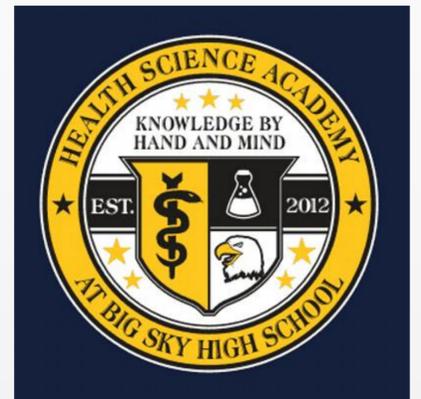# School Not-As-Usual
Evaluating Montana's First Career Academy

Background: The Health Science Academy at Big Sky High School was launched in the fall of 2012 and is currently serving 240 students. At the time of implementation, 50% of Big Sky H.S. graduates were not pursuing post-secondary education. Career academies are designed to engage students, and provide them with the interpersonal support and academic foundation necessary for college and career readiness.

What is unique about the Health Science Academy?
- Thematic education based on health science
- Industry certification prior to graduation
- Multiple job-shadowing opportunities junior and senior years
- 4-year health science curriculum from Project Lead the Way
- Regular "edventures" that support classroom learning
- Frequent academy social events
- Small learning community and strong interpersonal connections
  - Academy students take core courses together
  - Academy is staffed with selected teachers and administrators

Research Questions/Data Collection/Analysis Methods

Sub-question	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
Does the HSA improve academic achievement?	HSA vs. non-HSA 10th grade CRT scores	HSA vs. non-HSA ACT scores	HSA vs. non-HSA grade point average
Does the HSA increase college readiness?	Credits earned by HSA vs non-HSA students in the 12th grade	HSA vs. non-HSA ACT scores	12th Grade Student Expectations survey
What sub-groups receive the most benefits from the HSA?	HSA vs. non-HSA students who receive free and reduced lunch benefits	HSA vs. non-HSA students at different levels of achievement	Compare ACT and CRT scores of HSA vs. non-HSA subgroups
What are students' attitudes about school and the HSA?	HSA Student Voice, survey measured satisfaction with the HSA.	Student interviews.	

What the literature says about career academies:
- The career academy has become a widely used reform models to reduce dropout rates and increase college readiness (Brand, 2004).
- Students enrolled in career academies had a higher graduation rate, a lower dropout rate and better attendance than comparative control groups (Sterns, 2010).
- High-risk or low-income students experience the most substantial benefits from career academies (Kemple and Snipes, 2000).

Responses to the 12th Grade Student Expectations Survey	HSA % Respondents N = 32	Non-HSA % Respondents N = 56
What are your plans for next year?		
School only	28.1	21.4
Work only	0	21.4
Combine school and work	65.6	46.4
Military	3.1	3.6
Unknown	3.1	7.1
What steps have you taken towards 2-year or 4-year college admission?		
Have taken no steps	0	12.5
Researched collage options	90.6	71.4
Took ACT or SAT	100	71.4
Submitted an application	96.9	75
Had an interview	28.1	14.3
What are your education expectations after high school?		
Will not pursue education after high school	0	7.1
Complete some post-secondary education or training	3.1	5.4
Attend college	3.1	19.6
Graduate from college	93.8	67.9
I have received at least one scholarship.	68.8	33.9
I have detailed knowledge of the qualifications and training necessary for obtaining a career that will provide me financial security.		
Strongly agree	50	28.6
Agree	50	55.4
Disagree	0	14.3
Strongly disagree	0	1.8

Key Findings:
- HSA students appeared to have a greater level of college readiness based on the results of the 12th grade student expectations survey.
- Student surveys indicated that HSA students had a high level of confidence, sense of belonging and sense of accomplishment.
- Student surveys indicated that interpersonal connections, between students and teachers, could be improved upon.
- Students found the HSA engaging.
- HSA students earned significantly more credits towards graduation than non-HSA students.
- The HSA did not enhance the academic achievement of students.
- The HSA attracted students who entered high school as higher academic achievers.
- The HSA served an abnormally low percentage of students from low-income households.
- Student interviews indicated that students found the HSA challenging yet rewarding.

Robert P. Ellenbecker

Big Sky High School   Missoula, Montana

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY MSSE

BIG SKY