



The

Challenge



November 2003

SBA set to dole out \$200 million

The West Virginia School Building Authority is making preparations to distribute \$200 million in school construction funds from the proceeds of a bond sale.

Over a two-day period in mid-November, representatives from 44 of West Virginia's 55 county boards of education were given 10 minutes each to try to convince School Building Authority members of the worthiness of their respective projects.

During its quarterly meeting on December 15, 2003, the School Building Authority will announce

the winners of the cash.

This \$200 million distribution will be the most the School Building Authority has ever given away at one time, since it was established 14 years ago. The previous record was \$136 million, which was distributed in 1994. Normally, the agency has about \$50 to \$60 million to distribute each year.

Profits from the state's lottery system are pledged to repay the bonds.

Only 11 counties did not submit requests for a share of the money. Those counties were Boone, Doddridge, Gilmer, Greenbrier, Monroe,

Morgan, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Roane and Tyler.

Mingo County has asked for \$22.7 million to build a new consolidated high school in that county. The Mingo County Board of Education, which only recently was released from State Department of Education control, plans to consolidate the county's five high schools into two. The consolidation there is scheduled to take place in two phases. In the first phase, Burch, Matewan and Williamson high schools

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Challenge WV grows again...



Challenge West Virginia has expanded again with the addition of a new chapter in Nicholas County. Above, Challenge Coordinator Linda Martin presents the founding members with their chapter certificate. The Nicholas County Chapter is headed by Challenge WV Fellow Robin Kelly.

Consolidation issue plays in election

The school consolidation issue in West Virginia is poised to play a significant role in the upcoming elections.

Residents of Lincoln County have taken the lead in the effort to push the issue to the forefront of the upcoming campaigns.

In early November, a group of Lincoln Countians, who are fighting consolidation in their county, issued a challenge to gubernatorial candidate Lloyd Jackson.

The group wants Jackson to

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This 'n that from around the state

- Challenge West Virginia is working on a new publication about school consolidation in West Virginia. The booklet, entitled *A Decade of Consolidation: Where are the Savings?* is authored by Cynthia Reeves. In the publication, Reeves examines the false promises from state and local education officials that the closure of no less than 424 schools, since 1989, would save state taxpayers tons of money. The publication is expected to be available after the holidays.



- An unanticipated result of all of those school closures has been the abandonment of most of the closed buildings. While many have been converted to other uses, the vast majority of them sit idle as inviting targets from vandalism. In Mingo County, 22 schools have been closed and six of those are huge targets for vandals. The State Board of Education plans to ask the State Legislature for funding to eradicate the buildings. Another three schools in Kanawha County adorn the state's list of the abandoned school buildings in the worst shape. Those three schools are High Lawn Elementary School in St. Albans, Clendenin Middle School and DuPont Junior High School. The High Lawn building was recently sold by the Kanawha County Board of Education. School Building Authority Director Clacy Williams told the State BOE he believes state money should be used to build schools rather than tear them down.

- The Roane County Board of Education is narrowing down locations for a new Spencer Middle School. A site selection committee working for the board has recommended four sites, which the committee believes to be suitable for the school. The project is in its early stages, but the board is planning to fund construction through an SBA grant and a local bond issue. The project will now be turned over to architects to determine whether the sites are suitable for the building.

- Four counties approved excess levies during November. Voters in Wyoming, Mason, Logan and Mingo counties approved the levies by wide margins. In Wyoming County, the excess levy received 83 percent of the vote. Only a little less than 1,200 voters turned out for the election, wherein they approved a \$4.5 million annual excess levy for the next five years. In Logan County, voters approved a five-year, \$29.5 million levy, by a vote of 2,087 to 688. Mingo County's levy will provide \$5.8 million per year over the next five years. The Mason County levy is worth \$4.7 million per year for four

years.

- Another excess levy election is set for December 6, in Upshur County. That levy will raise approximately \$1.8 million per year for five years, if passed.

- The Jefferson County Board of Education has contracted with a private consultant to perform an audit on the school system. The audit is to cover the school system's personnel. The consultant's mission will be to identify

all jobs within the school system and the duties of each job and person in the position. The audit will cost \$27.50 per hour, limited to no more than 2,000 hours.

- A "superintendent's interpretation" on state education law from Dr. David Stewart, State Superintendent of Schools, has advised the Taylor County Board of Education that it is exempt from having to hold any school closure hearings on the consolidation of Hepzibah Elementary School and Pruntytown Elementary School, because the closure was submitted to the voters of the county in the form of the approval of a bond levy. The voters approved a bond issue there in April 2003.

- McDowell County Superintendent Dr. Mark Manchin has decided to hold three public hearings on actions he wishes to take pertaining to school closures and consolidations in that county. McDowell is currently under state control and Manchin was placed in his current position by the State Superintendent of Schools. McDowell County is the site of another school consolidation battleground. Residents there have fought Manchin's plans through the filing of lawsuits and the presentation of feasible alternatives to Manchin's closure plans. So far, their fight has been to no avail. Two hearings will be held on December 15 at 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. at Gary Elementary School, while the third is set for December 16 at 6 p.m. at Kimball Elementary School.

- Floodwaters in Lincoln County wiped-out Griffithsville Elementary School recently. Students will be temporarily housed at Duval High School until portable classrooms can be erected for them. Lincoln County officials estimate the loss will be well over \$1 million.

- State Department of Education officials have announced that more than 25 percent of the state's teachers and over 40 percent of the state's principals are eligible to retire in the next five years.

SBA

will be combined into a "Mingo South" high school at the cost of more than \$22.7 million. In the second phase, the remaining schools will be combined into a "Mingo North" high school.

