



REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

College and Career Readiness

June 2018

Question:

What does the research say about how high- and low-performing students benefit from career pathways or career academy programs?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about career pathways. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on career pathways. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed the benefits of career pathways for high- and low-performing students. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Kemple, J. J. & Willner, C. J. (2008). *Career academies: Long-term impacts on labor market outcomes, educational attainment, and transitions to adulthood*. New York, NY: MDRC. Retrieved from https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_50.pdf

From the overview: "Since 1993, MDRC has been conducting a uniquely rigorous evaluation of the Career Academy approach that uses a random assignment research design in a diverse group of nine high schools across the United States. Located in medium- and large-sized school districts, the schools confront many of the educational challenges found in low-

income urban settings. The participating Career Academies were able to implement and sustain the core features of the approach, and they served a cross-section of the student populations in their host schools. This report describes how Career Academies influenced students' labor market prospects and postsecondary educational attainment in the eight years following their expected graduation. The results are based on the experiences of more than 1,400 young people, approximately 85 percent of whom are Hispanic or African-American."

Note: See pages 24–25 for a description of the three risk subgroups of students (high-risk, medium-risk, and low-risk) examined for this study and pages 34–35 for evaluation findings on these subgroups.

Sun, J. & Spinney, S. (2017). *Transforming the American high school experience: NAF's cohort graduation rates from 2011–2015*. Fairfax, VA: ICF. Retrieved from <https://www.icf.com/-/media/files/icf/reports/2017/nafs-cohort-graduation-rates-from-2011-to-2015.pdf>

From the executive summary: "The study includes the analysis of data from a total of 613,002 students in 2011–2012, with 171,489 being freshmen, of which 7,406 were enrolled in a NAF academy. Specifically, this report—prepared by ICF, the external evaluator—seeks to examine the effect of the NAF design on high school student graduation rates. ICF used a longitudinal quasi-experimental design to track a group of NAF students alongside an equivalent comparison group of non-NAF students from Grade 9 to Grade 12. Overall comparisons between NAF and non-NAF, as well as subgroup comparisons based on students' initial (Grade 9) on-track/at-risk status were conducted to examine whether NAF services had greater impact on certain subgroups. Outcomes were also examined for full participation students who were retained in NAF at Grade 12 and those with partial participation (e.g., withdraw NAF before Grade 12). Specifically, the study examined the following research questions: 1. What is the graduation rate of NAF students compared to similar peers? How do NAF's effects differ for at-risk students? 2. To what extent does the graduation rate vary with degree of participation in the NAF program (full vs partial participation)? 3. To what extent does the graduation rate vary with academy characteristics like theme, program length, and membership level?"

Note: See pages 9–14 for findings comparing at-risk and on-track NAF students.

Warner, M., Caspary, K., Arshan, N., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Park, C.,...Adelman, N. (2015). *Taking stock of the California Linked Learning District Initiative. Sixth-year evaluation report*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. Retrieved from https://irvine-dot-org.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/198/attachments/Linked_Learning_Year_6_Evaluation_Report_2015.pdf?1449866462

From the executive summary: "SRI International's sixth annual evaluation report captures a transitional moment, 2014–15 having marked the final year of the Foundation's funding for the initiative; over the past few years the Foundation has been shifting from a district focused strategy to a regional approach for advancing and scaling Linked Learning. This period also ushered in unprecedented state and federal funding supporting the

development of regional partnerships for the expansion and improvement of career pathway programs. Most notably, the California Career Pathway Trust (CCPT) grants awarded in 2014 and 2015 constituted a significant increase in the resources available for the nine initiative districts. These grants provided funds to develop regional infrastructures for increasing student access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities and to smooth educational transitions for students by aligning and articulating career-themed pathways with community colleges.”

Note: See page 61–62 for overall findings about students with low prior achievement compared with students with high prior achievement.

Additional Organizations to Consult

College and Career Readiness and Success Center: <https://ccrscenter.org/>

From the website: “The College and Career Readiness and Success Center (CCRS Center) is dedicated to ensuring all students graduate high school ready for college and career success. The mission of the CCRS Center is to serve Regional Comprehensive Centers in building the capacity of states to effectively implement initiatives for college and career readiness and success. Through technical assistance delivery and supporting resources, the CCRS Center provides customized support that facilitates the continuous design, implementation, and improvement of college and career readiness priorities.”

Center on Education and the Workforce: <https://cew.georgetown.edu/>

From the website: “We are an independent, nonprofit research and policy institute that studies the link between education, career qualifications, and workforce demands.”

National Research Center for Career and Technical Education: <http://www.nrccte.org/>

From the website: “The NRCCTE is committed to providing evidence-based solutions to the most vexing problems confronting CTE today, including how to better engage students in the school experience; how to improve academic as well as technical achievement; and how to improve the transition of college and career ready young people from high school to continuing education beyond high school.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (“Career pathways” OR “linked learning” OR “career and technical education” OR “career academies”) AND benefits AND (low or high) AND (“performing students” OR “achieving students” OR “prior achievement” OR “subgroup outcomes” OR “student demographics”)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- **Date of the publication:** Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last ten years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Search priorities of reference sources:** Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- **Methodology:** The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- **Existing knowledge base:** Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on May 31, 2018. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.