



The Bridge

Volume 5, Issue 6

March, 2014



Important Dates

- March 3 WESTEST Practice Test Window Opens
- March 10 Board of Education Meets: BOE @ 6 p.m.
- March 11 WESTEST Tech Readiness Tests Held
- March 18 Young Writers Night: PBHS Aud. 6:00 p.m.
- March 24 Board of Education Meets: BOE @ 6 p.m.
- March 28 All-County Music at PBHS gym—7:00 p.m.
- April 4 End 3rd Nine-Weeks Grading Period
- April 11 Report Cards for 3rd 9-Weeks Distributed
- April 14 Board of Education Meets: BOE @ 6 p.m.
- April 15 BOE Reconvenes March 24th Meeting
- April 18 ISE Day: No School Students (Tutoring)
- April 21-25 Spring Break — Out of Calendar Days
- April 28 Board of Education Meets: BOE @ 6 p.m.
- April 29 Philippi Main Street Art Stroll—Code Blue
- May 13 Election Day—No School
- May 26 Memorial Day—No School

Hi Folks,

Wow, and to think I was glad January was over, and here we've been hit with even more snow days in February and March! It does make me rethink how much, or even if, I really do enjoy winter...oh well.

Winter sports are coming to a close and I want to thank all of our student-athletes, coaches and support staff for their commitment to the various programs. A special "thank you" goes out to our parents for all their sacrifices...many times they are the unsung heroes.

"Personnel Season" is over and, while no recommendations or decisions are ever made in haste or are personal in nature, I again want to thank everyone for their patience, understanding, and trust placed in the process and in those implementing that process. It is never an easy task having to inform someone of a RIF or transfer, but I do make it a point to visit and talk to folks face-to-face.

Now we are faced with working through the annual budget process. When it comes to the budget, we all have to understand that, factually stated, the school system, very much like all of us in our personal lives, simply cannot spend more than our revenues allow.

We have ongoing challenges of dwindling resources and rising operational costs that will greatly restrict how we function in the coming year and beyond, until the financial situation of the Board improves. I have always been straightforward with folks. Even before officially coming on board in 2011, having reviewed the financial situation of the system, I told folks it would not be long before we reached the tipping point, even using our savings account and reserves, or the so-called free fund balance, to balance the budget. **I'm being straightforward again now – we have reached that point.**

With that said, as always, my perspective has not changed; the glass is still half full. We will be looking outside the proverbial box with our thinking and will be reaching out for suggestions from you to help the system. I know that we have great people who are willing, no matter the challenge, to help make the glass even fuller. And we will! Again, my personal "Thank You" goes out to of all our great people.



Sincerely,

Remember The Value of Those Unused Leave Days

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Regardless of the retirement system to which school employees belong, and regardless of when they entered the system, it is wise for them to occasionally reflect upon the value of their unused leave. For many personnel, those unused days can be converted into increased retirement benefits in the forms of credited service or employer-paid insurance premiums. But, for all, those accumulated days provide a precious safety net and a dependable flow of income in cases of serious illness or injury that may require an extended absence of weeks, months or beyond. As a reminder, on the next two pages, you will find state policies and procedures related to the use of unused sick, annual or personal leave for employees of boards of education in West Virginia:

Public Employees who are members of the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) or the Teachers' Defined Contribution System (TDC), and who are current participants in the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA) insurance plan, may use unused sick, annual or personal leave for certain benefits upon retirement, as described below.

CONTRIBUTED SERVICE FOR RETIREMENT CREDIT

Members of the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) who are currently participating in the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA) plan may elect to use unused annual/vacation and/or sick leave towards an increase in retirement benefits, on the basis of two days of retirement service credit for each day of unused annual/vacation and/or sick leave. (This provision does not apply to full time higher education faculty members employed on an annual contract basis other than 12 months.) Such days will constitute additional service in the computation of the member's retirement annuity. The additional credited service cannot be used to meet initial eligibility for retirement criteria. Lump sum payments of annual/vacation leave cannot be used in the computation of retirement benefits under TRS.

