

**Reaching Potential through Manufacturing: Strategies to Help At-Risk
Students Graduate and Become Career Ready**

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Key words: dropout prevention, at-risk, alternative education, career ready, graduation rate, blended learning, effective strategy, community partnerships, manufacturing

Funding Sources:

Textron Specialized Vehicles general budget
Richmond County School System general fund

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

Textron Specialized Vehicles

\$1,445,791.23 capital investments

Funding from Textron Specialized Vehicles covered the following:

- Facility building project: classrooms, infrastructure, warehouse restructuring, machinery, kitting
- Staff: RPM Operations Manager, 4 shift supervisors, RPM student/employees
- Custodial services
- Utilities

Richmond County School System

\$1,162,676.66 total investments

- \$10,473.60: furniture
- \$71,203.06: technology costs
- \$576,000.00: transportation costs
- Federal breakfast/lunch/dinner program: school nutrition
- \$500,000.00: staff salaries
- \$5,000.00: operating budget (supplies, materials, etc.)

Project Description:

In August of 2016, Richmond County high school students who needed another path to help them complete their secondary education, started their first day of work at RPM (Reaching Potential through Manufacturing). RPM is a partnership between EZ-GO Textron, makers of EZ-GO golf cars, and the Richmond County School System. RPM was replicated following the model developed by Southwire and The Carrol County School System, 12 for Life, in Carrollton, Georgia. Students involved in the program are part time employees of EZ-GO Textron, who go to school for half of the day and make subassembly parts for EZ-GO golf cars during the other half. The program targets At-Risk students who are in need of intense interventions and support. The goals of the program are to reestablish academic confidence , reengage consistent attendance habits, provide monetary support, develop a good work ethic, and ultimately help the students graduate from high school.

The inaugural class of 75 students entered the cooperative education program, which combines an instructional day with a four-hour work shift at the RPM manufacturing facility. The students produce subcomponents and subassemblies for products manufactured by Textron Specialized Vehicles (TSV), which manufactures vehicles under the E-Z-GO[®], Cushman[®], Textron Off-Road[®], TUG[™], Douglas[™], Jacobsen[®], and Artic Cat brands[®].

Besides the manufacturing floor, the facility includes classrooms and educational spaces to allow students to make progress toward their high-school diploma, and earn valuable work experience and income from a single facility. Students attend classes either at their home high school, or

they take coursework at the RPM facility, depending on their specific needs. Besides traditional academic classes, RPM students also receive training in life skills, job skills, and are provided tutoring resources as needed.

The program draws students from all Richmond County high schools. Students apply for the program, and are selected for participation based upon need and the suitability of the program to help in their specific situation.

Links to program videos providing further detail and information:

Student testimonials: <https://vimeo.com/atomicstudios/review/188326375/50f10bc74c>

Program information video: <https://vimeo.com/atomicstudios/review/184752752/ee0a617fcc>

Staffing Pattern:

Textron Specialized Vehicles

RPM Operation Manager

4 shift supervisors, 2 morning and 2 evening

RPM Manufacturing Engineer

RPM Forklift Operator

Custodial Services

Richmond County School System

Principal

Counselor

Administrative Assistant (Secretary/Bookkeeper/Data clerk)

4 Teachers (Math, Science, Social Studies, English Language Arts)

Career, Technical, and Career Education /Work-Based Learning Teacher

Jobs for Georgia's Graduates Advisor

Population Served:

Number of students: Initial Cohort: 75 students (25 per shift), Current enrollment: 100 students (33-34 per shift)

Description of project participants:

RPM targets the most at-risk students in the school system who are at least 16 years old, grades 9th-12th, are eligible to participate.

Participant selection criteria:

Students are selected using an at-risk rating rubric which quantifies a ranking for the student based on certain criteria. The criteria are attendance, credits/cohort status, financial need, discipline, and priority rating (teen parent, homeless, parents incarcerated, etc.).

Project Origination:

Jason Alford, Vice President of Integrated Supply Chain at TSV, following researched a project in Carrollton, Georgia, called 12 for Life, then approached the Richmond County School System with the idea for the project. TSV leadership and Leadership from the Richmond County School

System made several trips to Carrollton to tour the 12 for Life plant. The initiative was given final approval by TSV leadership and the Richmond County Board of Education and planning commenced.

