

The
5 Keys
for
Successful Career Academies



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The 5 Keys for Successful Career Academies

A career academy's success comes by design. Academies and SLCs are not likely to succeed if they are yet another "program" to be implemented. Where academies thrive is in schools where they are part of a whole-school, systemic improvement initiative.

Successful career academies from 1969 to the present have five characteristics in common. This gave birth to the 5 Keys for Successful Career Academies created in 1998. They are the basis for the National Educator Program's TINA (The Initial Needs Assessment) and TONYA (The Ongoing Yearly Assessment), and are the unifying element of multi-year professional development plans at NEP schools.

For a career academy to succeed, thrive, and sustain itself, it will need the following 5 Keys.



Key #1 **Faculty Ownership**

Faculty and administration at the school share a common vision of what the school is supposed to become, agree on the value of what career academies will bring to the school, and work cooperatively to create and continuously improve their school environment.

- ◆ The faculty members and school leaders feel compelled to implement academies to accomplish specific outcomes.
- ◆ The administration helps create faculty "ownership" of the process because the professionals in the classrooms will be the ones who primarily determine the success of the academies.
- ◆ A plan is developed under expert guidance on outcomes, implementation and evaluation.
- ◆ Outside funding is accepted only after Key #1 is established at the school site, or in the district. Outside funding helps to facilitate a vision that already exists.

Research: Archer, Elayne 1989; Dayton, Charles 1995; Kemple, James J. 1997; Kemple James J. & Rock, JoAnn Leah 1996; Burnett, Gary 1992; Sidler 1993; Thompson & Varano 2010.



Key #2 Preparation & Design

Prior to attempting implementation, the site-based educators work to articulate the vision and have it shared by faculty, district and appropriate feeder schools. The design is clear for implementation and allows for continuous innovation.

- ◆ A thorough needs assessment (such as TINA) is conducted that identifies desired outcomes, a school's strengths and assets, areas of change, benchmarks, a timeline, a long-term professional development plan, and involvement in a network of schools for data sharing (such as the NEPwork).
- ◆ Research is done into the various forms of implementation career academies can take. The long-term plan has ongoing improvement and innovation built into the initiative's life cycle.
- ◆ The school determines how many academies they will implement before the implementation process is completed. The school decides on the correct number of academies based on their enrollment.

NEP uses the following formula to be used by grade level to determine number of academies:

$$\text{ACS} \times \text{T} = \text{GLE}$$

Divide total student enrollment per grade by the GLE

ACS - The average class size at that grade level

T - The number of teachers who will be participating in academy instruction

GLE - The desired number of grade level enrollment per academy

Research: Stern, Dayton & Raby 2000; Kemple, James J & Snipes, Jason C. 2000; Finch, Frantz, Mooney & Norbert 1997; Kemple, James J. & Rock, JoAnn Leah 1996.

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Key #3 Career Areas

Career themes are chosen early in the process based on what resources the local community has to support instructional experiences inside and outside of the classroom, and which of those are most expedient for promoting student mastery of state-mandated content standards.

- ◆ Community experts are utilized as adjunct faculty, guest speakers, and assist with real-world learning experiences created for the classroom.
- ◆ These partners also host job shadowing and formal internship programs.
- ◆ Career areas are broad enough to allow teachers flexibility in creating learning experiences for students that are clearly understood and useful to students.
- ◆ Career partners are actively involved in planning instructional experiences.
- ◆ Career partners represent both local business interests and post-secondary institutions of all kinds (technical schools, community colleges, four year universities, etc).
- ◆ Post-secondary institutions work with high school educators to create smooth transitions for students from high school to post-secondary education.

Research: Archer, Elayne 1989; Kemple James J. & Rock, JoAnn Leah 1996; Kemple, James J. 1997.





Key #4 Specific & Well-Planned Professional Development

The professional development plan targets areas of specific need for academy teams and provides a mechanism to build capacity for future professional development that does not rely on an outside provider.

- ◆ Successful academies outline a course of professional development based on their initial needs assessment (such as TINA).
- ◆ Professional development includes training, consultation with an outside expert, staff-directed follow-up via professional learning communities and/or peer coaching, conferences, site visits and more.
- ◆ Faculty teams and administrators agree on one or two areas per year to focus on for professional growth. All professional development training, follow-up, coaching, etc., is then focused on those specific areas to promote mastery by the staff.
- ◆ Training is provided by staff with expertise or outside trainers who have proven expertise.
- ◆ Outside providers are vetted for qualifications and experience.

Research: Burke & Baldwin 1999; Joyce & Showers 2002; Groomes 1999; Coburn 2005; Neufeld & Roper 2003; Wade, Welch & Jensen 1994; Brewster & Railsback 2003.

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Key #5 Academic Vigor

Academic vigor is in place when a school combines the three elements of 1) high expectations (rigor and standards), 2) support structures to help students meet those expectations and 3) students are working hard because they want to meet the expectations.

- ◆ Vigor is found in both academic and CTE classes.
- ◆ Successful curriculum integration is found at all levels: Classroom Level, Partner Level and Team Level®.
- ◆ The learning experiences relate to the student's life outside of the classroom and includes all of the components of Meaningful Instruction®.
- ◆ The curriculum is flexible to allow teachers leeway in creating and planning instruction, as well as giving teachers the opportunity to capitalize on learning opportunities arising during instruction that were not foreseen.
- ◆ Teachers are given adequate planning time to create powerful learning experiences for students. This planning time can take many following forms, including the following: a common planning period, meeting time after school but during the contractual day, regularly scheduled off-campus planning retreats where substitute teachers are brought in to cover team members' classes, after hours with appropriate stipends/compensation with the approval of the teachers and their union, or a combination of these.
- ◆ Career academies are regularly using academic vigor to maximize the student experience at school by increasing success and achievement with demanding and meaningful learning experiences.

Research: Reynolds, Dorothy 1984; Maxwell, Nan L. 1999; Reller, Dorothy J. 1987; Kemple James J. & Rock, JoAnn Leah 1996; Burnett, Gary 1992; Hicks, Glasgow & McNary 2005; Johnson 2002; Neufeld & Roper 2003; Leckvarcik 1992; Thompson & Varano 2009.

