

Improving Youth Labor Market Prospects

Long-Term Findings From Career Academies

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

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Outline

- **Background**
 - Policy Context
 - Career Academies
 - Research Design
 - Overview of findings
- **Labor market impacts**
- **Impacts on educational attainment**
 - what we learned from an experiment that we may have missed with alternative designs
- **Family formation impacts**
- **Cautions and caveats**

Context

- Youth employment rates falling
- Wages and earnings stagnant, declining for disadvantaged youth (especially males of color)
- Out of wedlock childbearing rising
- Transition to adulthood lengthening
- Emphasis on academic achievement and “college for all”
- De-emphasis on CTE and STW
- Disappointing evaluation results from school reforms, 2nd chance programs for youth

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 career-related course sequence
- *Employer partnerships* to support career awareness and development activities and work-based learning

➤ Goals

- *Dropout prevention*
- *Career development and academic achievement*
- *Pathways to the labor market and post-secondary education*

Features of the Evaluation

- 9 sites reflecting “typical” Career Academy implementation and urban contexts
- Random assignment field experiment involving over 1,700 students who applied to Career Academies in 1993, 1994, 1995
- Qualitative information on program implementation and context
- Baseline and outcome data:
 - Surveys administered during high school (4 waves)
 - School records data
 - 4-year post-high school follow-up survey
 - 8-year post-high school follow-up survey

Background Characteristics Full Sample

	Academy Group (%)	Non-Academy Group (%)
Gender		
Male	41.2	41.0
Female	58.8	59.0
Risk of dropping out of high school		
High risk	24.3	23.7
Medium risk	49.9	51.2
Low risk	25.8	25.1
Race/ethnicity		
Hispanic	55.7	58.3
Black	31.5	27.6
White	6.0	7.8
Asian or Native American	6.9	6.3
Family receives welfare or food stamps	23.3	23.3

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)

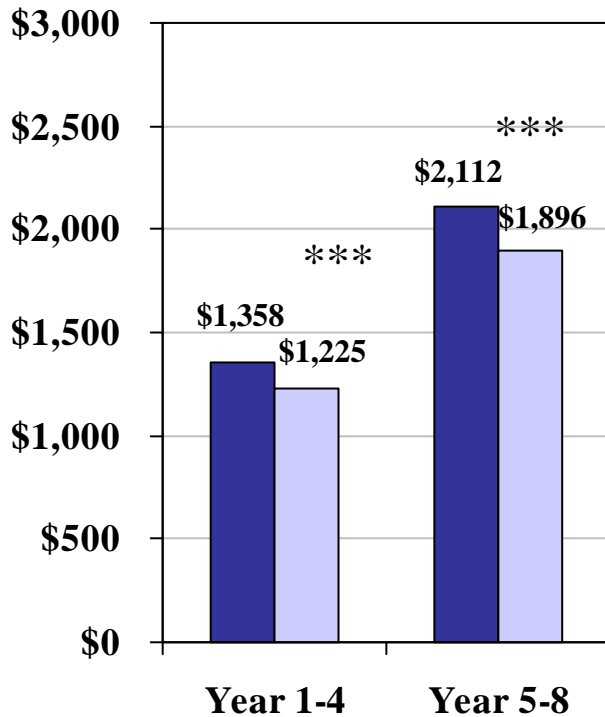
- **Positive and sustained impact on employment and earnings through 8 years following scheduled high school graduation.**
 - Impact for full sample: \$2,088 per year (11 percent increase)
 - Impact for young men: \$3,724 per year (17 percent increase)
 - Impact for young women: \$1,026 per year (not statistically significant)
- **High levels of educational attainment, but no impact (positive or negative) from Career Academies.**
- **Positive impact on family formation and independent living.**

