



# The Challenge



October 2004

## "No Cost Busing Bill"

### Challenge Initiative; Martin Says Community Voices Need To Be Heard

Challenge West Virginia coordinator Linda Martin told a large group attending Challenge's annual conference in Charleston that Challenge is working hard to make the voices of community people heard about the future of children.

Much of the day-long conference, held at the Embassy Suites, was focused on a statement given by Dr. Larry Parsons of Mason County - "We must meet the needs of children, not the wants of adults."

Martin said "The State Board continues to close our small schools and make our children endure long bus rides," saying Challenge is supporting the "No Cost Busing Bill."

"It is a simple bill that will put legal limits on the amount of time kids can spend on a bus," said Martin, 30 minutes for elementary, 45



Future first lady Gayle Manchin (left) and Challenge WV's Linda Martin (right) discuss consolidation issues at October conference "Our Communities, Our Schools"

minutes for middle school and 60 minutes for high school students.

Such legislation will likely prevent more school closings.

Martin said state education officials have misrepresented the measure by telling county school sys-

tems that such a move would cost millions of dollars.

Martin expressed concern about democratic principles being violated by state education officials, overruling decisions made by local elected officials. Challenge is assisting in taking constitutional cases to the Supreme Court.

"When Mingo County schools elected anti-consolidation members, the State Board of Education started trying to take over the system," she said. "Basic democratic principals are at stake," with Challenge fighting to ensure the rights of communities and elected officials.

Lincoln County currently has a suit before the West Virginia Supreme Court.

West Virginia has closed 325  
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## Stop Weighing The Pig And Feed It



"I'm a shameless advocate for rural communities," said Marty Strange, Policy Director of the Rural Schools and Community

Trust, speaking before the Challenge conference in Charleston in October.

Strange was critical of No

Child Left Behind, creating schools that are "treadmills to despair." He said we need to "Stop weighing the pig and feed it."

"Rural communities matter and should not be left behind," he said, with urban policy makers not trusting ordinary people in rural communities to run their schools.

Strange applauded Challenge West Virginia's work toward effecting change "Speaking the truth to power.

Your group is recognized nationwide."

"Challenge is changing the political climate and stripping the veneer," he said. "It is no longer easy to close community schools because of Challenge."

"The state's political leaders are finally listening," he said.

"Do children have the right to have a good education close to their homes?" he asked. "Small schools in

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Visit Challenge West Virginia at [www.challengewv.org](http://www.challengewv.org)

# This 'n that from around the state

• **Thanks to Challenge West Virginia** and the Christian Appalachian Project for the 3-ring binders that were delivered to the students and teachers at Ivydale and Lize-more Elementary and Clay Middle Schools.

These new binders were part of a



around the state by Challenge to low income and rural schools.

This is the fourth time that Challenge has been able to distribute school supplies and books to the children of Clay County.

• **Mezzatesta Defeated In Hampshire** - Some West Virginia newspapers are reporting that state residents may be getting their fill of school consolidation, while reporting the defeat of former House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta and other politicians during 2004.

Mezzatesta was accused of improperly securing money for the Hampshire school board. Teacher Ruth Rowan defeated Mezzatesta 54 percent to 46 percent. He has been challenged over a series of alleged violations regarding his role as head of the education committee, including the faking of memos.

Speaker Bob Kiss removed him from his long-time



tractor trailer load of donated supplies that were distributed

recent high school graduates have to take basic math and English in order to make it into regular classes.

Lorraine Anderson with Marshall University says students every in WV high school should be prepared for regular college classes, but way too many aren't.

Shepherd University representative Rachelle Davis says it's a double-edged sword. She says because they want students to succeed they offer the remedial classes, but they'd rather not offer them because students should be ready for a university curriculum.

• **Mingo Passing On 18.5 Million From State** - The Mingo County Board of Education is passing on \$18.5 million in funding from the state. That money would have gone to consolidated four of the county's five high schools into one

The make-up of the Mingo County School Board changed and so did the board's mind about consolidation. A majority of the board does not want to see Burch, Matewan, Williamson and eventually Gilbert high schools merge.

Issues related to the county's school consolidation could be moving toward a court battle.

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## Larry Parsons And Carol Smith Recognized

A 35-year education veteran and Superintendent of Mason County Schools Dr. Larry Parsons was given a special award for his dedicated service to his community and the children of Mason County. The award was presented by Challenge fellow Darrell Hagley. Dr. Parsons spearheaded a local effort against school consolidation and helped the county pass a levy to maintain community-based schools, handing back \$14 million to the School Building Authority.

Lincoln County fellow Thomas Ramey presented Carol Smith, President of the Lincoln County Board of Education, a special award for her "strong and steady voice for small schools." Ramey said Smith led the board and county residents to stand up against consolidation in a county that has been taken over by the state system. When there was no money for the fight, she "helped with hot dog sales and fund-raisers."

*Additional Photo Page 3.*



Thomas Ramey presenting to Carol Smith.

## Busing Bill

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schools with plans to close an additional 151. About 80% are elementary schools.

Martin told the conference that "The results are in, they're just being denied," about community-based schools displaying better achievement, particularly low-income students.

She also spoke about focus on test scores, "teaching to the test" and much of the new federal dollars going to top-end administration, leaving teacher's salaries behind.

"West Virginia spends more money on busing students than any other state," Martin said. "

"We need students who do more than learn how to pass standardized tests, but to become fully developed human beings," she concluded.

## A Staggering 53 Counties Fail NCLB Progress

Dr. Lorna Jimerson of Vermont told Challenge fellows that children deserve an education beyond passing a test, reviewing aspects of No Child Left Behind.

Dr. Jimerson echoed a number of other presenters who believe that NCLB could have a hidden agenda to dismantle the public education system.

She said "A staggering 53 counties in West Virginia just failed to

meet the average yearly progress."

Jimerson said while NCLB goals appear to be good, the sanctions are punitive and are unattainable.

Dr. Jimerson has a doctorate in Education Leadership and Policy from the University of Vermont and is past president of the Vermont School Board's Association and is currently doing research for the Rural School and Community Trust.

## Art Is Not A Cherry On The Top Of Life

"That which is in children is what education should inspire," said Jude Binder, the artistic director and teacher of one of West Virginia's leading centers for the arts, located in Calhoun County.

Binder made a compelling presentation before Challenge's confer-

ence, saying "How can we rob children of their uniqueness?" expressing concern that children are no longer being nourished in school systems that teach to the test.

Life is about nourishment. "You are nourished when you are part of a community," she said.

## Larry Parsons And Carol Smith Recognized



Darrell Hagley presenting to Dr. Larry Parsons.

## Weighing

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small communities have better results. They can develop a window to the world."

Strange said West Virginia's educational leaders must accept they are fourth in the nation on spending and 39th in achievement.

## This 'n that

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• **Block Scheduling Issues Raised** - Representatives from five Kanawha County high schools told the school board that block scheduling is a better learning environment for students and teachers. Some said the extra time means more can be accomplished, especially in classes with labs. Some said it better prepares students for a college environment. Some counties have been moving away from block scheduling.

## 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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