



The

Challenge

October 2001



Legislative body hears from Challenge

Challenge WV's Linda Martin testified in September at an interim meeting of the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability.

In asking support for

Challenge WV's bill which would limit the time children spend on school buses, Martin told the senators and delegates that 20 years of research is clear. "The smaller the school, the

higher the achievement level of students," she said.

"Unfortunately," she said, "West Virginia is going in the opposite direction. The School Building Authority is telling counties that unless they consolidate schools, they won't get money.

"The SBA is focusing on one thing, economies of scale. This is a business concept that says if you can make 10,000 widgets in one place instead of in several places, you can make them cheaper. I say to you this is not the cornerstone on

which we should base how we put money into education," she said.

She reminded legislators that Challenge's bill calls for giving equal weight to all seven criteria used to determine whether counties will receive funding for facilities.

"If the seven criteria were followed, growth counties would be getting the money they need to build the schools they need," she said.

Delegate John Doyle, who represents the Eastern

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Challenge WV to sponsor small schools conference

What's happening with small schools, on both a national and state level, will be the focus of Challenge WV's annual fall conference, "Our Communities, Our Schools."

The conference will be held Saturday, October 13, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Days Inn in Flatwoods

Dr. Rachel Tompkins, president of the Rural School and Community Trust, will be the keynote speaker.

Dr. Stan Maynard of Marshall University and Dr. Barbara Maynard of the RESA II (Regional Education Service Agency) will present a program about their work with Hannan High School in Mason County.

Challenge WV is a statewide organization committed to maintaining and improving small com-



Dr. Rachel Tompkins

munity schools. The organization is funded in part by The Rural Trust.

The Rural Trust works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 33 states to strengthen relationships between rural schools and communities, engage students in community-based public work and to support more active community

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Putnam Board member speaks out against SBA

Putnam County School Board member Patty Thornton said she isn't happy with state rules that only give money to large schools.

"We have been held hostage by the School Building Authority for long enough," Thornton said,

The Putnam County Board plans to ask the State School Building Authority to help fund a \$3.3 million expansion and renovation project at Hurricane High School, the county's largest

school.

The action came after SBA director Clacy Williams told school officials his agency is unlikely to give money to help rebuild a burned-down middle school in the county unless schools are consolidated.

Williams said Putnam County should close Winfield, Poca and Buffalo high schools and construct a combined high school for

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This 'n that from around the state

• Kanawha County parents are protesting the proposed closings of Valley Grove Elementary and Cedar Grove Community School's middle school program. They told Board members they don't want their kids sitting in portable classrooms, they don't want them spending long hours on school buses and they don't care whether their schools meet "economies of scale," according to a report in *The Charleston Gazette*.

"Our school is a school where teachers know all the children by name," said Michael White, whose two

children attend Valley Grove. "I guess that's because we're below economy of scale."

"Squat down and look at 11-, 12- and 13-year-olds," said Clayton Young, a Cedar Grove Community School parent, "and tell them that you're going to be putting them on a bus for 45 minutes or an hour, and tell them this is the right thing for them."

School Board members voted to hold public hearings in November to discuss whether to close the schools.



• *The Logan Banner* reports that former Superintendent Ray Woolsey was given yearly pay raises during a four-year term from 2000 to 2004, prior to a

buy-out of Woolsey's contract. *The Banner* quoted an attorney who works with another school system as saying that giving county superintendents yearly pay raises over a multi-year contract term does not comply with state law.

• Fayette County Challenge WV Fellow Carolyn Arritt told members of the Fayette County Board of Education their actions were "tearing little children apart" and advised Superintendent Harry Hoffer that he "should not take out your anger on a five-year-old."

The County has vacillated on whether to allow kindergarten students from Summers County to attend school at Meadow Bridge, which sits on the Fayette-Summers county line. At the September 17 meeting, a decision was made to split the Summers County students between Meadow Bridge and Danese elementaries. At the same meeting Board member Steve Pilato called for Hoffer's resignation. The superintendent was hired in July.

• For the fifth straight year, West Virginia high school students scored worse on the ACT college placement test than their peers across the nation, according to an ACT official.

• The McDowell County Board of Education in September voted to enact a spending freeze on everything except "absolute basic necessities," according to a report in *The Welch Daily News*.

The State Department of Education asks:

Did You Know?