Impacts on Employment and Earnings

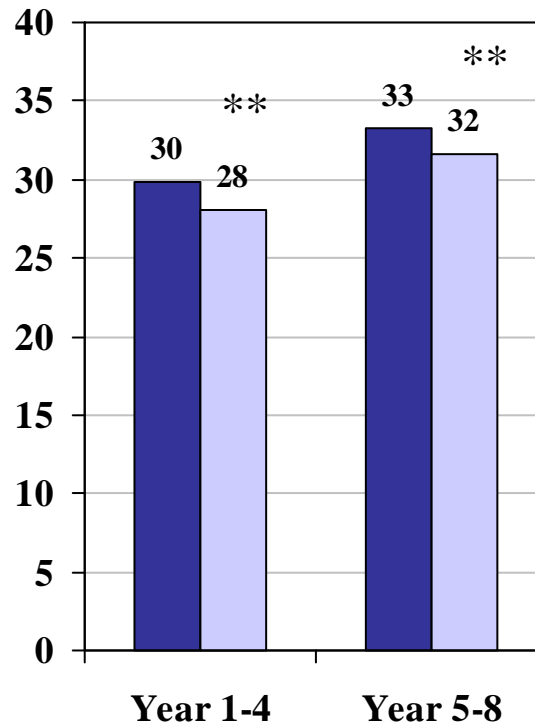
Full Sample

8 Years Post-High School

Average Monthly Earnings



Average Weekly Hours



Average Hourly Wage

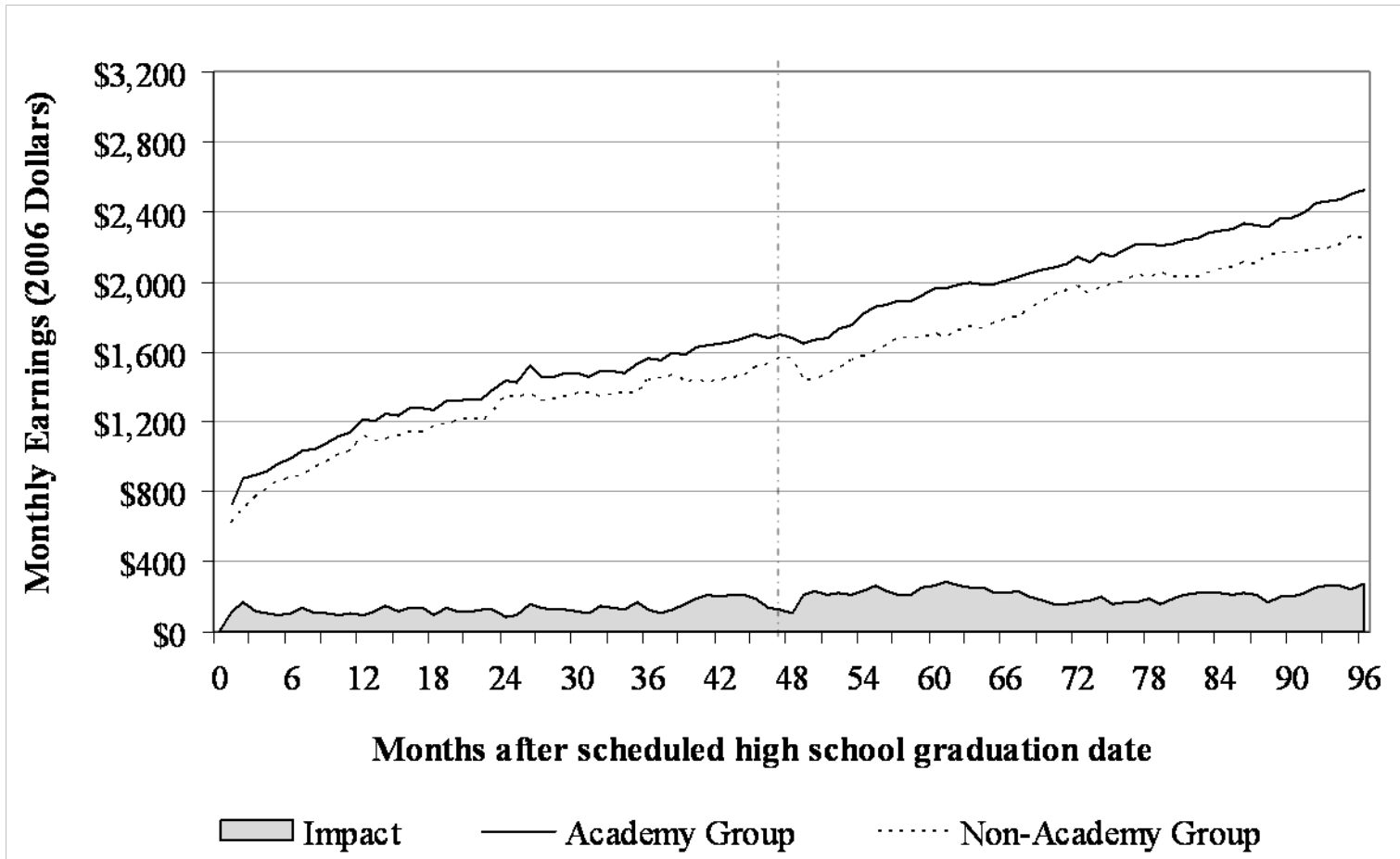


Academy
 Non-Academy

Impacts on Monthly Earnings

Full Sample

8 Years Post-High School



Characteristics of Current/Most Recent Job

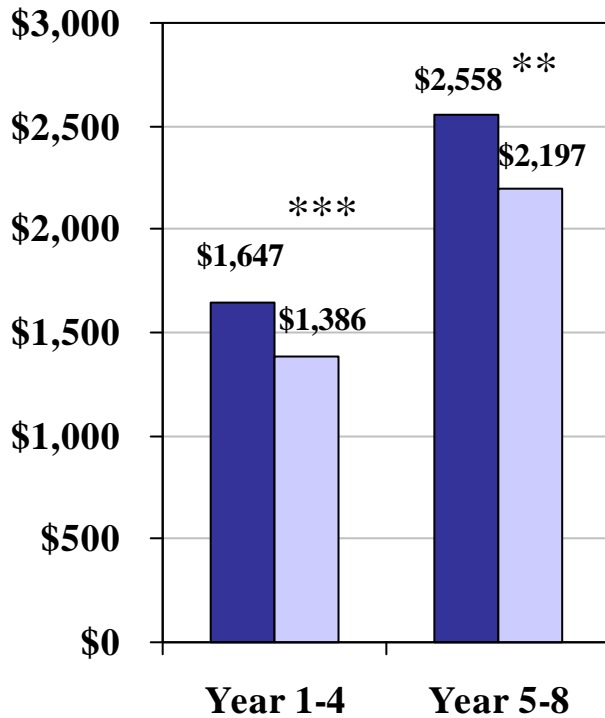
Full Sample

8 Years Post-High School

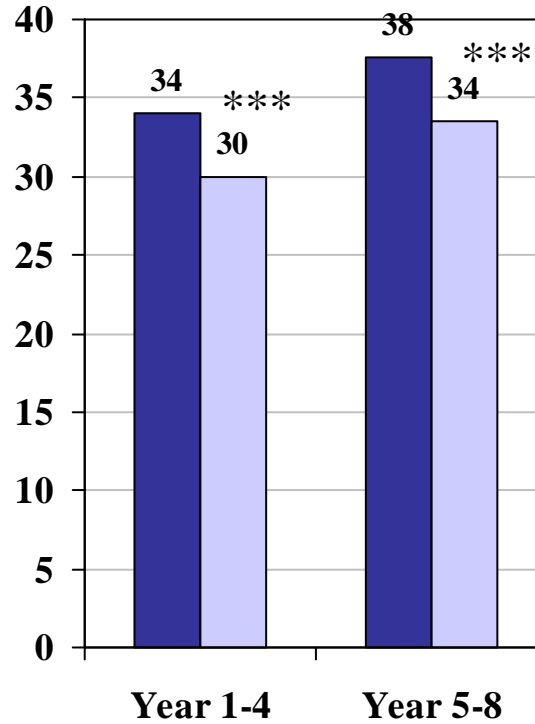
	Academy Group	Non-Academy Group	Difference
Occupational sector (%)			
Management/business & financial operations	19.2	16.0	3.2
Computer, engineering, & media technology	6.9	3.5	3.4.**
Education, social services, law, & science	8.0	10.6	-2.6
Healthcare/medical support & technology	9.2	10.9	-1.7
Sales, food, & personal services	11.7	14.4	-2.7
Office and administrative support	23.9	25.4	-1.6
Construction, production, maintenance, transportation	15.3	14.9	0.5
Other/unknown	5.5	4.2	1.3
Job offers a health plan (%)	74.3	75.2	-1.0
Very satisfied at job (%)	44.0	41.5	2.5
Very likely to be working in the same field in two years (%)	60.0	55.5	4.2
Job is/was directly related to high school studies (%)	38.6	30.6	8.0*
Choice of field was influenced by high school experiences (%)	46.3	35.7	10.6*

