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 third issue of our quarterly publication provides five 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.

• Department of Labor Releases Info on Integrating WIOA With Youth in Foster Care
• Wyoming Rethinks Accountability for Alternative High Schools
• California State Senate Approves “At Promise” Adoption
• Ohio Adopts New SEL Standards
• Game Changer: Black Teacher; Black Principal

Please send us your thoughts so 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.

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.

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I’m a black male elementary teacher, and I’ve just finished my first year working for a black principal. It’s been incredible. It hasn’t always been that way in my teaching career. I’ve felt sidelined, misunderstood, and disrespected at some of the other schools where I’ve taught.

At my new school, black teachers and other teachers of color are hired because of our first-hand experiences being part of the same marginalized communities we serve, our deep concern that equips us with the strength to bear the weight of the trauma that our communities experience, and our drive to pay back the educational debt owed those communities. For the first time in my career, I feel empowered.

In the past, I’ve sat in staff meetings where it was clear that the needs of marginalized students were not a priority. Early in one recent teaching job, I began to be concerned about the gaps that most of my students of color exhibited in their learning. I decided to bring up those concerns in planning meetings and, on one occasion, in a meeting with the principal.

I said I wanted to build in additional supports for children with gaps in their learning, and hoped I’d have the opportunity to plan with resource teachers and instructional coaches. I was told that planning for “those kids” should take place before school hours. It was clear to me that equity wasn’t even on the school leadership’s radar, let alone a priority.

I realized that the challenge of meeting students’ needs wasn’t the issue. The people in the building didn’t take me seriously. I didn’t feel respected or valued, and that lack of respect had nothing to do with my knowledge and ability.

I decided to look for another job. I wanted to serve in a school where faculty and staff reflected the community and were invested in the welfare of the students and families they served. To increase the chances of working in a school like that, I decided to aim for a school with a principal of color. That was a challenge in and of itself.
Being a public school teacher in the United States is stressful. In addition to our standard duties, there are things we aren’t necessarily trained for. For example, the emotional toll of carrying the baggage of fear for the welfare of the community you serve can be draining.

I also carry with me the angst that comes from being a black man in a society that has created a negative and frightening narrative about us. As a black male teacher in the elementary setting—a setting dominated by white women sheltered by that privilege—the stress I experience on any given day could be connected to my anxiety about being an outcast, or my fear of losing my job after sharing progressive ideas that no one in leadership positions understands.

Let me be clear: I’m not saying that schools with white principals can’t understand the needs of underserved students and be committed to equity. You don’t have to be a teacher of color to understand the needs of students from marginalized communities. I don’t know what my current white colleagues thought or felt about marginalized communities before they came to this school, but I know that now they are committed to doing the work of understanding the community’s ways of being and knowing because it is a priority.

They take the equity training seriously. The administration leads the staff in engaging in hard conversations about race in this country and culturally responsive classroom management is a driving force in our school’s culture. And through programs like the summer library, in which books are brought from the school into the community, and the family food market, a monthly distribution of free, fresh produce and pantry items, the administration and teachers find ways to maintain relationships with the community. All of these things place the community at the center of the school’s culture.

Working in a school where the community is at the heart of the school’s culture is refreshing. It has reminded me of why I became a teacher, and it’s my reason for wanting to stay in education for years to come.

Ohio Adopts New SEL Standards

In Each Child, Our Future, Ohio’s Strategic Plan for Education, social-emotional learning is one of four equal learning domains supporting Ohio’s goal of preparing each student in Ohio for postsecondary life. Through a stakeholder-driven process, Ohio teachers, school counselors and education personnel developed Ohio’s Social and Emotional Learning Standards for grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12). The Ohio State Board of Education adopted the social-emotional learning standards in June of 2019.

Each district and school will decide for itself the extent to which it uses these standards and how it uses these standards. A school’s or district’s choice will be informed by the values and needs of its local community. These standards are meant to be integrated into the regular daily activities in school, and they do not mean more classes for students or more work for teachers. The Ohio Department of Education will not develop tests to measure students’ progress in learning the standards. Instead, schools and districts will have flexibility to choose whether and how to gauge the extent to which students are demonstrating mastery of the standards. The standards are the first step in the Ohio Department of Education’s plan to create resources for districts to voluntarily implement or modify to best meet the social-emotional needs of their students.

What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Social-emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. Research demonstrates that students who receive support for social and emotional learning in schools do better academically, socially and behaviorally. Social-emotional learning has also been shown to positively impact economic mobility and mental health outcomes. Developing these skills in our students is an important part of meeting the needs of the whole child.

