

McDowell County Office of Education Performance Audits (OEPA) Summary

For Gayle Manchin and Randi Weingarten

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In the first full-scale audit of McDowell County schools since the West Virginia Board of Education returned the school system to local control in 2013, OEPA conducted performance/equity audits of each school in the county as part of Governor Earl Ray Tomblin's transformative education performance initiative for WV schools. These baseline audits occurred during the end of October 2015 with teams comprised of knowledgeable individuals who either currently serve as building level or county level administrators and those who have recently retired from school system administration. Audit criteria included 7 standards for high quality schools in the areas of school climate and culture; school leadership; standards-focused curriculum, instruction and assessment; student support services and family/community connections; educator growth and development; efficient and effective management; and continuous improvement. Additionally, policy and code compliance were reviewed.

Transformative continuous improvement must always begin with self-reflection at the local level. McDowell County schools, through this self-reflection process, know precisely where their areas of strength and challenge lay. In building upon the premise that **all students** have the right to a high quality, relevant and rigorous education, McDowell County is focusing efforts and resources on student performance, health and well-being; teacher leadership; high expectations for all students and staff; parent and community involvement; and the principal as instructional leader.

Highlights across McDowell County schools include:

- Data are used consistently and thoughtfully to improve classroom instruction and to offer necessary support and intervention. Leadership has provided the space for empowerment with comments such as "the teachers own it", referring to coherent approaches to improve student performance with continuous reflection and data review to ensure students have their academic, social and emotional needs addressed. Student led conferences are in place versus the traditional parent-teacher conference model. Students maintained data notebooks to track their progress.
- Principals are visible in the classrooms and promote distributed leadership to nurture current and future teacher leaders. Teachers remarked how much they look forward to instructional feedback from the principal and described it as "receiving a Christmas present".
- Climate and culture are positive with teachers who stated they **want** to teach in McDowell County. This was corroborated by students, who when asked what was the best thing about their school, replied "the teachers". A principal commented, "Our teachers are the best in the county. They keep students engaged and are always learning and sharing with one another."
- Schools involved grandparents during the instructional day to provide reading and writing support for students.

- An Innovation Zone grant has funded a community coordinator as part of an effort to create a community school.
- Although instructional technology integration is an emerging area for the schools, teachers and students agreed the best assignments were those involving technology. Students respectfully asked our audit team to recommend professional development for their teachers so they could use more technology in the classroom.
- Students **want** to be in school. In several schools, students are part of the decision-making team. Student empowerment and voice as well as feeling safe and secure at school is evident with the significant decrease in the **dropout rate over a five year period from 4.5% (2010-2011) to 2% (2014-2015)**. The high school **4 year graduation rate has significantly increased from 74% (2010-2011) to 80.08% (2014-2015)**. **44.7% of 12th graders are Advanced Placement test takers.** **The 2015 ACT National Composite Score is 21.0 with McDowell County's composite score at 18.3.** Counselors and graduation coaches also are an integral part of the school teams and contribute to this data.
- A pervasive comment made throughout the audit was the exceptional support provided by the county superintendent and the central office staff. They are visible in the schools and know their principals, teachers, students, parents and community.