

# *Improving Youth Labor Market Prospects*

## *Long-Term Findings From an Evaluation of Career Academies*

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<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/482/full.pdf>

**MDRC**

# How might Career Academy research and practice inform strategies for connecting classrooms and careers?

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## Practice

- 35-year track record of implementation, planned expansion, and efforts at continuous improvement
- Intervention with goals and core features aligned with important problems in high schools and youth employment

## Research

- 25 years of non-experimental research and a commitment to learning what works
- 15-year random assignment field experiment involving 9 sites, over 1,700 students, and 12 years of follow-up
- Rare evidence of positive effects on labor market outcomes without compromising on academic goals

# Career Academies

## Program Characteristics and Goals

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### ➤ Key Features

- *Small Learning Communities* to promote interpersonal supports and program coherence
- *Career theme* to combine academic curriculum with career-related course sequence
- *Employer partnerships* to support career awareness and development activities and work-based learning

### ➤ Goals

- *Dropout prevention*
- *Career development and academic achievement*
- *Pathways to the labor market and post-secondary education*

# Key Findings (High School Years)

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## Strengths

- Higher level of interpersonal supports from teachers and peers
- Increased exposure to career awareness activities, work-based learning, career-technical courses
- Greater benefits to “higher risk” students

## Potential Limitations

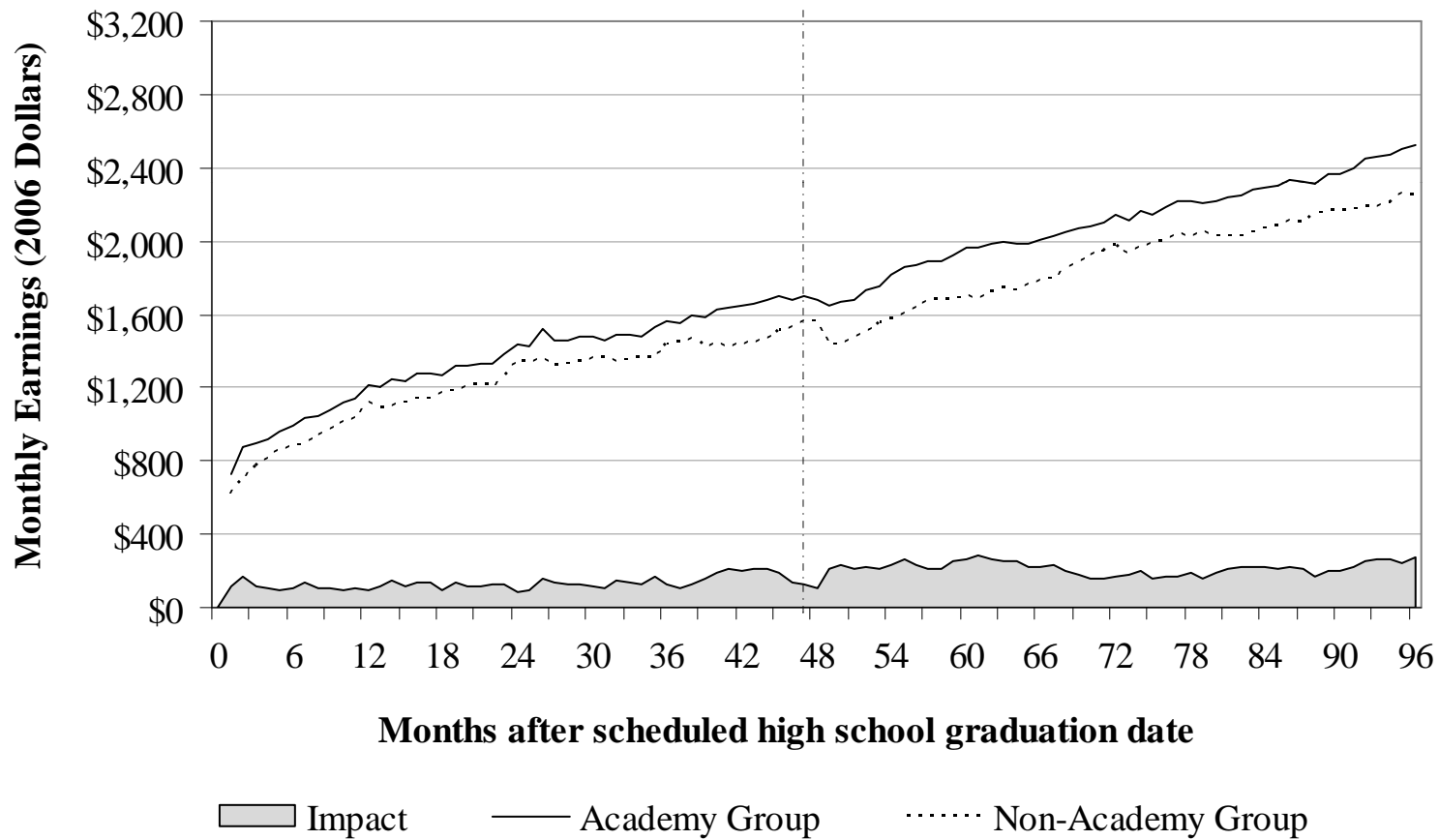
- High attrition rates
- Uneven quality of curriculum integration and internships
- Little or no impact on academic performance indicators

