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Group focus: Education

STEPUP goal is to shed light on concerns of the Eastern Panhandle

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CHARLES TOWN — Improving student learning by advocating for qualified teachers and adequate resources is one of the primary goals of a statewide group based in the Eastern Panhandle.

STEPUP, which stands for Stop Teachers Exodus Please Unite Parents, is a nonprofit, issue-oriented organization designed to unite parents and concerned citizens to improve the quality of education for students in public schools across West Virginia.

The group accomplishes this by gaining a better understanding of the challenges in education, and presenting those issues to fellow citizens.

STEPUP began out of an initiative of Sen. John Unger, D-Berkeley, and Delegate Bob Tabb, D-Jefferson, in 2007.

Unger said that the organization started as a grassroots operation made up of parents in Berkeley and Jefferson counties. The group was designed to empower parents and get them involved in the issues. The initiative, Unger said, is to get parents who are

outstanding leaders and advocates more involved.

"They're fighting the fight to bring attention to the exodus of teachers in the Eastern Panhandle," Unger said.

That, of course, has declined in the past couple years with higher gas prices and the slow housing market, Unger said.

"We're not competitive to surrounding areas in attracting and retaining teachers," Unger said.

Debbie Royalty, chairman of the board of directors of STEPUP, said the growth rate in the Eastern Panhandle has made it difficult to keep

Location	Number of Schools	Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers
Berkeley Co.	28	82.32%
Jefferson Co.	13	76.70%
Morgan Co.	8	89.66%
WVa.	900*	91.49%

Source: W.Va. Department of Education
* Figure is approximate.
Journal graphic by Allison Corbin

up with providing a good education, and that teachers years, is originally from Maryland. being paid more.

Royalty, who has lived in See EDUCATION B2