Improving Youth Labor Market Prospects

Long-Term Findings From an Evaluation of Career Academies

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How might Career Academy research and practice inform strategies for connecting youth and careers?

**Practice**
- Nearly 40-year track record of implementation, planned expansion, and efforts at continuous improvement
- Intervention with goals and core features aligned with important problems in high schools and youth employment

**Research**
- 25 years of non-experimental research and a commitment to learning what works
- 15-year random assignment field experiment involving 9 sites, over 1,700 students, and 12 years of follow-up
- Rare evidence of positive effects on labor market outcomes without compromising on academic goals
Career Academies
Program Characteristics and Goals

➢ Key Features
  – *Small Learning Communities* to promote interpersonal supports and program coherence
  – *Career theme* to combine academic curriculum with technical and applied sequences
  – *Employer partnerships* to support work-based learning and career awareness and development activities

➢ Goals
  – *Dropout prevention*
  – *Career development and academic achievement*
  – *Pathways to the labor market and post-secondary education*
Key Findings
(High School Years)

Strengths

● Higher level of interpersonal supports from teachers and peers
● Increased exposure to career awareness activities, work-based learning, career-technical courses
● Greater benefits to “higher risk” students

Potential Limitations

● High attrition rates
● Uneven quality of curriculum integration and internships
● Little or no impact on academic performance indicators
Key Findings
(8 Years Post-High School)

- Positive and sustained impact on employment and earnings through 8 years following scheduled high school graduation.
  - Impact for full sample: $2,088 per year (11 percent increase)
  - Impact for young men: $3,724 per year (17 percent increase)

- High levels of educational attainment, but no impact (positive or negative) from Career Academies.

- Positive impact on family formation and independent living.
Impacts on Monthly Earnings
Young Men
8 Years Post-High School

[Graph showing the impact of educational interventions on monthly earnings over time.]
Implications for Connecting Youth and Careers

- Increased investments in career-related experiences during high school can have substantial payoff in the labor market, at least for young men.
- Career Academies demonstrate feasibility of accomplishing goals of school-to-career and career-technical education without compromising on academic goals.
- Career Academies serve as a viable pathway to post-secondary education, but not necessarily better than what is already available in high school.
WARNING LABEL

- Important to be clear about the focus of the impact (labor market outcomes) and about the likely source of effects (career development and work-based learning activities).
- Trading on the Career Academy “brand name” without careful attention to all core components may lead to dilution of fidelity and lack of impact on misaligned outcomes.
Selected Resources for Career Academy Support

- Career Academy Support Network (www.casn.berkeley.edu)
- National Academy Foundation (www.naf.org)
- National Career Academy Coalition (www.ncac.org)
- MDRC (www.mdrc.org)