

# The Educational, Social, and Economic Value of *Informed and Considered Career Decisions* Summary of Key Findings

America's Career Resource Network Association<sup>1</sup>  
Research-based Policy Guidance



As policymakers deliberate and formulate policies that affect career information and services, America's Career Resource Network Association (ACRNA) urges consideration of the **extensive body of evidence of the educational, social, and economic value of career information and services that foster *informed and considered career decisions*.**

**Career information is central to the processes that facilitate *informed and considered career decisions*.** As depicted in the graphic to the left, career information extends outward in a direction of increased complexity and value. The outer circles of increased complexity act upon career information in extending, organizing, relating, integrating, and applying it to myriad human situations. The outermost circle provides a feedback loop that informs, improves, and extends the reach and effectiveness of career information, processes, and services.

Career development professionals take career information and embed it into career information systems, and into career information processes such as career education, career guidance, and career counseling services. Career networks add further value through improving practice. Any cost/benefit analysis of career information and services must consider the **value added to public and private investments by the array of career development professionals** who create information systems, processes, and networks that facilitate *informed and considered career decisions*.

Career information is **the intelligence that guides workers** (and the professionals who advise them) in the analytical process of examining, comprehending, and making decisions about the world of work.

*Informed and considered career decisions* are linked to improved educational achievement, attainment, and efficiency. Students who make informed and considered career decisions are more **likely to graduate from high school and to succeed in postsecondary education.**

Investing in career information and services at a level that ensures universal competency in making *informed and considered career decisions* might be **the national investment strategy to enable full participation in the Twenty-first Century workplace.**

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<sup>1</sup> America's Career Resource Network is the Department of Education's implementation of Section 118 of the Carl Perkins Act (1998 reauthorization). America's Career Resource Network Association (ACRNA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting, supporting, and improving career information and services. ACRNA produced and distributed the document upon which this summary is based. The document is available from [www.acrna.net](http://www.acrna.net).

## Research Highlights

Career interventions are more effective when a career professional is involved. Career counseling, career development courses, and career workshops have all been shown to be more effective than interventions that are information-only.

Utah and Missouri studies indicate that career interventions in secondary grades lead to higher ACT scores and more Advanced Placement courses taken.

Students who see school being relevant to their lives and future work are better engaged. Seventh graders in a career development program had improved attitudes about school.

Academic counseling, which aids students in seeing relevance of the subject, leads to better grades in mathematics. Career academy graduates were more likely to complete a baccalaureate degree and needed less remedial work than peers from the same school district.

College career development courses lead to fewer course withdrawals and shorter times to graduation.

Indiana students who formulated a career plan with the assistance of a school counselor by the beginning of their junior year of high school

- Had better grades
- Were more likely to enroll in academically rigorous curricula
- Were more likely to expect to complete four or more years of postsecondary education (Latino students with career plans had double the rate of their peers who did not have plans.)

Comprehensive guidance programs, which emphasize career interventions, lead to

- More students in Advanced Placement courses
- More females in mathematics and science courses
- Better grades
- Higher levels of satisfaction with school
- Increased attendance rates
- Lower dropout rates

Indiana's extensive education and career information campaign to secondary students is linked to an increase in the college-going rate from 37.5 percent to 60.5 percent between 1986 and 1998—a 61 percent increase in 12 years.

Middle school students who receive career interventions are better able to make education decisions regarding specificity, sequencing, and college appropriateness.

Many social benefits derive from higher levels of educational attainment:

- Decreased dependency and use of social benefit programs
- Lower poverty rates
- Better academic performance and behavior of children
- More likely to vote
- Longer lifespan
- Greater community involvement

More than five times as many people enter careers by chance than through the assistance of career professionals. This results in a high degree of occupational mismatch, job dissatisfaction, job-related stress and depression (estimated to cost employers \$44 billion annually). About 14 million workers need career assistance annually, and about one in six workers will change jobs this year. People who make informed and

considered career decisions reduce the likelihood of mismatch and increase the likelihood of “fit,” which is characterized by increased job satisfaction.

Informed and considered career decisions are associated with higher levels of income and lower levels and shorter durations of unemployment. The premium on a baccalaureate degree is approximately \$17,000 per year in annual earnings compared to the earnings of high school graduates.

Unemployment is a direct inverse function of level of education. A college graduate is nearly half as likely to be unemployed as a high school graduate and is likely to be unemployed for a shorter duration of time.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, U.S. investments in upper secondary and postsecondary education result in a return between 10 and 14 percent for both men and women.

### Investing in Career Information and Services

Given the urgent need for tools, resources, and processes that lead to *informed and considered career decisions*, investment in career information and the processes that lead to *informed and considered career decisions* should be among the first investments in national economic security and social well-being. Not only is the return on investment great, the cost to taxpayers is relatively small.

The principal federal investment in career information and services is through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 Reauthorization (P.L. 105-332). The total annual outlay is less than ten million dollars. This money serves 142 million workers and 60 million students in K-16 and represents an annual investment of about 5 cents per person.

Investment in career information and services is needed at a level to ensure that all students

- Participate in education with a sense of its importance and relevance to future well-being,
- Formulate a flexible education and career plan prior to commencing high school,
- Have access to high quality career information and receive career guidance services in the context of a comprehensive school guidance program,
- Participate in a career development program that encourages students to engage in academic rigor and postsecondary education and training, and
- Learn the skills associated with career self-management that can be applied to career transition throughout one’s life.

Such investment would ensure that all *workers*

- Have the skills to cope with changing employers, occupations, and skill demands,
- Have confidence in their ability to advance and develop their careers,
- Understand the importance of fit between an individual and the person’s work and work environment, and
- Have access to high quality career information and the services of career professionals who can assist with transitions.