



‘Crucial time’ for education Wise Supports ‘Small And Rural Schools’

By Gov. Bob Wise

See *State Of The State* address articles on pages 2 and 6

West Virginia is at a crucial time in the education field. Economic pressures, new federal mandates and the rapidly changing demands of work and higher education are combining to challenge the way we think about public education. While we have many obstacles to overcome, our hard work on behalf of the children of West Virginia has prepared us to make the Mountain State the Education State in the 21st century.

We are encouraging our teachers to better themselves. Recently, I honored 63 West Virginia educators who attained National Board Certification. I am pleased that many local school boards have chosen to join the state in rewarding these teachers who surpass these highest of standards. Ultimately, the quality of our teachers affects educational outcomes more than any other single factor.

We are supporting small and rural schools. These schools not only provide a quality education, but are centers of civic activity in the communities they serve. I am committed to working with the state Board of Education, county boards of education, community leaders and parents to ensure that education is a part of the community, not separate from it. I am pleased we are pursuing a grant from

the Gates Foundation to study successful small, rural schools throughout the South. We will apply these lessons to our schools and continue to provide a modern, quality education in a community-based setting.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act has presented us with opportunities and challenges. We welcome the higher standards and accountability and have become one of a few states to meet federal deadlines for implementation of plans to meet our goals. But Congress and the President have failed to fund the mandates at the promised level, and not every child will be served across America. I will continue to work with the education community in pursuit of federal support of America’s children.

Teachers are using technology in new and exciting ways. Today, a lesson from a teacher in Charleston, or London, can be beamed into a classroom in rural West Virginia. The traditional barriers of mountains, rivers and weather are being bridged with broadband technology and distance learning. We can bring the world to West Virginia.

The PROMISE Scholarship has changed education at every level. It has motivated students and given educators new input on what best prepares young people for college. Parents now can concentrate on helping their sons and daughters with homework rather

See **CRUCIAL TIME** on page 5

Overview

STATS

Day of Session:	3
Days Remaining:	57
Bills Introduced (not including House Carryover Bills):	221
Education Bills (WVSBA Count):	57

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QUOTE

“But, as we build new schools, we must preserve rural and small-town schools and sustain the contributions they make to their communities.” — Gov. Bob Wise in his Jan. 14 State of the State address.

Conference Taking Shape

Plans for the W. Va. School Boards Association’s 2004 Winter Conference are taking shape. The WC will be held Feb. 13/14 in Charleston (Marriott Hotel).

Education-critic-turned-supporter Jamie Vollmer is the keynote speaker. He will address conference attendees on Friday, Feb. 13., beginning at 1:00 p.m. The program, which is being finalized, will include a Friday evening session wherein invited gubernatorial candidates are invited to participate in a panel discussion. Other general sessions relate to the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Three workshops also will be held, one relating to the program the Monongalia County Board of Education used for passage of a \$50 million bond issue in 2003. Another program relates to a faith-based initiative in Parkersburg, and a third workshop relates to the future school facilities policy.

Although arrangements aren’t settled yet, plans are being made for a reception-type event which WVSBA would host with the W.Va. Association of School Administrators. The final event would require approval from the WVSBA and WVASA governing boards.

For more information, contact WVSBA at 304.346.0571.

Wise cites 'revolution in education'

Six Major Education Proposals Unveiled

Gov. Bob Wise, in addressing educational issues in his 2004 State of the State address, cited what he termed a 'revolution in education in West Virginia' during the past three years.

Citing accomplishments such as "a real 180-days" instruction for students, The Safe Schools Helpline, "improved teacher salaries," and the removal of the cap on increment pay for teachers having more than 29 years' service, Wise outlined these education goals in his address:

- The "Teacher Empowerment Act." Although not going into detail, the governor said the purpose of this legislation was to "reduce paperwork required of teachers, guidance counselors and school administrators."
- Creation of a "statewide system of tracking dangerous students so that they can't simply enroll in another school after they have been expelled."
- A \$1,000 increase—to \$3,500—for teachers who complete National Board of Professional Teacher Standards certification.
- Continuation of the Sales Tax Holiday.
- Making moneys available for construction of "small schools and rural districts."
- Providing a limit on bus transportation times for students (elementary school students).

The school construction proposal and bus travel times received the greatest amount of discussion, some observers seeing the former as a "shift" in the state's school facilities approach of the last 14 years. While the latter proposal was applauded, the press quoted

some school administrators and other officials as saying the idea actually could increase county transportation costs, especially in rural or sparsely populated counties.