Impacts on Employment and Earnings Young Men 8 Years Post-High School

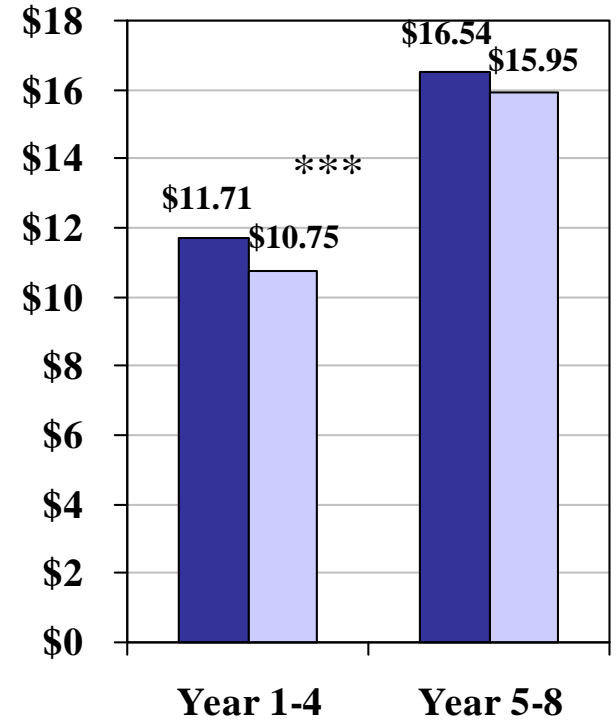
Average Monthly Earnings



Average Weekly Hours

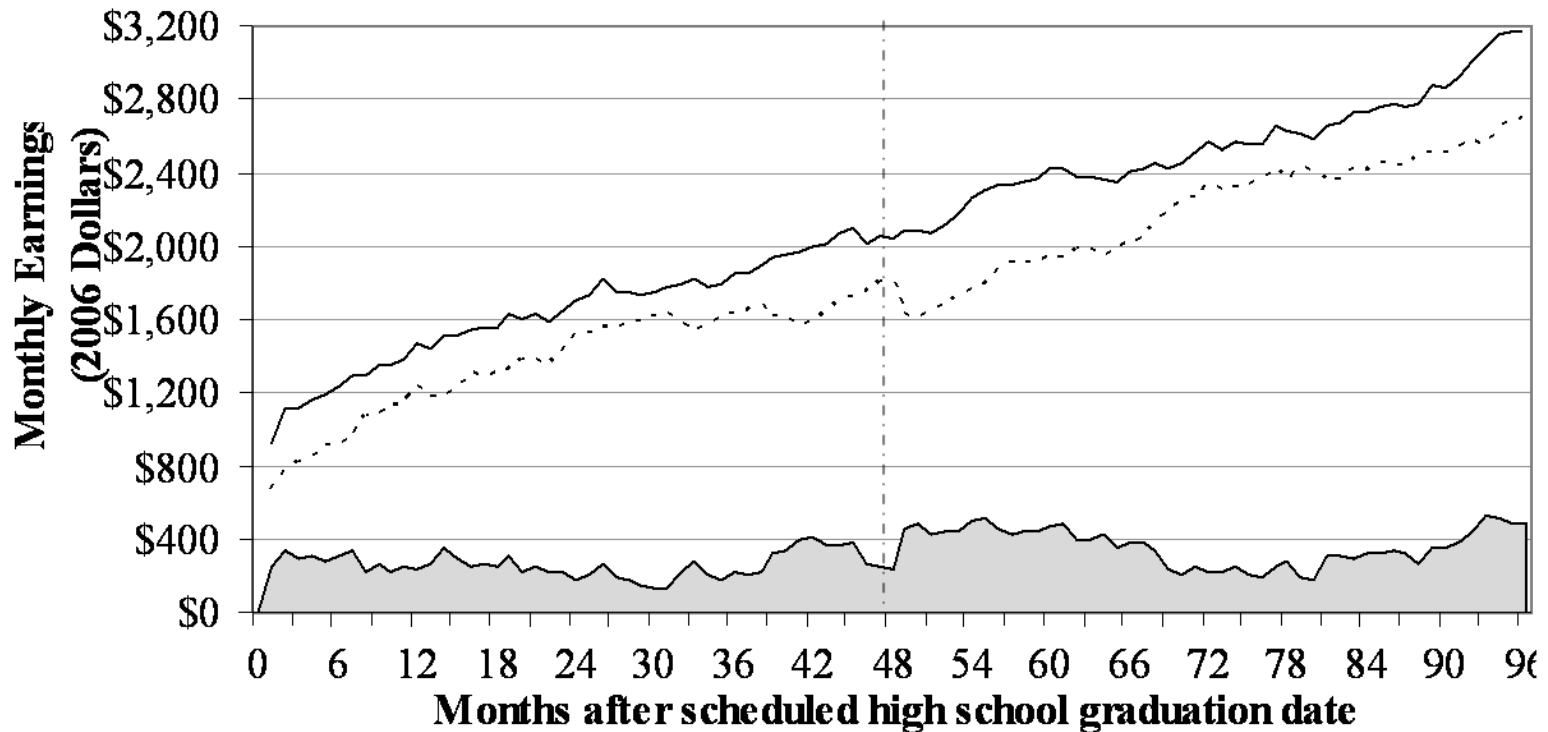


Average Hourly Wage



Academy
 Non-Academy

Impacts on Monthly Earnings Young Men 8 Years Post-High School



Characteristics of Current/Most Recent Job Young Men 8 Years Post-High School

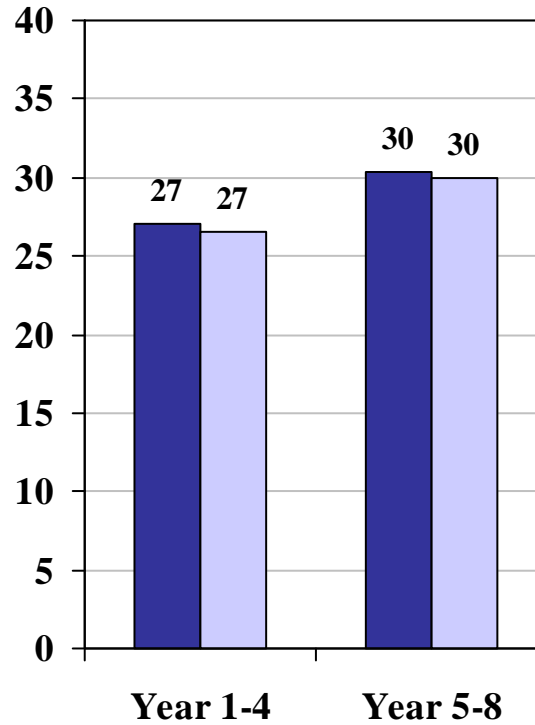
	Academy Group	Non-Academy Group	Difference
Occupational sector (%)			
Management/business & financial operations	<i>19.2</i>	<i>17.0</i>	<i>2.2</i>
Computer, engineering, & media technology	<i>12.0</i>	<i>5.8</i>	<i>6.2**</i>
Education, social services, law, & science	<i>4.7</i>	<i>5.9</i>	<i>-1.1</i>
Healthcare/medical support & technology	<i>4.4</i>	<i>4.5</i>	<i>-0.1</i>
Sales, food, & personal services	<i>10.7</i>	<i>16.0</i>	<i>-5.3*</i>
Office and administrative support	<i>10.7</i>	<i>15.2</i>	<i>-4.4</i>
Construction, production, maintenance, transportation	<i>30.9</i>	<i>29.3</i>	<i>1.6</i>
Other/unknown	<i>6.9</i>	<i>6.3</i>	<i>0.7</i>
Job offers a health plan (%)	<i>72.2</i>	<i>73.3</i>	<i>-1.1</i>
Very satisfied at job (%)	<i>45.1</i>	<i>42.9</i>	<i>2.2</i>
Very likely to be working in the same field in two years (%)	<i>60.3</i>	<i>58.7</i>	<i>1.6</i>
Job is/was directly related to high school studies (%)	<i>38.3</i>	<i>28.2</i>	<i>10.1**</i>
Choice of field was influenced by high school experiences (%)	<i>44.8</i>	<i>33.8</i>	<i>11.0***</i>

