1. First established in 1969 in Philadelphia as a dropout prevention program, career academies are found in approximately 2,500 (about 24%) of the nation's high schools. Developed without Federal policies or significant benefactors, career academies are implemented in multiple organizational forms to address different state and local educational priorities for addressing diverse challenges and specific goals ranging from: retaining at-risk populations to implementing school-to-work systems to creating small learning communities to strengthening educational program alignment with and pathways to particular industry sectors (e.g., Finance, Travel and Tourism, and Information Technology). Recently six national organizations have reached consensus on the three structural elements that define high school-based career academies:

- A small learning community, comprising a group of students within the larger high school who take classes together for at least two years, taught by a team of teachers from different disciplines;
- A college preparatory curriculum with a career theme, enabling students to see relationships among academic subjects and their application to a broad field of work; and
- Partnerships with employers, the community, and local colleges, bringing resources from outside the high school to improve student motivation and achievement.

A review of the career academy directories maintained by two national organizations (NAF and CASN) indicates that career academies in Wisconsin are limited to two high schools in Milwaukee (Hamilton-Finance; Washington—Finance, Law/Education/Public Service) and four in Green Bay (West-Computer and Information Technology, East—Health Services; Preble-Integrated Manufacturing; Southwest-International Business). Several Wisconsin school districts operate academies that are not affiliated with national networks.

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2. To strengthen the implementation of career academies based on the evolving evaluation and research evidence, ten standards of practice have been recently adopted by national organizations. A high quality career academy reflects the following standards:

- Defined mission and goals (simultaneously focus on college and career paths, raise student aspirations and commitment, and increase student achievement)
- Academy structure (cross-grade articulation, cohort scheduling, etc.)
- Host district and high school (administrative support, adequate funding and facilities, etc.)
- Faculty and staff (teacher leader, credentialed teachers, supportive counselors, etc.)
- Professional development (common planning time, teacher professional development, employee and parent orientation, etc.)
- Governance and leadership (advisory board, healthy partnership, student voice, etc.)
- Curriculum and instruction (meets external standards, rigorous learning that meets college entrance requirements, post graduate planning, dual credit options, etc.)
- Employer, Higher Education and Community Involvement (career theme fits local economy, work and community based service learning, etc.)
- Student assessment (student data collected, multiple academic measures are included, evidence of impact, etc.)
- Cycle of improvement (academic implementation is examined, refinements are planned, etc.).

Each of the standards of practice is aligned with other evidence-based high school reform and restructuring models, including SREB’s High Schools That Work, the Johns Hopkins University Talent Development High Schools, NASSP’s Breaking Ranks II, the National High School Alliance’s Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth, and the U.S. Department of Education’s Small Learning Communities program. Career academies can be implemented successfully as a small school or school within a school strategy if the vision, goals, resources, implementation plan, and stakeholder commitment all reflect the practices outlined above.

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3 Career Academy Standards of Practice. Downloaded: January 23, 2006 from http://casn.berkeley.edu/resources/national_standards.html
3. There is limited but significant research evidence suggesting that career academies are associated with important school and post high school outcomes⁴, including the following:

- Higher student satisfaction, attendance, grade point averages, and course credits earned (see studies 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the reference list)
- Lower absenteeism and dropout rates (studies 1, 4, 5 and 6)
- Postsecondary education outcomes that are at or above the national averages for preparation, enrollment (particularly in 4-year colleges), and success (studies 6, 7, and 8). However, most longitudinal studies do not reveal significant effects/advantages for career academy and non-academy participants from similar communities and backgrounds.
- Significant long term earnings benefits (≈18% greater over 4 years, $10K differential) for male participants (studies: 9)
- Significantly better outcomes, particularly for at-risk students and for females attending 2-year institutions, than for general education or vocational students (studies: 6, 9, 10)
- Follow-up studies suggest that between 40-50% of career academy graduates pursue college majors and employment in the career field (studies: 10)

Successful implementation of career academies in a local context is highly dependent on a clear commitment to and a shared understanding of: (a) the students to be served and their academic needs, (b) economic and workforce development priorities and goals, and (c) the outcome indicators to be used to measure progress in meeting student and economic development needs.

4. Most comprehensive schools with mature career academies have extensive and multifaceted relationships with national, state, and/or industry and professional associations. The National Academy Foundation has prepared curriculum and instructional resources (including resources for professional development and work-based learning programs for students) for implementation across different grades in three career fields: business/finance; hospitality and tourism; and information technology. Other national organizations interested in pursuing the development of career academy resources and programs include: the States’ Career Cluster Initiative, the National Partnership for Careers in Law, Public Safety, Corrections and Security; the Association of General Contractors; and the Public Relations Society of America. Currently, the National Career Academy Coalition is developing projects and

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materials to support career academies in health, business and construction. In some industry sectors (e.g., health and information technology), close alignment of the academy curriculum with postsecondary education degrees and credentials creates multiple pathways for further career preparation and initial certification.

A successful career academy initiative in WI will require widespread support by business and industry networks with commitments to career development pathways and partnerships that include appropriately aligned and articulated higher and postsecondary education programs at 2-year and 4-year institutions. Frameworks for career academies should also incorporate non-traditional, emerging industry and economic needs such as: entrepreneurship and small business development, virtual enterprises, and global marketing.

Implementation and Impact Studies


