



The Challenge



November 2004

"No Cost Busing Bill" has high expectations during Manchin's term

Governor-elect Joe Manchin underscored the importance of education during his successful campaign and leaders are hoping he's serious. Manchin campaigned hard on education issues, thumping Lloyd Jackson in the primary. Jackson had been one of the state's principal architects of education policy and school consolidation.

Manchin has proposed to maximize technology, to protect small, community schools and to establish a West Virginia Teacher Corps -- a loan forgiveness program for college students who pursue degrees in shortage areas such as math, science, vocational education, special education and speech therapy.

Manchin will be asked to support



their salaries. While superintendents, principals and others in leadership positions have received some pay raises over the last five years, teachers have not, according to teacher union president Judy Hale.

Hale said teachers can cross the state line and, in some cases, earn

Challenge WVs "No Cost Busing Bill," which will effectively halt years of school consolidation and long bus rides.

Teachers are asking for an overdue increase in

\$20,000 more a year. "We can't staff our schools in math, foreign languages, reading, science and other critical areas."

"I think Manchin will be a real plus," said Tom Lange of the West Virginia Education Association. "He knows education is a critical component to the vitality of the state."

House Speaker Bob Kiss, D-Raleigh, said delegates next session will consider the state formula funding schools, transportation issues, the instructional term and libraries.

Manchin has said education will be a "central value" of his administration, noting that education is "key to our economic well-being."

Mezzatesta and wife plead no contest to faking documents



Lou have agreed to plead no contest to a misdemeanor charge that they allegedly altered or destroyed legislative computer records.

After blaming staffers, Mezzatesta appears to have been a party to the creation of a fake letter which supported his position regarding alleged double dipping.

Facing a Kanawha County grand jury indictment, former House Education Committee Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta and his wife Mary

House investigators determined that Mezzatesta and his wife took part in an elaborate scheme to fend off allegations that Mezzatesta lied to Kanawha Prosecutor Mike Clifford, House Speaker Bob Kiss and the state Ethics Commission.

Mezzatesta was removed from chairmanship of the House Education Committee, after which he lost his bid for re-election in Hampshire County.

"This is another example of a corrupt, unethical West Virginia politician who got a slap on the wrist, and the taxpayers again take it on the chin," said Tifney Terry, co-director of West Virginia Wants to Know, a group that has filed a separate ethics complaint against

Mezzatesta.

Mezzatesta is recovering from prostate cancer.

During the Mezzatesta investigation, Kanawha Prosecutor Mike Clifford said he discovered more than 80 pornographic photographs on the House office computer of Mezzatesta's longtime lawyer, Richard Lindroth.

Lindroth also serves as Kiss' lawyer at the House, and he represented Mezzatesta during an ethics investigation earlier this year. The downloaded files display teen girls in graphic sex acts, said Clifford, who released the disk to the media.

No laws were violated in downloading pornographic files.

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This 'n that from around the state

• PROMISE'S PROMISE -

Despite some positive accomplishments, Dr. Ed Welch of the University of Charleston, said there are problems with the promise of Promise scholarships. The scholarship is keeping the most successful high school students attending WV colleges, with some of them remaining in the state. He says the program is not keeping up with inflation, placing many of the students in financial risk. Another problem, most of the students cannot find employment in the state.



• SCHOOL CLOSINGS PENDING IN FAYETTE - Fayette County

is still in the midst of consolidation battles. Public hearings regarding school closures are now being held with a board vote scheduled for December 16. Superintendent Helen Whitehair has proposed closing Montgomery Middle School and Gauley Bridge High School, saying Gauley Bridge and older Montgomery students should be moved to Valley High School in Smithers.

Phil O'Dell, vice president for Citizens for Equal Education says "We would be a good school, if they would leave us alone." Because school officials have tried to close the school for more than 30 years, O'Dell said the school is being short-changed. "There are a million studies that point out what a bad idea it is to close small schools," he said. "If it closes, our students will have longer bus rides. Longer bus rides mean lower grades."

Since 1984-85 Fayette County has closed 14 elementary schools, a special education school, a CEC school and one middle school. In one earlier battle, the school board voted to close five schools, but a citizen's groups took the case to court because of violations of the open meetings law. The school closures were stopped.

In a second case, a judge ruled that two board members were ineligible to serve because they also held seats on the public service district boards.

• STATE NEEDS MATH WAKE-UP CALL -

Senate Education Committee chairman Robert Plymale says he is concerned about math skills in public education. He wants an eighth grade end-of-year algebra exam to force public schools to improve math instruction. He said educators need a wake-up call.

Fewer than seven in ten students in West Virginia are proficient in math and 30 percent of college freshmen in West Virginia are enrolled in remedial math courses. State schools Superintendent Dave Stewart says he is very aware of the problem.

• PANHANDLE WANTS CHANGES IN FUNDING FORMULA -

Eastern Panhandle legislators say West Virginia needs to change the way it funds schools so counties with growing enrollment don't have to beg for money for the students they serve.

Senator John Unger of Berkeley County says he expects a bipartisan committee of legislators to be formed to examine the issue and introduce a bill by 2006.

Under West Virginia's school funding formula, counties get money based on how many children were enrolled there in the second month of the previous school year. For example, the budget for the current school year was set according to enrollment in October 2003.

Unger says that gives a budget cushion to counties with declining enrollment, but causes problems for counties with increasing enrollment.

In the confusing world of testing and rating schools, one of the state's most progressive schools was not recognized as an exemplary school.

• HEALTH AND MEDICATION BURDEN RESTS WITH SCHOOL NURSES -

The health care burden in schools is falling to nurses. There is one nurse for every 1,500 students in kindergarten through seventh grade. The national recommendation is one nurse per every 750.

