

Executive Summary

This is the third in a series of reports from an ongoing evaluation of the Career Academy approach, a widely established high school reform initiative aimed at improving students' performance in high school and providing them with clearer pathways to post-secondary education and careers. The evaluation is being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) with support from the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor and 14 private foundations. It focuses on 10 Career Academies across the country.

Career Academies share three basic features. First, the programs are typically organized as schools-within-schools in an effort to create more supportive teaching and learning communities. Second, they have a career theme and attempt to integrate a college preparatory academic curriculum with more applied, occupation-related courses. Third, they establish partnerships with local employers as a means of increasing students' awareness of career options in a given field and providing them with learning opportunities in a work setting.

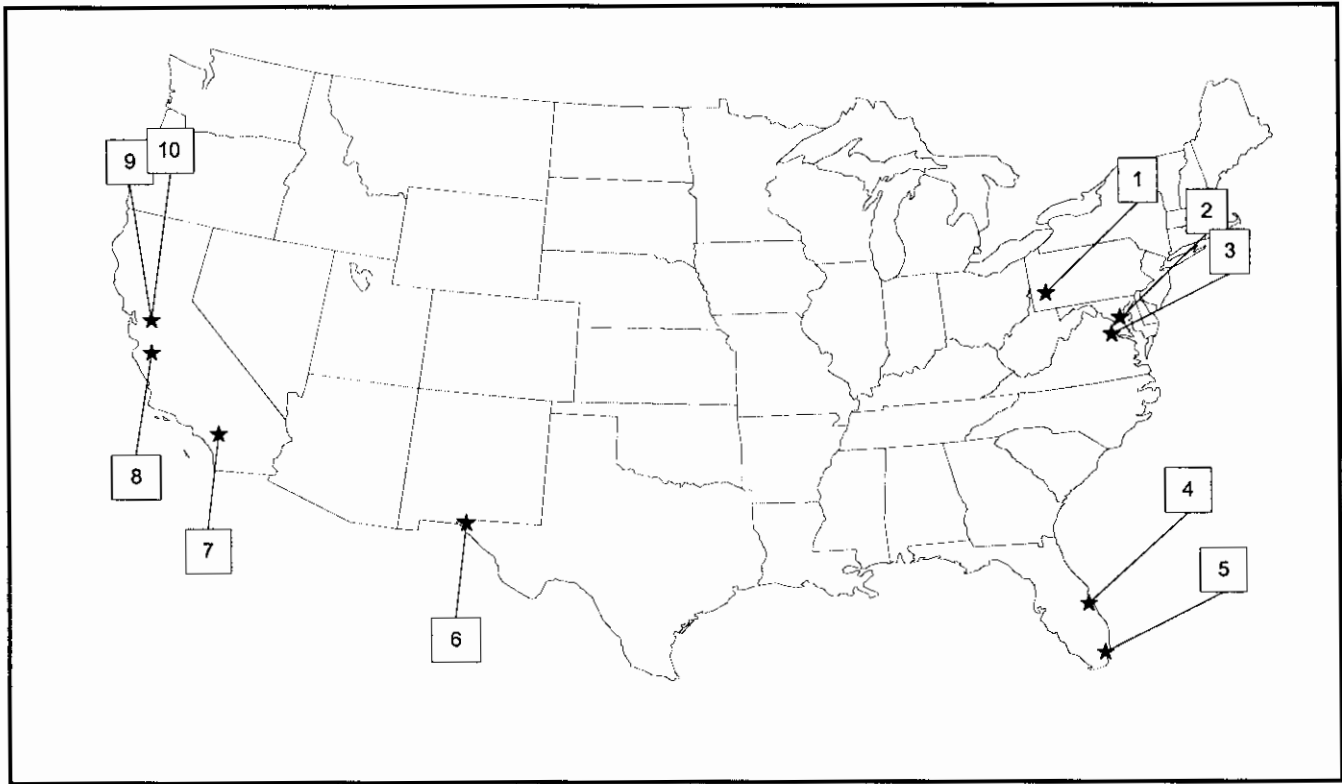
This report focuses on the third of these features, the employer partnerships and how they evolved in each of the 10 participating Career Academies. It also assesses the extent to which Career Academies increased student participation in various career awareness and work-based learning activities that were sponsored by the employer partners. The findings presented in this report provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that high schools and local employers face as they seek to build constructive partnerships. The report suggests several lessons that can guide the development of employer partnerships and work-related learning opportunities for students in the context of Career Academies or other school-to-work programs.

Figure ES-1 shows the names, locations, and affiliations of the 10 Career Academies participating in the evaluation. Most of the school districts represented in the evaluation are large and enroll high percentages of black and Hispanic students compared with national averages. The participating school districts also have higher dropout rates, unemployment rates, and percentages of low-income families than national averages. Most Career Academies across the country are located in such districts, and MDRC purposely sought such sites for the Career Academies Evaluation. Using this group of sites will ensure that the study yields findings for a broad mix of students, including those who, in the experience of schools in the district, may be at risk of doing poorly in school.