Issues Addressed:

Many of the students in need of this type of intervention were not going to school or were extremely disengaged. They often had to make a critical “either/or” decision pertaining to their high school diploma and education and getting a job to support their families. Many of the students, particularly those living in extreme poverty, need the income to survive and support their families. The choice is either go to school and work towards a high school diploma or drop out and get a job. These students are superstars, both academically and on the manufacturing floor, but life circumstances, lack of academic confidence, school disengagement, and lack of job and life skills was hindering any type of progress. RPM gives these students a second chance and instead of an either/or choice at a high school diploma they now have an “and” choice: to go to school *and* get a job *and* get a high school diploma. This unique educational path helps them reach their educational goals, and also provide training in life skills and tangible work experience they can leverage to launch their careers.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

Increase in graduation rate for the school system
Increase in graduation rate for high schools in the school system
Increase in attendance rate for the school system
Increase in attendance rate for high schools in the school system
Decrease in the dropout rate for the school system
Decrease in the dropout rate for high schools in the school system
Increase in the number of skilled workers to feed the TSV workforce shortage

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

42 total graduates in 2017:
 25 graduates May 2017
 12 graduates July 2017
 5 graduates Dec 2017
11 graduates employed by TSV
80 courses completed in Edgenuity
Summer: 168 courses, 150 course passed, 89% pass rate
Average Daily Attendance: 93%
1st semester-93% (6)
2nd semester-90% (9)
Summer-97% (.6)
Last year: 87% (23)

Strategies and/or Interventions:

- The program serves as an intervention for At-Risk students throughout the Richmond County School System
- Small class sizes, less than fifteen students
- Edgenuity credit recovery and Edgenuity blended learning model

- Phone calls and text messages to students and parents/guardians when students are not at school or work
- Transportation provided for all students, even on non-school days when students are only working
- Wednesday classes with Peach State Federal Credit Union on financial literacy
- RPM Mentor program
- During school and after school tutoring available
- Positive Men's and Positive Ladies group sessions on Thursdays with community experts in the fields of gang prevention/intervention, character building, positive relationship choices, health and wellness guidance
- Yoga classes once a week to teach mindfulness and aid in emotional control and well being
- RPM Family Action Team: the RPM Family Action Team is comprised of fifteen social service and community based agencies that meet once per month at the RPM facility with the administration to review individual and program needs to provide guidance and additional intervention and support to students and families. Members include:
Communities in Schools
Christ Community Health Services-Medical and Dental needs
Department of Juvenile Justice
Rape Crisis and Sexual Assault Services
Serenity Behavioral Health Services
The Augusta Partnership for Children
Medical Associates Plus
United Methodist Family Services
Full Circle Refuge
Revelation Outreach Ministries
Augusta Urban Ministries
Department of Family and Children Services

Project Timeline:

November 2015-August 2016

First day of Operation-August 2nd, 2016

Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project:

Each member of the partnership served in specific roles on the project. Textron Specialized Vehicles facilitated the construction and customization of the building for operational needs, and also supervises the day to day manufacturing operation. The Richmond County School System was responsible for the hiring of the school staff, school nutrition, curriculum development, scheduling, and transportation, as well as day to day operation of the school portion of the program. The RPM program is a joint partnership and both partners work together daily for the success and the benefit of the students.

Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:

The mission of the RPM program is to help students finish high school with a full diploma and gain valuable work readiness skills.

