

# What is a Career Academy?

## A small learning community

A career academy is a personalized small learning community within a high school, selecting a subset of students and teachers for a two-, three-, or four-year span. Students enter through a voluntary process; they must apply and be accepted, with parental knowledge and support. While academies vary in size, they usually have from one to three sections of students at each grade level, or 100-300 students in all. Academy classes are usually blocked back-to-back in the daily schedule, and students attend them as a group. Students are able to complete academy requirements within the regular school day, with the exception of work internships and possible college classes.

A career academy involves teachers from different subjects working together as a team. This team manages the program, with one member usually serving as the coordinator. Teams usually participate in professional development, particularly in implementing the key features of the model and gaining exposure to the career field. Team members have shared planning time, usually a daily common planning period, and often release time. The joining of a group of students for several periods each day with teachers who they come to know well provides a family-like atmosphere, nurturing close student-teacher ties. An academy functions within the larger high school and requires administrator and counselor support. Academy students may also participate in required and elective classes outside the academy, as well as other activities such as clubs and sports.

## College preparatory curriculum with a career theme

Students in a career academy have a mixture of career (usually one or two) or academic (usually three or four) classes at a time. These classes meet entrance requirements for four-year colleges and universities. They are linked to academic and industry standards and encourage high achievement. They show students how their subjects relate to each other and the career field.

The career classes develop knowledge in a given field. They are designed to expose students to the full range of careers in that field. Special projects require students to bring together academic skills across their subjects and apply these to community and work settings outside the school. Usually the junior and/or senior year includes work experience, a paid or unpaid work internship or community service assignment. During the senior year students are provided with college and career counseling, forming a post-graduate plan which may include college, a mixture of work and college, or full-time work.

## Partnerships with employers, communities, and higher education

The academy career theme is selected locally, based on an industry that is healthy and can provide a cadre of partners interested in supporting the program. Employers from a group of companies in the selected field work as partners in the academy, serving on a steering committee (along with teachers, administrators, and often parents and students) that governs the program's development and operation. This committee helps to plan the various activities in which employee volunteers participate: as speakers at the school, informing students of the industry and career options; as field trip and job shadowing hosts at their companies; as individual mentors, career-related "big brothers and sisters" as work internship supervisors during the summer or

part-time during the school year; and as community service coordinators. The employer partners may also hire graduates. Postsecondary educational institutions are often included as well, providing course articulation and concurrent enrollment options.