

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.

Reconnecting McDowell Is Improving Schools and Communities

Thirty first-graders from Ms. Bowles' and Ms. Hatfield's classes at Welch Elementary School recited the Pledge of Allegiance to begin the Reconnecting McDowell partners meeting Sept. 20; more than 150 people attended the event at the National Guard Armory in Welch, W.Va. The meeting kicked off an action-packed day focused on highlighting the progress made in the nine months since the public-private partnership was launched. The long-term goal of Reconnecting McDowell is to revitalize the county's struggling education system, community services and economy.

"McDowell County is slowly but surely becoming reconnected on a variety of fronts, thanks to the collaborative work of more than 100 partners and friends," AFT president Randi Weingarten told those in attendance. "When the partnership was launched, I said McDowell is an American story that deserves a new chapter. We are now working chapter by chapter, and are committed to completing the book over the next few years."

Books and band instruments

At the meeting, West Virginia first lady Joanne Tomblin presented a \$50,000 check from Verizon to First Book to continue its efforts to provide free books to children in McDowell. The money will be used to continue book distributions and establish 10 family reading centers in the county. These centers will be located in schools and other community locations to provide places where parents and children have access to free books, reading tips and "keeper books" they can take home. To date, First Book has given away 4,000 books, with the promise of 18 more books per child, per year for the next five years.

Tomblin also announced that VH1 Save the Music Foundation, in collabora-



tion with the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, has provided Mount View High School with \$30,000 worth of musical instruments. Music teacher Chris Hudson noted that these top-of-the-line instruments have put music education within reach of many students who cannot afford their own instruments: "When I started, we only had nine students enrolled in band. Now, we have more than 100 beginners."

The Reconnecting McDowell governance structure and comprehensive action plan, based on input and guidance from the partners and the community to implement the project's short- and long-term strategies, and goals also were announced.

Infrastructure improvements

Other progress reports at the meeting included an announcement that all county schools will be wired with high-speed broadband by Oct. 1. This is good news for Mount View High School librarian Lois Henderson who monitors several virtual Spanish, chemistry and calculus classes. "Without the virtual classes, students would not have the opportunity to take these courses."

A student roundtable discussion with state Department of Education officials and Gayle Manchin, state Board of Education vice president, was held later in the day. Some students who take virtual classes told the officials they couldn't do their "virtual homework" because of

the poor Internet service at their homes. Jimmy Gianato, from the Reconnecting McDowell technology subcommittee, assured them the problem would soon be rectified. Shentel Communications is laying hundreds of miles of fiber optic cable connections directly to 10,000 homes by the end of the year.

Among the houses to be wired are two brand-new affordable homes built by the Council of Southern Mountains, a Reconnecting McDowell partner, which held a community ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house immediately following the partners meeting. Penni Padgett, the organization's housing coordinator, noted that excitement about the homes has been overwhelming. "I knew there would be interest, but I never expected to get 30-40 calls a day," she said. The long day wrapped up at a well-attended community town hall with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. He noted that Reconnecting McDowell could become a national model for other struggling communities.

"Tears in my eyes"

Teacher recruitment and retention is a chronic concern in McDowell. At the end of the town hall, Katie Walker, a new math teacher at Mount View Middle School approached AFT president Randi Weingarten and thanked her for establishing Reconnecting McDowell and told her that watching a video about the project was the reason she came to McDowell to teach. "After watching the video with tears in my eyes, and seeing the great need for teachers here, I saw that I could make a difference."

Gayle Manchin, who chairs the Reconnecting McDowell governance board, summed up the eventful day and entire project best when she told partners at the meeting that to fully realize the goals of the partnership, "This is a marathon, not a sprint."

Reconnecting McDowell Partners and Friends

American Federation of Teachers	DonorsChoose.org	McDowell County Redevelopment Authority	United Mine Workers of America	West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin	Edvantia	Mountaineer Challen/NGe Academy	U.S. Department of Agriculture	West Virginia Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
Gayle Manchin, vice president of West Virginia Board of Education	Edwards Educational Services	New River Community and Technical College	U.S. Department of Education	West Virginia Education Association
AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust	Epsilon	Ohio-West Virginia State YMCA	U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall	West Virginia GEAR UP
AFT-West Virginia	FACES	Office of Management and Budget/Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs	U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin	West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
Alliance for Excellent Education	First Book	Pioneer Community Bank	U.S. Sen. Jay Rockefeller	West Virginia Housing Development Fund
Alpha Natural Resources	Frontier Communications	Preston Scheffenacker Properties	Vera Institute of Justice	West Virginia National Guard
Appalachian Power	Globaloria	Rahall Appalachian Transportation Institute	Verizon	West Virginia PTA
Arch Coal	Grace Bible Church	Reba Honaker, Mayor of Welch	VH1 Save the Music Foundation	West Virginia School Boards Association
Benedum Foundation	Harvard University—Advanced Leadership Initiative	Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health	Wastewater Treatment Coalition of McDowell County	West Virginia School Service Personnel Association
Bluefield State College	Highland Community Builders	The Rural School and Community Trust	West Virginia AFL-CIO	West Virginia Sen. H. Truman Chafin
BlueGreen Alliance	Highmark West Virginia Inc.	Save the Children—U.S. Programs	West Virginia Association of Student Councils	West Virginia Sen. John Pat Fanning
Bowles Rice McDavid Graff & Love	Hope Community Development Corporation	1199 SEIU	West Virginia Board of Education	West Virginia Sen. Robert Plymale
Building America Community Development Enterprise	Huntington Area Food Bank	Share Our Strength	West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services	West Virginia State Police
Catholic Charities West Virginia	IBM Corp.	Shentel Communications	West Virginia Center for Professional Development	West Virginia Supreme Court
Children's Home Society of West Virginia	Joe Ford, Mayor of Iaeger	Silver Lining	West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education	West Virginia University
Christian Community Development Association	KaBOOM!	South Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO	West Virginia Delegate Clif Moore	World Wide Workshop Foundation
Cisco Systems Inc.	Kellogg Company	Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College	West Virginia Delegate Mary Poling	WV FREE
City of Welch, West Virginia	Marshall University's June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development	Southern Highlands Community Mental Health Center	West Virginia Department of Commerce	Youth Enrichment Services
Coalition for Community Schools	McDowell County Board of Education	Tug River Health Association Inc.	West Virginia Department of Education	
College Board	McDowell County Commission	United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400	West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts	
Communications Workers of America	McDowell County Commission on Aging			
Concord University	McDowell County Economic Development Authority			
Council of the Southern Mountains	McDowell County Juvenile Drug Court			
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library				

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.