## **Key Findings (8 Years Post-High School)**

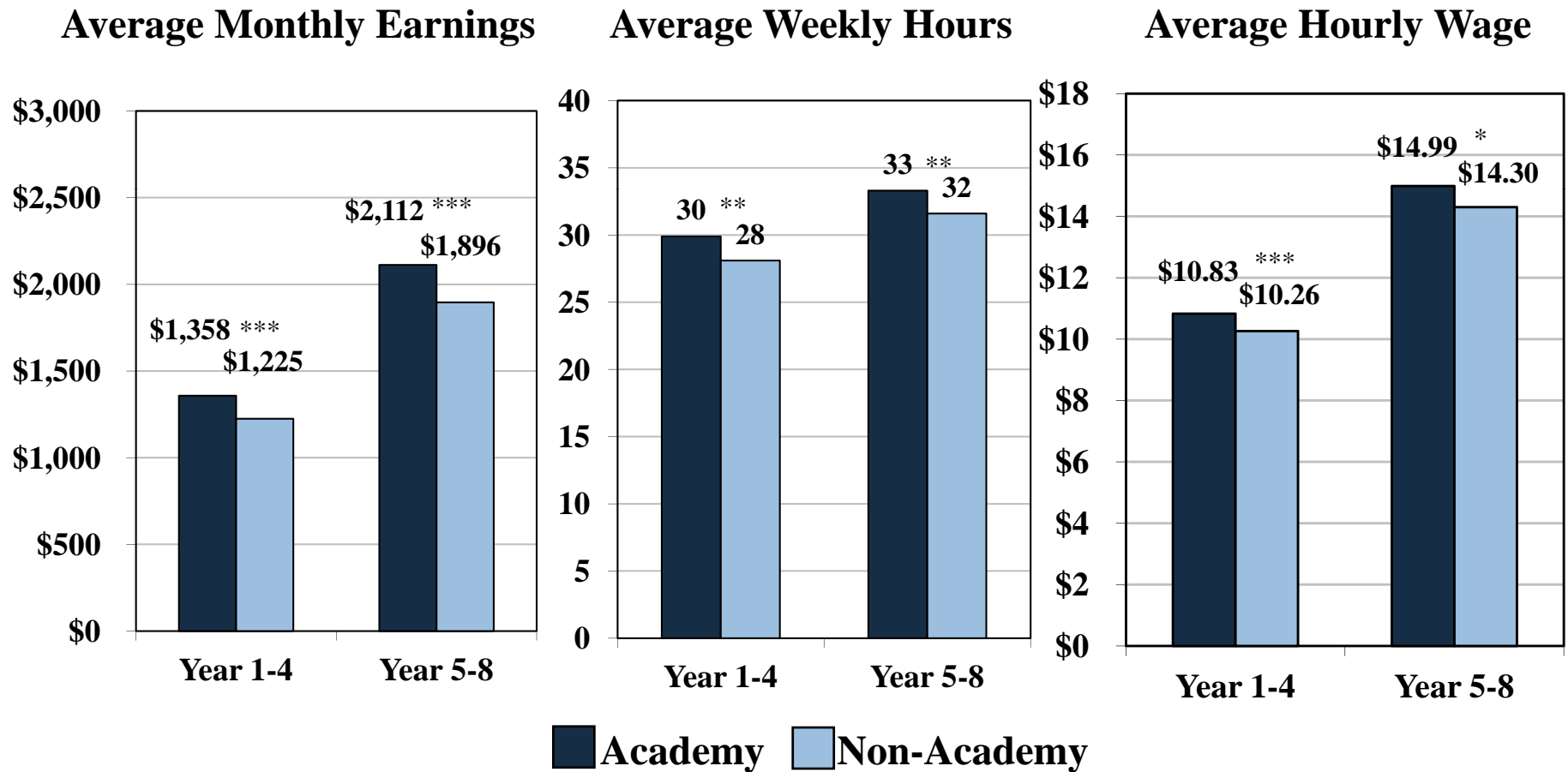
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- **Positive and sustained impact on employment and earnings through 8 years following scheduled high school graduation.**
  - Impact for full sample: \$2,088 per year (11 percent increase)
  - Impact for young men: \$3,724 per year (17 percent increase)
  - Impact for young women: \$1,026 per year (not statistically significant)
- **High levels of educational attainment, but no impact (positive or negative) from Career Academies.**
- **Positive impact on family formation and independent living.**