Recently the Board of Examiners for Registered Professional Nurses urged the state to update its policy or risk the licenses of its school nurses.

About half the counties have adopted a plan requiring a doctor's order for every drug. The state adopted a compromise policy in April. It allows secretaries and others who take online training to give over-the-counter drugs. It also gives high school students permission to carry over-the-counter medication.

Students in kindergarten through eighth grade still have to obtain medication from the principal, teacher or other designee. Policies differ from county to county.

• WISE REAPPOINTS HADEN -

Governor Wise has reappointed Priscilla Haden to a 12-year term on the state Board of Education. Wise first appointed Haden, a Republican, to the nine-member board on November Fourth, 2002, to fill an unexpired term.

Haden's reappointment must be confirmed by the state Senate. Haden says she's delighted the governor has faith and trust in her. Haden is a Charleston resident and widow of the late U-S District Judge Charles Haden the Second.

• FELLOWS MEET FOR WORKSHOPS -

Challenge WV Fellow, Jana Freeman hosted a School Finance and Budget Workshop October 29 in Aurora, Preston County for Northern, WV Fellows. Jerry Johnson presented information and handouts. Attending were Paul Burke, Paul Hamrick, Arvin Harsh, Peggy Savage, Brenda Stonebraker, Jana Freeman, Linda Martin and several community members.

A workshop for Southern, WV Fellows was held November 5th at Covenant House, Charleston. Those attending were Robin Kelly, Cindy Miller, Amelia Anderson, Carolyn Arritt, Darrell Hagley, Thomas Ramey, Eric Rogers, Dianne Weaver and Linda Martin.

Several topics were discussed, including, auditing v. evaluating, budgeting and policy, information sources, implementation and monitoring. Other workshops will be scheduled for 2005.

Mon County bus drivers go deer hunting

Morgantown's Dominion Post reported that ten school buses were left parked when 21 school bus drivers didn't show up for work on the first day of deer season. Students had to find their own way to school. Irv Scheutzner, Mon County Schools transportation director, attributed the situation mainly to drivers taking off for hunting.

Mon County has not adopted a one-week-off for deer season and Thanksgiving holiday.

The number of buses left stranded dropped to six the following day.

"Parent Jenny Dinsmore said she had to take time off from work Monday to drive her daughter to North Elementary School and pick her up that after-

noon. On Tuesday morning, her daughter again waited in vain for a bus," reported the paper.

Regular drivers scheduled their time-off early for deer season, depending on substitutes to fill the gap. The substitute drivers did not show.

Lincoln students subject to regional consolidation

Students from Harts High School in Lincoln County will soon be attending Chapmanville High School in Logan County.

School board members argued whether the issue was a result of regional consolidation.

Following a joint meeting of the Lincoln-Logan boards, Carol Smith, Lincoln board president said "I think if we're going to consolidate two schools, there should have been a committee between both schools and a new name."

"I don't think the Harts kids have ever received a fair shake in Lincoln County. I hope and pray that if they do come to Logan County that Logan County will give them a fair shake because they do deserve that," she said.

Most high school consolidations in West Virginia receive a new name, often neutral to the two areas. Logan County School Board President Don Steele was adamant that the name will not be changed. "We're not moving Chapmanville High School," Steele said. "It's Chapmanville High School or Chapmanville Regional School. That's the

Logan County Board's decision."

"We're inviting those kids to come here," said Chapmanville resident Roy Mills. "They don't have to come to Chapmanville," saying it is not school consolidation. Harts resident Shirley Ramey said "It's forced consolidation by whatever name."

Lincoln Superintendent of Schools William Grizzell said Chapmanville is not closing their school. "They're not changing anything. They're accepting the students from Harts. If they don't want to come here, they can go to the new school in Hamlin (Lincoln County)."

Harts residents have opposed the consolidation of their school, which would require a long bus ride to Hamlin, requiring some students to be on a bus for over one-and-one-half hour.

"We're not closing Chapmanville High School," Logan board member Bob Wolfe said. "We're building a new school for the citizens of Logan County. We were building a school whether Harts comes or not. We were elected to take care of Logan County children."

State's most prestigious school left behind

George Washington High School churns out some of the highest test scores in the state. They get accepted at Ivy League colleges and consistently win National Merit scholarships, including eight this year.

The prestigious public high school hasn't made the cut three out of the past four years because of slightly missing NCLB criteria. George Washington Principal Jim Vickers said "it's time for the state to overhaul the exemplary rating program."

"It appears the recognition program in this state tries to eliminate schools that should be recognized," Vickers said. "Recognition should be for academic excellence. Our school is arguably the top academic high school in the state."

This year only 29 West Virginia schools received the state's highest mark — down from 57 last year and 77 in 2002. Most counties failed to comply with NCLB standards. Schools receive exemplary status based on achievement test results, attendance, dropout rates and writing exam scores. Schools that miss any one of the standards don't make the cut.

Bush administration cutting Pell Grant funds

Many West Virginia college students will soon be losing their Pell grants or see them cut, after changes were made by congressional Republicans to the federal budget bill.

West Virginia has 35,000 students who depend on Pell — about 40 percent of all full-time college students in the state.

The cuts will mostly hit students

from families that earn \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year.

Attempts were made to cut Pell grants last year, an effort by the White House.

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission is analyzing students' financial information now, according to Dan Crockett, director of student and educational services.

About 100,000 students nationwide are expected to lose it entirely, with about 1.2 million students getting grants cut, but the current measure will kick hundreds of thousands of students off eligibility.

Sen. Jon Corzine, D-New Jersey said "We need to expand opportunity in this country, not relegate it to only those who can afford it...I call on the president to rescind the rule..."

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.



Challenge West Virginia

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