



Replication of a career academy model: the Georgia Central Educational Center and four replication sites



Summary



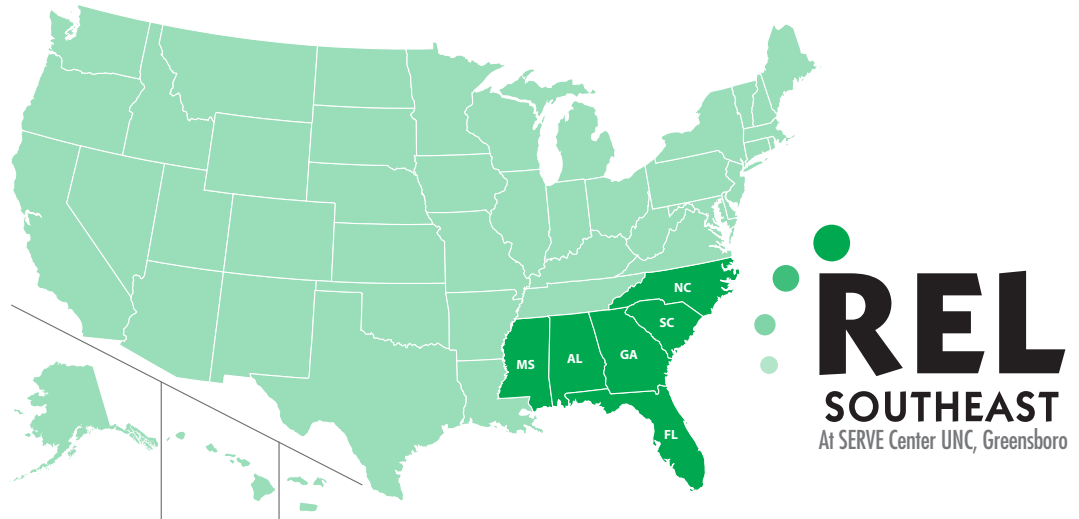


Replication of a career academy model: the Georgia Central Educational Center and four replication sites

Summary

January 2011

Prepared by
Amy Detgen
Academy for Educational Development
and
Corinne Alfeld
Academy for Educational Development



Issues & Answers is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

January 2011

This report was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-06-CO-0028 by Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast administered by SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The content of the publication 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.

This report is in the public domain. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, it should be cited as:

Detgen, A., and Alfeld, C. *Replication of a career academy model: the Georgia Central Educational Center and four replication sites*. (2011). (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2011–No. 101). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

This report is available on the regional educational laboratory website at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Replication of a career academy model: the Georgia Central Educational Center and four replication sites

The study surveyed four career academies in Georgia that replicated the model of the Georgia Central Educational Center, which integrates technical instruction and academics at the high school level. The four replication sites adhered to the major tenets of the model. The model's flexibility helped the new sites meet community needs.

Integrating career and technical instruction at the high school level has gained prominence in recent years, with career academies springing up around the country. Policymakers, educators, and researchers have grown more interested in career academy models as they search for strategies to raise student performance, academic expectations, and graduation rates (Kemple and Willner 2008). An increasingly popular approach to high school reform, career academies strive to create more effective paths between high school and postsecondary education and the workplace.

First appearing some 35 years ago, career academies have been implemented in an estimated 2,500 high schools across the country (MDRC 2010). Partnerships with local employers are a distinctive part of the schools' planning and implementation. A major feature of career academies has often been the involvement of community partners, or stakeholders,

seen as key to developing programs and curricula that train students for local career and employment opportunities. The most successful career academies have involved stakeholders from the beginning of program development.

The Georgia Central Educational Center (CEC), opened in 2000, is a charter career academy developed through a partnership of local employers, high schools, and a technical college in Coweta County, Georgia. Since 2004, Georgia has provided funding to other communities to replicate the CEC model. While some studies describe the CEC model, this study examines how selected elements have been replicated in four charter schools in Georgia. The aim was not to examine the effectiveness of the model but to see how three selected elements have been replicated and to compare the five schools. The three focus areas are:

- *CEC is needs-driven.* CEC develops courses and curricula based on community and employer needs.
- *CEC is a joint venture.* To encourage community support, CEC invites major stakeholders from secondary and postsecondary education and local businesses to serve on its steering committee or board.

- *CEC is seamless.* CEC integrates academics with career and technical education (horizontal seamlessness) and secondary with postsecondary education (vertical seamlessness), emphasizing dual enrollment opportunities that lead to postsecondary credentials.

Information on each replication site was collected through web searches for background information and interviews with a leader from each site. Site leaders reported that the three focus areas characterized each site. Site leaders also emphasized the importance of the CEC model's flexibility for enabling career academies to tailor their programs to community needs.

Site leaders reported the following common features:

- Operation as a shared-time facility—that is, students attend the school for part of the day, before or after attending their local high school.
- Curriculum development based on a needs assessment of area businesses. Health care was identified as an employment need in all five sites.
- Advisory committees composed of local business members that assist in initial curriculum development and regularly review the relevance of programs.
- Key partnerships with the business community, local technical colleges, and other community stakeholders.
- Support from business and postsecondary partners in funding, equipment, space, and curriculum input.
- Emphasis on the link between academic and technical skills.
- Academic classes, but fewer than in home high schools.
- Opportunities to earn course credits at technical colleges through dual enrollment. Four site leaders indicated that sharing physical space or colocating with a technical college was critical in facilitating vertical seamlessness.
- More challenges with horizontal seamlessness than with vertical seamlessness.

Site leaders reported the following variations:

- The program areas reflect differences in labor force needs in the community. (An exception was health care, a common employment need.)
- The composition of partnerships varied. In addition to local businesses and technical colleges, some sites partnered with local nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and other postsecondary institutions.
- The sites took various approaches to maintaining partnerships—from joining community organizations to sponsoring events.
- Two sites provided formal onsite planning time for career academy academic and technical teachers to work together.
- Two sites created opportunities for faculty to interact with students' home high school faculty, to align course content and end-of-course testing requirements.

The Georgia Department of Education Charter School Division, in discussion with Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast, suggested that a study of the CEC replication sites would help educators understand how CEC features

are implemented and help the Georgia Department of Education better understand and anticipate inevitable variations in CEC replication.

January 2011