

Reconnecting McDOWELL

www.ReconnectingMcDowell.org

Stay Connected with McDowell

McDowell County is an American story that deserves a new chapter—one filled with promise, with goodwill, with the type of shared commitment that offers solid reasons to believe in a brighter future. Be a part of this historic partnership and show your support for McDowell's children and the greater community by joining the effort at www.reconnectingmcdowell.org.

Juvenile Drug Court to Open in McDowell

Battling teen drug and alcohol addiction with successful early intervention program

As part of its efforts to address the complex and interconnected challenges plaguing McDowell County students, Reconnecting McDowell approached the West Virginia Supreme Court to establish an innovative juvenile drug court in the county—a cooperative effort of the juvenile justice, social service, law enforcement and educational systems.

West Virginia Supreme Court Justice Robin Davis announced the new McDowell County juvenile drug court at the April 16-17 Reconnecting McDowell planning retreat in Charleston. The court is designed to divert nonviolent juvenile offenders exhibiting alcohol or drug abuse behavior from the traditional juvenile court process to an intensive individualized treatment and counseling process.

Davis cited early intervention as the best way to eliminate a young person's drug habits. "The drug issue is directly correlated to the truancy issue," she said. Hundreds of McDowell County students miss school on an average day.

If the two issues aren't addressed beginning in preschool and kindergarten, Davis added, then "we as a West Virginia court system will have to deal with those same students in our jails and prisons."

The state currently has 12 other juvenile drug courts serving 14 counties. These courts have had a 76 percent success rate to date, and truancy rates have been reduced.

"We've already had a juvenile drug court in Mercer County for two years, and it is going extremely well," said Judge Mary Ellen Griffith, the chief juvenile drug court judge in Mercer County. "It's very intensive counseling. [The students] are in counseling, their families are in counseling and a probation officer is dedicated to these kids."

The goal of the juvenile drug court is to keep troubled youths out of the judicial system and in the classroom. Supreme Court Justice Davis provided some compelling statistics about the importance of keeping kids in school:

85 percent of teenage drug abusers do not graduate from high school, and 80 percent of prison inmates are high school dropouts.

McDowell County Family Court Judge Lisa Clark, who will be one of two judges in the county's juvenile drug court along with Griffith, estimates that as many as two-thirds of her family court cases have some component of drug addiction, either by adults or children.

A public meeting about the new juvenile drug court will be held May 3 at the McDowell County Courthouse from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"We know that there's not a shortage of talented, creative children," Clark said. "It's the challenge that they face attaining their goals—economic, problems within the family and the lack of opportunities."

The new juvenile drug court cannot solve the problem of drug abuse, but it can be part of the solution, noted Griffith.

Voices from McDowell

"Reconnecting McDowell is providing opportunities for our county to grow and flourish. It is allowing the possibility for new commerce, more opportunities for education experiences and most importantly, it is giving the residents of McDowell County the one thing they need most—HOPE."

*Sabrina K. Poore,
pre-K aide at
laeger Elementary*



McDowell School Staff Attend Professional Development Workshops

A team of McDowell school staff attended the annual AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel Professional Issues Conference April 20-22 in Washington, D.C.

McDowell County public school staff D. Ann Mullins and Sabrina K. Poore participated in professional development workshops and attended a luncheon featuring a discussion on the challenges facing McDowell County that included Jackee Long, president of the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association (WVSSPA). Many of the more than 900 conference attendees were moved to tears upon hearing the determination and resolve of Mc-

Dowell residents as described by Long and WVSSPA executive director Bob Brown. "We refuse to be constrained by probabilities in McDowell County," said Brown, "but are going to be driven by possibilities."



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Reconnecting McDowell Partners Meet to Strategize on Action Plan



Gayle Manchin, Mary Poling and Randi Weingarten pictured left to right

commissioned by Reconnecting McDowell, which maps McDowell County's community resources, structure and funding streams.

To form the basis of a community mapping tool, Watts has identified 20 elements that a community needs to

thrive; the presence and right mix of these elements determine a community's success.

Bob Brown then introduced two West Virginia lawmakers who were instrumental in passing two pieces of legislation—which Reconnecting McDowell had supported—that will bring positive change to the county. Delegate Mary Poling described House Bill 4101, the teacher-in-residence bill, which will help to recruit and retain high-quality teacher candidates from local colleges and universities. State Sen. Robert Plymale discussed Senate Bill 371, the Innovation Zone legislation that will allow counties to apply for a special exemption from certain regulations. To qualify, the McDowell County Public School District must submit a collaborative plan based on employee and community buy-in.

Several Reconnecting McDowell partners discussed the work they currently are engaged in, including Anna Hardaway from Save the Children, which is recruiting families to participate in its family literacy program. Sen. Plymale, who is one of the co-chairs of the Housing, Transportation and Recreation subcommittee, is taking the lead on an extensive land-use plan for McDowell County. Several other co-chairs gave subcommittee reports including short- and long-term goals, action items and ways to include McDowell community members in the planning process and long-term implementation.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, also announced that Reconnecting McDowell is pursuing 501(c)(3) status with support from the partners.

Nearly 100 participants from 67 partner organizations, including labor unions, nonprofit organizations and corporations attended the Reconnecting McDowell planning retreat in Charleston April 16. The goal was to create the partnership's guiding plan of action to improve the county's educational environment while addressing the underlying social and economic concerns that inhibit the county's growth and development.

Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin opened the retreat with a call to action. "We can't depend solely on the education system to combat the problems, he said. "There are bright students in McDowell, and it will take a full commitment from all partners to help them reach their full potential."

Before breaking into subcommittees, the Rev. Matthew Watts from the Hope Community Development Corporation in Charleston presented an initial survey,

Founding Reconnecting McDowell Partners

American Federation of Teachers
 West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin
 Gayle Manchin, vice president of West Virginia Board of Education and former West Virginia first lady
 AFT-West Virginia
 Alliance for Excellent Education
 Alpha Natural Resources
 Appalachian Power
 Benedum Foundation
 Building America Community Development Enterprise
 Cisco Systems Inc.
 College Board
 DonorsChoose.org
 First Book
 Frontier Communications
 Globaloria
 Grace Bible Church
 Highmark West Virginia Inc.
 Hope Community Development Corp.
 Marshall University's June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development
 McDowell County Board of Education
 McDowell County Commission
 Rahall Appalachian Transportation Institute
 Save the Children – U.S. Programs
 Silver Lining
 Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College
 United Mine Workers of America
 U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall
 U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin
 U.S. Sen. Jay Rockefeller
 West Virginia AFL-CIO
 West Virginia Del. Clif Moore
 West Virginia Del. Mary Poling
 West Virginia Education Association
 West Virginia PTA
 West Virginia School Boards Association
 West Virginia School Service Personnel Association
 West Virginia Sen. H. Truman Chafin
 West Virginia Sen. John Pat Fanning
 West Virginia Sen. Robert Plymale
 West Virginia State Police
 West Virginia Supreme Court
 World Wide Workshop Foundation

Virtual Book Drive to benefit McDowell Children

On April 21, the American Federation of Teachers and First Book, a Reconnecting McDowell partner, launched a virtual book drive. The proceeds will be used to help fund First Book's proposal to provide 18 free books a year to every child in McDowell County. The virtual book drive is live at www.firstbook.org/donatemcdowell until May 31.



Want to get involved or learn more?

For more information about Reconnecting McDowell or to find out how you can get involved, contact AFT-West Virginia staff member Debra Elmore at delmore@aftwv.org or 304-552-5766.