The participating Career Academies offer a range of occupational themes. Three are in the business and finance fields, three focus on high-technology areas such as electronics and aerospace technology, and there is one each in the fields of health occupations, public service, travel and tourism, and video technology. The participating programs were drawn from most of the major established networks of Career Academies across the country, with four from the California Partnership Academy network, two from the National Academy Foundation network, one from the Florida network of Academies for Career Development and Applied Technology, and one from the network of Academy programs created by the District of Columbia Public Schools. Two of the participating Academies were created independently through local high school or district initiatives.

The findings presented in this report are based on information collected during several field research visits to each of the 10 sites participating in the study. The report also relies on a survey that was administered to about 1,600 Academy and non-Academy students from the sites

**Figure ES-1
Names, Locations, and Affiliations of Participating Career Academies**



<u>Academy and High School</u>	<u>School District and City</u>	<u>Academy Network and School Year Academy Started</u>
1. Business and Finance Academy George Westinghouse High School	Pittsburgh Public Schools Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Independent 1984-85
2. Academy of Finance Lake Clifton/Eastern High School	Baltimore City Public Schools Baltimore, Maryland	National Academy Foundation 1987-88
3. Public Service Academy Anacostia High School	District of Columbia Public Schools Washington, D.C.	D.C. Public Schools Academy Network 1989-90
4. Academy for Aerospace Technology Cocoa High School	Brevard County Public Schools Cocoa, Florida	Florida's Academies for Career Development and Applied Technology 1993-94
5. Academy of Travel and Tourism Miami Beach Senior High School	Dade County Public Schools Miami Beach, Florida	National Academy Foundation 1991-92
6. Health Professions Academy Socorro High School	Socorro Independent School District Socorro, Texas	Independent 1991-92
7. Global Business Academy Valley High School	Santa Ana Unified School District Santa Ana, California	California Partnership Academy 1991-92
8. Watsonville Video Academy Watsonville High School	Pajaro Valley Unified School District Watsonville, California	California Partnership Academy 1991-92
9. Electronics Academy (SC) Silver Creek High School	East Side Union High School District San Jose, California	California Partnership Academy 1984-85
10. Electronics Academy (I) Independence High School	East Side Union High School District San Jose, California	California Partnership Academy 1984-85

at the end of their 12th-grade year. The survey asked students a variety of questions about their work experiences during high school and about their exposure to career awareness and development activities both in and outside of school.

The Basic Features of Career Academy Employer Partnerships

Previous and ongoing research focusing on school-to-work initiatives has revealed many challenges to establishing partnerships with local employers and developing meaningful work-related learning experiences for students. The 10 Career Academies participating in this evaluation were chosen strategically with the goal of providing a credible test of the Career Academy approach as it had been defined in practice and in previous research. They were also selected to reflect a range of local contexts in which Career Academies have been implemented and sustained. The field research conducted for the study produced rich information documenting various dimensions of their employer partnerships and the intensive effort that was required to implement and sustain them. The following is an overview of the core elements they had in common during the period under study (generally, the 1994-95 school year through the 1997-98 school year).

- **Multiple employers with multiple roles.** Each of the participating Career Academies succeeded in engaging a group of local employers in an ongoing effort to support the Academy programs and to sponsor a range of career awareness and work-based learning activities for students. These relationships predate the study, which began in 1993. The employer partnerships in each of the sites involved a minimum of three employers. The employers supported the Academies by contributing resources, most intensively in the form of the time their employees committed to participating in Academy-related activities as guest speakers at career awareness workshops, special event coordinators, mentors for students, or internship supervisors. Employer partners also provided financial support, equipment, advice on curriculum, information about job opportunities and skill requirements in their fields, and even financial aid for students going to college.
- **Staff time for partnership coordination.** Each of the sites relied on a person or group of people who served as liaisons between the employers and the Academies and as the coordinators for the various employer-sponsored activities. The role of the coordinator was pivotal in facilitating communication between the employer partners and the Academy teachers and administrators. The coordinator in each site also played a central role in developing career awareness and work-based learning activities for students and facilitating student participation in such activities.
- **Career awareness and development activities.** Each of the Career Academies established a variety of employer-sponsored activities that were designed to enhance students' understanding of the world of work in general and their awareness of occupations within the program's broad career theme. Some of these activities occurred outside of school; these included career-related field trips, job shadowing (in which students had the opportunity to accompany an

adult to his or her job for a day), and contact with an adult who acted as a mentor or provided students with personal and professional guidance. Other activities typically occurred in school; these included researching and learning about jobs and their requirements in a class, discussing connections between school and work with other students or adults, receiving instruction or counseling about how to find a job or act on the job, and events at which adults came to school to talk about their jobs.

- **Work-based learning activities.** Each of the Career Academies developed a formal work-based learning program for their students. A key objective of work-based learning is to integrate different approaches to learning by drawing on the classroom, the workplace, and the occupational theme of the Academy. In each of the sites, the employer liaison or coordinator worked to identify or develop job opportunities for Academy students with one of the employer partners. These positions were intended to provide opportunities for students to learn about their assigned job, the range of jobs and career opportunities across the company or organization, and the world of work in general.