House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire) has said he doesn't plan on taking up the bus travel times bill this year.

Salaries was another issue attracting comment, with Tom Lange, president of the W. Va. Education Association, saying, "We are continuing to decline as a competitive market for teachers"—a reference to the governor not including teacher pay increases as part of his education package (except for persons completing NBPTS certification.)

W.Va. Federation of Teachers President Judy Hale's comments in regard to the state taking a "lump sum payment" of national tobacco settlement moneys may portend where teacher organizations propose to find moneys for a raise: "We deserve a cut of that money just as much as judges or police officers," Hale told the *Charleston Daily Mail*.

Wise proposes to use the lump sum payment to make some small pension programs solvent.

One education-related proposal was greeted with surprise—Wise's proposal to create a commission to study local governance in the 21st Century.

Although the governor's legislation has been introduced, copies of the proposals were not available in the House or Senate Journal Rooms, but are expected to be next week.

This was Wise's fourth State of the State address. It lasted a little over 50 minutes.

The Legislature provides county board of education members, state policymakers, school administrators, and others information, opinion and commentary regarding West Virginia legislative issues. This publication does not necessarily reflect the official views, opinions or policies of the WVSBA, unless specifically stated.

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2004 Legislative Calendar

✓ **First Day:** January 14, 2004: First day of session. (WV Const. Art. VI, §18).

Twentieth Day: February 2, 2004: Submission of Legislative Rule-Making Review bills due. (WV Code §29A-3-12).

Forty-first Day: February 23, 2004: Last day to introduce bills in Senate. Does not apply to originating or supplementary appropriation bills. (Senate Rule 14) Does not apply to Senate resolutions or concurrent resolutions.

Forty-fifth Day: February 27, 2004: Last day to introduce bills in House of Delegates. Does not apply to originating or supplementary appropriation bills. (House Rule 91a).

Forty-seventh Day: February 29, 2004: Bills due out of committees in house of origin to ensure three full days for readings.

Fiftieth Day: March 3, 2004: Last day to consider bill on third reading in house of origin. Does not include budget or supplementary appropriation bills. (Joint Rule 5b).

Sixtieth Day: March 13, 2004: Adjournment at Midnight.

Committees Okay Seven Bills This Week

The House and Senate education committees didn't waste any time getting to work. The HEC, in two meetings lasting about 45 minutes total, approved five bills, including two bills carried over from the 2003 session.

The first measure adopted would create an office of personnel within the W.Va. Department of Education. The purpose of this proposal is to provide county school administrators, school employees and the public a centralized means by which to receive responses to school employment-related questions.

The measure, which died in the state Senate last year, would lessen the amount of dollars county boards spend on employment-related attorney fees, according to HEC Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire).

The bill doesn't have a fiscal note because it wouldn't require employment of additional WVDE personnel, according to Mezzatesta.

The measure has these components. The office would:

- Develop a "uniform standard of employment" for all 55 counties;
- Advise counties in personnel matters; and,
- "Provide information to the public and school personnel regarding questions relating to personnel issues such as...hiring, employment, seniority and certification."

According to the proposal, the office would be "liable for the accuracy of any information or advice provided..."

Retirees

HB2268 would limit the employment of retired teachers as substitutes to those instances where no other teacher who holds proper certification and training in the shortage area. The HEC added a provision saying that when a retired teacher is employed as a substitute to fill a vacant position, the county board must continue to post the position until it is filled by a regularly employed teacher.

Additionally, the bill defines "area of critical need and shortage" as an area of "certification and training in which the number of available substitute teachers in the county who hold certification and training in that area and who are not retired is insufficient to meet the projected need for substitute teachers."

A final provision would give prospective teachers who intend to pursue teaching degrees in areas of "critical need and shortage" priorities for receipt of Underwood/Smith teacher scholarships.

Coaches

HB4039 would remove a provision of current law requiring coaching positions held by non-educators who coach athletic and other extracurricular activities to be posted each year. Individuals holding these positions must have been employed in the same position for at least three consecutive years, however. According to Mezzatesta, the practical effect of the legislation is to bar currently-employed certified professional educators from being able to annually apply for coaching/extracurricular positions held by non-educators for the past three years.