Members of the Teachers' Defined Contribution (TDC) System cannot use unused sick, annual or sick leave to increase retirement benefits. For more information regarding the ability to convert unused sick, annual or personal leave to contributed service for retirement, contact the Consolidated Public Retirement Board (CPRB) at 304-558-3570 or on the web at:

<http://www.wvretirement.com/>.

EXTENDED EMPLOYER-PAID PEIA INSURANCE COVERAGE – MEMBERS OF THE TRS

Instead of using unused accrued sick, annual or personal leave at retirement to increase retirement benefits, members of the TRS who are current participants of PEIA at the time of retirement may elect to use unused leave to extend employer-paid premium coverage for PEIA insurance, however, unused leave cannot be used for both options.

The amount of the benefit depends on when the employee first began participating in the PEIA insurance plan.

Employees Who Began Participating Before July 1, 1988

For employees who elected to participate in the PEIA plan before July 1, 1988, and have been continuously covered by PEIA since that time, the extended employer-paid coverage is calculated as follows:

- 2 days of accrued leave = 100% of the premium for one month of single coverage
- 3 days of accrued leave = 100% of the premium for one month of family coverage

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Remember The Value of Those Unused Leave Days

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Employees Who Began Participating Between July 1, 1988 and June 30, 2001

For employees who elected to participate in the PEIA insurance plan after July 1, 1988 but before July 1, 2001, or had a lapse in coverage during this period, the extended employer-paid coverage is calculated as follows:

- 2 days of accrued leave = 50% of the premium for one month of single coverage
- 3 days of accrued leave = 50% of the premium for one month of family coverage

Employees Who Began Participating On or after July 1, 2001

For employees who elected to participate in the PEIA plan on or after July 1, 2001, or had a lapse in coverage since that date, they are not eligible for extended employer-paid insurance upon retirement.

EXTENDED EMPLOYER-PAID PEIA INSURANCE COVERAGE – MEMBERS OF THE TDC

Members of the TDC Plan who were hired during the period July 1, 1991 and June 30, 2001, and who have not had a lapse in coverage, may elect to use unused sick, annual or personal leave to extend employer paid insurance coverage upon retirement. July 1, 2001 is the date that the ability to use unused leave for extended employer-paid PEIA insurance coverage was terminated. The benefit is calculated as follows:

- 2 days of accrued leave = 50% of the premium for one month of single coverage
- 3 days of accrued leave = 50% of the premium for one month of family coverage

Members of the TDC who were hired during the period July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2005, the date that the TDC plan was closed to new members, cannot use unused leave for either benefit. For more information regarding the ability to convert unused sick, annual or personal leave to extended employer paid PEIA insurance coverage, contact the Public Employees Insurance (PEIA) at 304-558-7850 or on the web at: <http://www.peia.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.



School Artists, Poets to Participate in Art Stroll

Young artists and poets from Barbour County Schools will once again participate in the annual Art Stroll program, to be held in downtown Philippi on the evening of Tuesday, April 29. Sponsored by the Philippi Main Street organization, the free event features galleries of fine arts produced by talented local citizens at a variety of locations along Main Street. All schools have been invited to participate, with their students' artwork to be displayed at Code Blue and the Philippi Library. County Arts Coordinator, Elaine Benson, will organize the visual arts portion of the event, while county literacy coaches, Teresa Marsh and Shelley Short, will coordinate the elementary-middle poetry portion.

PB's Gene Hovatter Selected to 2014 Agriscience Academy

Barbour County Schools will be represented at the 2014 National Agriscience Teacher Ambassador Academy to be held from June 15-20 at Chesapeake Farms in Chestertown, Maryland.

The NATAA program is sponsored by DuPont and is managed by the National Association of Agricultural Educators. Gene Hovatter, agriculture teacher at the county Career-Technical Center was named to the academy in late-February. The NAAEE will cover all expenses and arrange all accommodations during the week.



Gene will be one of 50 participants who were selected from more than 200 applicants nationwide. Members of this exclusive team will become spokespersons on behalf of agriscience education and inquiry-based learning at the national, state and local levels. Each educator will be required to present at least two workshops at the national level and at least one at the state level.