Impacts on Employment and Earnings Young Women 8 Years Post-High School

Average Monthly Earnings



Average Weekly Hours

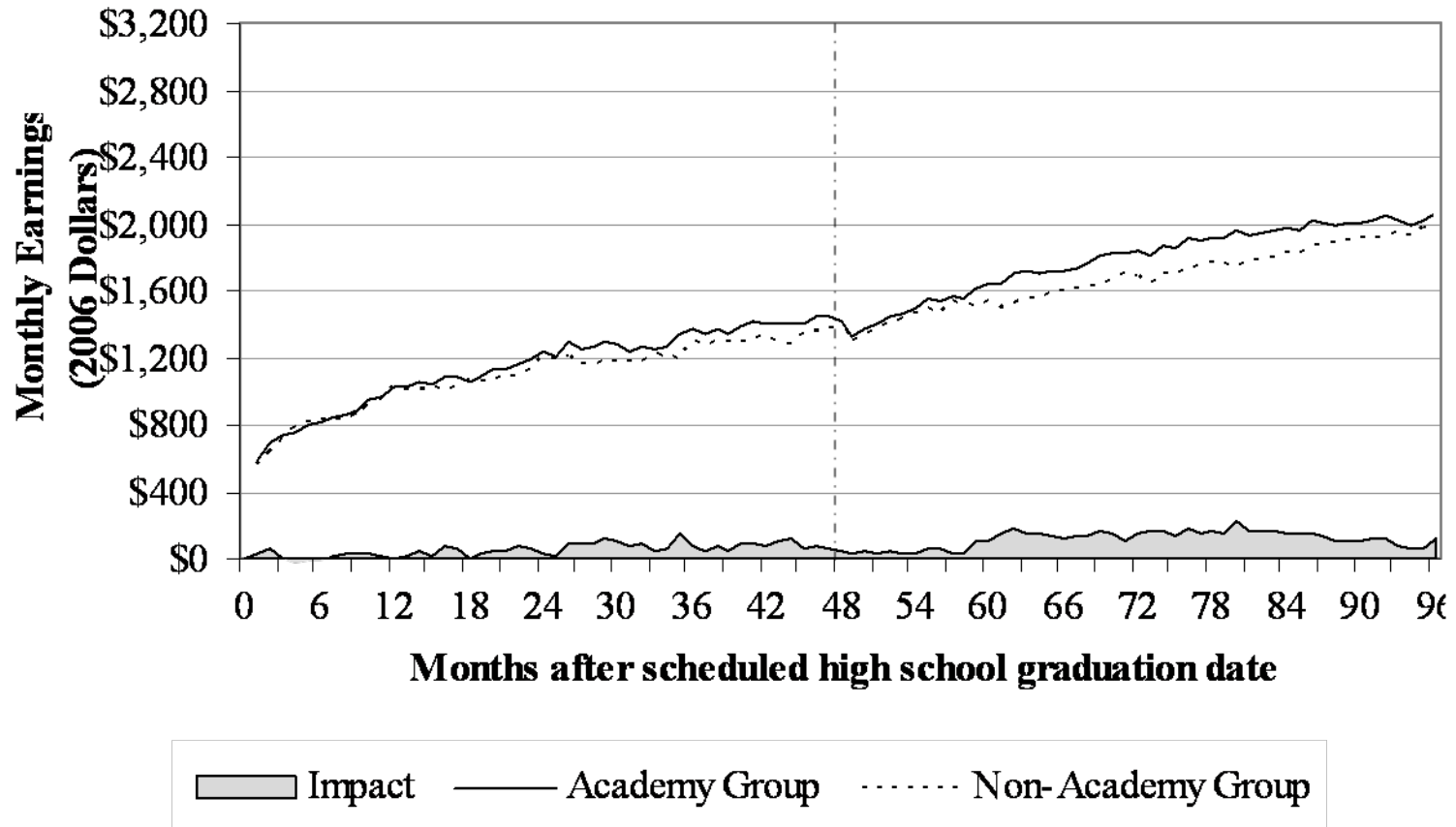


Average Hourly Wage



Academy
 Non-Academy

Impacts on Monthly Earnings Young Women 8 Year Post-High School



Characteristics of Current/Most Recent Job Young Women 8 Years Post-High School

	Academy Group	Non-Academy Group	Difference
Occupational sector (%)			
Management/business & financial operations	19.2	15.0	4.1
Computer, engineering, & media technology	3.2	1.9	1.3
Education, social services, law, & science	10.4	13.5	-3.1
Healthcare/medical support & technology	12.7	15.9	-3.2
Sales, food, & personal services	12.5	13.7	-1.2
Office and administrative support	33.5	32.8	0.6
Construction, production, maintenance, transportation	3.9	4.3	-0.4
Other/unknown	4.4	2.7	1.7
Job offers a health plan (%)	75.8	76.4	-0.6
Very satisfied at job (%)	43.2	41.0	2.1
Very likely to be working in the same field in two years (%)	59.7	53.7	6.0
Job is/was directly related to high school studies (%)	38.7	31.1	7.7**
Choice of field was influenced by high school experiences (%)	47.4	36.4	11.1***

Why Methods Matter

- **Outcomes vs. Impacts**

- **Outcomes** = *Measures of behavior or performance.*
- **Impacts** = *Effects of an intervention on outcomes.*

Difference between outcomes for program and outcomes for counterfactual.

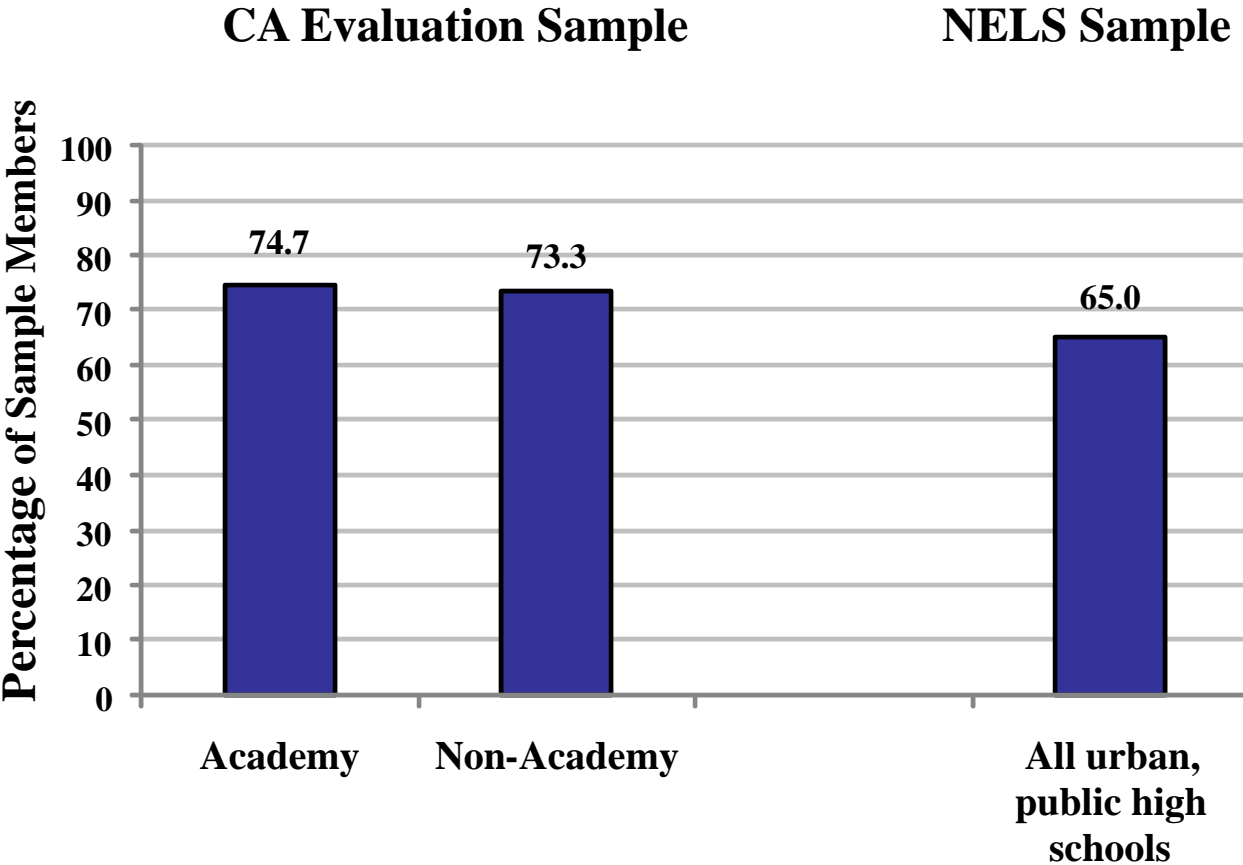
- **The wrong counterfactual risks offering the wrong answer to the right question**

