



Charleston (SC) Metro Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Bryan Derreberry (center) with 9 of the 15 career academy students awarded full two-year scholarships to Trident Technical College at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. (See p 21)

### Improving Graduation Rates

Even though national dropout rates are decreasing across most demographics, graduation rates among minority and low-income students, who represent the majority of students in public schools, still lag 10-15 points behind their white and upper-income peers, respectively. Career and technical-focused education (CTE) models in high school reduce dropout rates because they help students link academics to skills they will need in the real world, and they offer an array of experiences with potential career paths, especially for at-risk students. Most career and technical education programs allow students to accrue credit hours towards a degree, industry certifications and badges, and quality credentials. Examples of CTE models include converting large high schools into smaller career-focused academies or learning communities. Other models include dual-enrollment programs, early middle college programs, and high school apprenticeships. Here are some examples:

#### San Antonio: SA Works!

This industry-led program helped make San Antonio a national model for experiential learning. The Chamber works to align K-12 education with existing community-based career and technical programs to meet specific high skill workforce needs. One facet of the program offers high school students multiple options to explore career pathways:

- **Endorsements:** Incoming Freshmen specify an endorsement they intend to earn upon entering 9th grade, based on options such as STEM, Business & Industry, and Public Services. Selection of an endorsement creates an opportunity

for students to participate in CTE programs that align with their chosen field of study.

- **Practica:** Students gain real-world job experience through a paid internship during school hours chosen from a menu of 16 industries.
- **Alamo HS Academy:** A renowned program that has opened doors to hundreds of high school students with college-level training in aerospace, information technology, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare.

#### Jackson (MI): Early/Middle College

Early/Middle College engages high school students that are interested in technical trades and drawn to education experiences outside of the traditional high school learning environment. The Jackson Area College and Career Connection (JAC<sup>3</sup>) Early/Middle College (E/MC) Program is offered through collaboration between Jackson County high schools, the Jackson Area Career Center, local colleges and the Enterprise Group. Employers not only sponsor each student financially, they commit to the success of each student from day one by providing mentoring, hands-on training, and future career opportunities. Students divide their time between the classroom and the workplace of sponsoring employers, and at the end of the five-year high school program, students are on track to high-demand and high-paying careers. Students will receive their diploma, up to 64 credit hours (Associate's Degree) certified through local college programs, and a technical certification, all tuition free with no costs to students or their families. ▷