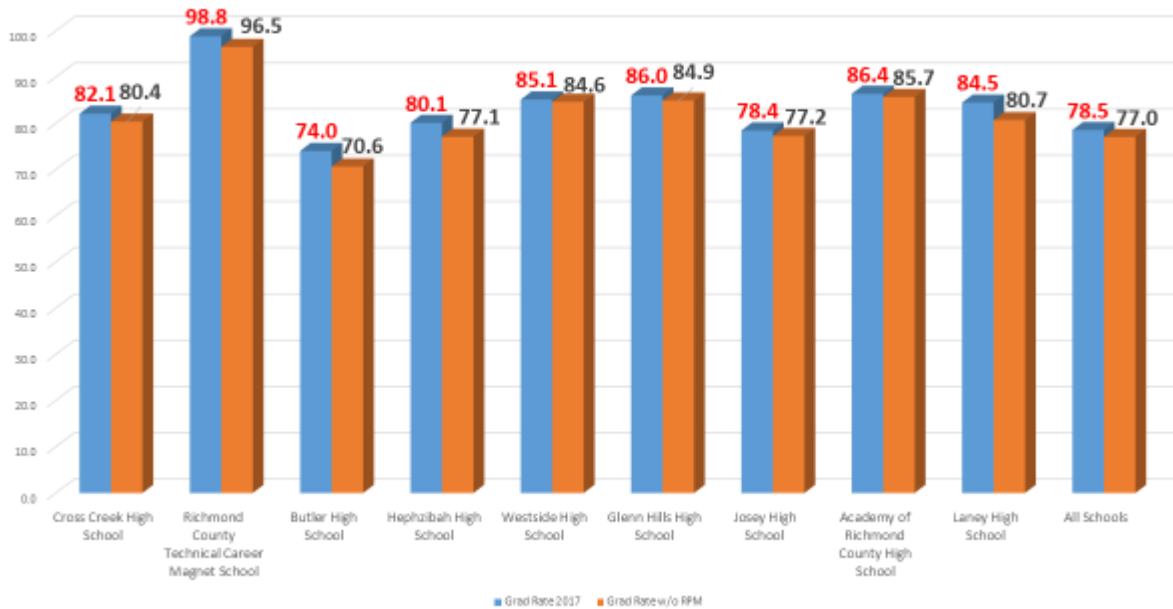
Graduation rate/Dropout rate:

After the first year of operation 25 students out of the initial cohort of 75 graduated in May of 2017, 12 additional students graduated in July of 2017, and 5 more graduated in December of 2017.

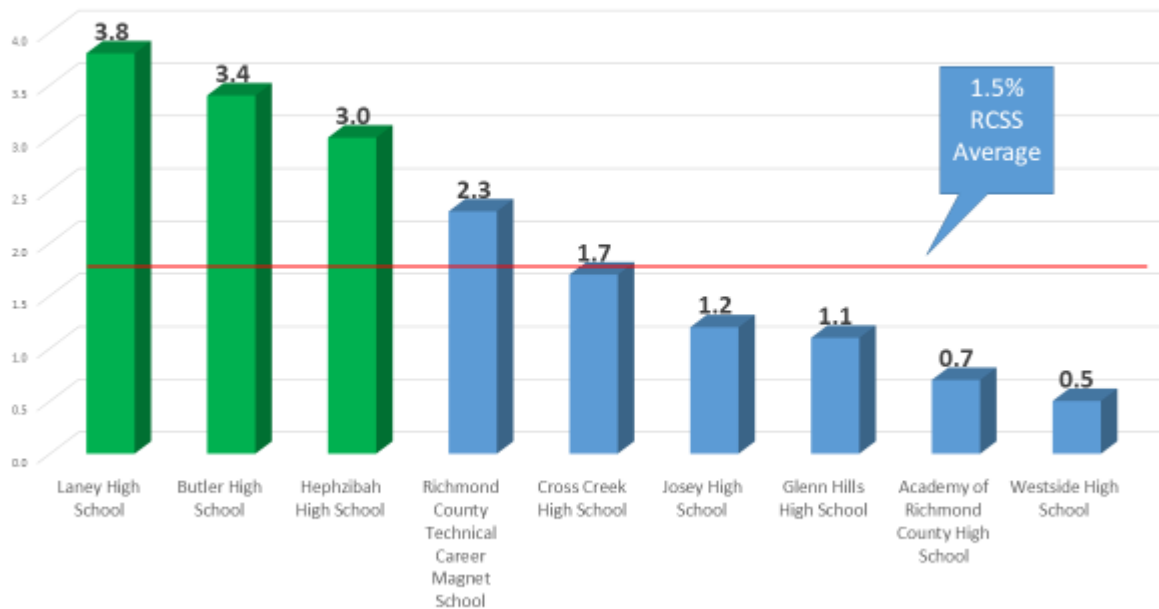
The impact rate was also calculated for the RPM and for each school. The impact rate is the percentage impact the RPM program had on the school system's graduation rate as well as the impact the program had on each school's graduation rate. The impact rate is calculated by subtracting each of the school's RPM graduates and recalculating the graduation rate without the RPM students. Table 1 shows the graduation rate, the total of students graduated, the 2016 and 2017 graduation rates, the graduation rate without the RPM graduates, and the impact percentage for each school and for the system. Table 2 the impact rate for each school and the system in chart form. Table 3 shows the impact rate for each school from greatest to least impact and the system average.