- **Outcome standards risk rewarding programs:**

- based on who they serve, rather than what they do
- that operate under promising conditions, rather than use promising practices

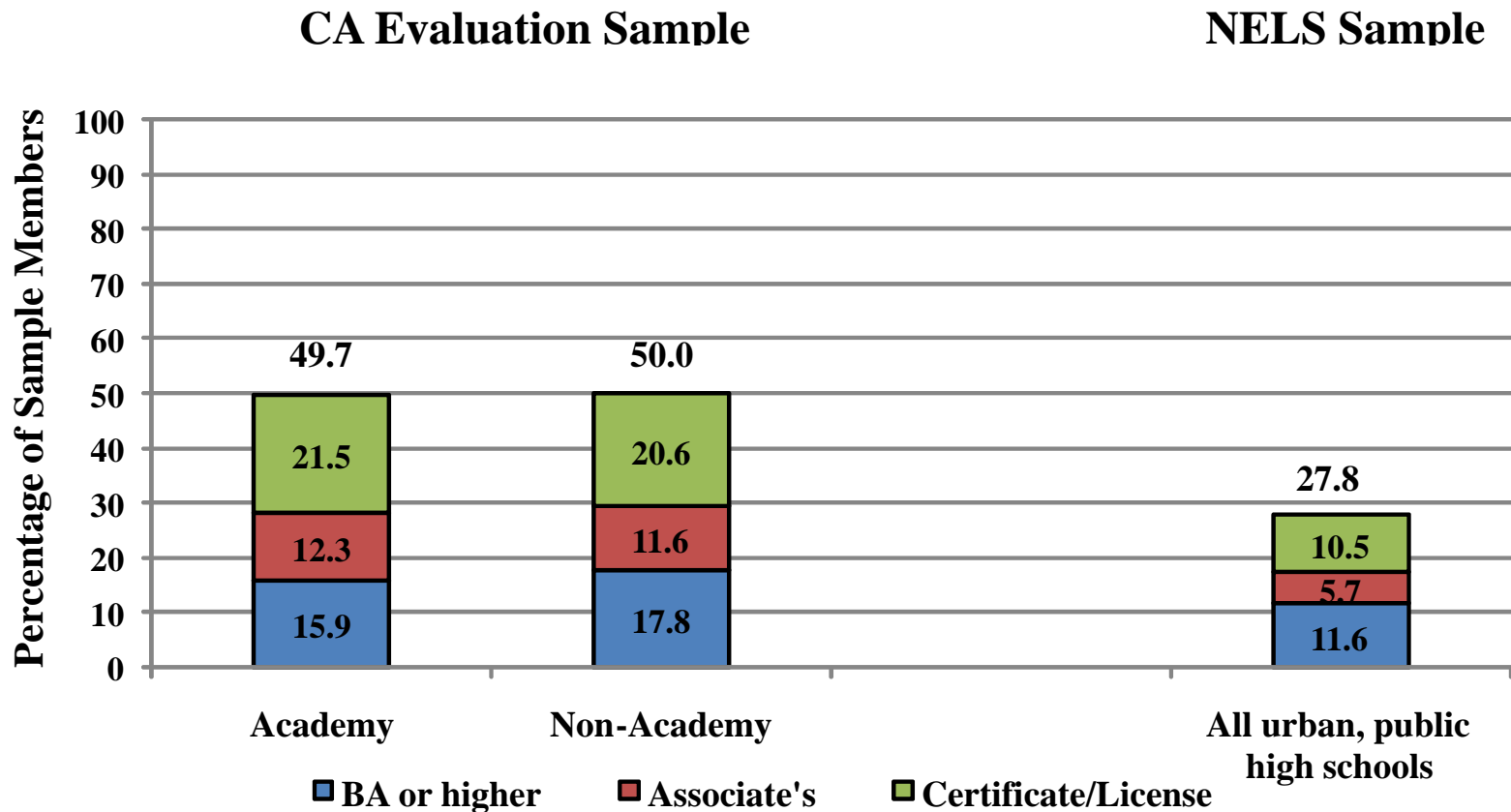
National Comparisons

On-Time High School Graduation

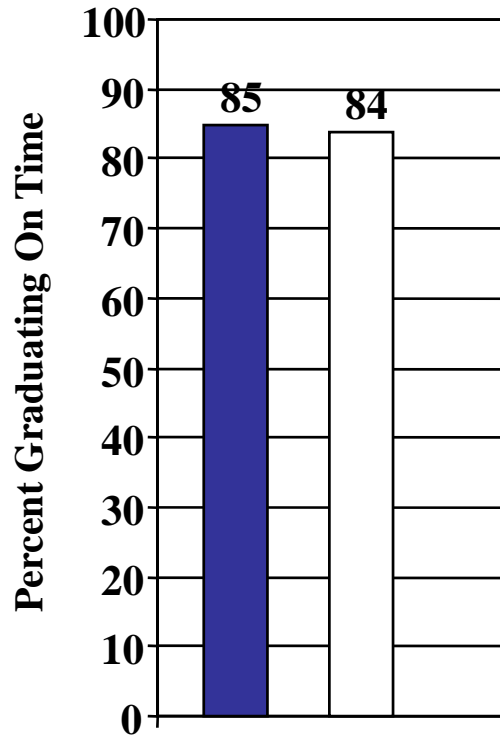


Note: National average estimates are adjusted to represent a sample with the same background characteristics as those in the Evaluation Sample.

