

## 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](http://www.reconnectingmcdowell.org).

## Reconnecting McDowell Project Begins

On Dec. 16, 2011, West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and the American Federation of Teachers announced the start of a public-private partnership called Reconnecting McDowell.

The partnership is a long-term effort to make educational improvement in McDowell County the route to a brighter economic future. More than 40 partners from business, foundations, government, nonprofit agencies and labor unions have signed a covenant to seek solutions to McDowell's complex problems. Each partner has agreed to provide services, money, products and/or expertise to lift McDowell County's schools, students and their families.

"McDowell County is an American story that deserves a new chapter. Given the challenges, being conventional won't be good enough. We will be flexible, creative and entrepreneurial, and will take risks," AFT president Randi Weingarten said. "The AFT's mission is to help all kids get a quality education, regardless of ZIP code, race or family income level, and we know that means tackling a wide range of issues in a coor-

ordinated way to help revitalize the community."

Educational improvement is the centerpiece of the five-year effort. The AFT will work with local educators, administrators, parents and the citizens of McDowell to make education what it should be: a lifelong gateway to opportunity. Efforts will include intensive preparation for prekindergartners, a well-rounded curriculum for academics and social development, guidance and other support services, parent engagement, and improved college and career readiness for high school students. Gov. Tomblin said he was pleased to partner with the AFT in the effort to revitalize McDowell County.

"Just like in many areas of our country that are plagued by the global recession, educational and employment opportunities are not where they should be for McDowell County residents," Gov. Tomblin said. "This collaboration will further strengthen my existing dropout prevention and substance abuse initiatives by engaging a revitalization effort throughout the county. This public-



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private partnership has the power to change lives for the better in rural West Virginia and inspire other communities throughout the nation to follow suit."

The project was initiated at the urging of Gayle Manchin, vice president of the West Virginia Board of Education and former West Virginia first lady.

"This impressive partnership will bring much expertise to dealing with problems inside and outside of the schools, including finding creative ways to invest in housing, technology and broadband, transportation, recreation and infrastructure," Manchin said.



## Gov. Tomblin Announces \$1 Million State Grant for McDowell

In his State of the State address, Gov. Tomblin announced \$1 million in state funds for literacy and early childhood education programs to be administered by Save the Children, which is a Reconnecting McDowell partner.

One of the first Reconnecting McDowell projects to get under way, the Save the Children venture has trainers on the ground in three county schools to work with students and families to raise literacy rates, strengthen early childhood education opportunities and increase parental involvement in student learning.

During his speech, Gov. Tomblin also proposed making McDowell a "County Innovation Zone Pilot Project" to allow teachers, school staff and administrators the regulatory and legislative flexibility they need to improve struggling schools.

Judy Hale, president of AFT-West Virginia and an AFT vice president, and Jackee Long, president of the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association, praised Tomblin's contributions, noting that they will help Reconnecting McDowell become a model for transforming rural education programs.



## Look for these Reconnecting McDowell projects breaking ground:

- To address the acute housing shortage in McDowell, the West Virginia AFL-CIO donated the money to begin digging water lines to a new housing development.
- Frontier Communications has committed \$100,000 to Globaloria, a social learning network, where students learn science and technology skills by designing and programming their own digital educational games. Look for this software to be available to McDowell students by February.
- The West Virginia Department of Homeland Security is laying fiber-optic lines throughout the county to bring broadband Internet access to all McDowell schools.
- Shentel, a Virginia-based communications company, will be providing broadband Internet access to 10,000 homes in McDowell County.

## First Book Mercer-McDowell Counties Advisory Board Looking for Members and Volunteers

First Book, a Reconnecting McDowell partner that already has donated 14,000 books to McDowell students and families, established the First Book Mercer-McDowell Counties Advisory Board in 2001. If you would like to help McDowell students and schools have access to thousands of books



at up to a 90 percent discount, contact Myra Blake, chair of the advisory board, via e-mail at [mercermcdowell\\_wv@firstbook.org](mailto:mercermcdowell_wv@firstbook.org).

## List of 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  
Benedum Foundation  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of West  
Virginia  
Building America Community  
Development Enterprise  
Cisco Systems Inc.  
College Board  
DonorsChoose.org  
First Book  
Frontier Communications  
Globaloria  
Grace Bible Church  
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  
World Wide Workshop Foundation

## 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](mailto:delmore@aftwv.org) or 304/552-5766.