Welcome to RAPSA’s Quarterly Journal

RAPSA is in the process of building a network of committed professionals who want to establish best practices for serving at-promise students and advocate for policies that support student success.

This inaugural publication provides four articles about research and initiatives across the country that explore solutions for serving out-of-school and other high-risk youth. We've also included links to news that may inform strategies that you develop to serve at-promise students.

- The Effect of Career and Technical Education on Human Capital Accumulation: Causal Evidence from Massachusetts
- New Dawn Charter High School: A New York Regents Exam Success Story
- Mass Customized Learning: The “How To” for Competency-Based Learning
- Alternative Schools Across America
- No Time Like the Present: Congress Approves JJDPA

We hope that this journal becomes a platform for sharing strategies, research and support among education, community and workforce leaders who serve the 16-24 year old at-promise population.

Please feel free to submit articles to me by email (ernie.silva@siatech.org) about your own successes and ideas for improving our work here.

We welcome suggestions for a name for this journal. Perhaps you prefer “RAPSA Quarterly Review,” “At-Promise Journal,” or have another suggestions. Email your vote or idea to me (ernie.silva@siatech.org).

Finally, we encourage your active membership in RAPSA. Please find a membership level that meets your needs. This quarter, new members will earn a $50 discount on the 2019 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum registration.

Thank you for your passion and commitment.

Ernie Silva, JD
Executive Director
RAPSA
916.712.9087
The Effect of Career and Technical Education on Human Capital Accumulation: Causal Evidence from Massachusetts
By Shaun M. Dougherty

Here’s a link to an important study by Dr. Shaun Dougherty that evaluates the academic impact of CTE courses for low-income students. The study suggests that CTE coursework can significantly increase graduation rates and other accountability metrics for low-income students. The study also suggests improved outcomes for specific CTE program participation on the accumulation of human capital in a high-stakes policy environment.

Nationwide, more than one in five high school students take four or more of their high school courses in a career and technical education (CTE) area, and over 90 percent of public high schools offer students access to CTE programs. Earlier study demonstrates that career and technical education (CTE) can provide long-term financial benefits to participants, yet few have explored potential academic impacts, with none in the era of high-stakes accountability.

Dr. Dougherty saw understanding the impact of CTE participation on students’ educational outcomes as crucial to determining its place in contemporary education policy. Earlier research has often ignored the potential effects of CTE on students from lower-income families. Such students are overrepresented in CTE and for whom CTE may have previously been used as a dumping ground. Dougherty suspected that CTE may provide an effective pathway through secondary school for students who may not otherwise graduate from high school, or provide a bridge to meaningful postsecondary education for students who would not otherwise have continued their schooling. He recognized criticisms that CTE programs may track students into educational programs that make them less likely to complete high school or face limited employment or schooling options in the future.

Massachusetts, a state with a long history of providing CTE, presents a compelling case to analyze. Massachusetts has thirty-two regional vocational and technical high schools (RVTs) where all students participate in CTE. His paper focuses on whether there are different impacts of RVT participation for low-income students, who, on average, are overrepresented in CTE and have been less likely to complete high school or enroll in postsecondary education of any kind.

The Dougherty study focused on high school graduation as a primary outcome of interest because it is broadly accepted as a signal of the minimum required human capital to access full-time employment. As an intermediate measure of persistence, he added an indicator for whether any potential effects on graduation are realized through intermediate measure of persistence, he added an indicator for whether any potential effects on graduation are realized through

Student Success Story: Ricky at New Dawn Charter High School
By Lisa DiGaudio, Ph.D., Founding Principal, New Dawn Charter High School

New Dawn Charter High School is a transfer high school located in downtown Brooklyn, New York City. New Dawn has been open since September 2012 and has served hundreds of the most at-risk students in the city. As a transfer school without entrance requirements, we attract students that just cannot succeed in a traditional model school. We provide real world work experiences and college writing as one of our key design elements, along with an intensive study in academics, advisory, and social-emotional learning. Our average “ninth” grader is between 18 and 19 years of age. Because of that, many of our students our starting their journey with us in their fifth and sixth year of high school.

Let us celebrate one of our most recent graduates. His name is “Ricky.” Ricky turned 24 years of age in January. He began his studies with us when we opened in 2012. Ricky suffered many hardships-homelessness among them- yet year after year he came back to school and little by little earned his credits and passed his exams towards a Regents diploma in New York State. The Regents Examinations are required for graduation by the State of New York. Ricky is special because of his persistence. Ricky took a math Regents NINE TIMES. He attempted Algebra in the school before ours SIX TIMES. Yet he kept trying. In fact, Ricky attempted Regents TWENTY-NINE times over his high school career. That’s twenty-four times of failing. Twenty-four times going “home” and not getting the diploma.

Well this time, we are proud to say that Ricky finally made it. Ricky is just one success story of so many that pass through the halls of New Dawn. ESSA regulations don’t count Ricky as a success. But we do. Ricky has a high school diploma, and he can look his family in the eye and talk about the importance of sticking something through, no matter how hard or frustrating it may get. This is what New Dawn is all about, and this school will continue to serve Ricky and students just like Ricky because they deserve to have someone believe in them just as much as the student that complete in a traditional pattern. These students are the backbone of who we are- getting up, coming to school, and persisting despite horrendous odds and obstacles. We are proud to be their champions and will continue to do this important work.