K-12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards

Ohio’s K-12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards are broken down by grade bands (kindergarten-grade 3, grades 3-5, middle grades and high school) and provide a continuum of development in five competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision-Making. The social and emotional learning standards are for all students, kindergarten through grade 12, with the understanding that each child develops at his or her own rate. The standards represent a continuum of development and a child may excel in one competency and struggle in another.
Birth - Kindergarten Social and Emotional Learning Standards

In 2012, the State Board of Education adopted the Early Learning and Development Standards for children birth - kindergarten entry. These standards include the Social and Emotional Development domain that addresses the skills, knowledge and behaviors that children develop within awareness and expression of emotion, self-concept, self-regulation, sense of competence and relationships with others. The Ohio Department of Education provides guidance and professional development around these standards, including implementation guides for teachers.

History of SEL at the Department of Education

- 2012 - Adoption of Birth - Kindergarten Early Learning and Development Standards including Social and Emotional Development
- 2015 - Ohio Department of Education, with approval from the State Board of Education, extended the social-emotional development standards from kindergarten through third grade.
- 2018 - Began development of social and emotional learning standards for kindergarten through grade twelve through a stakeholder driven process.
- 2018 Statewide Social and Emotional Learning Survey Results
- June 2019 - Adoption of Ohio’s Kindergarten through Grade 12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards.

If you have any questions about Ohio’s K-12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards, please email SEL@education.ohio.gov.
California State Senate Approves “At Promise” Adoption

On August 19, the California State Senate approved AB 413 which would replace the deficit term “at risk” in the Education and Penal Codes and adopt the affirmative term “at-promise.” Senator Steven Bradford, a co-author of the bill, presented AB 413 to his colleagues on the Senate Floor. “Perception matters and our youths are more than their situation. Let’s be intentional with our words and empower our students by using people-first language. AB 413 transitions California to the strength-based approach of at promise and recognizes the potential of every youth to succeed.”

The bill was approved by the State Senate on an overwhelming 34 to 2 vote. AB 413 was introduced by Assembly Member Reginald Jones-Sawyer to implement ACR 197 from last year, a resolution that he authored which was overwhelmingly approved in recognition of the importance of moving from deficit language to positive recognition of youth. ACR 197 recognized the importance of moving mindsets from the potential of youth who are predicted to fail, despite never being given a chance to prove otherwise, never being given the same access to resources and guidance as other young people, and never enjoying the privileges and opportunities afforded other young. Jones-Sawyer’s staff attended the 2017 RAPSA Policy Forum and shared the focus that attendees had on changing perspectives and opportunities for “at promise” students.

AB 413 has been approved at each stage of the legislative process and only needs to have its amendments approved by the house of origin before moving to Governor Newsom’s desk for signature. Since its introduction, AB 413 has added Assembly Members Santiago, Smith, Weber, and Kalra as co-authors along with Senator Bradford.

AB 413 was sponsored by SIATech and the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). This year’s RAPSA Policy Forum [link] will feature California’s success with the bill and offer a session that describes how education leaders in other states can provide similar transformations in their statutes. The “Rising From At Risk to At Promise – Lessons From California’s Advocacy” session will be offered by RAPSA Executive Director Ernie Silva, JD; LACOE lobbyist Pam Gibbs, JD; and Assembly Member Jones-Sawyer’s Legislative Fellow Erika Ngo (invited).
The Center for Assessment in New Hampshire strives to increase student learning through more meaningful educational assessment and accountability practices. Chris Domaleski manages the operations of the Center and plays an active role as a consultant to multiple states supporting the development, implementation, and evaluation of assessment and accountability systems. Alternative high schools serve a vital role in improving outcomes for students, particularly for those students who are most at risk. While there isn’t a uniform definition for “alternative,” the term typically describes a school that primarily serves students who have not been successful in a traditional environment. Alternative high schools often receive students with cumulative academic deficits and take on the vital work of helping students prepare for opportunities after high school.

**How Effective are Alternative High Schools?**

Given the key role of alternative schools, it’s essential to ask how effective they are in providing high-quality education to students. One would expect to find the answer by reviewing the state’s school accountability ratings. After all, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to provide uniform information about school quality and performance for all public schools in the state. However, alternative schools almost always wind up in the lowest performance categories of a state system. A low rating for all alternative schools can be interpreted in one of two ways: either all alternative schools in the state are, in fact, performing very poorly; or, the accountability model does not fit these schools very well. I find the latter more persuasive, and, increasingly, state education leaders are reaching the same conclusion. Wyoming recently adopted a system geared at meaningfully measuring alternative schools.

