



Welcome to ICF *Education Connections*

ICF is helping to improve educational outcomes by navigating clients through today's and tomorrow's challenges. From early education to K-12 and postsecondary schooling, ICF gives clients the insights they need to turn research into practice. In this issue, learn about:

- Partnering with private as well as public organizations
- Examining peer coaching's impact on college success
- Studying the impact of a career-themed academy on academic performance

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ICF Partnerships Span Public & Private Sector

Whether collaborating throughout the entire process of proposal development, or to conduct key aspects of the work, ICF has a proud history of successful associations with government and private organizations alike. ICF's track record includes working with partners to design their evaluations as they pursue funding from organizations that range from federal and state agencies to private funders like foundations, nonprofits, and commercial entities.

State departments of education in Texas and Maryland contracted with ICF to conduct evaluations of their public charter school programs. State departments in Texas and West Virginia engaged ICF to evaluate their GEAR UP programs. Community colleges in Tennessee, Maine, and North Dakota have worked with ICF evaluation teams under the auspices of the DOL Trade Adjustment Assistance and Community College Career Training programs.

ICF is currently engaged in multiple i3 efforts that involve partnerships with a national nonprofit organization, a state-based nonprofit, local education agencies, and a state

university. For example, ICF serves as the independent evaluator for the Virginia Advanced Study Strategies Rural Math Innovation Network, which is working with 20 rural local education agencies to develop a process using a networked improvement community of pre-Algebra and Algebra 1 teachers to incorporate growth model mindset and self-efficacy strategies into lesson plans. The evaluation is based on a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design that studies participants' reactions, learning, behaviors, and results. Working with Jacksonville State University, ICF is conducting a rigorous evaluation of the Collaborative Regional Education model, designed to improve college and work readiness among 8th-12th grade students in primarily high need and rural schools. The evaluation team will consider whether achievement and college readiness is higher for students taught by the treatment teachers than for those taught by the comparison teachers after two semesters of program implementation.

Studying College Possible's Impact on Skills for Success

ICF is leading the first nationwide evaluation of College Possible that is focused on non-cognitive skills. The study promises valuable findings about peer coaching's impact on the ability of low-income students to acquire skills essential for success in college.

ICF currently serves as the independent evaluator for a 2014 cohort investing in innovation (i3) development study of the College Possible program. Over the course of the five-year project, College Possible will provide an intensive two-year curriculum of coaching and support to approximately 1,330 low income high school students in 18 high schools across five states (Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin). Participating students will complete 320 hours of curriculum in a supportive group of college-bound peers. Junior year curriculum orients students to the college application process, provides extensive preparation for the ACT/SAT exam, introduces students to college life through campus tours, and allows time for students to apply for summer enrichment opportunities.

Senior year curriculum leads students through the college application process, assists them in applying for financial aid and scholarships, and guides them through the transition to college.

The evaluation of College Possible uses a quasi-experimental design (QED) employing propensity score matching (PSM) to pursue the confirmatory evaluation question of whether or not a variety of non-cognitive outcomes for students—academic engagement, commitment to learning, and sense of belonging—are greater for those who participate in the College Possible program than for similar students who do not. The evaluation will also examine high school completion and postsecondary enrollment. The impact study design has the potential to meet What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards, with reservations. ICF is also leading a mixed-method fidelity of implementation study to determine the extent to which the program is implemented as intended.

Evaluating NAF's Impact on Academic Performance

ICF's longitudinal quasi-experimental design study has helped NAF improve the quality of its academies, expand the reach of its model, and emphasize the importance of student persistence. NAF and ICF are continuing their partnership and examining the data further to understand the dynamics of its greater impact on at-risk students and the factors affecting students who leave the program early. Visit [this link](#) to read about and download ICF's full report, "Transforming the American High School Experience."

For more than 30 years, NAF has sought to transform the American high school experience by joining the corporate and education worlds to help ensure that students graduate high school prepared for college and careers. NAF's education design incorporates an academy-development framework, alongside rigorous career-themed curricula and instruction, an advisory board of business and community leaders, and a continuum of work-based learning.

Since 2014, NAF has partnered with ICF to evaluate school districts across its network in an effort to continuously improve its program. ICF developed a rigorous study with a longitudinal quasi-experimental design to track the academic performance of more than 7,000 NAF students in grades 9-12 alongside an equivalent comparison group of non-NAF students. ICF also conducted overall comparisons between NAF and non-NAF, as well as subgroup comparisons based on grade 9 on-track/at-risk status,¹ to examine whether NAF services have greater impact on certain subgroups.

The study found that, overall, the NAF program has a positive impact on students and that the program has an even greater impact on at-risk students. Further, the study demonstrates that student persistence in NAF participation until their senior year is vital for the success of the program. Supporting these results is the fact that certified or model academies² have a greater impact than member academies (adherence to the model is important) and that four-year academies have a greater impact than do three-year academies (length of exposure to the model matters).

These results provided guideposts for NAF's work with schools, districts, and partners moving forward to increase the quality of existing academies, expand the reach of the NAF model, and emphasize the importance of student persistence. NAF and ICF will continue their partnership to examine the data from this study to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the greater impact on at-risk students and the factors affecting students who leave the program early. NAF will also seek to mine the data gathered by this study to determine the characteristics of students who enter but do not graduate from a NAF

¹ A student who fails to meet any of the four performance indicator benchmarks (e.g., GPA, credits earned, English course, and math course) is considered at-risk for not graduating from high school. Conversely, a student who meets all four indicators is considered on-track.

² NAF academies are categorized into four academy membership or implementation levels (i.e., under review, member, certified, and model) based on academy assessment scores received on NAF's annual academy assessment.

academy, with the goal of developing approaches that will increase the graduation rate from NAF academies.

Using Innovative Methods to Identify Best Practices: ICF Thought Leader Jing Sun

Ms. Sun has partnered with NAF to use innovative methods to identify best practices and examine program effectiveness.

Ms. Sun is the Principal Investigator for ICF's longitudinal quasi-experimental design evaluation of NAF and has served as the quantitative lead for many other studies. For more than 10 years, she has conducted research and program evaluations in education, child welfare, public health, criminal justice, and other fields. Her functional skills cut across a number of areas, including research design for randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental, data management, data analysis, and research synthesis.

Ms. Sun has extensive experience in various data collection methods, including developing comprehensive data collection systems, survey instrument design, interview, and focus groups. She specializes in large scale data management and advanced statistical analysis, including multilevel regressions, logistic regression, propensity score matching, hierarchical linear models, structural equation modeling, ANOVA, and ANCOVA. She also holds a Geographic Information Systems certificate.