Variation Among Career Academies

The participating Career Academies used a wide range of strategies for supporting their employer partnerships and for building on the partnerships to develop new learning opportunities for their students. The variation among the Academies reflects the adaptation of the core dimensions of the Academy approach to local needs, capacities, and circumstances. For some program dimensions, the variation among sites reflects relative strengths or limitations in the sites' capacities to fully engage their employer partners and to develop high quality work-related activities for students. The field research for the Career Academies Evaluation highlighted particularly vivid differences among the sites in three key areas: the partnership management structure, staffing arrangements, and supports for work-based learning. Analysis of these differences provides insights into strategies that may enhance the stability and cohesiveness of the employer partnerships and the quality of work-related activities for students.

Employer partnership management structure. Four Career Academies in the study developed what may be characterized as highly structured approaches to sustaining employer partnerships. Each of the employer partners in these sites was required to provide a financial or in-kind support for the Academies. Financial commitments from the employer partners, as well as in-kind contributions of staff time and other resources, indicated a concrete investment in the success of the program. These sites established formal advisory boards that met regularly to focus and coordinate employer support for the programs. In general, the employer advisory boards provided a forum for employer partners, teachers, and administrators to develop a shared vision for the Career Academies and to discuss issues of mutual concern. Regular meetings provided opportunities for employers and educators to learn from each other and gain new perspectives on the different roles each played in the programs.

The six Career Academies with less-structured employer partnerships either did not have formal employer advisory boards or their employer advisory boards met less frequently. Involvement with employer partners at some of these sites tended to be less well coordinated and

less focused on the Academy's broad mission and operational issues. At some sites, the level of employer involvement fluctuated from year to year, and in one case the employer partnership was eventually reconstituted and then finally disbanded.

Interestingly, two of the programs with less-structured partnerships developed alternative strategies for sustaining or enhancing employer involvement. The partnership in one of these sites included only three principal employers, who provided a large number of work-based learning placements and contributed resources such as equipment and materials. The relatively small number of employers made coordination of their involvement more manageable for the Academy teaching staff and reduced the need for a highly structured approach to managing the partnership. A second site, recognizing the need for more stable and intensive employer involvement, eventually engaged a single large employer who provided financial contributions and made a commitment to providing work-based learning placements and career awareness activities for students. This move appears to have established a solid foundation for expanding the partnership and its role in the Academy.

Staffing arrangements. The sites used different staffing arrangements to coordinate the relationship between the programs and the employer partners and to develop the various employer-sponsored activities for students. Five sites were able to support a full-time, non-teaching coordinator to be the liaison between the Academy and the employer partners and to manage the employer-sponsored activities. With no teaching responsibilities, the coordinator had a flexible schedule and could accommodate meetings with employer advisory group members, Academy budget meetings with employer partners, and fund-raising activities. These non-teaching coordinators were also able to attend to other administrative work in the field to ensure that the career awareness and development opportunities and work-based learning activities ran smoothly over the course of the year. The coordinators were responsible for matching students with mentors and internships, providing orientations for mentors and work-based learning supervisors, monitoring student work experiences throughout the summer months, recruiting new employer partners, and maintaining relationships with existing partners. Interestingly, four of the five sites that were able to support a full-time non-teaching coordinator also relied on the highly structured approach to managing the partnership discussed in the previous section. In fact, the employer partners provided much of the financial support (usually supplemented by district support) for the coordinator's salary and benefits.

The other five sites relied on Career Academy teachers to serve as the primary liaisons with the employer partners and primary coordinators for employer-sponsored activities. At each of these sites, the Academy lead teacher had classroom responsibilities as well as administrative responsibilities for other Academy activities. To provide the lead teachers with some additional time to fulfill these roles, four of the sites provided additional funding to reduce their teaching load (usually from five classes to three or four classes). Although the coordinators at these sites were extremely dedicated, the added classroom and administrative responsibilities sometimes prevented them from engaging the employer partners on multiple levels and from developing a wide range of high-quality career awareness and work-based learning activities.

Supports for work-based learning. The sites differed in the types and degree of preparation they provided students and employers prior to and during their work-based learning internships. Nine of the sites provided some type of orientation for both the students and their employer supervisors prior to the start of the work-based learning activities. Six of the sites

provided a more formal set of supports for their work-based learning programs. In general, these included initial orientations for students and their employer supervisors followed by ongoing monitoring of student participation. These activities were organized by the partnership coordinator and were designed to focus students and their supervisors on creating learning opportunities and making the work experience more than a job for students. In three of these sites, the employer partners provided an additional orientation for the work-site supervisors. Employers were encouraged to expose students to as many aspects of their industry as possible, while students were instructed on general expectations in the workplace, including dress codes, decision-making and accountability norms, and “unwritten” rules for advancement.

The remaining four sites focused on developing job placements for their students but did not provide as much formal preparation for the employers or students. Employers and students were generally left on their own to explore learning opportunities and strategies for exposing students to a broad range of experiences on the job. This approach appeared to result in more variation in the learning value that students and employers attached to these activities.