West Virginia's classes have become smaller, and despite recent consolidations, a larger percentage of the state's students attend smaller schools than their counterparts across the nation.

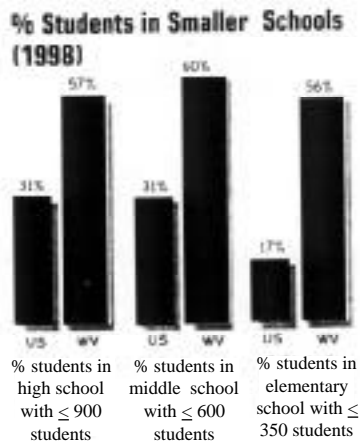


Chart and statement taken from the State Department of Education's web site

Challenge WV asks:

Did You Know?

The State Department of Education and the School Building Authority have pushed local school boards to close 324 of those small schools during the past ten years. One hundred fifty-one more small schools are on the chopping block for the next ten years.

Interim committee . . .

Panhandle region, said Jefferson County voters turned down a \$39 million bond issue because the state would only provide \$4 million as an incentive.

Doyle said Jefferson County would have built a new high school and taken some students from the existing consolidated high school.

He said he felt the SBA really didn't want to fund the proposal. "It would have meant breaking up a consolidated high school and that conflicts with their ideology," he said.

Martin said the state has closed 324 schools

during the past decade and plans to close 151 more during the next ten years. Eighty percent of the proposed closings are elementary schools.

"We have five year olds on buses for an hour. In the current law, the guidelines have recommended busing times of 30 minutes for elementary students, 45 for middle school students and one hour for high school students.

"We need to change that language so those times are law. Those guidelines are totally ignored," she said.

Sen. Donna Boley said she lives an hour and a half from the capitol, the same amount of time some handicapped children are on buses in her county.

"I would hate to make that trip every day. I think it's one of the bad things we've done to children. It's a heavy-handed message the SBA sends to school boards. Do it our way or not at all."

Martin said the state spent \$130 million last year for school transportation, more than any other state in the United States. "When we look at consolidating schools, we don't look at the cost of transporting those children," she said.

She noted that major cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Chicago are breaking down large schools into "Schools within Schools."

"Those states have learned that smaller is

better. Here in West Virginia we continue to go down the road of consolidation."

Delegate Jerry Mezzatesta, chairman of the House Education Committee, argued that some schools must close because of declining population and because small schools can't offer necessary classes.

Martin responded that those decisions should be made at the local level. "People need to have a voice in saying what is best for their children," she said.

"We have a community that is saying to their board of education, 'if you will give us \$25,000, we will raise \$250,000 to build a new school for this community.'

"This is the kind of support there is for schools and education in the state. People are voting against bonds because that is the only way they can say no to what the SBA is doing."

Conference . . .

participation in schooling.

Dr. Tompkins previously served as extension professor for community, economic and workforce development in the West Virginia University Extension Service in Morgantown.

At Hannan High School, Stan and Barbara Maynard are working in cooperation with the Mason County Board of Education, the staff of the high school and the school's parents and supporting community to create a model of a good,

small rural school.

Just two years into the process, the Hannan Project is showing remarkable results, with student test scores and community involvement on the rise.

The Duval High School Bluegrass Club, under the direction of Peggy Dean, also will perform at the conference.

Duval is a small high school in Lincoln County.

Everyone who is interested in small, community schools is invited to attend the conference. Cost, which includes a lunch meal, is \$10 per person.

Those who wish to attend are encouraged to register by contacting Linda Martin, 801 Gordon Drive, Charleston, WV 25503, phone 304-744-5916, email LBM94@aol.com.

Putnam . . .

the three.

He suggested building an addition at Hurricane High School and splitting the high school population between Hurricane and the new school, creating two schools of about 1,300 students.

Each school would have about 200 more students than Hurricane High School now has.

Williams said the school board could spend the \$4.9 million insurance settlement for George

Washington Middle School on any project it wants to – not necessarily the rebuilding of the school that burned.

Thorton said residents should march on Charleston during the next legislative session to change the way schools are funded.

Putnam County voters in May rejected by a three-to-one margin a bond proposal that would have funded the consolidation of Buffalo and Poca High Schools.

Correction
In the September issue of The Challenge, we misspelled the name of Hannan High School. We regret the error.

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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