

Making a Difference through Community Connections

**Natalie Gouge
Director of Student Services
McDowell County Schools
600 McDowell High Drive
Marion, NC. 28752**

828-442-9697

natalie.gouge@mcdowell.k12.nc.us

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jf5u6msqAxvgT_LSkVAdw6SitvjT4MEYdq_g-ekrrAg/edit?usp=sharing

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

Funding Sources:

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

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

- 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
- 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 3 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 behavior, improve the graduation rate, and decrease the dropout rate. The following are initiatives that have been implemented:

- **Apprenticeship/Internships:**

Apprenticeships have been coordinated with five industries in McDowell County for McDowell High School students. Apprenticeship is a system of skilled occupational training that combines practical work experiences with related academic and technical instruction. An apprentice works on the job for an employer and is taught and supervised by an experienced person in the chosen occupation. Apprenticeship standards--established by the NC Department of Commerce - Apprenticeship and Training Bureau--are the minimum standards acceptable for any program. Local program standards may vary depending on local needs and should be developed in conjunction with all participating stakeholders.

Internships have been coordinated for students through area businesses. An internship is a work-based learning experience where a student participates in the daily operations of a work site under the direct supervision of a business mentor. The internship provides a realistic environment within which a student intern learns about a particular industry or occupation and applies knowledge and skills learned in the classroom. The work experience contributes to the student's career pathway helping the student to narrow their career choices.

- **BOOST-Business Outreach Opportunities for Suspended Teens:**

This program is an alternative to suspension program. Coordinated with area businesses, our BOOST Supervisor works closely with school administrators, students, parents, and business partners to provide meaningful community service as an alternative to out of school suspension.

The program consists of community volunteer hours, academic opportunities to continue the learning process through time provided to work on school work during the community service workday, attendance credit, student involvement to adhere to the program expectations, parent involvement to contact BOOST Supervisor, provide transportation to community worksite and adhere to the program expectations, and community partner agency involvement to adhere to expectations and keep lines of communication open between student, parent, and school.

- **Camp Opportunity:**

Camp Opportunity is a partnership between McDowell County Schools and McDowell Technical Community College to offer around 150 middle school students a free week-long day camp, which provides them with the opportunity to learn about a different career each day through exploration and hands-on activities. Sessions are held at McDowell High School, McDowell Technical Community College, Universal Advanced Manufacturing campus, and other area locations. Transportation is provided through an abbreviated bus route and lunch and snacks are provided at no cost. Sessions provided are:

Advertising/Graphic Design	Engineering	Machining
Agriculture	Esthetics	Mathematics
Art/Painting/Drawing	Fashion	Music
Automotive Technologies	Fire Technology	Networking/IT
Biology/Anatomy/Physiology	Fitness/Recreational Therapy	NJROTC
Chemistry	Forensics	Performing Arts Exploration
Construction/Masonry	Forestry	Photography
Cooking/Culinary Arts	Game Art & Design	Veterinary Medicine
Cosmetology	Gizmos & Gadgets	Welding
Drones	Healthcare	Wildlife Management
Emergency Services	Law Enforcement	
Environmental Science	Literature/Writing	

- **CARP - Career Awareness and Readiness Program:**

CARP is a program designed to raise students' level of awareness of career opportunities in McDowell County. Twenty-five 8th graders are selected through an application process. The selected 8th graders participating in CARP will learn not just about careers, but also about their own skills and how those skills relate to the world of work. By the end of the program, each student will be able to identify career opportunities and the education required to pursue those careers. Students will also write their first resume and gain valuable experience by participating in a mock job interview.

This program would not be possible without the partnership and support of area businesses, industry, the McDowell County Chamber of Commerce, McDowell Technical Community College, and McDowell County Schools.

- **Public Safety Academy:**

Includes EMT, Fire and Law and Justice

Courses offered are Firefighter Technology I, II, & III, EMT I & II, Law & Justice I & II and Public Safety I & II. The Public Safety Challenge is a annual event that is a combination of

challenges for students to test their endurance, speed, and overall knowledge of all of the fields and a contribution of 19 local and state agencies in which they demonstrate subjects from their prospective fields.

- **GAP - Guys and Girls Apprentice Program:**

GAP is partnership between McDowell High School and our community business leaders. This apprentice/mentoring program helps bridge the gap for students as they transition from high school to either college or the workforce. The goal is to assist in creating a better future for high school students by teaching them practical life skills, disciplines, and sound principals. Students will spend at least one hour a week with their matched mentor either at school, in the mentor's workplace, or doing an activity of interest.

Along with one-on-one time with the mentor, the group participants will go on field trips throughout the county that will be educational and entertaining. These trips are intended to showcase the many career opportunities in McDowell and introduce students to the variety of career fields within any one industry. Mentors will help students explore career options based on the students' skills, talents, and passions. Other topics that may be covered in the program include: • Work ethic • Goal setting • Proper business attire • Professional conduct • Job punctuality • Phone etiquette • Completing a business plan or project • What it takes to establish credit/open a bank account • Money management • Motivation • Loyalty • Positive attitude • Dealing with the public, and/or career specific information.

- **PGC - Peer Group Connection: Partnership with the Center for Supportive Schools**

PGC High School is a mentoring transition program to ease the transition from middle to high school. It is research-based and is grant-funded. The program taps into the power of high school juniors and seniors, who are trained as peer leaders to create a nurturing positive environment for incoming freshmen. Once per week, pairs of junior and senior peer leaders meet with groups of 10-14 freshmen in outreach sessions designed to strengthen relationships among students across grades. These peer leaders are simultaneously enrolled in a daily, for-credit, semester or year long leadership course taught by school faculty during regular school hours.

It is an awesome program and worth checking out:

www.supportiveschools.org

www.supportiveschools.org/peer-group-connection/

- **Teen Court** - will be implemented as soon as funding is received from Governor's Crime Commission

***For more information about these programs and partnerships, contact:
natalie.gouge@mcdowell.k12.nc.us or mary.finley@mcdowell.k12.nc.us**

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 outcome is 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 and 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 Student Services Director, I worked directly with Mary Finley, CTE 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