Finally, all of the sites struggled to build concrete connections between classroom- and work-based learning. While some students reported using math, reading, or computer skills in their work experiences, these applications were rarely an outgrowth of academic classes students were taking in school. Several of the Academies developed school-based projects or “virtual learning” activities that presented students with work-related problems to solve, but these were often not directly related to students’ actual work experiences. In some Academies, students wrote papers or engaged in classroom discussion reflecting on their work experiences and the relevance of their experiences to their career goals. Building concrete connections between school and work-based teaching and learning is a dimension of the Career Academy approach (as well as other school-to-work approaches) that needs further attention from both educators and employers.

In summary, four of the sites incorporated all three of the most productive variation of the features that have been discussed here: a highly structured approach to managing their employer partnerships, a non-teaching partnership coordinator, and formal orientations and supports for their work-based learning activities. These sites all benefited from generous financial and in-kind contributions from employer partners, employer advisory boards that channeled employer roles and contributions, and employers involved with the Academies on a broad range of levels. They also benefited from the full-time commitment of a staff member who coordinated the partnerships and the career awareness and work-based learning activities. A fifth site, while it did not have a highly structured employer partnership, was able to support a non-teaching coordinator and incorporate the more formal approach to supporting its work-based learning activities. As will be seen in the discussion that follows, Career Academy students in these five sites were more likely to participate in a wide range of career awareness and work-based learning activities (and, in general, to participate more intensively) than their counterparts in the other sites.

Participation in Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Among Career Academy 12th Graders

- **Career Academy 12th-grade students in this evaluation were engaged in career awareness and work-based learning activities at levels that were equivalent to or higher than participation rates found in other school-to-work initiatives.**

Even before the recent efforts to build more intensive school-to-work initiatives (particularly those stemming from the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994), many schools and school districts offered a range of career awareness and development activities for students. Over the past four years, a burst of new school-to-work initiatives has taken place around the country. Studies of these initiatives indicate that the new school-to-work partnerships have focused most intensively on creating or enhancing career awareness and development activities such as career counseling, employer presentations, work site field trips, and job shadowing. Most notably, the National School-to-Work Implementation Study focused on eight states that had established a wide array of local employer partnerships using funding allocated from the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. Early findings from these intensive-implementation states indicate that very few high school seniors were participating regularly in career awareness and work-based learning activities. According to a survey administered to seniors in these eight states, 20 percent reported attending three or more work site field trips during high school, 7 percent reported participation in three or more job shadowing activities, and 16 percent reported participating in what could be described as work-based learning activities.¹

Direct comparison between the Career Academies Evaluation and the National School-to-Work Implementation Study should be interpreted with caution because of the differences in the program approaches they cover and the research designs they use. Nonetheless, the two studies surveyed similar groups of students and used similar measures to capture participation in career awareness and work-based learning activities. These similarities suggest that early findings from the National School-to-Work Implementation Study can serve as a useful context for interpreting findings from the Career Academies Evaluation. In short, it appears that seniors in the Career Academies study participated in career awareness and work-based learning activities at rates similar to or higher than those found among seniors in the national study. For example, about half the Career Academy seniors participated intensively in career awareness and development activities, about 45 percent reported having a job that was connected to school, and about 25 percent reported having a job that included a high level of work-based learning content. The findings emerging from the Career Academies Evaluation suggest that the programs have been successful in increasing student participation in these activities. It is also sobering, however, that a significant portion of the Academy seniors (between half and three-fourths) were not exposed to key aspects of the Career Academy experience. These findings are explored in more detail in the next section.

- **Nearly all the students who remained in a Career Academy throughout high school participated in some type of career awareness and develop-**

¹Alan M. Hershey, Paula Hudis, Marsha Silverberg, and Joshua Haimson, *Partners in Progress: Early Steps in Creating School-to-Work Systems* (Princeton, N.J.: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 1997), xxi, xxv.

ment activity. Over half these students participated intensively in these activities.

Virtually all (99 percent) of the students who were enrolled in an Academy at the end of 12th grade reported that they had participated in one or more career development and awareness activities during high school. Some of these activities occurred outside of school. These included career-related field trips, job shadowing activities (in which students had the opportunity to observe at work for a day), and contact with an adult who acted as a mentor or provided students with personal and professional guidance. Other career awareness and development activities took place in school. They included learning about jobs and their requirements in a class, discussing careers and connections between school and work with other students or adults, receiving instruction or counseling about how to find a job or act on the job, and attending events in which adults came to school to talk about jobs or careers.

