



ACADEMY STANDARDS



**BE FUTURE
READY**

NAF is a national network of education, business, and community leaders who work together to ensure high school students are college, career, and future ready. NAF's educational design ignites students' passion for learning and gives businesses the opportunity to shape America's future workforce by transforming the learning environment to include STEM infused industry-specific curricula and work-based learning experiences, including internships. Since 1982, NAF has been partnering with existing high schools in high-needs communities to enhance school systems at a low cost by implementing NAF academies – small learning communities within traditional high schools. NAF has grown from one NAF Academy of Finance in New York City to hundreds of academies across the country focusing on growing industries including: finance, hospitality & tourism, information technology, engineering, and health sciences.

The NAF educational design is built around four essential elements of practice: academy development and structure, advisory board, curriculum and instruction, and work-based learning. Each of these elements is comprised of three to five standards that articulate important aspects of the NAF educational design. These standards are the centerpiece for NAF's annual academy assessment; a process involving teachers, school and district administrators, parents, students, advisory board members, community partners, and representatives of higher education in a dialogue to determine their academy's level of fidelity to the NAF educational design. This process coupled with the academy's periodic reviews of student academic data, informs the support needs of our network. NAF uses this information to determine the best use of human and financial resources in developing programs, curricula, and professional development.

Each standard contains several strategic actions that reflect the everyday academy practices that support each standard. It is at this action level, during an annual assessment process, where academy teams respond to questions and prompts to determine their academy's level of implementation of the NAF design. It is important to note several threshold items that an academy must meet in order to be considered a high performing, or Distinguished Academy. Those strategic actions are highlighted in green.

The *italicized* items throughout this document are concepts and terms that are explained in the glossary on pages 8-10. Learn more about NAF's Academy Assessment, Data Center and continuous improvement cycle in the Academy Support Hub.

The standards have been established in cooperation with the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC), ConnectED, and the Career Academy Support Network (CASN). In addition, the standards are aligned with current research and policy. On behalf of NAF, thank you for your interest in these standards. We hope this document proves to be a useful tool in the successful implementation of the NAF educational design.

Cordially,



JD Hoyer
President
NAF

ELEMENT 1: Academy Development and Structure

The academy, designed as a four-year high school experience, has an open and equitable student enrollment process that results in a student body that reflects the demographics of its community. Both the academy teaching team and students fully participate and collaborate in program design, decision making, and regularly-scheduled, professional development activities. School and district leaders perform the critical tasks and functions required to support, maintain, and sustain fidelity to the NAF design at the highest level.

STANDARD 1: STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

A student-choice recruitment process with special outreach to NAF's target student population is used and results in a sufficient enrollment that reflects the demographics of the school.

Strategic Actions

1.1. a. Outreach efforts seek at-risk students who represent *NAF's target student population* and an *open, choice-based enrollment process* is used to ensure that academy demographics reflect the overall school or the district if the academy is a school.

1.1. b. Recruitment efforts result in student enrollment numbers that increase each year until the academy enrolls a minimum of 75 students per grade level.

1.1. c. Recruitment procedures ensure that applicants and their families know that the academy is part of a national network and is designed to impact students' post-graduation plans and opportunities for life success.

1.1.d. Parents and student orientation is provided so that applicants and their families are aware of the curriculum, student supports, advisory board and partnership involvement, and work-based learning opportunities. In addition, a highlight of the relationship of the academy and the NAF would ensure that attendees know that the program is part of a national network.

STANDARD 2: PERSONALIZED ENVIRONMENT

A personalized environment is created in the academy

Strategic Actions

1.2. a. Academy *students are scheduled as a group* into NAF theme courses as well as in two or more core academic courses such as language arts, math, science, or social studies.

1.2. b. Academy serves as the organizational structure in a four-year high school program of study. By design, it links core courses with technical content at each grade level, with a minimum of four NAF courses (or their *equivalent*) which are *sequenced* and *coordinated*.