The Eastern Panhandle county of Jefferson has requested \$19 million to fund the construction of a new high school and the renovation of an existing high school building. The total estimated cost of this project is more than \$48 million. The Jefferson County BOE was awarded a \$6 million grant from the W.Va. Economic Development Grant Committee. That grant also comes from the proceeds of a bond sale, the repayment of which is likewise secured by profits from the lottery system. Jeffer-

son County expects to fund the remaining amounts through a local bond issue. Jefferson County Superintendent of Schools Steven Nichols told the Associated Press he's confident the bond issue will be approved by voters in Jefferson County. "We will pass a bond in May," Nichols told the AP. "If it fails in May, we'll try it in June. If it fails in June, we'll try it in July. It will pass."

Monongalia County has asked for \$12 million to help with the construction of a new University High School. That county recently passed a bond levy, which contained a local match for the requested amount.

Mason County has made a request for \$13.4 million to consolidate Point Pleasant Middle School with Point Pleas-

ant High School. The resulting school would hold grades seven through 12.

Logan County is asking for \$16 million for the construction of a new consolidated high school across county lines. The Logan proposal calls for the new school to hold students from Chapmanville High School in Logan County and Harts High School in Lincoln County. This is the second straight year that Logan has made this proposal. A bond issue proposal, which contained \$5 million for this project, was defeated by Logan County voters earlier this year.

A request for \$15 million was entered by the Wood County Board of Education. It plans to renovate, but not consolidate three of the county's high schools.

Hancock County has requested \$22 million for use in constructing a new school to consolidate Oak Glen and Weir high schools.

The Mineral County Board of Education is asking for \$12 million to build a new middle school at Keyser.

Kanawha wants \$12.2 million for a new middle school located at Sissonville.

Raleigh County has asked for a grant of \$10.6 million for use in renovations at a number of schools around the county.

State officials recently announced that bond rating services have upgraded the School Building Authority's rating on the 1994 bond issue.

No announcement has been made concerning the new bond ratings.

ELECTION

return to his native Lincoln County for one week and ride school buses so he can see what it's like for Lincoln County school children.

Jackson has long been a proponent of school consolidation, which causes school children to endure long bus rides from their communities to schools elsewhere. Many children in West Virginia have been documented as having bus rides up to two hours each way.

"What we would like

him to do is to come to Lincoln County for one week and ride a school bus for four hours every day, which is the amount of time lots of our kids will be on the bus," said Ramey, the leader of Challenge West Virginia's efforts in Lincoln County. "I think it's only right he ride those buses at least one week to give us an educated answer — are long bus rides conducive to learning?"

"Lloyd Jackson's actions have forced many of our children to commit to a four-hour round trip bus ride each day just to

get to and from school — twice the state guidelines and four times greater than the time elementary students are supposed to be on a school bus," said Carol Smith, president of the Lincoln County Board of Education.

It was recently revealed Jackson has moved out of Lincoln County. Jackson said his move was so his children can receive better educations. One of Jackson's children attends George Washington High School in Charleston and the other attends an out-of-state boarding school.

Jackson is backing the W.Va. Department of Education's plan to consolidate all high schools in Lincoln County into one.

Jackson's representatives say the group's complaint should be directed to the W.Va. Board of Education. Ironically, Jackson resigned from the W.Va. Board of Education so he could focus his time on running for governor.

Prior to his stint on the BOE, Jackson was the chairman of the W.Va. Senate's Education Committee.



Challenge West Virginia

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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 the Mountain State 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.

We Support Small Schools!

Challenge West Virginia County Contacts

Braxton County

Sue Clifton
(304) 765-2994

Calhoun County

Eric Rogers
(304) 655-7134
rpeskid@yahoo.com

Clay County

Marge Bragg
(304) 286-2655
ijram98@hotmail.com

Fayette County

Carolyn Arritt
(304) 484-7919
Carritt-McCune@citynet.net

Harrison County

Paul Hamrick
(304) 622-56645
LITCCHC@aol.com

Jefferson County

Paul Burke
(304) 876-2227
NumbersInstitute@juno.com

Lincoln County

Thomas Ramey
(304) 855-3930
tprameyvw@hotmail.com

Logan County

Chris Stratton
(304) 752-9348
cstratton@loganbanner.com

Marshall County

Frank Longwell
(304) 232-1093

Mason County

Bill Reedel
(304) 675-2067
rr9546@dragonbbs.com

McDowell County

Marsha Timpson
(304) 875-3418
marshatimpson@hotmail.com

Mingo County

Mike Carter
(304) 426-4226
hiecc@hotmail.com

Monongalia County

Jon Frist
(304) 292-9599
jon.frist@us.army.mil

Morgan County

Andy Andryshak
(304) 947-5664
andy.peace@frontiernet.net

Nicholas County

Robin Kelly
(304) 649-5932
RocknBirdy@hotmail.com

Preston County

Jana Freeman
(304) 735-3411
Janaf11@hotmail.com

Putnam County

Tim McCoy
(304) 586-9823
tmccoy@bna.com

Raleigh County

Lorelei Scarbro
(304) 854-1016
candlelight29@aol.com

Ritchie County

Patty Deak
(304) 869-3462
pdeak@dot.state.wv.us

Webster County

Cindy Miller
(304) 493-6369
KCACMiller@juno.com

At-Large

Bob Henry Baber
(304) 846-6644
wvpoet@richwoodwv.com

Challenge WV Coordinator

Linda Martin
(304) 744-5916
LBM94@aol.com

Send Questions or comments to
Chris Stratton
cstratton@loganbanner.com