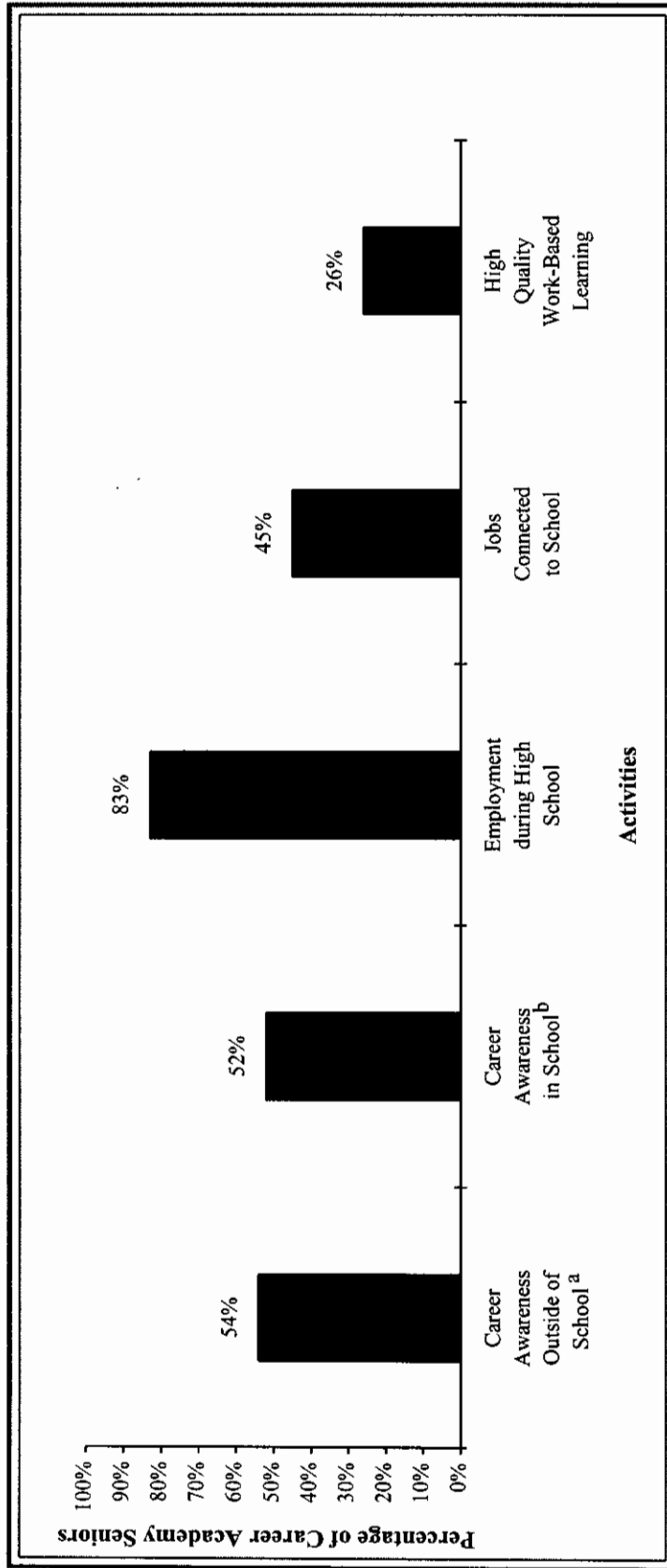
Figure ES-2 presents a summary of selected findings from the survey of Career Academy 12th-grade students regarding their participation in career awareness and work-based learning activities during high school. The first bar in the figure shows that 54 percent of the 12th-grade students enrolled in an Academy can be said to have participated intensively in career awareness activities that typically took place outside of school, and 52 percent reported intensive exposure to school-based career awareness and development activities. Intensive participation was defined as participating in two or more activities outside of school or participating in school-based activities at least once per month.

- **The vast majority of the students who remained in a Career Academy through the 12th grade worked at some point during high school. Just under half the Career Academy seniors worked in a job that was connected with school, and about one-quarter can be said to have held a job with a high level of work-based learning content.**

Figure ES-2 shows that 83 percent of the students who were enrolled in a Career Academy at the end of their 12th-grade year were employed at some point during high school. Approximately 45 percent reported working in a job that was connected to school, and 26 percent can be said to have held a *high quality* work-based learning job. Jobs that were connected to school included jobs that were obtained through a school program or teacher, jobs for which students received school credit, and jobs in which staff from a school-based program monitored the student's work either directly or through contact with the employer. These jobs were considered to be "work-based learning jobs." Jobs with a "high degree of work-based learning content" included jobs in which students reported using reading, writing, or computer skills, receiving advice on general and specific work expectations, having the opportunity to learn new things, and being engaged. Significantly, students who held jobs that were connected to school were much more likely to report having jobs with a high degree of work-based learning content.

- **Students in Career Academies with highly structured employer partnerships or support for non-teaching employer coordinators reported higher levels of participation in career awareness and work-based learning activities than those in Career Academies that had less-structured partnerships or coordinators with teaching responsibilities.**

Figure ES-2
Participation in Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities
of Career Academy Seniors



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Career Academies Evaluation 12th Grade Survey.

NOTES: ^aThis denotes intensive participation as defined by participation in two or more career awareness and development activities.

^bThis denotes a high level of participation as defined by participation in at least three career awareness activities per month.

Figure ES-3 uses the same measures of student participation in career awareness and work-based learning activities among Career Academy seniors as Figure ES-2. The bars in Figure ES-3 show the differences in participation rates between students from the five Career Academies with highly structured employer partnerships and/or non-teaching employer coordinators and students from the five Academies with less structured partnerships.

