



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Miles to Go Before We Sleep

Gayle Conelly Manchin, President
West Virginia Board of Education

Gayle Conelly Manchin was appointed to the West Virginia Board of Education in 2007 to serve a nine-year term ending in 2015. She was elected president in 2013.

Mrs. Manchin previously taught in Marion County schools and at Fairmont State University. She also was the director of the University's first Community Service Learning Program.

She served as West Virginia's first lady, from 2005 to 2010, and as a commissioner on the West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service; the chair of the Governor's Healthy Lifestyles Coalition and the West Virginia Citizen's Council on Children and Families; and as co-chair of the Governor's 21st Century Jobs Cabinet and the Intellectual Infrastructure of Vision Shared.

She is an emeritus board member for The Education Alliance and past president of the Vandalia Rotary Club of Charleston and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).

She attended West Virginia University, where she attained her bachelor's degree in language arts and education and a master's degree in reading. She also holds a second master's degree in educational technology leadership from Salem International University.

It is indeed an exciting time to be living in West Virginia. Our state, which has always "powered" this country through its natural resources, is again coming to the forefront with the rich Marcellus Shale vein running deep within our core. The external beauty and historic ruggedness of West Virginia captured the hearts and minds of Boy Scouts International, which built its new "home" right here in the Mountain State, for all to enjoy and to learn for a century to come. Entrepreneurs and visionaries alike are being drawn to our diverse landscape as broadband now connects our highest peaks and deepest valleys, and West Virginia strategically sits within 500 miles, a one-day's drive, of two-thirds of this country's major population and economic density.

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Consider this million-dollar question: "What is the defining element that ensures the progress and sustainability of all that West Virginia affords to our people and the global arena?"

Unequivocally, the answer is **education**. However, it cannot be the industrial education process that defined our state and nation for the past two centuries, nor should it be. As we explore the far reaches of outer space and the deepest depths of our oceans, so must our "system of learning" stretch our imagination and ingenuity to its limits.

Look at the following words and capture the first "picture" that comes to mind:

- School building
- Teacher
- Classroom
- Textbook
- Standardized test
- Homework
- Hallowed halls of learning
- Ivory towers
- 180 days

Now, look at the following terms and consider the first image that comes to mind:

- E-books
- Learning studios
- Professional directors of learning
- Facilitators of discovery
- Innovation labs
- Blended learning
- Competency-based evaluation
- Expeditionary schools
- Individualized learning
- Digital learning

Simply put, we cannot "tweak" the first set of images to fit the second list. We have removed the walls, the stigmas and the structures that bind creativity. What we do have is terminology that challenges the Baby Boomers and excites the millennials. It forces us to stretch beyond boxes we have functioned in for many generations – but no more.

As the current president of the West Virginia Board of Education, I am a fortunate member of a team of highly skilled, diverse individuals who have taken on the exciting opportunities described above. We are embarking on a journey that will empower the children of West Virginia



to grow, develop, compete and succeed in life. We will hold our students, our parents, our faculties and administrations, our communities, and ultimately ourselves, accountable for the strides we make. The policies we develop for the Department of Education to implement will expect new thinking, new delivery and a demand for excellence for each of us, at every level.

Through the joint efforts of the Governor, the Legislature, the Department of Education and the State Board, we have raised the bar through legislation and policy revision. The State Board is engaged in the process of a national search for a state superintendent; we have raised our standards, goals and assessments to assure West Virginians that our children will read at grade level by the end of third grade, that we will graduate young people college- and/or career-ready, and that our students at all ages will be able to compete with children across this country and the world.

We are leading the nation in our efforts and successes in early childhood learning and opportunities – critically important and not finished. We are committed to a systemic professional development for teachers and to teacher education programs that promote “learning communities.” Our students will be engaged in complex exercises that ask questions, analyze research and create solutions through team collaboration and projects that allow inquiring minds to develop and continue learning throughout life.

Because we cannot do this in isolation, we have forged partnerships with capacity building entities who realize the importance of consistency and sustainability. Forward-thinking technology initiatives like Project 24, Globaloria, STEM Robotics and virtual learning, engage our young people’s minds in exciting opportunities to experiment, create and navigate. It is not

all about money, but it is about passion and persistence to provide every student the capability to learn and the ability to accomplish his or her dreams.

Yes, it is indeed an exciting time to live in West Virginia – the “stars have aligned” to bring all entities together, focused on our most important resource – our children! Together, we can be a model of governance for rural states across this country in propelling education headlong into the 21st century. I feel comfortable in speaking collectively for the West Virginia State Board of Education when I say in the words of Robert Frost:

*“But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.”* 