**Promising Practice: Wyoming**

Wyoming Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 87 called for revisions to the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act (WAEA) to include the establishment of a separate alternative school accountability system. State education leaders responded by empaneling an advisory group comprising alternative school leaders along with broad group of experts and advocates. Working with the Center for Assessment, the advisory group developed a framework for the new system, and then conducted a multi-year pilot to evaluate the initial design and inform refinements and improvements to the system. The new system was finalized in the fall of 2018. Wyoming's alternative accountability system includes indicators that overlap with the general model as well as distinctive elements. Some overlapping indicators have been adapted to better reflect the priorities identified by the advisory group. For example, the alternative system emphasizes progress toward proficiency using a
performance index, and substantially weights academic growth. Distinctive elements include a climate survey and credit for implementing individual Student Success Plans. These latter elements were selected in part to promote an environment characterized by personalized support and mentoring, seen as crucial to helping students reach their post-secondary goals.

The new model helps leaders and stakeholders differentiate between schools that are more or less effective at preparing students for post-secondary success. While some schools still receive feedback that indicates performance is below expectations, the ratings are seen as fairer and more useful to inform improvement planning. And the fact that some schools are recognized as meeting or exceeding expectations provides evidence that while the performance goals may be ambitious, they are attainable.

**One Size Doesn’t Fit All**

There is no one “right way” to design an accountability system. What may work well in one state may be poorly suited for another. The Wyoming case provides a great example of a process for creation of an alternative school accountability system which included mechanisms to:

1. elicit input from a diverse group of experts and stakeholders
2. develop and document policy priorities
3. pilot and fine-tune the system before fully operationalizing it

Ultimately, both the process and the product are vital. A thoughtful process develop appropriately-customized solutions for alternative schools that improves outcomes for all students. One size doesn’t fit all. It’s time to rethink accountability for alternative schools.

Mr. Domeleski’s full article published by The Center for Assessment can be reviewed here: https://www.ncriea.org/blog/assessment-systems/rethinking-accountability-alternative-high-schools
Youth in foster care and youth who have exited foster care, like all youth, need many resources to assist them in becoming successful adults. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act’s (WIOA) Youth Program (Title I) and Social Security Act’s Title IV-E Program (federal foster care funding) can be leveraged together to prepare young adults in foster care for success in the 21st Century workforce.

The federal foster care system helps to provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children until the children are safely returned home or placed permanently in other living situations (adoption or guardianship). While in foster care, there is an opportunity for workforce development and child welfare professionals to partner to provide services to assist youth in their transition to adulthood. Youth in foster care may live in foster homes, with relatives, or be living independently. State foster care systems can vary in how they are operated but all are responsible for case management services. While the child welfare system provides case management, services regarding employment and career planning may be better delivered by WIOA Youth Program professionals who have expert knowledge.

Department of Labor Releases Info on Integrating WIOA With Youth in Foster Care

The WIOA Youth Program focuses on assisting youth with one or more barriers to employment prepare for postsecondary education and employment opportunities, attain educational and/or skills training credentials, and secure employment with career/promotional opportunities. Eligible youth include both out-of-school youth (OSY) and in-school youth (ISY).

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<th>OSY Eligibility</th>
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<td>• 16-24 years of age</td>
<td>• 14-21 years of age</td>
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One of the barriers included in the definition of both ISY and OSY is “an individual in foster care or who has aged out of the foster care system or who has attained 16 years of age and left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption, a child eligible for assistance under sec. 477 (the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the Chafee program)) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement.”

Both the WIOA Youth Program and foster care systems serve a population within the age range of 14-24; child welfare agencies around the country work with youth until they transition out of foster care at age 18 or 21 and can continue to provide services up to age 23 or 24 in some states. Through partnership and alignment, the WIOA Youth Program and the foster care system can increase the capacity of service providers to assist young adults in foster care meet their employment and educational goals.

Youth in foster care or who have left foster care are eligible for the WIOA youth program whether in school or out of school. The WIOA Youth Program requires that at least 75% of program funds be spent on OSY. Many youth in foster care fall into the category of OSY, and local areas have up to 25% of funds that can be spent on eligible ISY.

Most youth in foster care could benefit from additional opportunities to prepare for life after high school, such as career preparation, and technical education or training, or postsecondary education. While child welfare professionals are able to assist youth with basic employment activities and skills, WIOA Youth Program professionals have the ability to help youth build the skills needed to progress along their career trajectory. Collaboration across these programs is foundational to serving youth as services and supports are needed.

The original article can be viewed here: