



Part of Optimal's mission as a company is to provide rigorous analysis and objective research to our clients on issues and policies that are relevant, timely, and necessary for our communities and, ultimately, our country. The recently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 brings to the table such vital issues as service obligation, health care reforms, energy, and the environment. Optimal is in a unique position to examine some of these same issues, which you will see highlighted in this edition of our newsletter.

Finally, we are committed to the bright future ahead: A new generation is being called upon to rise to this occasion, and Optimal is proud to play its part in mentoring students and engaging scholars and researchers in this important work.

Mark D. Turner, PhD, President and CEO
Tracye Turner, Executive Vice President and COO

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Spotlight

Incentive-based Program Tracking, Performance, May Be Key to Support Training of Some Professionals in U.S.

Workforce shortages of [primary care physicians](#) and highly qualified [special education teachers](#), for example, pose a mounting public policy challenge. To address these systemic national shortages, policy makers are turning to a family of incentive-based programs, including service obligation scholarships, loan repayment programs, and loan forgiveness programs.

The concept of these incentive programs is simple enough: reduce or remove a student's financial burden by providing an educational scholarship with a post-graduation service requirement or providing a graduate with loan payment assistance/cancelation for maintaining employment in a needed area. Seemingly straightforward, the tracking of data can be challenging for the federal and state agencies sponsoring programs and for the students and employers involved.

Optimal's contribution in solving workforce shortages

Questions or Comments?
Contact us for more information:
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has been the development of the Service Obligation Tracking System, an Internet-enabled case management and performance measurement solution. To learn more about Optimal's role in service obligation program management, and to review select pieces of federal legislation regarding service obligation in education, visit the [National Center on Service Obligations](#) Web site.

Optimal Research Presentations at National Conferences

Poster Presentation on Quality Indicators at Fall 2009 APHA Annual Meeting

Optimal researchers Olajumoke "Jumy" Adekeye and Danielle Ward have had their work on health quality indicators accepted as a poster presentation at the 137th American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting, November 7-11, 2009, in Philadelphia. Their work, titled "Incorporating quality indicators in electronic health record development," evaluated the technical feasibility of using electronic systems already in place in hospitals nationwide to collect data for performance measurements. In addition, they identified the potential ramifications that the use of these interim systems may have on improving the healthcare of Medicare patients.

Poster Presentation on Evaluation of Virginia's Children's Mental Health Program at Fall 2009 APHA Annual Meeting

Optimal researchers Grace Hong, Katlo Manthe, and Kelly Gent have had their work on Virginia's Children's Mental Health (CMH) Program accepted as a poster presentation at the 137th American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, November 7-11, 2009, in Philadelphia. The evaluation of the CMH Program assesses how children who transition out of residential care and receive community-based services through the CMH Program experience changes in their functional levels over time as compared with similar children who remain in residential care. The comparison group will be identified by matching baseline characteristics, such as diagnosis and baseline functional level. Their work, titled "Evaluation of a Virginia Medicaid Waiver Program: Assessing the effectiveness and implementation fidelity of the Children's Mental Health Program," also monitors the fidelity of the CMH program by comparing the adherence of the actual program implementation to the intended program theory and design.

Optimal Fellow Leads Session, Research Associate Contributes Presentation, at 2009 AERA Annual Meeting

Toks Fashola, PhD, Senior Research Fellow with Optimal, served as panel chair for a session at the American Education Research Association (AERA) conference in San Diego, April 13-17. The title of the panel was "Sample Recruitment, Design Implementation, and Data Collection in RFT Designs: Districts and Schools as Partners." Monica Leal Priddy, a Research Associate at Optimal, presented her research in the session. Her presentation, titled "Recruitment Challenges, Considerations, and Best Practices for Recruitment Efforts," described lessons learned in the context of two Optimal projects: the National Charter School Evaluation project, on which Optimal serves as a subcontractor to Mathematica Policy Research, and the Study of Teacher Preparation in Early Reading Instruction, on which Optimal serves as the prime contractor. A full list of panel members and their presentations from this session are available on Optimal's [Education Research Center](#) Web page.

New Contract Announcements

Optimal gained new opportunities that recognize our expertise in our Housing, Economic Development and Transportation and Health Policy Research Centers:

- IDIQ (Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quality) contract through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy, Programs, and Legislative Initiatives
- Medicaid Information and Assistance Project for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Optimal Civic Engagement



Optimal Opens Its Doors to High School Students for Job Shadow Day

On March 26, a group of high school juniors visited Optimal for "Job Shadow

Day." This was the third time that Optimal has sponsored high school students from Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties (Maryland). The students were challenged at the beginning of the day with a [video](#) that provided them with a global perspective on the fast-growing and increasingly achieving populations in such countries as China and India. This is all happening within the fast-paced dynamics of technical and knowledge work, which means a career may not exist when they start school but may exist by the time they finish! The students were reminded that learning to think was the most important thing they could take away with their education.

National Science Foundation Program's Aspiring Economists Get Entrepreneurial Perspective at Optimal

On June 18, Optimal welcomed 15 students taking part in a grant program from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The students' host was William Spriggs, PhD, Professor and Chair, Department of Economics, Howard University, nominee for Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Labor. This was the second time Optimal has hosted NSF students through this program. After spending 2 days visiting Capitol Hill and offices of the Federal Reserve, the students met with Optimal president and labor economist Mark Turner, PhD, for the entrepreneurial perspective. Dr. Turner challenged the students to think about applications in economics that do not exist yet and to re-think their career ambitions, based on today's economic environment, the needs of the country, and where their talents lie.

New Staff

Optimal has recently added many new staff members to its Research Centers and IT staff:

Aryah Fradkin, M.P.P., Research Analyst III
Holly Saltrelli, Research Analyst I
Ugonna Nwosu, M.B.B.S., M.P.H., Research Analyst III
Reginald Crosby, DBA/Programmer
Benjamin van der Horst, M.A., Research Analyst III
Anna Oh, Research Analyst I
Monica Burnett, Research Analyst I
Kianna Banks, R.N., B.S.N., M.S.N., Clinical Quality Improvement Specialist
Mildred Williams, L.I.C.S.W., Senior Associate
Helen Imbernino, M.P.H., Senior Associate
Maggie Pagel, Research Analyst I

Going Green

Portion of 2009 Stimulus Act Aims to Promote Energy Efficiency

[The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#) dedicated a total of \$61.3 billion out of the \$787 billion to the energy sector. The roughly 8% of the stimulus package for energy sectors target numerous green initiatives that implement environmental policy and technology, notably:

- \$500 million for training of "green-collar workers" (i.e., environmental design, policy, and technology);
- \$250 million to increase energy efficiency in low-income housing; and
- \$300 million to buy energy-efficient appliances.

For consumers, the new legislation has increased the

energy efficient tax credit to as much as 30% ([Energy Star Tax Credits](#)).

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