



The

Challenge



May 2003

Challenge releases new publication

Challenge West Virginia has released a new publication, which examines the effects of school closings and consolidations on students, families and communities.

The publication, entitled "The Long and Winding Road: Consolidation - The Separation of School and Community," was authored by Jim Lewis. Challenge WV's Linda Martin coordinated the book's publication.

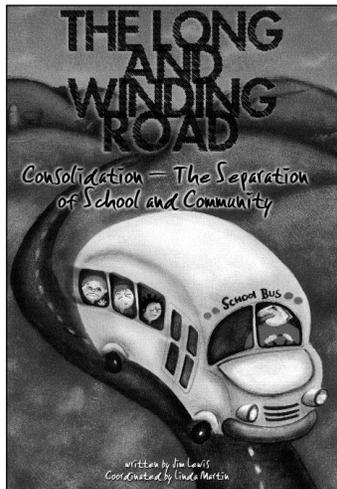
A short excerpt from the publication reads:

"The financial cost of transporting our children over country roads is exorbitant and results in money and resources being diverted away from community-

based schools that serve children and families well."

"That hidden cost, not reflected in state school board budgets, is the cost to our children,

their families and the communities in which they live. These costs are over-and-above the dollars-and-cents cost of education in West Virginia. These costs have to do with the price children and families pay



emotionally, physically, psychologically and socially. The cost of b u s i n g children to consolidated schools is dramatic and devastating."

"This is our best publication yet," said Martin. "It's a real eye-opener and we want everyone concerned to see it."

Over the past few years, Challenge West Virginia has issued a number of other education-related

publications including: "Whatever Happened to Pauley vs. Bailey: The Story of the Politics of Education in West Virginia;" "Small Schools;" "If This Is Democracy, Then I Missed the Bus"; and "Long School Bus Rides: Stealing the Joy of Childhood."

To obtain a copy of "The Long and Winding Road," contact Martin. Her contact information is printed on the back page of this newsletter.

Other publications are available at the Challenge WV Internet site at <http://www.challengewv.com>.

Are State BOE members abusing pay system?

Over the past several years, West Virginia taxpayers have been paying members of the State Board of Education to read e-mails, give media interviews, attend funerals, attend Christmas parties and participate in athletic events, among other things.

An investigation by *The Charleston Gazette* recently revealed the details of the pay system, about which many West Virginians are outraged.

"They should be ashamed of themselves," Challenge WV Coordinator Linda Martin told the *Gazette's* Eric Eyre. "It's

taking advantage of the taxpayers and the children of West Virginia.

State law, specifically *West Virginia Code* /18-2-3, allows members of the West Virginia Board of Education to be paid \$100 per day, for each day, or "any part thereof, spent in the performance of their

duties." But, many West Virginians believe the board members have over-interpreted the statute.

During the past four years and six months, State BOE members have been paid \$247,200 in per-diem payments. Board

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This 'n that from around the state

- The Bush Administration has proposed the elimination of most functions of the ERIC Clearinghouses on Rural Education and Small School. The ERIC Clearinghouse provides extensive and indispensable research information on small schools and rural education. "Shutting down ERIC will shut out many parents and community members from getting vital information they need regarding schools, education and their children," said Challenge WV Coordinator Linda Martin. "It will be an enormous loss." Those who oppose this plan are urged to contact their Congress members and the U.S. Secretary of Education. The ERIC Clearinghouse serving our area can be found on the Internet at <http://www.ael.org/eric>.



- The West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals has approved the use of outside attorneys by county boards of education. In a four-to-one decision, the court ruled that county boards may use their own discretion when deciding whether to use the services of the county prosecuting attorney or whether to hire an outside attorney for advice and representation.

- For the first time since the State Legislature created the W.Va. School Building Authority, a governor is lobbying for a specific school construction project. Governor Bob Wise sent a letter to SBA Executive Director Clacy Williams and the SBA governing board's nine members, urging the agency to fund a proposed \$30 million high school in Jefferson County. In the letter Wise expressed concern that the state has neglected Jefferson County's educational needs, despite the economic boom in the county. Jefferson County has asked the SBA for a \$15 million grant for the school. The request was rejected by the SBA during its March meeting, but may be considered again in December. Since its inception, more than 300 West Virginia schools have been closed under the auspices of the School Building Authority.

- During a public appearance on May 16, Governor Wise said he believed the state has consolidated about as many schools as it could and now needs to turn its attention to maintaining schools and making smaller schools "sustainable."

- U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) is one of six co-sponsors of a school facilities bill currently pending before the U.S. Senate. If passed, the bill could help provide West Virginia \$170.4 million for school buildings over the next two years. Under the bill, \$25 billion in

school construction and renovation money will be made available nationwide. The bill would allow local school boards to issue interest-free bonds. Bond buyers would get federal tax credits in lieu of interest. According to School Building Authority figures, county boards of education have asked for grants totaling more than \$800 million over the next 10 years.

