



The

Challenge

November 2001



The Duval High School Bluegrass Band

Rural schools need to be in national conversation

The issue of small schools is a popular issue in the national conversation.

The problem is how to get small community-based rural schools into that conversation, says Dr. Rachel Tompkins, president of the Rural School and Community Trust.

In her keynote address

for Challenge WV's fall conference, "Our Communities, Our Schools," Dr. Tompkins said groups such as the Rural School and Community Trust and Challenge WV need more effective research to counter the argument that small schools cost too much and that they

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Hannan project 'speaks for the children'

Everyone agrees that children are important, but if you want to know how a community really views its children, go to the community school and see how it looks and smells, says Dr. Stan Maynard.

Dr. Maynard, director of the June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development at

Marshall University, addressed the Challenge WV conference, together with his wife, Dr. Barbara Maynard of the RESA II (Regional Education Service Agency).

Stan Maynard said the Harless Center's goal is to be a voice for children, just as Challenge WV works for children.

Duval Bluegrass Band entertains, educates

Hitting their licks on acoustic guitars, mandolins, fiddles, banjos and basses, the Duval Bluegrass Band provided foot-stomping entertainment at the Oct. 13 Challenge WV conference as students demonstrated how place-based learning can happen in a small West Virginia school.

The Band is from Duval High School, a Lincoln County school with less than 500 students.

The musicians mixed old-time West Virginia

mountain tunes with original songs. The result is achingly beautiful music that echoes some of the best of a mountain culture that has been passed down from generation to generation.

The Band was formed because eighth-grade science teacher Peggy Dean has an enduring passion for bluegrass music.

Dean and her husband R.D. attend festivals around the country. The sponsor of a band at a large high school

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Multi-county consolidation rejected by Hardy County

Residents of Hardy County have rejected a

proposal to build a complex that would include a consolidated high school to serve Grant and Hardy counties.

"There are a lot of voices for big people," he said. "Who speaks for children?"

The Maynards discussed their work at Hannan High School in Mason County, a school with 250 students in grades 7-12. Two years ago, Hannan was at the bottom

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The state School Building Authority spent about a year putting together the proposal for the complex, which would have been in Hardy County about midway between Moorefield and Petersburg in Grant County, according to the Associated Press.

The complex also **Please turn to page three**

This 'n that from around the state

- The Fayette County Board of Education voted to hold all its school closure hearings in a single day, a move opponents believe will restrict community input, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*. West Virginia Education Association staffer Perry Bryant said the board has not drawn “significant input into decisions” from parents, community leaders and teachers. He said all decisions regarding school consolidations appear to come from “three board members and the superintendent.”



Bryant said consolidation plans bear a striking resemblance to the one defeated by voters in May’s school bond issue. Bryant said if high schools in Oak Hill, Mount Hope and Fayetteville are consolidated at the Oak Hill site, the building would house 1,300 students and have only 44 teaching stations, requiring teachers to share the same classrooms. He also pointed out that many students who attend Meadow Bridge High School already ride the bus an hour to get to school. Closing the school would add 22 miles over mountain roads to their commute.

- Marion County school buses will continue to cross into Taylor County to pick up students who attend school in Marion County. The Marion County Board of Education voted unanimously to keep the buses rolling after Taylor County school officials ordered Marion County to “cease and desist.” State Schools Superintendent David Stewart said Marion County is not violating statutes by allowing Taylor County students to ride from Taylor to Marion County. Marion County Superintendent Thomas Long said Marion County is not recruiting students. Taylor County plans to fight Marion County’s decision, according to the *Clarksburg Exponent*.

- Attorney Dan Hedges, who has spent the past 20 years trying to get more money for education in West Virginia, has filed a motion in Kanawha Circuit Court calling for Gov. Bob Wise to allocate “unencumbered” tobacco money to county schools systems, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*. Hedges and many county school officials say the state school funding formula does not provide enough money to operate successful schools. His recommendation would give schools an estimated \$30 million a year to help pay for teachers, service workers and transportation. Ohio Circuit Judge Arthur Recht will consider the motion in November.

- State School Board members will ask the Legislature to mandate 180 days of instruction time for students, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*. *The Gazette* said some board members plan to support a “substantial” pay raise for teachers to make the changes more palatable. Other State Board legislative priorities include eliminating the requirement that the state superintendent have a master’s degree in education administration and five years of school experience;

eliminating the \$146,000 cap on the state superintendent’s salary; and placing the Center for Professional Development under the state School Board.

