

## **Making a Difference through Community Connections**

**Mary Finley, CTE Director  
McDowell County Schools  
600 McDowell High Drive  
Marion, NC. 28752**

**828-460-3011**

**mary.finley@mcdowell.k12.nc.us**

**[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jf5u6msqAxvgT\\_LSkVAdw6Sivjt4MEYdq\\_g-ekrrAg/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jf5u6msqAxvgT_LSkVAdw6Sivjt4MEYdq_g-ekrrAg/edit?usp=sharing)**

*Key words:* community, partnerships, mentoring, relationships

**Funding Sources:**

- Center for Supportive Schools i3 grant
- Governors Crime Commission
- Local business/industry
- McDowell County Schools
- CTE funds

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

- Career Awareness and Readiness Program (CARP) - industry/business-funded/McDowell County Schools pays for transporting students by bus to industry and businesses around the county. Total cost for transportation is approximately \$200.
- Guys and Girls Apprentice Program (GAP) - industry/business-funded
- Teacher Externships - \$125 per day of working
- Peer Group Connection (PGC) funded by an i3 grant with Center for Supportive Schools- \$9,500. each year for three years
- Teen Court - funded by a Governor's Crime Commission grant- \$47,000. We will begin this program as soon as funds are received.

**Project Description:**

McDowell County Schools is connecting to its community partners to build strong mentoring relationships, provide awareness of and improve career and outreach community service opportunities for students, transform student learning, reduce risk behaviors and improve the graduation rate and decrease the dropout rate. The following are initiatives that have been implemented:

- Apprenticeship/Internships
- BOOST-Business Outreach Opportunities for Suspended Teens
- Camp Opportunity
- CARP-Career Awareness and Readiness Program
- Emergency Services Academy/Integrated Courses
- GAP-Guys and Girls Apprentice Program
- PGC-Peer Group Connection
- Teen Court-will be implemented as soon as funding is received from Governor's Crime Commission
- Workforce Pipeline

**Staffing Pattern:**

- Natalie Gouge, Director of Student Services
- Mary Finley, CTE Director

**Population Served:**

- 500 students
- Grades 8-12
- Ages 13-18
- Male and Female

Selection Criteria: For CARP and PGC: Students are selected through an application and interview process. GAP Mentors choose students based on need, career interest, etc.

Teen Court volunteer participants will be chosen within the Law and Justice Classes at McDowell High School as well as through other areas of student career and leadership interests.

**Project Origination:**

- Project originated by examining our dropout and graduation data, at risk student data, student interest, and examining our need for mentors.
- Project was developed by seeing the need to utilize our community partners to create supportive student-centered environments

**Issues Addressed:**

- Low graduation rate
- High dropout rate
- Need for mentoring relationships
- Need for students to be involved in hands-on learning through apprenticeships and internships
- Need to involve our community and business partners to optimize student outcomes

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this project, the desired outcomes are to identify ways to utilize community partners as resources to improve course offerings, provide engaging learning and mentoring opportunities, and strategies for dropout prevention. Other desired outcomes and measurable objectives are to see an increase in our graduation rate, a decrease in our dropout rate, and increased mentoring opportunities.

**Results (Outcomes and Achievements):**

- The dropout rate has decreased each year since projects were implemented
- The graduation rate has increased each year since the projects were implemented
- Mentoring opportunities have increased since projects were implemented.

**Strategies and/or Interventions:**

- Make community partnerships a priority.
- Establish a collaborative planning/brainstorming session and structure inviting all partners to the table.
- Share data to show needs.
- Listen to feedback and incorporate a variety of ideas.
- Provide opportunities for ways to be engaged and participate.
- Provide ongoing follow-ups and meetings to discuss progress and provide feedback.
- Evaluate initiatives and progress throughout the year. Share data.

**Project Timeline:**

- 2015-current school year

**Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project:**

- Continued support of local business and industry partners and the local school system
- Strategic planning with community partners and McDowell County Schools

- Collaboration among school system and community partners to provide transportation for students as needed
- Time

**Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:**

- In the 2012/13 McDowell County Schools had 84 dropouts. We had 55 for the 2016/17 school year.
- In the 2012/13 McDowell County Schools graduation rate was 78.2%. The rate was 85.3% for the 2016/17 school year.

**Current Status of Project:**

- Initiatives will be continued for the 2018/19 school year

**Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:**

- As the CTE Director I worked directly with Natalie Gouge, Student Services Director to create, coordinate, implement, and continue the initiatives. I worked directly with students, teachers, school and county administration and local business and industry partners.

**Lessons Learned:**

- Sharing data with all stakeholders is critical
- Make sure all parties involved understand the data
- Requires buy-in
- Start small
- Strategic planning with stakeholders is key to optimizing student outcomes

**Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:**

- Take baby steps
- Establish relationships with local business, industry and community partners
- When planning strategically with partners, it is a give and take: it is working as a team to build capacity among kids and strengthen the community
- Share graduation and dropout data with all parties involved