Vacancies

HB4040 would change current law so that the provisions of W.Va. Code §18A-2-12 (professional employee evaluations) and §18A-4-7a (employment, promotion and transfer of professional personnel; seniority) to be consistent. The bill revises §18A-4-7a (6) of the criteria for making decisions affecting the filling of vacancies if one or more permanently-employed instructional personnel apply

for a classroom teaching position. The criteria would be an overall rating of 'satisfactory' on the previous two evaluations, rather than over the previous two years as current Code states. According to Mezzatesta, the bill addresses a recent Level IV grievance decision.

Superintendent Bonding

HB4045 would require each county board to submit evidence to the State Superintendent of Schools that the county superintendent has posted bond with good security, as required under §6-2-10. According to committee testimony, one county superintendent was not bonded last year. Mezzatesta told the committee that a person who is elected county superintendent but who cannot post bond would not be able to assume the position. Reasons for not being able to post bond include prior conviction for criminal activity, according to committee testimony.

In regard to the coaches bill, Mezzatesta said a county board "would not be prohibited" from posting a non-educator coaching position, based on unsatisfactory evaluations even if the person meets the "three-year" bill provision.

In other committee deliberations, Mezzatesta announced the creation of two subcommittees, one of which will examine "school calendar-related" issues, and the other to examine paperwork issues. That subcommittee will meet Jan. 21, and is headed by HEC Vice Chairman Larry Williams (D-Preston).

W. Va. School Boards Association Executive Director Howard M. O'Cull, Ed.D., and Martha Dean, Ed.D., executive director of the W.Va. Association of School Administrators, have participated in preliminary discussions with Williams' subcommittee members. The subcommittee is expected to consider a recent report regarding paperwork completed last fall by a taskforce involving principals, some HEC members and WVDE personnel.

Mezzatesta also asked Steve Paine, deputy state superintendent of schools, for the state department to provide fiscal notes for the governor's education bills. The chairman said he would be discussing these bills in a Monday meeting with committee Democrats and Republicans.

SEC

In its meeting Thursday (Jan. 15), the Senate Education Committee originated and passed a bill that would eliminate the mandatory order of activities on Instructional Support and Enhancement (ISE) days created under last year's **SB522**.

Plymale said teachers and principals in his district expressed frustration regarding the inflexibility of ISE day activities.

Sen. Larry Edgell (D-Wetzel), SEC vice chairman, said the first two hour block within the days for personal instruction with students and parents was problematic because buses don't run on such days and students are apt to sleep in. Moving the time for consultations to the afternoon could help, stated Edgell. The committee also passed out a higher education bill.

Interim Reports

In other legislative developments, the period for interim meetings concluded with the Joint Committee on Education receiving reports from its respective subcommittees. The reports included overviews of the dialogue within the subcommittees over the interim and only one recommendation relating to K-12 was made. Edu-

See **EDUCATION COMMITTEES** on page 5

HEC/State Board Hold Joint-Meeting

By Jason B. Keeling

Day one (Jan. 14) of the Legislature's 2004 regular session included a joint-meeting between the House Education Committee and the W.Va. Board of Education, with members voicing their concerns regarding the future of public education and discussing some positives.

Alignment Urged

House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire) said more joint-meetings would be conducted and urged efforts to simplify administrative duties. He said the "layers of bureaucracy" that have been created at both the state and federal levels are negatively affecting morale among teachers, principals, and superintendents. Alignment of state education policy with the federal No Child Left Behind Act should also be a top priority, according to Mezzatesta.

The W.Va. Department of Education was compiling a side-by-side comparison of state laws and federal requirements, said State Schools Superintendent David Stewart, adding that the state board was in the process of conducting a policy-review that could lead to the repeal of up to 20 of the state's 135 education policies.

Additional policy modifications have been suggested by a taskforce of administrators facilitated by the WVDE. A teacher taskforce would soon undertake the same initiative, according to Steve Paine, deputy state schools superintendent.

Improving staff development was also at the top of the state board's agenda, said member Barbara Fish (Wood). Mezzatesta said allowing more staff development efforts at the local district level would be positive.

As the governor's public education budget proposal was discussed, Del. David Perry (D-Fayette) said some cutting the education department's budget could be necessary, asking board members what entities they saw as "sacred calves" that should be exempted from reductions.

WVBE President Sandra Chapman (Ohio) said the Office of Education Performance Audits was critical to the state's accountability system, with Fish adding that Regional Education Service Agencies were equally important.

Mezzatesta acknowledged that RESAs were moving in the direction intended within their 2002 restructuring under **HB4319**.

Stewart said funding school aid formula moneys for counties was of utmost importance.