- When the McDowell County school system was taken-over by the State Department of Education in 2001,

state officials accused McDowell County administrators of trying to artificially inflate the standardized test results for the county, by excluding excess number scores from poor-performing students. But, *The Charleston Gazette* recently found that, after seizing control, state officials excluded even more scores than the local administrators did. Prior to the takeover, 22 percent of the test scores were excluded, but, after the takeover, the number excluded climbed to 25 percent. Despite the increase in the number of excluded scores, state education officials have praised the state-appointed McDowell County administrators for increasing test scores in less than two years.

- In October 2003, the Kanawha County Board of Education will attempt, once again, to pass an excess levy. The last excess levy proposal was defeated by voters in the November 2002 elections. The amount to be raised by the proposed levy has yet to be decided.

- On July 1, the West Virginia Ethics Commission will begin determining whether certain candidates can serve on county boards of education. The new authority was granted by the Legislature, during this past session, in response to a number of court decisions requiring the removal of members of county boards of education who were illegally serving in other public positions. In the most publicized incident last year, two members of the Fayette County Board of Education were removed from the board because they were illegally serving, simultaneously, on local public service district boards.

- A lawsuit has been filed against the Pocahontas County Board of Education, by a man who was arrested after videotaping a board meeting. Norman Alderman was arrested on April 8, 2002, while he was attempting to tape a public meeting of the board. Alderman is suing on the basis that the arrest violated his Constitutional and statutory rights. He is seeking damages in an unspecified amount.

Lincoln BOE rebels against State BOE

The Lincoln County Board of Education is rebelling against the State Board of Education and its plan to consolidate all of the county's high schools.

The Lincoln County BOE has voted, five-to-zero, to trash the county's Comprehensive Education Facilities Plan and keep all four of the county's high schools open.

The board's position is that their authority is being usurped by the state board's unconstitutional seizure of the county's

school system in 2000.

The board believes it should be able to use \$30 million in money from the W.Va. School Building Authority to renovate the county's schools instead of consolidating and building the proposed new high school.

If they can't use the money in the way they wish, they will return it to the SBA, the board members said.

State-appointed Superintendent of Schools Bill Grizzell called the vote

"meaningless" and said it was another "ploy" to delay the new school.

Grizzell maintains the vote was made because the local board isn't happy with the site selected for the school. That site was flooded earlier this year after a day of hard rain.

The state-backed plan involves the closures of Harts, Hamlin, Duval and Guyan Valley high schools. Students from Hamlin, Duval and Guyan Valley high schools will go to the new consolidated

school, while Harts students will be allowed to transfer to a new \$19 million high school in Chapmanville.

A lawsuit challenging the closure plan is currently pending in Kanawha County Circuit Clerk.

Mark Your Calendars
**Challenge
West Virginia
Annual Fall
Conference**
October 10, 2003
at 10 a.m.
Marshall University

PAY

members are also reimbursed for expenses such as traveling from their homes to board meetings and other such travel-related expenses. During the 2001-2002 fiscal year, the board's nine members collected \$45,900 in per-diem payments.

Among the payments received by board members are the following:

- WVBOE President Howard Persinger was paid \$100 for delivering the commencement address at Williamson High School.
- Board member Sandra Chapman got 66 payments of \$100, over a three-year period, for such activities as "catch[ing] up on miscellaneous mail," "reading catch-up," "miscellaneous calls," "research," "e-mail" and "preparation for meeting[s]."
- Persinger also charged

the State for giving interviews to *The Charleston Gazette* and WSAZ-TV.

- Former BOE President J.D. Morris, who was recently convicted of embezzling more than \$100,000 from the Clay County Bank, received \$100 for attending the Future Farmers of America Ham, Bacon and Egg Show.
- Morris also was paid \$700 for attending the state boy's high school basketball tournament in Charleston.
- Morris received another \$100 for attending the funeral of the wife of House of Delegates Education Committee Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire). Morris is currently incarcerated at the Federal Corrections Institution in Ashland, Kentucky.
- Former BOE Member Jim McCallum was paid

\$100 for attending the State Department of Education's annual Christmas party.

- Board Member Paul Morris also charged for attending a Christmas party.
- In 2000, former Board Member Jim McKnight got \$400 for selecting potential sites around the state for education forums held by the board.
- McKnight was also paid \$200 for attending a two-day conference on waste in public schools.
- Former Board President Cleo Matthews received a payment after being questioned by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in connection with an investigation into the affairs of former State Superintendent of Schools Hank Marockie.

Several board members received payments for talking with education

leaders from around West Virginia, including Tom Lange, president of the West Virginia Education Association. Lang told *The Gazette*, "I didn't know they were going to use me to get money. Now that I know that, I'll wait to talk to them on a day they're here in Charleston for a board meeting."

In response to the outcry after the news broke, Persinger announced that he will appoint a committee to review the per-diem payments.

Delegate Mezzatesta has vowed to introduce legislation to restrict the payments. Mezzatesta also said he was offended by the fact that Morris got paid \$100 for attending his wife's funeral. "That offends me quite a bit," said Mezzatesta in an interview with the *Gazette*. "That far exceeds any quality of taste."

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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