In general, students from the five sites that had either highly structured employer partnerships or were able to support a non-teaching employer coordinator participated at significantly higher rates in all dimensions of career awareness and work-based learning activities than students in the other five study sites. For example, 66 percent of the 12th-grade students from the highly structured Academy sites reported intensive involvement in career awareness and development activities that occurred outside of school, and 59 percent reported intensive participation in career awareness and development activities in school. In contrast, 12th-grade students from the less-structured Academy sites reported participation rates of 43 percent and 39 percent, respectively, in these types of activities.

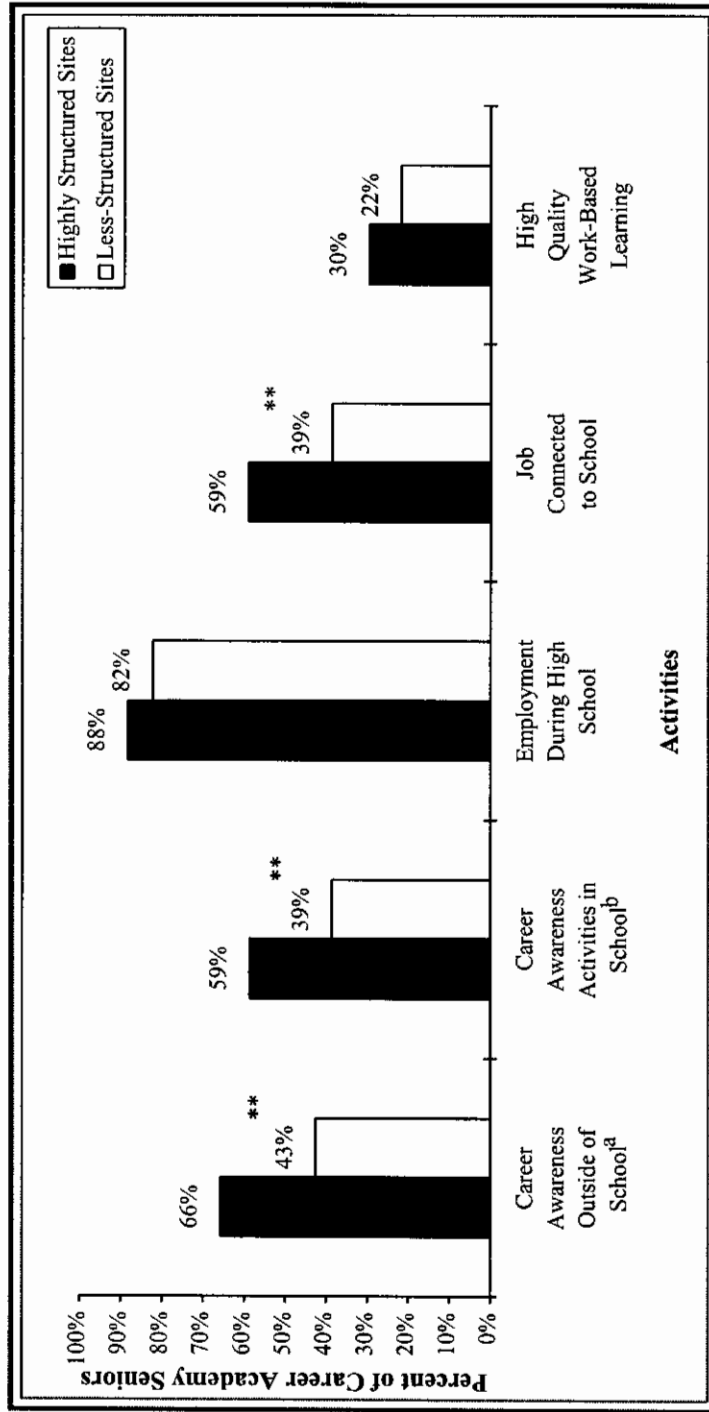
Having highly structured employer partnerships or having a non-teaching person responsible for coordinating the employer partnerships was also strongly related to higher rates of student participation in work-based learning programs. In particular, 59 percent of the 12th-grade students from the Academy sites with these characteristics had jobs that were connected to school, compared with 39 percent of the students in the other sites. Interestingly, the level of structure of their employer partnerships and the manner in which they organized the coordination of the employer partnerships was not as strongly related to the percentage of Academy students who had jobs with a “high” level of work-based learning content. Thirty percent of the students from the highly structured sites had jobs with a “high” level of work-based learning content, compared with 22 percent of the students from the less-structured sites.

Career Academy Impacts on Student Participation in Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities

The Career Academies Evaluation provides a unique opportunity to compare the experiences of students who applied for and were selected to attend a Career Academy (referred to as the Academy group) with those of students who also applied but were not selected to attend a Career Academy (referred to as the non-Academy group). To ensure that the two groups were comparable, applicants eligible for each of the participating Academies were selected at random to enroll in the programs. (This selection was possible because the programs had more qualified applicants than they were able to serve.) Because the two groups of students were determined randomly, they started out, on average, with the same set of background characteristics.