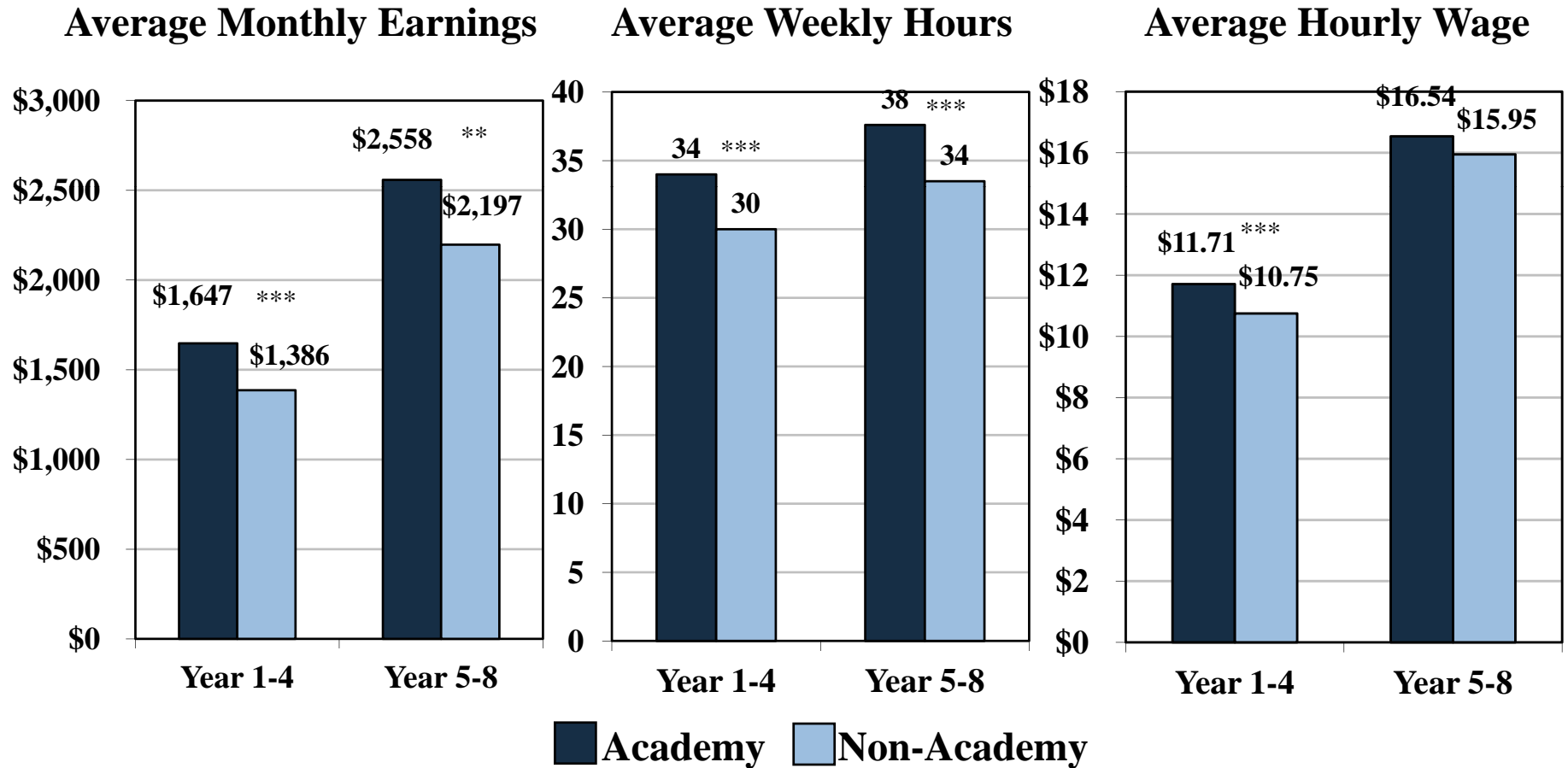
# Impacts on Monthly Earnings Full Sample 8 Years Post-High School



