

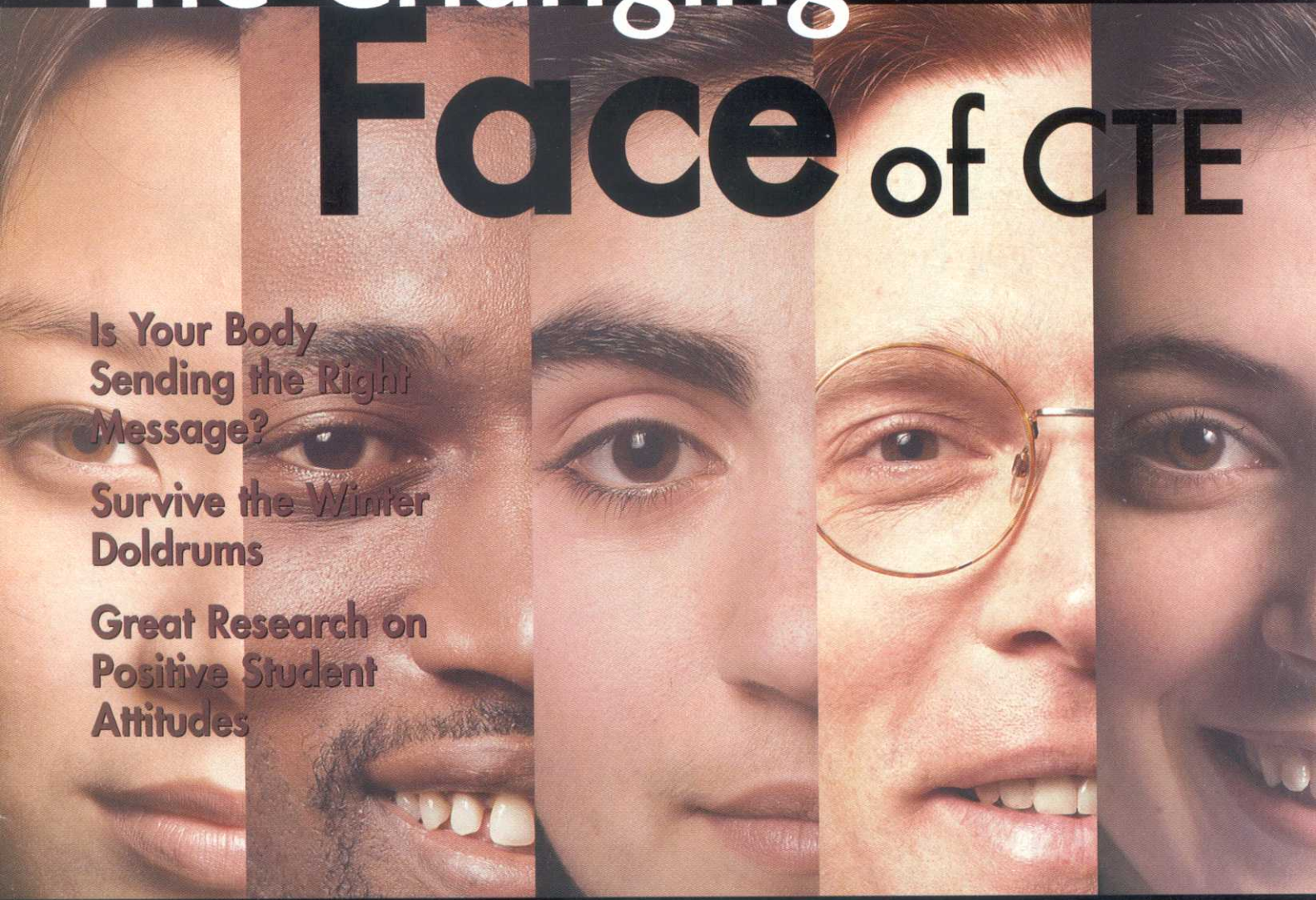
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Building Futures Together

By Connie Scotchel-Gross

In the Palm Beach County School District, career academies are preparing students for their future . . . not our past.

The Palm Beach County School District has begun an exciting and visionary project to improve the quality of education for its students. It is developing 80 career academies as a response to the business community's request for high performing graduates. These career academies offer expanded choices to students that challenge them academically and provide them with skills to successfully continue their postsecondary education and meet career goals.

Arthur Johnson, superintendent of the Palm Beach County School District, declares that career academies are extremely important to Palm Beach County, the state of Florida, and the nation, because ultimately young people have to be given an opportunity to train for a career.

"Whether students choose to become an orthopedic surgeon or an automotive technician, they need some level of training. Career academies give them the opportunity to be gainfully employed immediately, and the financial means and interest to continue their postsecondary education," says Johnson.

Palm Beach County has traditionally had vocational schools and comprehensive high schools. Now, the career and technical programs are being combined with high-level academic courses within comprehensive high schools to create career academies. The academy is a four-year program that supports standard curriculum and college dual-enrollment courses.

All programs stress the importance of postsecondary education. This ensures that students have both the academic skills and the technical skills to be successful.

Tom Lynch, chairman of the Palm Beach County School Board, says career academies are really about choices. "It's really giving students opportunities to look at other options—choices—to keep students in school and get an education," he explains.

Cynthia George, career academy coordinator, describes the career academy approach as one of the most established and viable high school reform models in the United States. She explains that academies are school-within-school structures that provide a personalized and supportive learning environment, with students more engaged in the learning process and focused on what they are going to do in the future. Students make connections between academic and technical information, helping them discover the answer to, "Why do I have to learn this?"