- County school superintendents, reporting record student loss for the second year in a row, are questioning how they will be able to operate school systems at all if enrollments continue to drop, according to a report in *The Charleston Daily Mail*. The superintendents recommend changing the state school funding formula, which is based on the number of students.

- The Kanawha County Board of Education has scrapped plans to close Valley Grove Elementary and Cedar Grove Community School’s middle school program. Last month Superintendent Ron Duerring said the two school closings were necessary for the “mere survival of this school system.” But Duerring withdrew his recommendation after a majority of board members told him privately they opposed the plan, according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*.

- The state-controlled Lincoln County Board of Education plans to use eminent domain to take the Jones property in Hamlin for a new consolidated high school, according to *The Lincoln Journal*.

- Under threat of a lawsuit from property owners, all five members of the Putnam County Board of Education voted to stop trying to buy the Harmon property in Red House. Five months ago the Board signed a 180-day option to buy the property. If county voters had approved a \$35.8 million school bond, the board would have built a new school and consolidated Buffalo and Poca highs. Instead voters rejected the bond by a 3-1 margin, and the property owners said the contract was voided by that vote.

Hardy County . . .

would have included a community college, a National Guard post and a vocational-technical school.

The high school would have combined Moorefield and Petersburg high schools.

Grant County's school board approved the proposal by a 4-1 vote.

But Hardy County residents overwhelmingly

voiced opposition at two recent public hearings. The Hardy County Board voted 5-0 against the plan.

Superintendent Ron Whetzel said Hardy County residents expressed concern about how large the school would be.

They also wondered whether it might not be better to maintain and upgrade existing facilities.

SBA director Clacy Williams said the consolidation would have given students an 'amazing' curriculum.

Whetzel said the enhanced curriculum would have been attractive, but many of the classes that would have been added can be made available through distance learning.

Rural . . .

are not diverse enough.

"We're looking at busing and targeting the cost to kids and families, the consequences for children and families if they spend more than an hour on the bus," she said.

Tompkins said at this time, the national conversation about small schools is being carried out through the school within schools movement in urban areas, the charter school movement and, most recently, through the interest of the Gates Foundation in smaller schools.

The Gates Foundation has directed several million dollars to support the breakup of large urban schools, to finance new small schools and to fund networks of charter schools, Tompkins said.

"We have not been able to convince them to support networks of small rural schools, but we continue to work on that," Tompkins said.

Bluegrass . . .

encouraged Dean to start one at Duval.

She had no budget and no instruments, but Dean thought these things would come if students wanted to form a band. They met after school, located instruments and started to play.

One student said he would have quit school if not for the Band. Another said he had made friends for the first time and felt that he was a part of a family.

The president of the senior class said she had been writing songs since she was a child, but the only instrument she played was a clarinet.

Learning to play the



Dr. Stan Maynard was presented with Challenge WV's first annual "Meeting the Challenge Award" by Challenge Coordinator Linda Martin.

Hannan . . .

of student test scores in the state and had been repeatedly threatened with closure.

Stan Maynard said what is going on at Hannan is happening in schools across the nation.

Key components of the revival include teacher

training, community involvement, the leadership provided by a dedicated principal – and financial help through grants written by Barbara Maynard, whose work has given Hannan \$250,000.

"I think there is frustration in a lot of schools because they don't have resources," Barbara Maynard said. "They don't have resources and don't know where to get them."

Now in their third year of working with the school, the Maynards have seen improvement in every area. Student test scores are the best in Mason County.

But Stan Maynard says the greatest evidence to him that "something quality is happening at Hannan" is where students are opting to attend high school.

"Mason County has open enrollment and before we started, most of the Ashton Elementary students went to Point Pleasant High School. Now 80 percent of 6th graders have decided they want to go to Hannan," he said.

acoustic guitar allowed her to sing her songs.

Peggy Dean said the project worked because she knew all the students. She had taught them eighth grade science.

"I wouldn't have been able to do it in a large school," she said. "That's why it's so important that we keep schools like Duval."

The Duval Bluegrass Band has CDs for sale for \$10 and tapes for \$8. Please send a check or money order to Peggy Dean, 970 Middle Creek Road, Hamlin, WV 25523.

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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