

## 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).

## Housing Project Begins Construction!



Renaissance Village  
construction site in Welch

Renaissance Village—Reconnecting McDowell's project, which seeks to address the housing shortage that has made it difficult to keep teachers in the County—is now under construction. The building, which is the first new multistory structure in Welch in more than 50 years, will have two floors of apartments to house educators and other professionals, as well as two floors of retail/commercial space.



Terri Kennedy

## McDowell Educator Wins Classroom Resources

The American Federation of Teachers held TEACH (Together Educating America's Children)—its biennial professional issues conference—July 11-13 in Washington, D.C. Nine educators were given Freedom to Teach awards at the event. Freedom to Teach is AFT's campaign to enable educators' success in the classroom by providing resources that will allow them to tailor their lessons to students' needs. Thirty-five educators applied to the program, and nine were each awarded \$1,000 credit on DonorsChoose.org, a website that helps teachers purchase classroom essentials.

McDowell County educator Terri Kennedy received one of the awards. Kennedy has taught at Welch Elementary for the past five years, and for two years has served as a certified special needs teacher for students who have moderate impairments; she works with nonverbal students who have a variety of learning capabilities. Kennedy says the award allows her flexibility in choosing the differentiated instruction every child needs. "Freedom to teach is not only important, it is essential," she says. Her good fortune continued when she won a \$50 gift card at TEACH's political action booth.

# Reconnecting McDowell Partner Spotlight: Project Aware

WV-AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education) is a project funded by a grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, awarded in 2013 to the West Virginia Department of Education and managed by the Marshall University Autism Training Center. The purpose of the project is to increase awareness of the mental health issues throughout the state by training school personnel and other adults who interact with school-age youth on how to detect, respond to, and connect children and families who may have mental health issues with the appropriate services. The WV-AWARE grant focuses on students in prekindergarten through grade 12, ages 3 to 21, in West Virginia public schools. McDowell County is one of three counties that served as a demonstration site to guide the development of a statewide sustainable systems' approach to improve mental health services. Berkeley and Wood counties were the other school systems.

Perry Blankenship serves as a school counselor and has been the Project Aware coordinator in McDowell County for the past two and a half years. He is responsible for coordinating mental health services provided by the schools and outside agencies. He has been working with school counselors and other essential personnel to build professional development around Tier I, Tier II and

Tier III supports for mental health in the schools. The first tier is offered to all students; the second is for students who need additional services, which can usually be done via group sessions; and the third tier is for students who need individual interventions.

Project Aware has helped to train four employees in McDowell County schools to be trauma-focused therapists; the project has also trained school counselors in all of the County schools to implement the Too Good for Drugs &

Violence program in grades 3-12.

Some of the project's upcoming plans are to train bullying prevention teams, utilizing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program; to imple-

ment a tele-health service for mental health therapy in the two McDowell County high schools, with the goal of eventually implementing it into all County schools; and to continue training community and school personnel in youth/adult mental health first aid. Project Aware is also helping to establish PBIS (positive behavior interventions and supports) in every school for the 2019-20 school year.

Project Aware is continuously looking to build relationships with the school system and community partners and to build capacity for sustainability. If you need further information, contact Perry Blankenship at [perry.blankenship@k12.wv.us](mailto:perry.blankenship@k12.wv.us).



## Reconnecting McDowell Partners Meeting

Reconnecting McDowell's next board and partners meeting will be held Sept. 9-10. It is the semi-annual meeting where partners share progress on the project's efforts and strategize for the upcoming year. For more information, visit [bit.ly/rmp19](http://bit.ly/rmp19).

## Family Advisory Council Meetings

The next Family Advisory Council meeting will be held Sept. 30 from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Phoenix Center in Welch. The monthly meetings are organized by McDowell County Schools and are open to all families and community members. Lunch will be served. For more information or to give a presentation at a meeting, contact Amanda Fragile Peyton at [afragile@k12.wv.us](mailto:afragile@k12.wv.us) or 304-436-8441, ext. 250. The upcoming meetings are scheduled for:

- Oct. 28, 2019
- Nov. 19, 2019
- Jan. 27, 2020
- Feb. 24, 2020
- March 23, 2020
- April 27, 2020

For a list of Reconnecting McDowell partners, visit [www.ReconnectingMcDowell.org/partners](http://www.ReconnectingMcDowell.org/partners).

## Let's Connect

Follow Reconnecting McDowell on social media to receive the latest updates and news. We share information on webinars, job-training opportunities and upcoming community events. We also highlight our partners and their work in McDowell County and the state.

### Social Media



Follow us on Twitter:  
[@ReconnectMcD](https://twitter.com/ReconnectMcD)



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[facebook.com/ReconnectMcD](https://facebook.com/ReconnectMcD)

## Want to get involved or learn more?

For more information about Reconnecting McDowell or to find out how you can get involved, contact Chad Webb ([cwebb@aftwv.org](mailto:cwebb@aftwv.org)) or Debra Elmore ([delmore@aftwv.org](mailto:delmore@aftwv.org) or 304-552-5766).

