

Creating Career Academies



What is a Career Academy? A Career Academy is a 4-year program within a traditional high school (as compared to a vocational school) that provides students with a focus on a particular career skill set and knowledge base, for both college and job prep. It typically uses a problem-based learning (PBL) approach; applies a variety of skills, materials, and tools; exposes students to diverse pedagogies, perspectives, and peers; and includes career and technical education (CTE) certifications.

Why Build an Academy?

- Provide students with new learning pathways beyond the traditional curriculum
- Draw resources like grants, sponsors, and partnerships (ex. local colleges and trades organizations)
- Build staff capacity and diversity
- Be more competitive with choices like private schools, vocational programs, and online learning

Considerations in Deciding on a Career Academy

- Have you researched and factored in labor market demand and employability skills?
- What existing resources (ex. courses) can be adapted?
- Who is your target audience, and what will your entrance criteria be?
- How flexible will course pathways be for students?
- Will there be unique requirements for academy students, like internships, capstones, and research?
- Will courses with extra seats permit non-Academy students to enroll?

Design Elements

- **Funding:** Partnerships and grants are widely available, and the development process connects schools with outside resources that further academy goals.
- **Transportation:** Students may need to be bussed across multiple locations; transport for internships and field experiences should be considered (many place there in senior year, assuming they drive).
- **Staffing:** There will be a need to identify and/or recruit the top teachers in each area, sometimes requiring specialized knowledge or experience that is not currently within the staff talent pool.
- **Curriculum Writing:** Staff will not only need to write curriculum for new courses, but develop the flipped content and capstone projects (etc.) unique to Academy classes.
- **Materials:** Supporting project based learning and open-ended inquiry, proposed academy courses will require unique access to materials and tools facilitated through access to makerspaces, etc.
- **Professional development, training, certifications:** Professional Development will be ongoing and additional certifications may be pursued by educators to enhance the course offerings. Maximizing common preparation time will facilitate the development of interdisciplinary lessons and activities within their unique PLCs.

And while you would be wise to plot out all four years of your academy, in reality you need only finalize plans for your freshman class and increase offerings each year.