



Designing an Experimental Evaluation of Career Academies in Philadelphia

This research was supported by the Institute for Education Sciences, through Grant R305B050029. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education.

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Background

Philadelphia Academies, Inc.

- Philadelphia Academies, Inc. (PAI) is a non-profit organization that has been operating career academy programs in the School District of Philadelphia since 1969.
- Each Academy program is housed in a large urban high school as a "school-within-a-school."
- An Academy's curriculum is centered around a career theme to motivate students, connect students to business and community partners, and give students practical applications to prepare them for post-secondary education and careers.
- Currently, Academy programs are operating in 17 high schools, including 14 career fields, and serving over 8,000 students.

Prior research

- MDRC's longitudinal Career Academies study (Kemple, 2004, 2000, etc.) was the only study to meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards for rigor. This study will use and adapt MDRC's survey instruments and observation protocols.
- Comparison group studies have revealed a variety of positive outcomes for career academy students relative to their non-academy peers (Maxwell & Rubin, 2002; Stern et al., 1989; Linnehan, 1996; Reller, 1987)

Sample & Data

This study is a randomized control trial (RCT). The target population will include all ninth graders enrolled at the six study schools who select the PAI-supported career academy. Due to oversubscription of PAI academies, students will be randomly assigned to treatment (PAI academy) and control (other academies).

Students will be identified for the study by expressing interest in the PAI academy at their high school on an Academy Selection Form. Available student spots will be filled by selecting students at random from the pool of interested students. The probability of being assigned to treatment (PAI academy) and control (other academy) will vary based on the number of available spots and the number of interested students.

Year	School	Academy	# of students
2008-09	Bok	Process Technology	120 (60 Treatment, 60 Control)
2008-09	Fels	Business	120 (60 Treatment, 60 Control)
2008-09	Kensington	Business	1200 (400 Treatment, 800 Control)
2008-09	Mastbaum	Hotel, Restaurant, Tourism	100 (50 Treatment, 50 Control)
TBD	Swenson	Electric	to be determined
TBD	West Philadelphia	Auto	to be determined

Research Questions

Impact questions:

- (1) Do students enrolled in PAI-supported programs have higher high school graduation rates than non-PAI students in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP)?
- (2) Are students enrolled in PAI-supported programs more likely to obtain employment or to pursue post-secondary education than non-PAI students?
- (3) To what extent and in what ways do treatment and control student experiences differ?
- (4) Do student experiences and outcomes differ across PAI programs and schools?

Process questions:

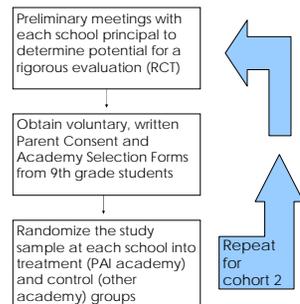
Business partnerships:

- (1) How does PAI develop business partnerships?
- (2) What roles do business partners play in the Academies?

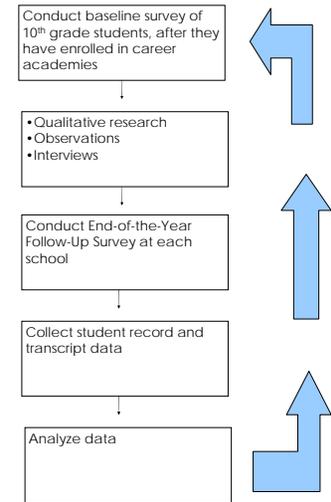
Curricular balance and rigor:

- (3) How do schools balance college preparatory academics with career training programs?
- (4) What are the challenges to this "new vocational" or "combined" approach?

Recruitment & Randomization (2007-08)



Ongoing Research & Student Tracking (2008-12)



Methods and Data	Significance
Randomized control trial (RCT)	Analyze the effectiveness & impacts of PAI programs
Transcript analysis	Analyze course-taking patterns; use Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) to control for students' prior achievement and demographics and to nest students' within academies, within schools
Student Surveys · Baseline (10 th grade, upon enrollment in Career Academy) · End-of-the-year Follow-Up (every year, beginning in 10 th grade)	Determine student experiences, satisfaction with program, and aspirations; Link with student record data Determine changes in experiences and aspirations over time; Link with baseline & student record data
Interviews · Lisa Nutter, PAI President · School principals (x6)	Learn about program activities, operations, policies, business partnerships, and challenges to implementation
Observations · 4 days at each study school + special events	Learn about academic and career curriculum, PAI programs and activities, and school climate