



A Covenant of Commitment

Expanding opportunities for McDowell County children must be the driving force behind every activity of the Reconnecting McDowell partnership. To accomplish this, we must first work to enhance achievement and well-being for all McDowell County public school students and their families. This will require a well-rounded curriculum based on high standards, as well as the support and enrichment services students need. These academic and support services and programs must prepare McDowell County children to succeed in the 21st-century knowledge economy. We must rethink the education system and reinvigorate the community to overcome the impediments that are denying too many McDowell kids their right to a quality education that provides the skills, tools and knowledge they need to succeed in life.

We commit to challenge ourselves every day to put in place the plans that will enhance the well-being of McDowell County children and empower them to build a bright future in McDowell County or wherever their dreams take them. We commit to embrace flexibility, creativity, entrepreneurship, trust and risk-taking.

As members of the Reconnecting McDowell partnership, we know that McDowell kids can achieve. We also believe that the broader civic community can build its capacity to address local needs. We acknowledge the complex problems that confront McDowell County—poverty, economic decline, drug and alcohol abuse, housing shortages, limited medical services and inadequate access to technology and transportation. We refuse to see those challenges as reasons not to achieve; rather, we view them as opportunities for each of us to bring our particular expertise and capabilities to bear through mutually reinforcing activities that create change.

We understand that there are no simple solutions—no easy answers or quick fixes. Together, we are striving to meet these challenges, but we know we won't accomplish that in a day, a month, or even a year. We will find ways to measure our progress, and we believe that the changes we propose and implement must be judged by rigorous standards of accountability. We accept that this will be a long-term endeavor, and we commit to stay engaged until we have achieved our goals of building the support systems that students need and helping the residents of McDowell County to take charge of their desire for a better life ahead.

To reach those goals, we commit to working together along with parents, community members, educators, business leaders, foundations and other stakeholders to develop a multi-faceted plan of action that includes, but is not limited to:

- **Education.** This is the centerpiece of our effort. We aim to capture the aspirations of the community for enhanced learning opportunities. Our pledge is to create a new reality of educational excellence—schools that will launch McDowell County children on a lifetime of achievement.
- **Services for students and their families.** McDowell County's economic situation has produced an array of social and health-related problems, with only limited services available to address them. We commit to develop a plan for such services at public school sites and other accessible locations throughout the county.
- **Transportation, technology and other issues.** Distances, limited roads, and mountainous terrain make isolation a fact of daily life in McDowell County. We will work to find new transportation alternatives, to expand broadband capacity and Internet adoption, and to improve cellular phone service—all of which will give members of the community, and particularly the county's young people, new access to recreational activities, online learning and other services.
- **Housing.** McDowell County's shortage of adequate housing is a barrier to recruiting the teachers needed to staff the county's classrooms. Lack of housing forces young people to look outside the county for places to live when they finish high school. We will marshal public, private and nonprofit group resources to expand McDowell County's housing opportunities.
- **Jobs and economic development.** Too many of McDowell County's young people must leave the county to find economic opportunity—and jobs. Any serious effort to improve the well-being of the county's children must include economic development.
- **The McDowell Community.** Going forward, we believe the most important partner in this effort is the McDowell County community—and we will continue to seek the input and guidance of community institutions and organizations, leaders from all elements of local life, parents, students and other residents. As we move ahead to develop plans and strategies, we are committed to making the McDowell County community part and parcel of all our efforts.

In sum, our pledge is to create a new reality, starting with our commitment to the children of McDowell County—to help their community build a new personal, institutional and programmatic infrastructure for success. And it is our promise to one another to work together to achieve that goal.