Both groups of students completed a survey during their 12th-grade year and were asked the same questions about a broad range of school- and work-related experiences during high school. Because the students in the Academy and non-Academy groups entered the study with a similar set of background characteristics on average, any differences in school- and work-related experiences that emerged later can be attributed to differences between the Career Academies and the regular high school environments in which the non-Academy students were enrolled.

Figure ES-3
Participation in Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities
of Career Academy Seniors
by Degree of Structure of Employer Partnership



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Career Academies Evaluation 12th Grade Survey.

NOTES: Percentages are regression adjusted to control for background characteristics of sample members. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between highly structured and less-structured sites. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThis denotes intensive participation as defined by participation in two or more career awareness and development activities.

^bThis denotes a high level of participation as defined by participation in at least three career awareness activities per month.

The findings discussed in this section and summarized in Figure ES-4 are based on comparisons between the experiences of students in the Academy group and those of students in the non-Academy group. As will be discussed in detail, students in the Academy group had varying degrees of exposure to the Career Academy programs; some remained in the programs throughout high school, others enrolled for one or more semesters and then left, and some never enrolled at all. Hence, unlike Figures ES-2 and ES-3, Figure ES-4 presents participation rates among all students who applied and were eligible for admission to an Academy, including those who may not have been enrolled in the Academy throughout high school. Because of the random selection process, the comparison between Academy and non-Academy groups provides a reliable estimate of the extent to which the Career Academies add to the availability and rates of participation in these career awareness and work-based learning activities.

The findings from this comparison indicate that while some non-Academy students also participated in career awareness and work-based learning activities, the students who had an opportunity to attend an Academy participated more frequently and more intensively than non-Academy students. Students in the study's Academy group were also more likely to work, and they were more likely to work in jobs that were connected to school. While the findings discussed in this section are encouraging, they are also sobering in that over half the students selected to enroll in an Academy never participated intensively in career awareness or work-based learning activities.

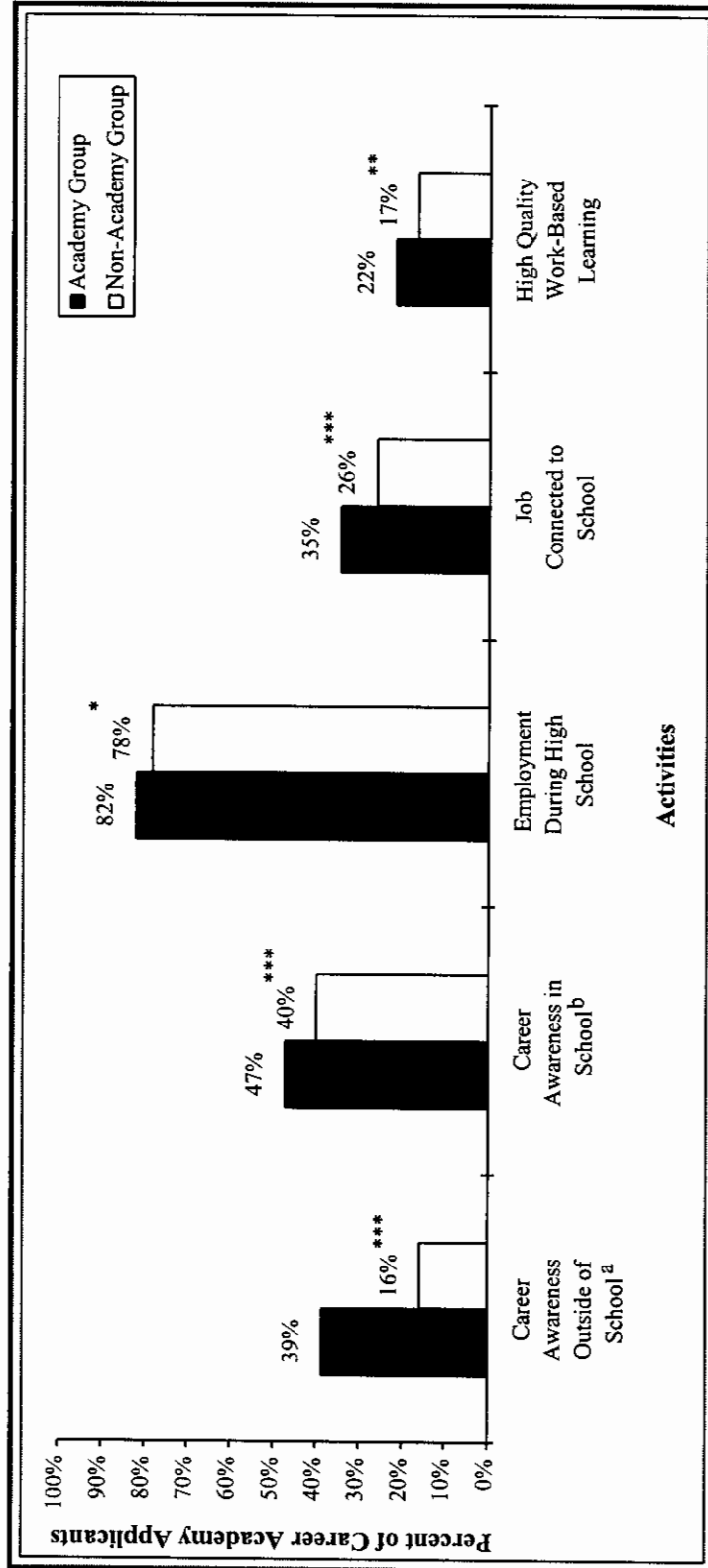
- **While career awareness and work-based learning activities were also available outside the Academies, students in the study's Academy group participated more frequently and more intensively than their peers who did not have the opportunity to attend an Academy.**

