

PRESS RELEASE

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**Pocahontas County Schools' Nature's Mountain Classroom Wins
First-Ever WV School-Business Partnership of the Year Awards Program**

Winning Partnership, Jennifer Garner, Headline WV Education Summit

Charleston, W.Va. (May 15, 2025) – **Pocahontas County Schools'** partnership with **Nature's Mountain Classroom** has been named West Virginia's School-Business Partnership of the Year. The announcement was made at the 2025 WV Education Summit by the Education Alliance and Hope Gas.

Pocahontas County Schools was selected as the winner out of 75 school-business partnerships in the state. The county school system will receive an award package valued at \$25,000.

Every student in Pocahontas County is given the opportunity to explore Nature's Mountain Classroom. From a storybook-based playground adventure for the youngest students to skiing, hiking, kayaking, mountain biking, and overnight camping trips for middle school, and career exploration and leadership skill-building in high school, learning has never been more immersive!

With the goal of recognizing impactful school-business partnerships that are giving West Virginia K-12 students a leg up in academic success and career preparation, the Education Alliance Caperton Center for School and Business Partnerships launched the *Hope for the Future: WV School-Business Partnership of the Year Awards Program*.

Pocahontas County Schools and Nature's Mountain Classroom were one of eight regional winners before being named the state winner. The list of regional winners include:

Region 1

Mercer County Technical Education Center and Conn-Weld Industries
Pocahontas County Schools and Nature's Mountain Classroom

Region 2

Nitro High School and Appalachian Power (AEP)
The WIN Academy and WVU Medicine Thomas Hospitals

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Region 3

Warwood Middle School and West Liberty University
High School and Blue Stream Farms

Region 4

Hardy County Schools and Pilgrim's Pride
North Elementary School and Black and White Small Business Solution

"The Partnership of the Year Award highlights the incredible impact of school-business partnerships on students across West Virginia," said Dr. Amelia Courts, President/CEO of the Education Alliance. "We are thrilled to partner with Hope Gas on this initiative and congratulate Pocahontas County Schools for this remarkable recognition."

"On behalf of everyone at Hope Gas, I congratulate the schools, businesses and, most importantly, the students taking part in these winning partnerships across the state," said Morgan O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer of Hope Gas. "School-business partnerships are critical to exposing students to careers and preparing them for the evolving job landscape. Hope Gas is committed to supporting the important work of organizations that help make sure kids have opportunities to achieve their fullest education, career and life potential right here in the Mountain State. That is why we started Hope's "Keeping our Kids in West Virginia" initiative. I am so proud to support the Education Alliance's Hope for the Future WV School-Business Partnership of the Year Awards with the first grant from Hope's Keeping Our Kids in West Virginia project. Congratulations winners and Education Alliance on your great work!"

The Summit also featured actress and business owner Jennifer Garner, co-founder of *Once Upon A Farm*. The company's partnership with *Save the Children* has committed to providing one million children with nutritious meals. Garner participated in a moderated discussion about her company and the power of partnerships. The Summit also featured an industry panel exploring cutting-edge careers in agriculture and technology, and a Student Expo featuring real-world success stories in career readiness, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

To establish a school-business partnership at your local K-12 school or to learn more about the Education Alliance, please visit www.educationalalliance.org.

About the Education Alliance

The Education Alliance is a statewide nonprofit organization that advocates for quality public education for all students. Established in 1983, the Alliance works to advance its mission by mobilizing business and community partnerships that equip West Virginia's students for success. For more information, visit educationalliance.org.

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