W.Va. Education Association representative Perry Bryant said local share education funding was increasing while the state's share has not.

Mezzatesta said he was prepared to vote for increased taxes if necessary to sufficiently fund education given a pending \$120 million state budget deficit, urging legislators to be prepared for such.

In response to a question from WVBE member Paul Morris (Kanawha), Mezzatesta said the Legislature would not consider consolidating county school districts, but a subcommittee would be formed to study the issue, particularly focusing on "administrative links" that could be established.

Del. Brady Paxton (D-Putnam) said he would like to see a cost/benefit analysis of school consolidation, adding that small schools may facilitate a more personable environment among students and

staff.

In terms of the school calendar, Mezzatesta indicated that another subcommittee would study the matter, with efforts being made to end the first semester before winter break, given that instruction time after the break can be less productive, he said.

After a five year effort, the state's graduation rate is at parity with the national average, according to Stewart. He said West Virginia's many successes were acknowledged within *Education Week's* 2004 "Quality Counts" evaluation of state education systems.

According to Paine, West Virginia ranked first in the nation when combining grades of the five areas assessed by "Quality Counts".

U.S. Department of Education Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Ken Meyer was on hand to address issues surrounding NCLB. Meyer said the characterization of NCLB as an unfunded mandate was inaccurate, saying that the moneys doled to states from the federal government are optional grants. He said the law's sanctions mostly require the *transfer* of the appropriated federal dollars among services when standards are not met, adding that many of the services required were not utilized by all students in failing schools.

He said the law was not perfect but established greater accountability, specifically in terms of the federal moneys appropriated for impoverished students.

Mezzatesta said he was concerned that student groups identified as low-performing were becoming targets within their schools. Meyer responded that in many cases communities are reaching out to such students and that public relations were critical to help parents understand the law's intent.

Meyer said concerns regarding special education student testing could be addressed in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Paine said the state was also exploring potential leeway for testing such students.

Mezzatesta also said he was concerned that the court system in West Virginia could again be engaged as a result of the dual accountability created as a result of NCLB.

State Board Criticized

The state board was criticized by WVEA President Tom Lange and Perry for its decision not to join a potential suit against the federal government regarding NCLB. Board member Priscilla Haden (Kanawha) and Chapman said the state board is responsible for the students of West Virginia's schools, not to engage in federal level political wrangling.

In the Jan. 13 Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability meeting, Senate Education Chairman Robert Plymale (D-Wayne) commented to Meyer that NCLB was dictating education at the state level. He said he was particularly upset given the differences between state accountability plans and felt the Bush administration had not been assessable to hear state concerns (See page 5 for more on that meeting.).

— *Keeling has been WVSBA executive assistant since 2001.*

The Legislature

WATCH FOR THE LATEST ON EDUCATION LEGISLATION.

Angry Legislators Blast NCLB at Interim Meeting

An unscheduled interim committee appearance by Ken Meyer, a deputy assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Education, gave legislators the opportunity Tuesday to vent their frustrations over the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

“There is significant misunderstanding, misapprehension, and misinformation about No Child Left Behind,” said Meyer. It didn’t take long for members of the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability to raise their apprehensions with the 2002 law.

Senate Education Chairman Robert Plymale, D-Wayne, called the program an unfunded mandate that gives federal government undue influence over how states run their public schools.

He said the feds should not be able to dictate state educational policy, considering that federal funding accounts for only 8 percent of the state’s public education budget.

“We’ve well documented our problems and we’re getting no help from the federal government,” Plymale said.

Meyer maintained that No Child Left Behind is adequately funded, noting that West Virginia has received \$153 million to implement the law.

House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta, D-Hampshire, objected to a recent federal release that indicated West Virginia had failed to appropriate \$32 million of its federal No Child Left Behind funding.

“That is a lie. That is a bare-faced lie,” said Mezzatesta, who said federal authorities knew that money had to be set aside as a draw-down for teacher salaries.

He said states are also struggling with conflicting federal mandates for teaching special needs students.

Under individual education plans, schools are required to educate special needs students at their level of ability, while No Child Left Behind requires those students to be tested at their age level, regardless of their level of ability.

“That’s an unfair mandate to say, you’re going to teach them at this level, and we’re going to test them at this level,” Mezzatesta said.

Meyer said No Child Left Behind is actually a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, intended to improve student performance.

Despite that initiative, he said that today, two of every three fourth-graders cannot read on their grade level, seven of 10 innercity students cannot read at a basic level, and one-third of all college freshmen require remedial courses.