# Impacts on Employment and Earnings Full Sample 8 Years Post-High School

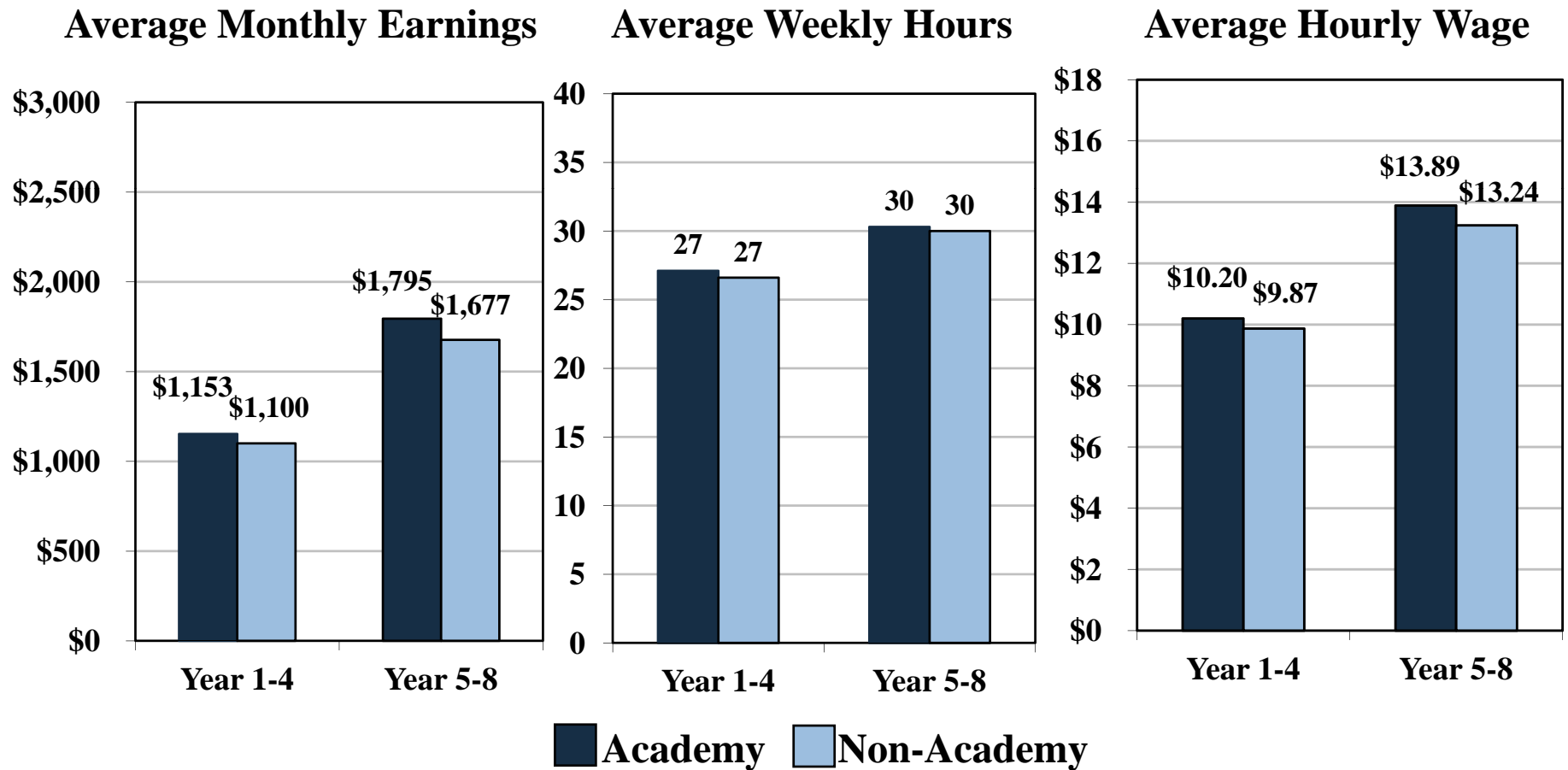


# Impacts on Employment and Earnings Young Men 8 Years Post-High School

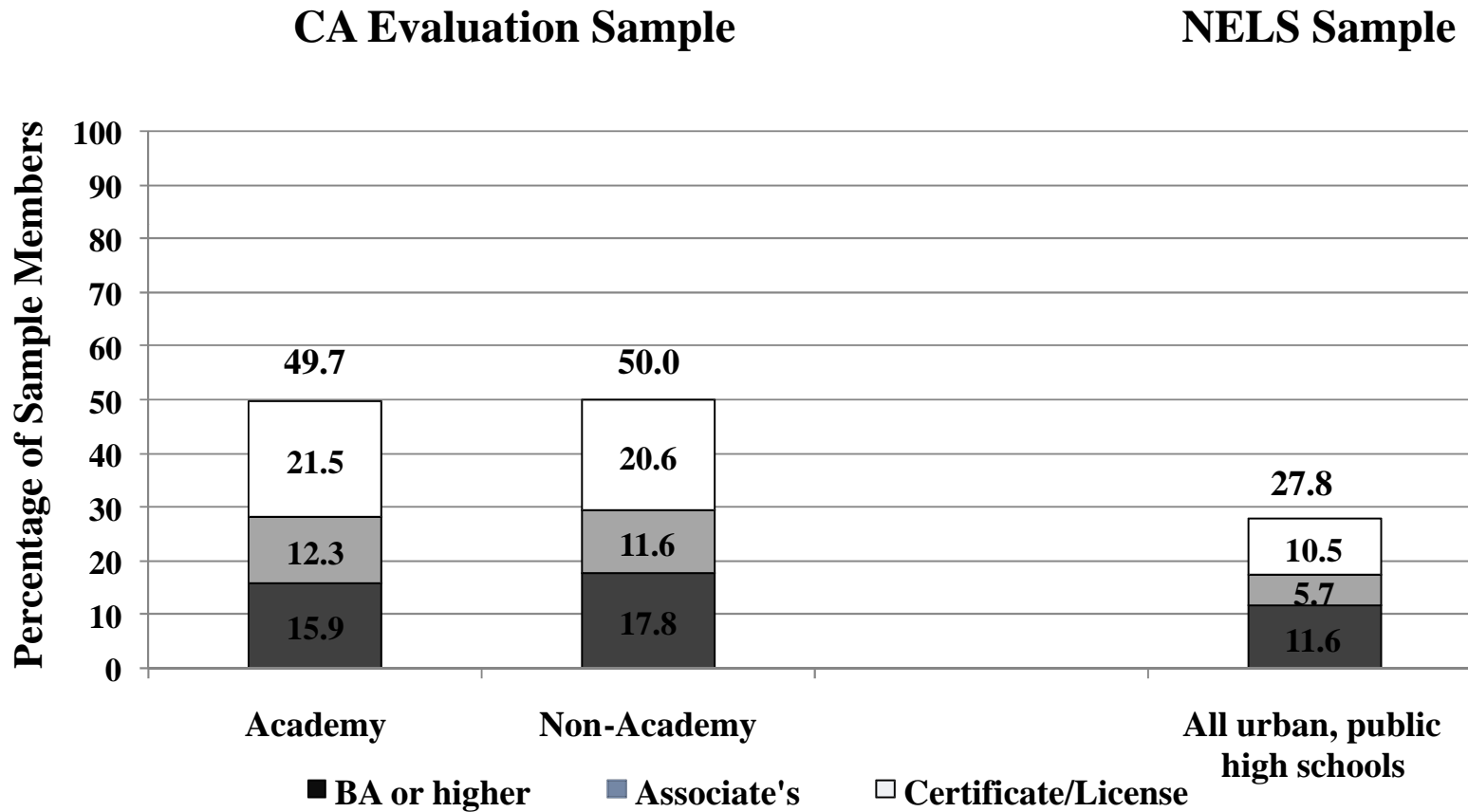




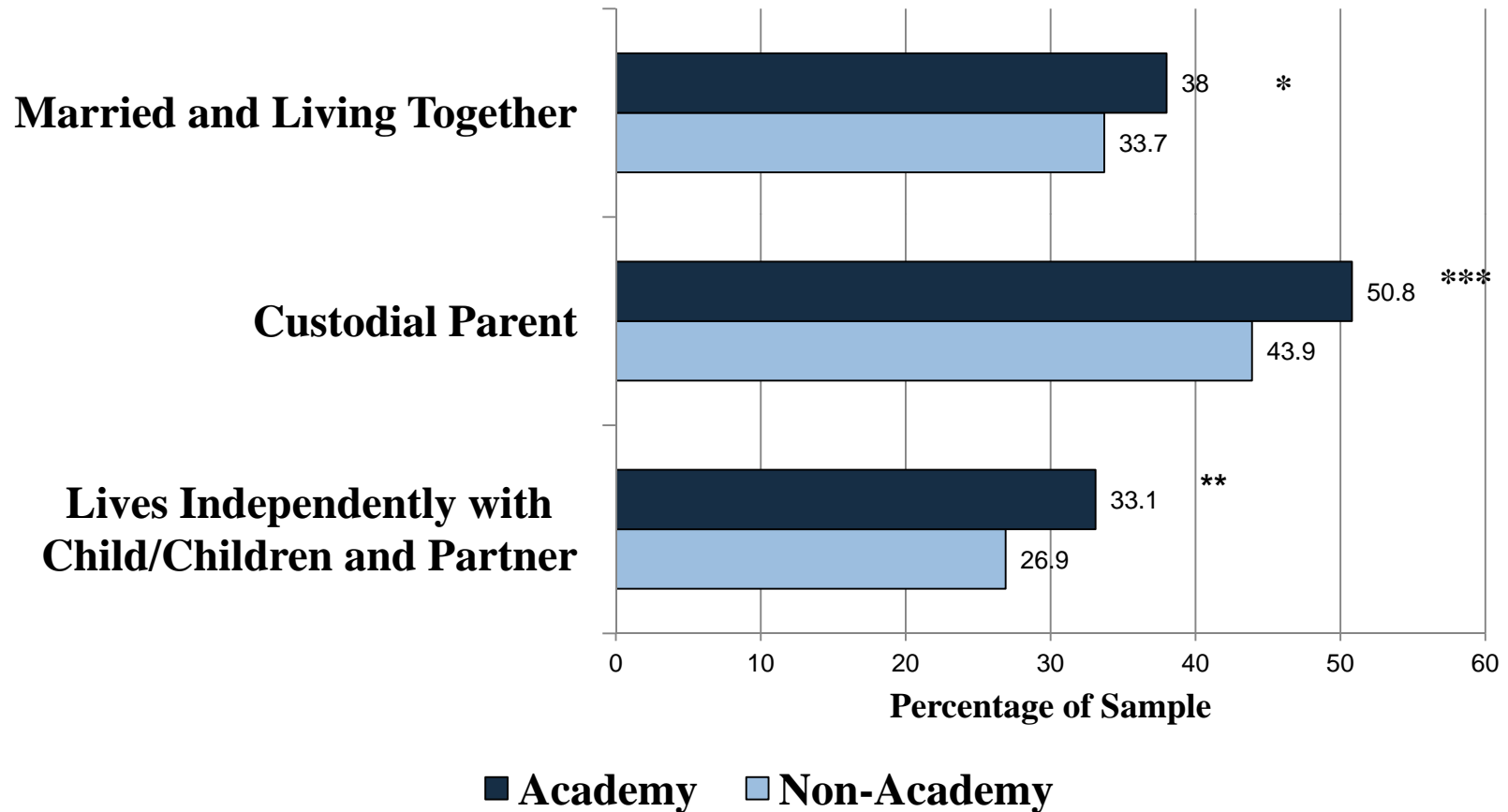
# Impacts on Employment and Earnings Young Women 8 Years Post-High School



# Post-Secondary Completion with National Comparisons (8 Years Post-High School)



# Impacts on Social Adjustment Indicators Full Sample 8 Years Post-High School



# Implications for Connecting Classrooms and Careers

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- Increased investments in career-related experiences during high school can have substantial payoff in the labor market, at least for young men.
- Career Academies demonstrate feasibility of accomplishing goals of school-to-career and career-technical education without compromising on academic goals.
- Career Academies serve as a viable pathway to post-secondary education, but not necessarily better than what is already available in high school.

# WARNING LABEL

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- **Important to be clear about the focus of the impact (labor market outcomes) and about the likely source of effects (career development and work-based learning activities).**
- **Trading on the Career Academy “brand name” without careful attention to all core components may lead to dilution of fidelity and lack of impact on misaligned outcomes.**

# Selected Resources for Career Academy Support

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- Career Academy Support Network  
([www.casn.berkeley.edu](http://www.casn.berkeley.edu))
- National Academy Foundation  
([www.naf.org](http://www.naf.org))
- National Career Academy Coalition  
([www.ncac.org](http://www.ncac.org))
- MDRC  
([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org))