

Improving Youth Labor Market Prospects

Long-Term Findings From an Evaluation of Career Academies

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<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/482/full.pdf>

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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

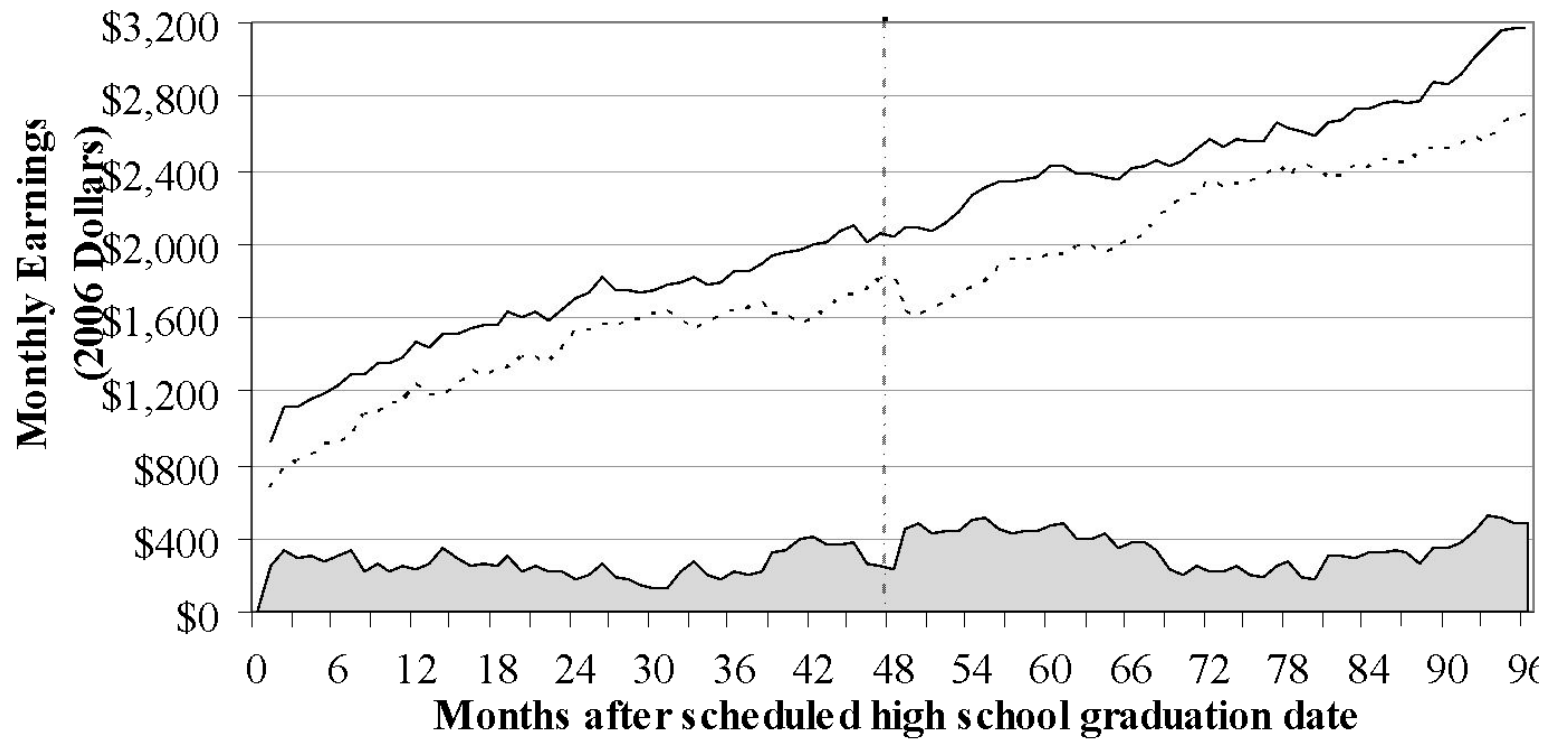
- High attrition rates
- Uneven quality of curriculum integration and internships
- Little or no impact on academic performance indicators

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



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)