He said those figures show why federal government needed to place more accountability on the states for education.

“No one here is against No Child Left Behind,” Mezzatesta said. “It’s the implementation of it, the funding of it.”

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—Used by Permission of Charleston Gazette. Parts of the article relating to higher education were omitted.

EDUCATION COMMITTEES

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education Subcommittee C: Public Education recommended the WVDE require specialized staff development with existing appropriations for school counselors, possibly through RESAs or the Center for Professional Development. That subcommittee made no recommendations on the school calendar, the compulsory school attendance age, access to library services, the grievance procedure, or school transportation.

NOTE: For space purposes, listing of bill sponsors has been omitted.

CRUCIAL TIME

continued from page 1

than worry about how they will pay tuition. Our institutions of higher learning are filling with bright, motivated West Virginia students from every background.

Making West Virginia better for our children is hard work; however, we must take inspiration from the successes our efforts have brought as we renew our commitment to the future of our children and grandchildren.

—Wise, a Democrat, is the state’s 33rd governor. Prior to being elected governor, he served nine terms as a U.S. Representative from West Virginia.

Wisdom

‘What does it tell you?’

“Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. “Watson, look up and tell me what you see.”

Watson replied, “I see millions and millions of stars.”

“And what does that tell you?” Holmes asked.

Watson pondered for a minute. “Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is about 3:15 a.m. Theologically, I can see God is all powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Why, what does it tell *you*?”

Holmes was silent for a moment, then spoke: “Someone has stolen our tent.” —Anonymous.

'Bureaucracy' cuts proposed

Wise Touts Accomplishments/2004 Goals

By Martha Dean, Ed.D.

Prior to the State of the State address I spent a few minutes chatting with some of the Delegates. Among those with whom I spoke there appeared to be a lack of optimism for the current session of the Legislature. After all, it is an election year, tax collections are down, we are facing a deficit budget, there will be no new funds and the economy hasn't turned around yet in West Virginia.

On the other hand, the Governor presented a positive outlook for this year's session as well as many examples about how West Virginia is prosperous and has improved during the first three years of his governorship. He compared West Virginia to several other states who have had to tighten their belts over the last few years and pointed out that other states have had to "reduce public education programs" in their efforts to have balanced budgets. He did not say that West Virginia would not cut education.

What I heard him say is that his budget cuts have exempted the State Police and Department of Corrections; he would not cut programs for senior citizens; and the school aid formula has grown by \$39 million but we will have to sacrifice some of the funding for the "bureaucracy."

Until we analyze his budget bill and other bills which were presented via e-mail to the members of the Legislature Wednesday evening, we don't know exactly how the "bureaucracy" may be sacrificed. Regarding the budget he is presenting, he did say that we can't use yesterday's priorities to balance this year's budget. Again, this is a statement that seems to have additional meaning yet to be discovered.

Lynch: 'Product' of public schools

Governor Wise received several minutes of applause when he came to the podium. But, Jessica Lynch appeared to be the one who was most heralded by the audience. She was honored first among those who had been invited as examples of who in West Virginia are exemplifying what we are about and care about. She is truly a product of our public schools who has captured the respect and admiration of our citizens. In his wrap-up, the Governor referred to her as a "future kindergarten teacher".

In introducing his education agenda, the Governor credited his administration for leading three years of gain in education. *Education Week* has just come out with their annual review of education in the states and West Virginia has been named one of the top performers in the country in education. He said we now have a "real" 180-days of instruction each year, presumably referring to the changes made to require counties to make up snow days by converting non-instructional days to instructional.

He also mentioned that the safety hot line is available twenty-four hours per day. Then he said that it is time to make it easier for teachers to do their jobs. He is introducing legislation, named the "teacher empowerment act" that promises to reduce unnecessary paper work for teachers and principals. He proposes raising the bonus for teachers who are national board certified to \$3500.

Rural and small schools

He continued by saying that we must preserve rural and small town schools. It appears that he wishes to accomplish this by changing the rules regarding acquisition of School Building Authority of West Virginia funds to make it easier to fund small schools and rural school districts for school construction projects. An added caveat was that he believes that no elementary school student should ride more than 30 minutes to school on a school bus. This issue has been troubling to me since the governor first mentioned it. It is one thing to believe that small schools can be a positive part of an effective school system. However, it is something else to fund the necessary staff to deliver high quality instruction and the rich curriculum that is essential.