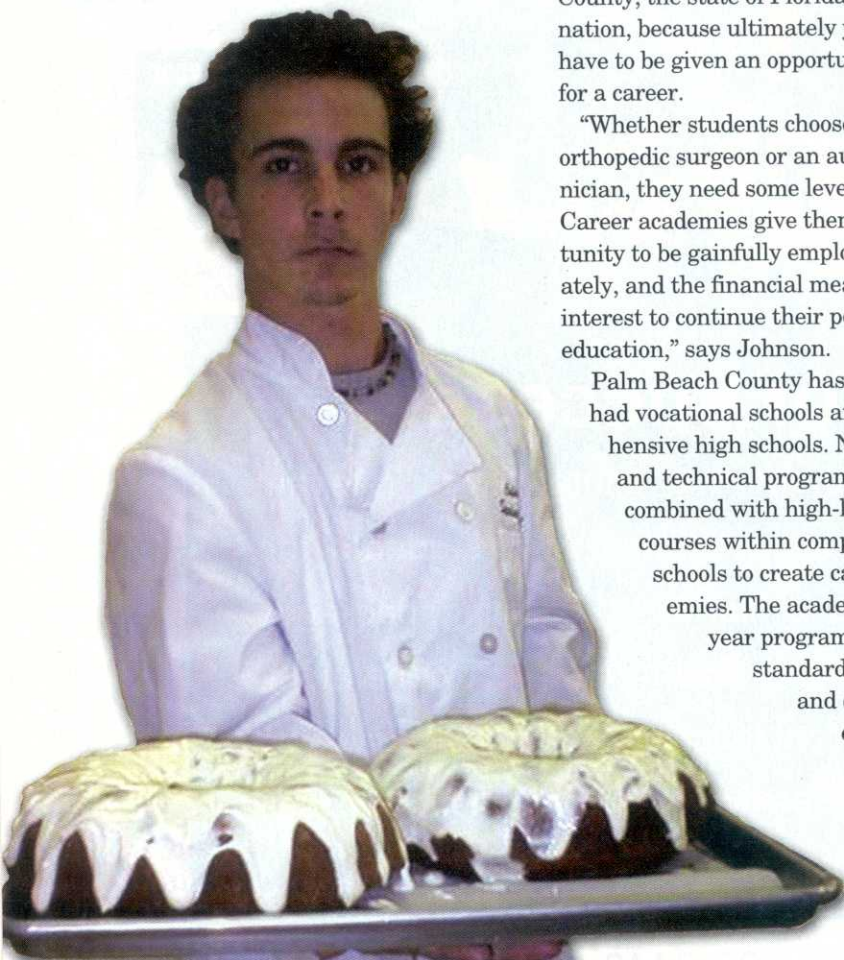
Other benefits of career academies include hands-on learning, relevant and rigorous curricula, and leadership skills.

Career academies offer real application to a student's future career. The curricula is developed by business; the facilities are designed by business;

What They Say . . .

"We were able to bring industry and education to the table and implement several programs that we have found to be very successful."

— Michelle Hillery, director of operations and programs, Palm Beach County Film and Television Commission



students have mentorships, job shadowing, internships and service-learning experiences; and businesses embrace and welcome these students into the job market.

Kathryn Schmidt, president and CEO of Workforce Alliance of Palm Beach County, states that, "Eighty-eight percent of businesses surveyed indicated a number-one priority of staying or relocating in Palm Beach County centered around a skilled, competent workforce."

She adds that, with career academies, "We are fulfilling that need and demand."

The opportunities that exist after the student graduates from a career academy are endless and provide students both the knowledge and skills they need to enter college and a career. Students in Palm Beach County's career academies leave school with up to two years of postsecondary credit and also have the opportunity to earn industry certification.

Thus, not only do academy students graduate from high school with a head start, but they also understand how an industry or profession in which they are interested "really works."

Additionally, all students have the opportunity to qualify for the Bright Futures Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars Award.

According to Jody Gleason, executive director of the Palm Beach County Education Commission, work has changed, but school hasn't. Students need to think critically, communicate effectively, learn workplace skills and be team players, in addition to



In career academy programs, students are given professional opportunities from a variety of fields, including teacher education and medicine.



acquiring academic knowledge. For businesses, the benefits of an academy are enhanced community participation and a chance to create a pool of highly talented potential employees.

Mary Vreeland, director of the Choice Programs and School Choice Department of the Palm Beach County School District, sums up career academies best. She says, "Career academies are small learning communities that draw together the major forces in business, industry and labor to provide our school district with a model career education program for our students." **I**

Connie Scotchel-Gross is manager of the Department of Choice Programs and School Choice. For inquiries about Palm Beach County career academies, contact Cynthia George at georgecy@palmbeach.k12.fl.us.

... About Career Academies

"Career Academies encourage students to enter health careers where they can receive a certificate to practice and move into advanced education."

—Suzette Wexner, president of Palm Health Care Foundation

"It's a really interesting course, and it's real-life—stuff that I can use later on in my career."
—a student in the Academy of Information Technology and Internet Marketing

Career Academy Programs Available to Students

- Agriscience Technology
- Automotive Technology
- Band & Music Industry
- Biotechnology
- Business Administration
- Computer Science & Technology
- Construction
- Culinary Arts
- Drafting & Design
- Engineering & Technology
- Environmental Science
- Finance
- Global Business & Entrepreneurship
- Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration
- Information Technology
- Marine Technology
- Media, Film & TV Production
- Medical Science
- Pre-Law & Criminal Justice
- ROTC
- Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
- Sports Management & Recreation
- Teacher Education
- Tourism, Hospitality & Resort Management
- Visual, Performing & Communication Arts