well."

- Former Fayette County Superintendent Harry Hoffer has applied for unemployment benefits in Maryland. Hoffer, who served as Fayette superintendent from July to February, agreed to a contract buyout in which he said he would not bring claims against the board.

- A majority of Lincoln County's board of education members do not support the decision to build a new consolidated high school in Hamlin, according to a report in The Lincoln Journal. Board member Carol Smith said she had nothing to do with the site selection, she doesn't think it is the best selection and doesn't want to be held liable in any lawsuits resulting from the site selection. Board members Royce Frye and Billie Frye agreed with Smith. The state took over the Lincoln County school system in the summer of 2000, leaving the local board powerless in matters of finance, personnel and, apparently, deciding what schools should be left open or closed.

- West Virginia Federation of Teachers president Judy Hale charged that school administrators mislead the public about being "out of formula." In a debate over job cuts in Putnam County, Hale said vice principals are counted as half-time administrators and half time teachers under state guidelines. Yet few vice principals teach, Hale said. "They do administrative duties all day, every day. The end result is that we look like we're over formula." If vice principals weren't counted as teachers, the county would be under guidelines, Hale said. "It's not quite fair when they say we are out of formula in teachers because in actuality, we are out of formula in administrators."

- High schools built with state School Building Authority money should include all the basics for academic instruction *and* house vocational and technical programs, according to SBA director Clacy Williams. Most counties now have separate facilities for vocational and technical programs. Students must be transported to their schools, then on to vocational schools, thus losing hours of academic time because of the added travel time.

Education Week looks at WV consolidation

Education Week magazine published a major article about the debate over forced school consolidation in West Virginia in its April 10 issue.

Reporter Alan Richard traveled to Pendleton County and visited with Dorothy and Fay Bennett, who were among the leaders of an ill-fated effort to save Circleville School, one of 325 schools closed by the state since 1990.

"In just about every county in West Virginia, governors and legislators in distant Charleston have forced schools to shut their

“. . . few states have beaten a path to school consolidation faster than West Virginia."

doors," Richard wrote. While schools are being consolidated around the country, "few states have beaten a path to school consolidation faster than West Virginia."

Richard interviewed Challenge West Virginia coordinator Linda Martin, who told him that "a majority of people want their children to attend school in the community where they live."

Richard also inter-

viewed Ken Price, the last principal of Circleville School, now the superintendent of Pendleton County Schools.

"The only way you could get money to build was to consolidate," Price told Richard. He also said the district has not saved much money by consolidating schools since it spends \$900,000 of its \$9 million budget on transportation.

Price defended the

closing of Circleville, telling Richard students are able to take more advanced math classes, that they meet more children their own age and they can join a full-size band or choir.

But he seemed nostalgic when he spoke about Circleville – with its sports teams anyone could join, with the one-on-one attention children received, and the involvement of parents in their children's education.

For more information, visit Education Week's website at <http://www.edweek.org>

Finance case lawyer calls for more funding

Saying the state will not prosper without a quality education system, attorney Dan Hedges asked Gov. Wise to direct an economic development panel to give at least \$40 million to West Virginia schools.

During a school funding hearing before Judge Arthur Recht, Hedges said the \$40 million would help poor rural school systems retain teachers.

The nine-member economic development panel was charged with doling out \$200 million in economic development funds.

"At some point the governor has to recognize his constitutional responsibility," Hedges said. "It's in his hands. He has the authority to direct the money."

"I can't imagine the panel would reach the conclusion that a ballpark for the (Charleston) Alley Cats (minor league baseball team) would come before the education of West Virginia's children. Education is the most important economic development priority the state of West Virginia has."

Recht, who has overseen the school funding lawsuit for 28 years, said Hedges' request could conflict with the state constitution. He said it's up to Wise and legislators to fix the state's education problems, and he can't order them to do anything.

"I have serious reservations in terms of the constitutional limits on the judicial branch of the government," said Recht, who called the hearing for

an update on whether the Legislature addressed school funding problems during the last session.

Last year State Superintendent David Stewart recommended that the Legislature revise the state school funding formula and allocate an

additional \$40 million a year.

Instead Legislators passed a bill that will provide \$2.5 million to help counties retain teachers and service workers, a move Hedges called inadequate.

Recht has scheduled a Dec. 13 hearing to receive an update.

SBA allocates \$5 million

The State School Building Authority distributed \$5,074,950 in March for major school renovation projects in thirteen counties.

The grants, by county, include:

Berkeley, Rosemont Elementary, \$485,000; Clay, Clay Elementary, \$500,000; Hancock, Oak Glen High School, \$480,000; Jackson, Henry J. Kaiser Elementary, \$200,000; Jefferson, Shepherdstown Elementary, \$415,220; Kanawha, Ruffner Elementary, \$500,000;

McDowell, Mount View High School, \$500,000; Nicholas, Cherry River Elementary, \$247,224; Ohio, Triadelphia Middle, \$298,000; Raleigh, Woodrow Wilson High School, \$500,000; Roane, Roane County High School, \$170,000; Tucker, Tucker County High School, \$279,506; and Webster, Webster Springs Elementary, \$500,000.

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

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