I believe that the consolidation that has occurred in West Virginia over the last couple of decades is as much a result of the inadequate school aid funding formula as it is the carrot of money for new schools if consolidation were part of the package. Class sizes of 10 to 15 students are really nice. However, at best, the funding formula only provides for an average class size of 19. Personnel needs in small schools are much more critical than the niceties of a new school.

It will also be interesting to see how the 30-minute bus ride issue is dealt with by the Legislature. In our rural state, people live many places where they have to drive 30 minutes to get to the main road, let alone a school. I believe it is time that we collect some accurate data to determine exactly how many students are currently on the bus exorbitant amounts of time.

The report done by the *Charleston Gazette* a year or so ago reported how many buses were on the road for excessive numbers of minutes. It did not relay to the public exactly how many students have extremely long bus rides.

Higher education

Higher education breathed a sigh of relief as the governor explained that they would only be cut 2.5 percent instead of 9 percent this year. This comes to them after they have survived the cut of last year *and* have the highest enrollment numbers ever, according to Governor Wise. Moreover, one of his proposals is to support a higher education bond issue to build more classrooms in the state.

With a broad brush, I would summarize the State of the State as an effort by Gov. Wise to tell the people of West Virginia that his administration has accomplished a lot in three years. He wants to continue to work hard to make West Virginia a better place for all West Virginians during his final year in office. One thing that mildly surprised me was his proposal to establish a commission to study what local government should look like in the 21st century. He declared that little changes had occurred in local government in the 140 years West Virginia has been a state and that he surmised that, in different times, we need a different type of local governance. He did not, however, give any definition to "local" that I heard.

—Dean is executive director of the state Association of School Administrators.

Small central offices: **Gilmer Superintendent Cites Challenges**

By Howard M. O’Cull

One consequence of declining student enrollments—a factor in 34 West Virginia Counties—is an “accompanying” decrease in educational professional and service personnel positions funded through state school aid moneys, including administrative positions such as principals and central office administrators.

Based on West Virginia Department of Education figures, 10 counties—Gilmer, Ritchie, Doddridge, Tucker, Wirt, Pocahontas, Clay, Monroe, Summers and Calhoun—have four or fewer positions typically identified as central office administrative positions, positions such as superintendent, assistant superintendent, administrative assistant, director/manager of instructional programs, director/coordinator of support services, and treasurer/chief school business officer. The average for all counties is 7.66 such positions.

Given the above descriptor, let’s examine one county which has a small central office. Gilmer County, located in central West Virginia and home to Glenville State College, has 1,049 students. (For contrast, 20 schools in the state have more students.)

Superintendent Sue Waggoner admits her job is challenging due to limited administrative staff, pointing out difficulty in complying with state requirements for data and information. “Due to the limited number of [central office] administrators, it is difficult to monitor all of the programs and meet the timeline requirements,” she said.

Here’s other ways to illustrate Waggoner’s plight: she’s worked with a wheelchair-bound student once this year due to the unavailability of a substitute aide—her training is in special education—and she currently completes her own correspondence and much of the office correspondence.

Besides Gilmer County’s two administrative positions, as defined by the WVDE (superintendent and treasurer), the central office includes a part-time attendance officer (also serves as a half-time principal at Gilmer County High School), a receptionist who also works in the special education and Title I programs and a payroll/accounts payable supervisor.

Waggoner wishes things were different: “My thoughts on wanting the superintendency were to be able to make a difference in instructional matters. But, my time is spent in dealing with sports, facility repairs, overseeing a renovation project, mediating personnel issues, preparing for grievances, overseeing the special education program and meeting with parents on students’ individualized education plans [IEPs] or related matters, and riding various bus routes to resolve personnel and parental issues.”

She knows some things will have to change in the county, saying the county likely will “end up” with two schools—a PK-6 elementary school and a Grades 7-12 secondary school. (Voters rejected a plan to increase the county’s excess levy to keep four elementary facilities open.) The county, however, is counting on enrollment increases due to the opening of a federal prison. There’s also the possibility of enrolling additional pre-K students and of

greater partnering with Glenville State College. Waggoner also mentions the possibility of cross-county schools.

Waggoner’s situation is not unlike that in several small counties, a combination of a student-driven school funding formula and declining enrollments. Simply put, she sees further retrenchment unless the state economy improves or the Legislature changes school funding methodology.

