AMERICA'S EDGE
Strengthening Businesses Through Proven Investments in Kids

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Career Academies: Preparing North Carolina Students For Post-Secondary Education and Careers

The Problem: Too many high school students leave school unprepared for post-secondary education or the workforce, contributing to the "skills gap" reported by America's businesses.

- 27 percent of North Carolina high school students fail to graduate on time.[1]
- Six out of 10 surveyed North Carolina employers reported communications skills gaps among job applicants. Close to half of employers reported deficiencies in critical thinking and problem solving abilities.
- Almost half of North Carolina employers cited training in occupational skills as the most valuable priority to improve their workforce.
- One quarter of surveyed employers reported a short supply of workers with abilities in skilled trades.[2]
- Two thirds of all new jobs created in North Carolina between 2008 and 2018 will require some type of formal education beyond high school.[3]
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) jobs will grow by 17 percent in North Carolina between 2008 and 2018, and 91 percent of those jobs will require post-secondary education by 2018.[4]

The Career Academies Model: Career Academies integrate career technical training with a rigorous academic curriculum, equipping students with important skills highly valued by employers.

- Also called "smaller learning communities," an academy:
  - Is comprised of a group of students who take classes together for at least two years and are taught by the same group of teachers;
  - Provides a college preparatory curriculum based on a career theme that helps students see relationships and connections between academic subjects and their application in the real world; and
  - Develops partnerships with employers, the community and colleges.
- Approximately 4,800 high schools nationwide report having at least one Career Academy, serving an estimated 1 million students, many of whom are at-risk students in large urban areas.
  - There are at least 30 Career Academies in North Carolina according to the National Academies Foundation and the Career Academy Support Network.
- By working in teams and through real work experience, students begin to understand the importance of professionalism, reliability, teamwork and clear oral communications skills.[5]

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Proven and Promising Outcomes:

- A high-quality randomized control study showed that:
  - Career Academies students were twice as likely to be working in the computer, engineering or media technology sector eight years after graduation as students left out, thus helping to increase the supply of needed STEM workers.[6]
  - High-risk Career Academies students were 50 percent more likely to complete a core academic curriculum than similar students left out.[7] Completing a core curriculum may better prepare students for college or the workforce.
  - Academies produced a significant, sustained increase in former participants' earnings and overall months and hours of employment, without any decrease in educational outcomes, especially among young men and youth who had been in the high-risk subgroup. Young people who went through Career Academies worked 12 percent more hours per week and earned 11 percent more than those who did not participate.[8]

Policy Opportunities: With only approximately 5 percent of U.S. public high school students attending a Career Academy, the public and policy-makers must be made aware of their value as a key workforce development strategy.

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