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MDRC's Career and Technical Education Projects

The past decade has seen a resurgence of interest in career and technical education (CTE) as a way to engage students, help people build the skills necessary to succeed in a technologically advanced economy, and meet employer demand for workers. MDRC — which has a two-decade history of developing and evaluating CTE programs, including our landmark study of [Career Academies](#) — is partnering with over a dozen CTE programs to build evidence and inform CTE policy and practice. MDRC's current projects encompass a range of employer-driven programs — including career pathways, work-based learning, apprenticeships, and sectoral training — and target everyone from high school and college students to at-risk young people and low-wage workers.

K-12 STUDENTS

[CareerWise Colorado](#) is a Swiss-inspired youth apprenticeship program that aims to meet employers' needs for skilled workers and to improve labor market outcomes for young people. The program is driven by local businesses and industry intermediaries representing high-growth, high-wage sectors in Colorado, such as information technology (IT), finance, and advanced manufacturing. MDRC is conducting an implementation study of the planning and pilot phase of the program.

[Career Technical Education Innovation: New York City as a Laboratory for Learning](#) will look at the impact of CTE programs on a variety of student outcomes: social competencies, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion, employment, and earnings. The study will also look at the variation in the more than 200 CTE programs across New York City to understand what program components contribute to improved student outcomes. The study is being conducted in partnership with the Research Alliance for New York City Schools and the University of Connecticut.

[Next Generation California Partnership Academies](#) is a replication of MDRC's study of career academies — small learning communities within larger high schools that combine academic and technical curricula around a career theme and provide students with work-based learning experiences. MDRC's original [study](#) found long-term impacts on earnings for students who participated in career academies. This new study, centered on career academies that receive enhanced technical assistance from the California Department of Education, will follow students for 12 years and measure impacts on educational attainment, employment, and earnings.

[P-TECH 9-14](#) is a six-year high school model that was created by IBM, the New York City Department of Education, and the City University of New York (CUNY). Students participate in work-based learning experiences at IBM and graduate with both a high school diploma and a free associate's degree from CUNY. There are now seven P-TECH schools, each with different industry partners, in New York City, and the model has proliferated across New York State and nationally. MDRC is conducting an implementation, impact, and cost study of New York City's P-TECH 9-14 model schools.

[YouthForce NOLA](#) is an initiative designed to connect New Orleans high school students to career pathways in high-wage, high-demand industries, such as health sciences, digital media, IT, and skilled crafts. The program provides technical support to schools to develop CTE programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials and collaborates with employers to offer a robust paid internship program. MDRC is providing formative feedback on program design, conducting an implementation study, and assessing the feasibility of an impact study.

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COLLEGE STUDENTS

[New World of Work \(NWoW\)](#) is designed to help students learn the 21st-century skills (also called “soft skills”) that are important for success in the workplace. The program, which is currently being piloted at community colleges in California, incorporates a 21st-century skills curriculum for the classroom, work-based learning experiences, and credentials designed to demonstrate mastery in these skills. MDRC is working with the developers of NWoW to adapt the program for use in CTE programs and assess its promise for improving students’ educational outcomes.

[The Great Lakes Career Ready Internship program](#) aims to help students persist in and complete college and improve their prospects in the workforce. The program offers career-focused, paid internships to several thousand low-income students. Participating colleges match students with employers on the basis of their professional interests. MDRC is exploring which features of the program help students stay in school and how colleges develop relationships with local employers.

AT-RISK YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

[Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy \(CCCA\)](#) in Washington State seeks to improve outcomes for young people (16 to 21 years old) who participate in Jobs Corps — a long-standing program for disadvantaged youth. CCCA uses a career pathways model to integrate academic learning, CTE training, work-based learning, and noncognitive skills training in a residential setting. CCCA aims to better serve young people who have left school by helping them pursue and obtain industry-recognized credentials. The study is being conducted in partnership with Abt Associates.

[GED Bridge](#) is testing whether a career-focused GED program at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College can help more students pass the high school equivalency exam and go on to college and a career. The program includes a curriculum that integrates material from the fields of health care and business and helps students identify the course of study that is right for them. GED Bridge builds on the lessons of LaGuardia Community College’s [Bridge to College and Careers program](#), which was found to increase GED exam pass rates and improve college enrollment and persistence.

LOW-WAGE WORKERS

[Families Forward Demonstration \(FFD\)](#) is testing new approaches to improve the earnings capacity and financial knowledge of noncustodial parents who owe child support but are unable to fully pay because of low earnings. FFD builds on previous research on employment programs for noncustodial parents and recent evidence on sectoral partnerships to develop ways to help parents obtain higher-paying jobs in their local labor market.

The [TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative \(SWFI\)](#) grant programs emphasize short-term, accelerated, demand-driven training aimed at preparing young adults and parents for middle-skill jobs in high-growth industries. Across 53 grantees, a variety of technical skills training approaches are being piloted. In addition, SWFI programs hope to foster training participation and completion by assisting parents in obtaining child care. The evaluation is led by Westat in partnership with MDRC.

[WorkAdvance](#) is a sectoral-focused advancement program that offers training and industry-recognized certifications in local high-growth sectors such as IT, advanced manufacturing, and health care. The program has several components: screening, preemployment services, skills training, job placement, and postemployment advancement services. MDRC’s evaluation found that WorkAdvance increased average earnings by nearly \$2,000 two years after program entry, increased employment in the targeted sector, and had impacts on job quality. The most successful WorkAdvance provider (Per Scholas in New York City) increased earnings by \$3,700.