

Momentum builds for Career Academies, a movement in education that infuses career-focused curriculum and experiences with postsecondary opportunities

With promising early results in the Twin Cities Metro, United Way receives \$2 million investment from the Bush Foundation to expand model into Greater Minnesota

(Minneapolis, Minn. – April 4, 2017) — Career Academies, a movement in high school education that combines rigorous career-focused curriculum and experiences with postsecondary opportunities for students in grades 9-14+, continues to gain momentum with students, educators, and employers in the Twin Cities metro area. Anchored by United Way in partnership with K-12, post-secondary institutions, government agencies and employers, Career Academies is responding to the changing workforce demands as it seeks to close the education opportunity gap between white students and students of color.

State demographers predict that by 2020, 75 percent of all Minnesota jobs will require some postsecondary education. Currently, only 44 percent of people 25 and older have a post-secondary degree or credential. Minnesota leads the nation with one of the largest graduation gaps. Career Academies is designed to reimagine education, making it relevant for all students in alignment with workforce demands.

Now in its second year, Career Academies shows promising early results and growth. When the program launched, 355 students enrolled; 65 percent of those were students of color, far exceeding statewide participation averages of 10 percent in concurrent enrollment, and nearly 20 percent in Postsecondary Education Options (PSEO). Career Academies has since flourished to more than 2,900 students across five communities – including Bloomington, Burnsville, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and White Bear Lake. To date, students have earned 1,075 college credits and 53 industry credentials. These numbers translate into savings of an estimated \$521,196 in postsecondary tuition costs.

The Career Academies model encompasses a sequence of rigorous academic and career-focused coursework coupled with career exposure and work-based opportunities that equip students with the knowledge, technical expertise, and 21st century skills to be successful in post-secondary and career. Students gain valuable career-based learning and workplace experiences that introduce them to high demand fields with sustaining wages, such as: healthcare, construction, manufacturing, engineering, information technology, and more. Along the way, students gain important transferrable job skills such as critical thinking, leadership and teamwork.

Each Career Academy is uniquely configured within districts and schools, leveraging existing resources, infrastructure, and partnerships to maximize relevancy and sustainability. The initiative has seen exceptional results in partnership with Minneapolis Community and Technical College's program with Alternative Learning Centers (ALC); in its first year, 61 percent of their Career Academy participants graduated high school compared to the typical ALC graduation rate of 17 percent.

“The Destination: Diploma to Degree (D3) program is providing ALC students access to the transformative power of education. Prior to D3, many were in danger of dropping out or aging out of the K-12 system before they completed high school. Now, not only are they finishing high school; they are earning college credits and on a path to promising careers,” says Minneapolis Community and Technical College President, Dr. Sharon Pierce.

Based on encouraging early results in the Twin Cities, Career Academies will expand into Southwest and South Central Minnesota thanks to a \$2 million Bush Foundation investment—paving the way for career pathway possibilities for students and gains for the state’s skilled labor force. In expanding the model to Greater Minnesota, United Way is partnering with a broad network, most notably the Minnesota Valley Action Council, Inc. in South Central Minnesota and the Southwest Initiative Foundation in Southwest Minnesota.

This collective effort is expected to provide exciting opportunities for high school students, boost graduation rates, and deliver a needed influx of talented workers into Minnesota’s economy. “The Bush Foundation is proud to support the expansion of Career Academies into Greater Minnesota so more students have access to these career-focused pathways,” says Bush Foundation Education Portfolio Director Kayla Yang-Best. She continues, “This investment is also a learning opportunity to inform our own individualized learning strategy, which is rooted in making K-12 education more culturally, instructionally and career relevant for all students.”

Career Academies is one of the few career pathway education models in the country that has rigorous program measurement built into its design that allows for tracking of metrics; progress, outcomes and learnings for evaluation and reporting.

“We know that equipping young people with the knowledge, job skills, and empowered mindset they’ll need for their future will build a stronger Minnesota,” says United Way President and CEO Sarah Caruso. She continues, “We are grateful for the support of the Bush Foundation and are thrilled to expand Career Academies into Greater Minnesota.”

To learn more about Career Academies or find out how to get involved, go to <https://www.gtcuw.org/our-purpose/career-academies/>.

United Way is grateful for the support of many early investors who have made this work possible. In particular, United Way recognizes U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo Foundation, Best Buy, Securian, and Christine and Robb Battist, Abigail Rose and Michael J. Blum, Suzanne and David Goodwin, Sherry and Phil Jaffe, and Barbara and Irv Kessler, for their support and leadership advancing Career Academies. United Way would also like to thank Carlson/Carlson Family Foundation, F.R. Bigelow Foundation, Saint Paul Foundation, UPS, and JPMorgan Chase for their Career Academies investments in addition to the following donors whose contributions have supported our Career Academies work: Land O’Lakes, Medtronic, UnitedHealth Group, and Mosaic Company.

-more-

About Greater Twin Cities United Way

Ranked as Minnesota's largest nongovernmental social services funder, United Way connects people and resources within our community to challenge and change systems—like Minnesota's education and jobs gap—that limit our potential. Our mission is to unite caring people to build pathways out of poverty, thereby improving individual lives and the community. Learn more at <https://www.gtcuw.org/> and about our 24-hour, statewide, multilingual information and referral service, United Way 2-1-1 at <http://www.211unitedway.org/>. Greater Twin Cities United Way serves Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott and western Washington counties. For more information call (612) 340-7400.

###