

CREATING AND REPLICATING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS

CASE STUDY

Reaching Potential through Manufacturing Richmond County–Textron Partnership

Connecting Experiential Learning and School
to Support At-Risk Students

Richmond County, GA



Carl Vinson Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Without Richmond County high school students, golfers across the country might be stuck carrying their golf clubs across the course. In August 2016, Textron Specialized Vehicles (TSV), a branch of Textron Inc. in Augusta, Georgia, opened its doors to a group of Richmond County high school students enrolled in a new work-based learning program called Reaching Potential through Manufacturing (RPM). The first class of 75 RPM students were accepted based on an application and assessment that included graduation risk factors such as current academic standing, attendance record, and family situation. Students spend their days at a dedicated RPM facility that contains both classroom and plant space, allowing for a seamless transition from class time to work time. TSV decentralized the brake assembly portion of the vehicle manufacturing process in order to move it to RPM. These students are now wholly responsible for production of the brakes on all E-Z GO golf carts as well as other functions at the RPM facility including material warehousing, process engineering, assembly, and quality control. There is no backup; if RPM does not run, then the main TSV plant will not run.

In the first year, 37 students graduated with both their high school diploma and a year of professional experience. Of those 37, nine were hired full time by Textron, and the company projects that close to one-third of future RPM graduates will come to work for Textron after receiving their diplomas. Graduates are not automatically given a job at Textron; they must apply, go through Georgia Quick Start testing, and interview like all other applicants. In addition to expanding the program to accommodate more than 150 students at a time with traditional school and career support, RPM is also working with the Augusta Partnership, a group of local nonprofits, to provide wraparound services to students and their families. Plans include bringing in a dental bus, mental and physical health care, and other services. Involving the nonprofit sector in the program not only benefits the staff of RPM and the students, but also gives these organizations a way into the schools.

For those currently working to create similar partnerships but facing barriers, Heather Meyers, a TSV employee who helped to found the program, said that sometimes all it takes is simply reframing an idea: “Schools are operations. They have people instead of parts. They just produce students instead of cars.” So, rather than focusing on potential barriers like legal issues or safety, she believes that businesses and education providers should sit down, have the hard conversations, and think outside the box about how to develop a strong local workforce and provide for students.