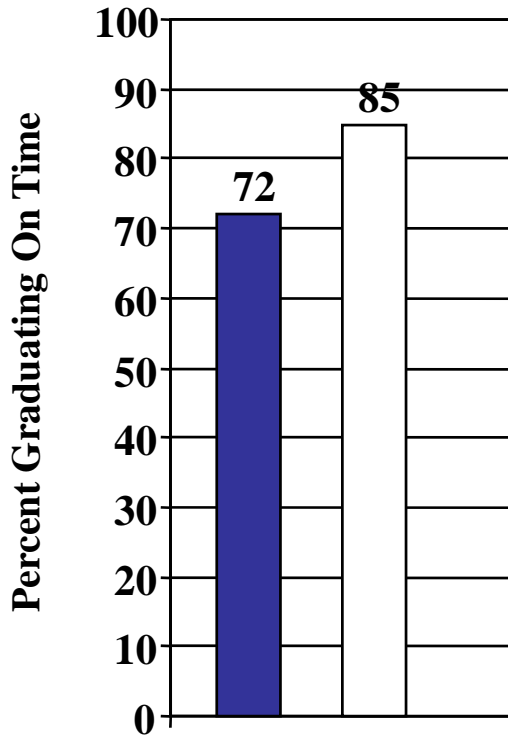
National Comparisons Post-Secondary Completion (8 Years Post-High School)



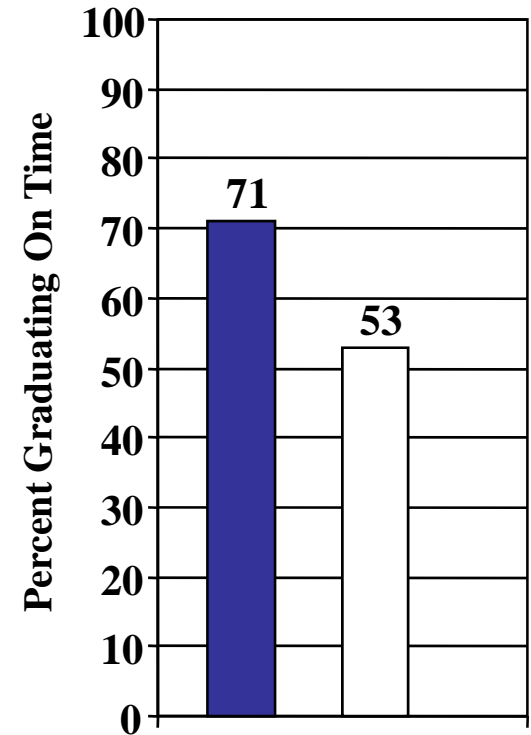
Judging Program Effectiveness: Outcomes vs. Impacts