Does it have to be this way? Here are some ways Gilmer and other counties could receive assistance:

1. Investigate cross-county school configurations. With the School Building Authority of West Virginia preparing to issue \$170 million in new bonds, let’s ensure that counties entering into these arrangements receive funding priority. Let’s resolve to address any legal hurdles.
2. The state has eight Regional Education Service Agencies. The Legislature should require these agencies, working with school boards, to develop a listing of positions that could be provided through regional collaboration. Simply put, it’s time for such collaboration.
3. Legislation enacted in 1989 allows counties to combine administrative positions. This certainly would benefit Gilmer and other counties such as Calhoun County, both of which share a vocational school.
4. Existing law allows teachers to assume some part-time administrative duties. Waggoner could expand upon this if dollars were available.
5. What about senior citizens or Glenville college students who could be paid to do central office clerical work and the like? Again, let’s examine prevailing school laws to give counties flexibility.

Small systems like Gilmer County are going to have to embrace some innovative, creative solutions if they are to survive. A bigger question, however, concerns the quality of education students in these counties receive vis-à-vis counties like Pleasants, Ohio, Berkeley and the like which have larger tax bases and student populations. Gilmer students have good test scores and the like, but let’s put the Legislature and state school board to work on solutions to Gilmer’s situation—a solution that benefits generations of West Virginia students.

—This article was included in *The Education Beat*, O’Cull’s weekly column sent to newspapers throughout West Virginia. The original piece was written in October 2003.

The Legislature

WATCH FOR THE LATEST ON EDUCATION LEGISLATION.

Active Bills

Senate

Senate Originating Bill 2 (to be assigned number). Eliminates the mandatory order of activities regarding Instructional Support and Enhancement Days. Originated in and passed Senate Education Committee 1/15/04. Referred to Senate floor.

House of Delegates

House Bill 2268 (carryover bill). Relates to employment of retired teachers as substitute teachers in “areas of critical need and shortage.” There are other provisions. House Education Committee adopted 1/15/04. Referred to House floor.

House Bill 2323 (carryover bill). Creates an office of personnel within the state Department of Education (using existing personnel). House Education Committee adopted 1/15/04. Referred to House Finance Committee (Second reference may be abrogated.)

House Bill 4039. Relates to contracts for non-educator athletic and extracurricular coaches. Would allow these individuals to continue coaching without position being posted yearly if serving in position for three or more consecutive years. Referred to full House. House Education Committee adopted 1/15/04. Referred to House floor.

House Bill 4040. Makes changes in statute relating to reference for overall rating of satisfactory on previous two years’ evaluations, making statutory change to “previous two evaluations.” House Education Committee adopted 1/15/04. Referred to House floor.

House Bill 4045. Requires state superintendent of schools to receive evidence that a county superintendent has given bond with good security pursuant to W. Va. Code §6-2-10.

Looking Back...

Gov. Gaston Caperton called for \$12 million in state lottery funds for school construction, as well as for pay raises for teachers and school service personnel in his Jan. 12, 1994, State of the State Address—Caperton’s sixth such speech. Caperton also called for an education “anti-crime package,” including making it a felony to possess a firearm within 500 feet of a school. (This legislation was the forerunner of the 1995 Safe Schools legislation.) Ending his discussion of education initiatives, Caperton said “education and jobs are the cornerstone to a better life in West Virginia...” In other developments, as reported in *The Legislature*, legislators predicted a ‘lite session.’ In association-related news, *The Legislature* reported that two WVSBA staff positions were being eliminated as part of a budgetary reduction measure, and that two other positions were being consolidated into an office manager position. (County membership subscription fees [dues] were reduced by 15 percent later that winter.)—*The Legislature* – Jan. 14, 1994.

WVSBA



On the Web at:
wvsba.org

Recent Readings: *Nickel and Dimed...*

Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2001) provides a riveting and timely investigation into an overlooked tragedy of the U.S. economy—that millions of Americans work hard at full-time jobs (sometimes two jobs) but can barely survive on the poverty-level wages. Ehrenreich, a successful author, took her “research” seriously, going “underground” to work several such jobs, including a month’s stint with Merry Maids in Maine, a restaurant waitress gig, and as a Wal-Mart associate at a store in the Minnesota. She asks us to consider our dependency on the underpaid labor of others who serve us, clean up after us, and staff many large retail outlets. The book

has proven controversial not only for these conclusions—it’s required reading for in-coming freshmen at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill—but for an aside that the author’s made about religion, namely that some Christians are eager to settle for a tamer Jesus than portrayed by the Gospels. By the way, Wal-Mart is the state’s largest non-governmental employer, according to the *Charleston Daily Mail*’s survey of businesses for 2003. Ehrenreich is author of 12 books and a frequent contributor to *Time*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation*.