Continuing Education Credit Notes

WV Code requires all employees to attain 18 hours of Continuing Education (CE) on an annual basis. For this year, the last CE day in the calendar has been repurposed to become a day of instruction for students. Because the CE day was removed from the calendar, it also removes the requirement that employees need to attain 6 hours of CE on their own time in order to take the last CE day off in compensation. Losing the last CE day in the calendar, however, does not affect the State Code requirement for all employees to attain 18 hours of CE.

Therefore, employees may count up to 6 hours of professional development that has been accumulated during normal work days, during normal work time and count it as Continuing Education. For more information about CE requirements for 2013-14, staff members may contact their supervisors or Jeff Kittle at the Board Office.

Barbour County and WV Embark Upon New TASC

For the first time in decades, West Virginia and Barbour County Schools will offer a new official high school equivalency assessment. The Mountain State joins New York, New Jersey, Nevada, Indiana and Wyoming in adopting the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) as its official statewide high school equivalency test, replacing the GED.

Described by State Department of Education officials as “more affordable and accessible” for U.S. adults who lack a high school diploma or equivalency, the new assessment now serves as West Virginia’s sole high school equivalency test for the state’s 6000 annual credential candidates. Cost was a strong factor in making the change, as West Virginia is one of only four states that offers high school equivalency testing at no charge to examinees.



The TASC battery includes assessments in English language arts (including reading and writing), math, science, and social studies. The new test also is designed to correspond more closely with the Common Core standards, which are being used in state public schools as part of a national measure of learning.

While the TASC has been approved for use statewide as of January of 2014, most school systems are in the process of making the transition from the GED and will offer the assessment beginning in late-winter or spring. Barbour County was recently certified as an official TASC test site and expects to schedule the first testing session at the Career-Technical Center within the next two months. For more information, interested citizens may contact the local CTEC at 304-457-4807.

— Odds 'N' Ends —

➤ **Math Field Day Re-Rescheduled:** Due to inclement weather, the 2014 Barbour County Math Field Day has once again been rescheduled, this time to Wednesday, March 12. The annual event will get underway at 4:00 p.m. in the commons area at Philip Barbour High School, with the awards program to begin in the auditorium at approximately 7:00 p.m. New student registrations will still be accepted for the competition through Friday, March 7.

➤ **School Breakfast Week:** During the week of March 3-7, schools across the country will celebrate National School Breakfast Week, part of National Nutrition Month. For activities, contests, plays and other ways to energize your school breakfast program, interested educators can visit the "Fuel Up to Play 60" website for some great ideas and information.

➤ **Are You an Aspiring Administrator?** The next session for educators who are interested in possibly joining the ranks of school administrators will be held on Tuesday, March 11, from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. in the LGI room at Philip Barbour High School. The rescheduled program is part of a series designed by Barbour County Schools to provide information and insights into the profession. The March 11 workshop will feature an attorney from a state law firm who will discuss perspectives related to managing legal issues, depositions and evidence. All current and future public school administrators, along with the curious, are cordially invited to attend.

➤ **Practice Test Window Dates:** The new WESTEST practice test window has been established as March 10 to June 11, 2014. In addition, the WESTEST technology readiness test at each school in Barbour County has been rescheduled for March 11th.

Community Foundation Grant to Aid Belington Traffic Flow

Barbour County Schools has received a 2014 grant from the Barbour County Community Foundation for the purchase and installation of 21 traffic signs



on the campus of Belington Elementary and Middle School to help organize and calm traffic on campus. For several years, concerns about the traffic flow and congestion on the campus of the two Belington schools have been expressed by bus operators, local law enforcement, school officials and parents and visitors.

Because of limited acreage and the fixed nature of the facilities and playgrounds, a team of local educators and citizens has determined that additions and revisions to traffic signage on campus is presently the most cost effective solution. The confusing and often hazardous conditions encountered by students, motorists and pedestrians have resulted in collisions and near-misses between vehicles and children, blockage of emergency and bus lanes, illegal parking and driver frustrations. With more parents and family members participating in the parent drop-off and pick-up option, the need for improvements in campus traffic flow and calming is essential. The school system has expressed appreciation to the Foundation and indicates that the new signage should be in place by the spring.