Program A



Program B

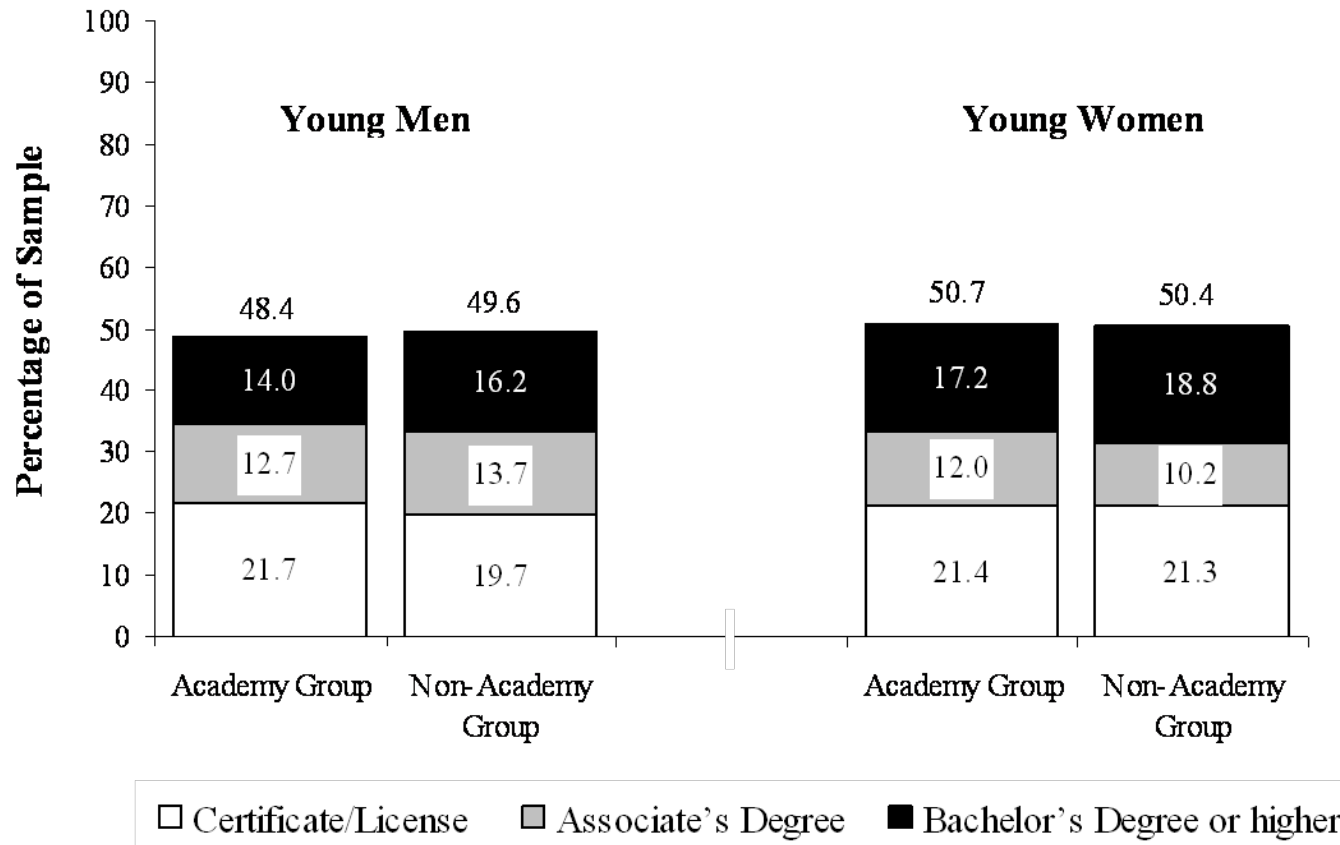


Program C

■ Academy Group

□ Control Group

Impacts on Educational Attainment By Gender 8 Years Post-High School



Impacts on Social Adjustment Indicators

Full Sample

8 Years Post-High School

Outcome (%)	Academy Group	Non-Academy Group	Impact	P-Value	Percentage Change
Marital status					
Married and living together	38.0	33.7	4.3 *	0.081	12.8
Single	55.6	60.0	-4.5 *	0.076	-7.4
Divorced, separated, or widowed	6.4	6.3	0.1 0.0	0.914	2.3
Parental status					
Custodial parent	50.8	43.9	6.9 ***	0.006	15.7
Noncustodial parent	5.1	7.8	-2.7 **	0.026	-34.5
Not a parent	43.9	48.0	-4.1 0.0	0.112	-8.5
Living situation					
Lives independently with child/children and partner	33.1	26.9	6.2 **	0.010	23.1
Lives independently with no children	30.0	32.4	-2.4 0.0	0.319	-7.5
Lives independently with child/children but not partner	10.1	9.4	0.7 0.0	0.647	7.2
Lives with parent(s) or guardian(s), with or without children	26.8	31.3	-4.5 *	0.062	-14.3
Ever gone without health insurance in past year	29.1	31.7	-2.6 0.0	0.296	-8.1
Received TANF or cash assistance in past year	6.8	6.6	0.2 0.0	0.851	3.7
Received food stamps in past year	12.2	12.2	0.0 0.0	0.987	0.2
Registered to vote	73.7	72.4	1.3 0.0	0.565	1.8
Any recent illegal or drug-related activity	10.3	9.7	0.5 0.0	0.733	5.5
Any recent illegal activity, excluding drug use	5.6	5.4	0.3 0.0	0.809	5.5
Sample size (N = 1,424)	781	643			

Impacts on Social Adjustment Indicators

Young Men

8 Years Post-High School

Outcome (%)	Academy Group	Non-Academy Group	Impact	P-Value	Percentage Change
<u>Young men</u> (N = 586)					
Marital status					
Married and living together	36.0	27.0	9.0 **	0.020	33.4
Single	59.3	65.6	-6.3 0.0	0.114	-9.6
Divorced, separated, or widowed	4.7	7.4	-2.7 0.0	0.157	-36.8
Parental status					
Custodial parent	36.6	25.2	11.5 ***	0.003	45.6
Noncustodial parent	11.5	17.9	-6.4 **	0.023	-35.9
Not a parent	51.9	56.6	-4.7 0.0	0.242	-8.3
Living situation					
Lives independently with child/children and partner	30.2	23.2	7.0 *	0.058	30.4
Lives independently with no children	35.8	45.7	-9.9 **	0.015	-21.6
Lives independently with child/children but not partner	2.8	1.9	0.9 0.0	0.476	44.6
Lives with parent(s) or guardian(s), with or without children	31.2	29.2	2.0 0.0	0.609	6.7

Impacts on Social Adjustment Indicators

Young Women

8 Years Post-High School

Outcome (%)	Academy Group	Non-Academy Group	Impact	P-Value	Percentage Change
<u>Young women</u> (N = 838)					
Marital status					
Married and living together	39.4	38.0	1.5 0.0	0.655	3.9
Single	52.9	56.5	-3.5 0.0	0.284	-6.2
Divorced, separated, or widowed	7.6	5.6	2.1 0.0	0.250	36.9
Parental status					
Custodial parent	60.8	57.1	3.7 0.0	0.279	6.5
Noncustodial parent	0.7	0.4	0.2 0.0	0.681	51.3
Not a parent	38.3	42.4	-4.0 0.0	0.238	-9.5
Living situation					
Lives independently with child/children and partner	35.1	29.0	6.0 *	0.064	20.8
Lives independently with no children	25.9	23.3	2.6 0.0	0.387	11.3
Lives independently with child/children but not partner	15.3	15.1	0.1 0.0	0.956	0.9
Lives with parent(s) or guardian(s), with or without children	23.7	32.5	-8.8 ***	0.005	-27.0

Implications for School Reform and Workforce Development

- 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 viable pathway to post-secondary education, but not necessarily better than other opportunities.

WARNING LABEL

- **Important to be clear about the focus of the impact (labor market outcomes) and about the likely source of effects (school-to-work transition 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.**

Candidates for Sources of Impacts

- **Probably NOT Career Academy influence on:**
 - Academic performance in high school
 - Educational attainment
- **BUT, probably need to ensure Academy keeps pace on these dimensions as “foundation” for other effects**
- **More likely:**
 - Increased access to career awareness and development activities
 - Higher likelihood of engagement in work-based learning
 - Completing CTE plus academic curriculum

Open Questions for Further Investigation

- How did the Academies produce the strong impacts on labor market outcomes for young men?
- Why didn't the Career Academies produce similar impacts on labor market outcomes for young women?
- Why didn't the Career Academies improve educational attainment?
- How did the Career Academies produce impacts on family formation?

Sustained Investment in Knowledge Building

- **Building evidence not just the domain of researchers: partnership among funding agencies, content experts, administrative systems, and researchers**
- **Set high standards of evidence: grounded in theory, designed for causal inferences and precision, and informed by context**
- **Mutually reinforcing commitments from partners to balance research ambition and operational realities**