Figure ES-4 shows the rates of participation in career awareness and work-based learning activities among students in the study's Academy and non-Academy groups. As shown in the first set of bars, 16 percent of the students in the non-Academy group participated intensively in career awareness and development activities that typically occurred outside of school. As is shown in the second set of bars, 40 percent of the students in the non-Academy group participated in career awareness and development activities that took place in school. These findings indicate that career awareness and development activities are generally available in the regular school environments and that even without access to a Career Academy, many of these students took advantage of these opportunities.

Overall, however, students in the study's Academy group were significantly more likely to participate in career awareness and development activities both in and outside of school. Specifically, 39 percent of the students who were selected to enroll in a Career Academy were exposed intensively to the career awareness and development activities outside of school (more than double the participation rate among students in the non-Academy group). Also, 47 percent of the students in the Academy group participated intensively in school-based career awareness and development activities.

- **Students in the Academy group were more likely than their non-Academy group counterparts to be employed during high school. They were also more likely to be employed in jobs that were connected to school and that incorporated "high" levels of work-based learning content.**

Figure ES-4
Career Academy Impacts on
Participation in Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities
for Career Academy Applicant Sample by Research Group



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the Career Academies Evaluation 12th Grade Survey.

NOTES: Percentages are regression adjusted to control for background characteristics of sample members. A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the Academy and non-Academy groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThis denotes intensive participation as defined by participation in two or more career awareness and development activities.

^bThis denotes a high level of participation as defined by participation in at least three career awareness activities per month.

Overall, 82 percent of the students who had an opportunity to attend an Academy reported being employed during high school, compared with 78 percent of the non-Academy group. Substantially larger differences were found with respect to students' participation in work-based learning activities. In particular, 35 percent of students in the Academy group reported being employed in a job that was connected to school. In contrast, 26 percent of the non-Academy students reported participating in such a job. Significant differences were also found in the percentages of Academy and non-Academy students who reported being employed in a job that included high-quality work-based learning content. Twenty-two percent of students in the Academy group reported having such a "high quality" work experience, compared with 17 percent of students in the non-Academy group.

- **Over half the students who were initially selected to enroll in a Career Academy did not participate intensively in career awareness and development activities or were not involved in work-based learning activities.**

The findings presented in Figure ES-4 are encouraging in that they show that Career Academies have a significant impact on student participation in a variety of work-related learning activities. At the same time, they indicate that over half the students who were selected to enroll in a Career Academy did not participate intensively in these activities. Two sets of factors help explain why students did not participate.

The first set of factors concerns the patterns of student enrollment in and attrition from the Academy programs. First, nearly half the students who were initially selected for the Academy programs either never enrolled in them (about 13 percent of those selected) or enrolled and then left before the end of their 12th-grade year (about 35 percent of those selected). Many of the career awareness and work-based learning activities in the Academies were not scheduled to occur until the 11th or 12th grade. As a result, more than half the students who never enrolled or who left the Academies before the end of 12th grade did not participate in these activities. Students gave a variety of reasons for either not enrolling in an Academy or enrolling and then leaving. Over half these students reported that they lost interest in the Academy or chose to attend another program for other reasons. About one-third reported that they moved or transferred schools, and about 13 percent reported that they dropped out of high school or were asked to leave the Academy for academic or behavior reasons. Student enrollment and attrition patterns are extremely important to understanding the potential effectiveness of the Career Academies and will be addressed in greater detail in the next report from the evaluation.

A second set of factors affected participation among students who remained in the programs throughout high school. Specifically, a number of Academy students either opted not to participate in the career awareness or work-based learning activities or did not meet the Academy's eligibility criteria for participation. In a few cases, the Academies reported that students could not be placed in activities because of the limited number of slots available.

Next Steps for the Career Academies Evaluation

This report, focusing on employer partnerships and work-related learning activities for students, builds on the information about Career Academies that has been presented in previous reports from this study. The full story of how Career Academies affect student experiences and

performance during high school and beyond is still unfolding. Future reports from the study will add to this evolving story in several important ways. The next report (scheduled to be released later in 1999) will include a broader array of student experiences. It will examine the extent to which the Career Academies have improved student engagement and performance in high school, increased graduation rates, and opened opportunities to enter post-secondary education and employment. That report will also examine whether some versions of the Career Academy approach — reflected in the differences among the 10 sites in the study — are more effective in improving student outcomes than others. Finally, additional reports will include information about how the Academies affect student outcomes in their post-secondary years.