—Howard M. O’Cull, Ed.D., W. Va. School Boards Association Executive Director.

MAKE PLANS NOW TO ATTEND

WV SBA's
**WINTER
CONFERENCE**

February 13/14
Charleston Marriott Hotel

Contact WVSBA Conference Registrar Shirley Davidson at sdavidson@wvsba.org or (304) 346-0571. The last day to make room reservations is Jan. 30.

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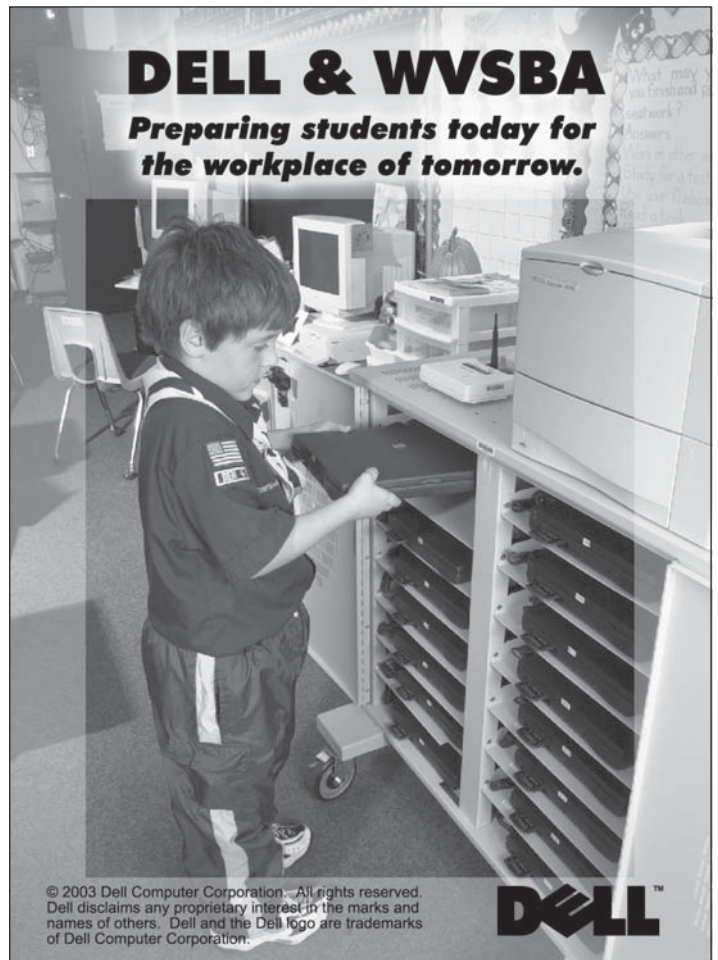
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Sound Bites

“Some say, ‘Let’s have business as usual.’ I say ‘The usual business has changed.’ We act based on the next generation—not the next election. We set a new standard, and we’re never going back. This will be a year of action...” – *Gov. Bob Wise in his Jan. 14 State of the State address.*

“The state board did not want to be involved in a partisan issue.” – *W.Va. Board of Education member Priscilla Haden (Kanawha) discussing the board’s decision last fall not to file suit against the federal No Child Left Behind Act.*

“We’ve well documented our problems and we’re getting no help from the federal government.” – *Senate Education Chairman Robert Playmale to a U.S. Dept. of Education director regarding NCLB.*

“This is a chance to be sure those who are responsible for money (county superintendents) are bonded.” – *Del. Stan Shaver (D-Preston) discussing a bill relating to superintendent bonding.*

“I will vote for a tax increase and urge all to do so if such is necessary to adequately fund education given the \$120 million [fiscal] gap.” – *House Education Chairman Jerry L. Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire)*

Various Legislative and Education Organizations are Invited to:

No Child Left Behind: An Open Forum

Jan. 21, 2004 – House of Delegates Chamber

2:30 p.m.

Includes presentations by W. Va. Congressional District, U.S. Secretary of Education’s Office, Education Associations/ Organizations

To confirm attendance contact Melinda Swagger at 304.340.3265.

“The one thing we all agree on is that no child should be left behind, and this is our opportunity to productively work together in order to find the best way to accomplish that goal.” – House Education Chairman Jerry Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire).

The Legislature

West Virginia School Boards Association
PO Box 1008
Charleston, WV 25324