School Name	Graduation Class Size	Total Graduated	Grad Rate 2017	Grad Rate w/o RPM	RPM Impact %	Grad Rate 2016
Cross Creek High School	301	247	82.1	80.4	1.7	80.4
Richmond County Technical Career Magnet School	85	84	98.8	96.5	2.3	97.9
Performance Learning Center	116	9	7.8	5.2	2.6	13.2
Butler High School	204	151	74.0	70.6	3.4	65.6
Hephzibah High School	231	185	80.1	77.1	3.0	76.4
Westside High School	175	149	85.1	84.6	0.5	83.4
Glenn Hills High School	186	160	86.0	84.9	1.1	73.3
Josey High School	167	131	78.4	77.2	1.2	67.1
Academy of Richmond County High School	301	260	86.4	85.7	0.7	84.5
Laney High School	161	136	84.5	80.7	3.8	86.7
All Schools	2186	1717	78.5	77.0	1.5	76.7

RPM Grad Rate Impact



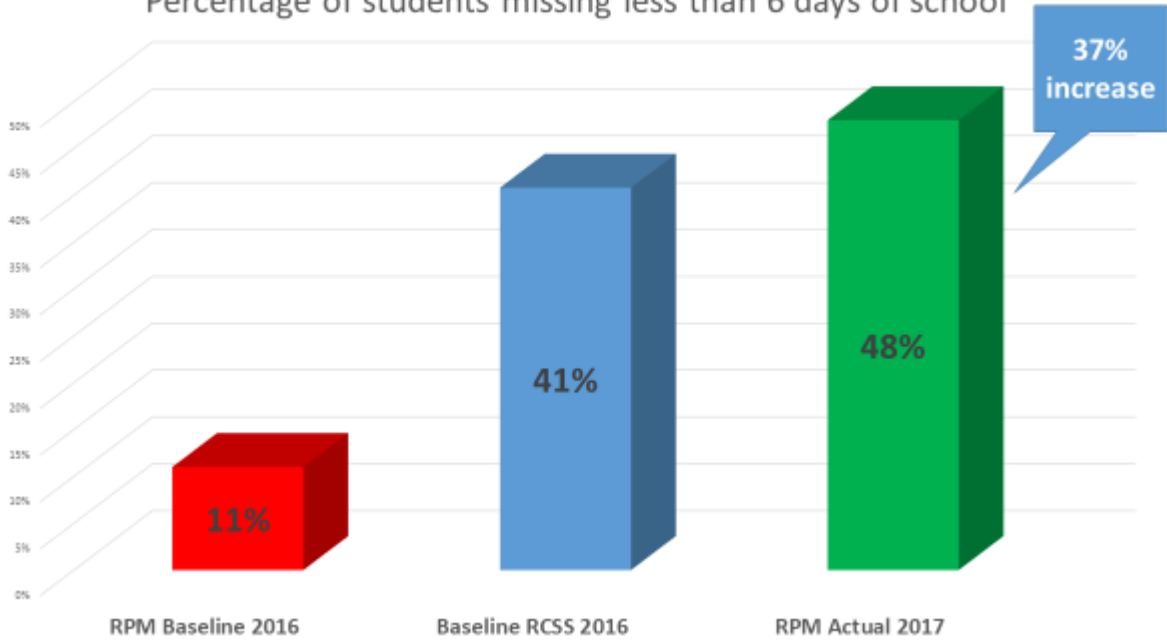
RPM Impact %



Attendance rate:

Attendance rate improved from 85% average daily attendance (initial cohort) to 93% average daily attendance at the end of the 2017 school year. The attendance rate for the RPM summer session was 97% average daily attendance. The percentage of students missing six or fewer days for the initial cohort of students was 11%. At the end of the first year of the RPM program, the percentage of students missing six or less days was 48%. There was a 37% increase in the percentage of students absent six or less days.