Mass Customized Learning: The “How To” For Competency-Based Learning
By Jan K. Bryan, EdD, VP, National Education Officer, Renaissance

Education has been described as an industry existing in a world that requires a profession (Schwahn, C. & McGarvey, B., 2012). Mass customized learning (MCL), places profession and achievement above tradition, norms, convenience, and habit. MCL is an educational approach focused on mastery. The concept of “mass customization” may seem an oxymoron; however, we live in a mass customized world. Each of us customizes our smart phones, yet there are specific sets of competencies that must be mastered and implemented uniformly by each user.

Similarly, education includes specific sets of competencies that must be mastered, and used uniformly, such as decoding, multiplication, content vocabulary, and the periodic table. These competencies are established and—until new discoveries are made—remain constant, therefore not available for customization. How much time it takes us to learn these competencies, the types of learning experiences required to achieve mastery, and how learners demonstrate mastery are customized by the learner and teacher.
MCL challenges the traditional “seat-time” structure of American education by removing artificial time constraints on learning. Instruction is guided by a learning progression in each discipline rather than governed by a set of standards rigidly aligned to an 18-week semester or 180-day academic year. Standards exist in the MCL model to identify the competencies across each discipline. A learning progression, however, details incremental steps between the standards—the focus of day-to-day instruction (Heritage, M. 2017). For a thorough review of learning progressions, please see Learning progressions: Supporting instruction and formative assessment (Heritage, M. 2008).

In the MCL model, educators and learners design learning experiences. Remarkably, many of these experiences are time-honored instructional techniques, such as mini-lessons filled with built-in checks for understanding, interactive lecture, and whole-group demonstration. MCL allows for additional instructional methods, such as a seminar with a “keynote” introducing the concept followed by specific study of the content, or a workshop where students share the responsibility for guiding their peers to mastery.

For full implementation impact, policies focused on the use of standards alone—rather than standards as a guide and a learning progression as the focus of day-to-day instruction—should be reconsidered. Further, time to mastery should be explored, and the artificial constraints, i.e., seat time, should be set aside. Demonstration of mastery, rather than time invested, is the acceptable metric in the MCL model. These policies require a reconsideration of assessment. Observational data, curriculum-based measures, student artifacts, and interim assessment data provide evidence of incremental growth on the road toward mastery in the impactful MCL model.

As your interest in MCL increases, this 2018 qualitative study at the University of Pittsburgh identifies key elements in MCL and offers insights and recommendations for implementation. For a brief MCL tutorial, complete with historical background, see how Pequea Valley School District (PA) implements MCL. Further, this video traces Central New York high school’s journey from the factor model of education into mass customization.

Alternative Schools Across America
By Jody Ernst and Jim Griffin, Momentum Strategy & Research

Momentum noted that many factors may be impacting state outcomes and explored the relationship between states’ graduation requirements and states’ average proficiency rates, finding that states requiring students to pass multiple end of course exams to receive a diploma showed higher average proficiency rates than states that required passage of few or no statewide exams.

For average graduation rate outcomes, no clear relationship was found between the specific policies investigated and the average states’ alternative school grad rates. However, it remained clear that 1) Education policies and practices do have an impact on individual state outcomes for alternative schools and should be considered when targets for accountability are being set, and 2) More research is needed to tease out other factors that impact differences between states.

Jody Ernst, a former RAPSA Board Member and frequent RAPSA contributor, is Momentum’s VP of Research & Policy Analytics. If you are interested in contributing your data to the NOYC initiative, please contact Dr. Ernst at jernst@momentum-sr.org.

No Time Like The Present: Congress Approves JJDPA
By Whitney Bunts and Noel Tieszen

On Thursday, December 13, the U.S. House of Representatives cleared a monumental piece of legislation, reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) (H.R. 6964). The bill passed out of the Senate Tuesday night by unanimous consent. The bill strengthens JJDPA’s core protections, adds accountability measures, and stipulates use of evidence-based and trauma-informed approaches to juvenile justice policy and practice.

First passed in 1974, JJDPA protects the rights and safety of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Reauthorization has been on the docket since 2013, but votes have come up short every year.

Recent changes in the Department of Justice made reauthorization even more necessary. Caren Harp was appointed the new administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which oversees implementation of the JJDPA. Within her first eight months, Harp loosened requirements for state reporting, ostensibly to simplify data management. However, this plan effectively decreased states’ accountability for reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the system. These changes mirror the current administration’s insidious pattern of civil rights rollbacks.

Under this year’s reauthorization, Congress requires OJJDP to reverse course. States must implement policies, practices, and system improvement strategies to identify and reduce racial and ethnic disparities. They will also have to create state plans that include elements such as alternatives to detention, use of community-based services, and family engagement. Once approved by OJJDP, state plans will be accessible on a public website. OJJDP will be held accountable by the Government Accountability Office for managing state compliance and providing technical assistance to states that fail to meet the law’s requirements.

This year, we have seen reversals of key civil rights protections, increased criminalization of youth culture, and failure of federal agencies to hold states accountable for equitable enforcement of the law.

In the midst of these setbacks, reauthorization of the JJDPA is a welcome victory for youth.