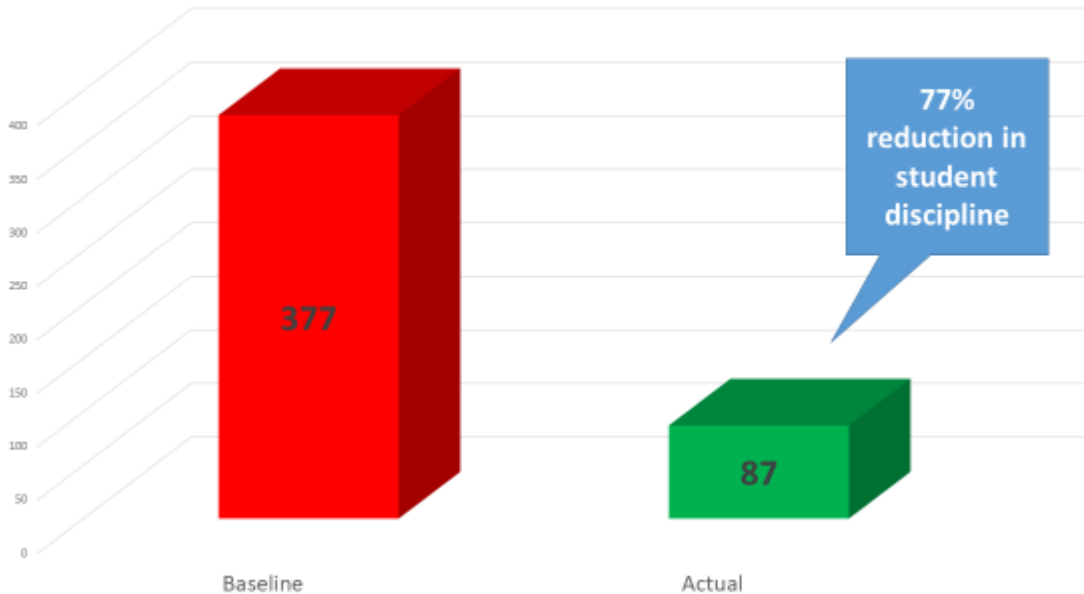
Percentage of students missing less than 6 days of school



Student discipline:

There was a 77% decrease in the number of discipline incidents at the end of the first year of operation. The initial cohort of students had 377 discipline incidents the previous year. At the end of the 2016-2017 school year, the students had 87 discipline incidents with the majority of incidents pertaining to work/school attendance policy referrals (TSV assigns points for missing work and for tardiness).

Discipline Incidents Impact



Current Status of Project:

The RPM program is currently in its second year of operation. The student enrollment has been increased from 75 to 100 students. In the initial year, only 25 students attended school on-site at the RPM facility. The other 50 students attended class at their zoned school. In the second year of operation, 77 students now take class on-site at the RPM facility, and the other 23 take class at their zoned school.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:

I currently serve as the principal of the RPM program. I am responsible for site supervision, staffing, student instruction, operations, public relations and communications for the Reaching Potential through Manufacturing Program. I initially served as a principal consultant at the onset of this project, but in June of 2016, I was named principal and project coordinator.

Lessons Learned:

Outside of the financial and academic support the program offers, it was realized a higher tier of intervention was needed to provide additional support. Several students had either quit the program or were terminated because of lack of additional intervention and supports. The RPM Family Action Team, with the partnership of community and business partners, has helped in retaining more students throughout the school year and helped in provided much needed wrap-around services.

In addition, we have moved away from full online credit recovery instruction to a more blended model of instruction. Students who are in need of intense academic intervention often struggle with keeping adequate pace in a full credit recovery course. They require more face to face instruction and direct teacher support to stay on pace and make progress toward graduation.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

- Plan a visit to the RPM facility to see the program and project in person and to see the students in action.
- Bring members of the local Chamber of Commerce as well as district level leadership and key stakeholders on the trip
- A multi-million-dollar investment and partnership with a Fortune 200 company is not the only avenue for implementation. Reach out to all local businesses, large and small, and brainstorm ways to get students involved in the workforce development initiatives in the local community.
- Make sure to include other community and business partnership to include social service agencies in order to provide additional support to the students.