1.2 c. There is a weekly common *planning time* or *other formal collaboration time* for the *academy team* of more than three staff members, so that integrated instruction, student supports, and college and career planning can occur across disciplines and grade levels.

1.2. d. All academy students receive *career-themed guidance* on college exploration and college choices based on their individual interests.

ELEMENT 1: Academy Development and Structure

STANDARD 3: DATA COLLECTION AND REVIEW

Ongoing review of the academy data is used for program improvement and to benchmark student progress.

Strategic Actions

1.3.a. The academy collects, analyzes and reports student data including characteristics (grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, ESL) and performance on a variety of outcome measures to make comparisons to the high school, in general. Data also includes the extent to which the academy *retains its students* and improves student performance.

1.3. b. Data review by the advisory board, academy leadership, and school administration is an integral component of the continuous improvement cycle of the academy.

STANDARD 4: ACADEMY LEADERSHIP

Academy leadership is broad-based, strategic, and sufficiently staffed.

Strategic Actions

1.4. a. Academy leadership structure includes clearly publicized responsibilities and may involve a combination of academy staff, advisory board members, district administrators, school administrators, and students.

1.4. b. School leadership recruits and hires *uniquely qualified staff* and works to *retain them* to promote quality and sustainability. School leadership publicly advocates for the program in the community, supporting the academy as part of a larger, whole-school transformation effort.

1.4. c. There is a defined structure for managing administrative and facilitative responsibilities within the academy that includes time for communicating with NAF and coordinating the program.

1.4. d. Academies have a designated counselor who knows students well and is familiar with the unique characteristics and needs of the academy. The counselor participates actively in team meetings, plays a role in recruiting students, coordinates interventions, and aligns course selections and work-based learning experiences with student interests.

STANDARD 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

District, school, academy leaders, and partners participate in regularly-scheduled, professional development and collaboration.

Strategic Actions

1.5. a. Professional development occurs at various levels, school, district, regional and state/national, featuring academy teachers participating in regularly or occasionally scheduled meetings and other trainings to design integrated projects, coordinate work-based learning strategies, develop college readiness activities, and personalize supports for students.

1.5. b. The academy team provides training session(s) for advisory board members and partners that assures their confidence to engage with students through work-based learning and project-based learning, and to participate in scoring the Academy Assessment.

1.5. c. NAF-sponsored professional development includes staff attending NAF Next, engaging in learning modules or webinars and participating in support activities offered through regional teams.

ELEMENT 2: Advisory Board

The academy's advisory board is representative of its community and supports teachers and students by increasing awareness of the career field. These leaders collaborate with teachers to inform classroom learning with industry developments, trends and practices, to design and implement student project work, and to provide structured work-based learning opportunities, including compensated internships, for students. The advisory board provides financial support and advocacy to develop and sustain the academy.

STANDARD 1: ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERSHIP AND OPERATIONS

A formally organized advisory board operates with broad-based community representation.

Strategic Actions

2.1.a. Advisory board recruitment efforts result in at least 10 members, who together represent all aspects of the academy's industry theme including businesses, higher education, parents, students, academy directors and school/district administration.

2.1. b. The advisory board has created operational documents including a strategic plan, updated by-laws, and a succession plan to help grow and sustain the academy..

2.1.c. The advisory board meets regularly and operates defined committees that advise the program of study, set policies and develop resources. The members also review academy data, participate in the Academy Assessment process and provide input into the academy action plan.

STANDARD 2: SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Advisory board members actively support teachers and help students attain increased levels of college and career readiness.

Strategic Actions

2.2. a. The advisory board assists academy staff with program of study selections, design, and implementation, as well as provides technical assistance and professional development.

2.2 b. The advisory board brings its industry knowledge and expertise to the students through *work-based learning* activities such as guest speaking and job shadowing. In addition, the advisory board participates in *project-based learning* such as evaluating culminating projects.

STANDARD 3: SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The advisory board supports the development and sustainability of the academy.

Strategic Actions

2.3.a. Advisory board members provide *resources* to ensure the stability of the academy.

ELEMENT 3: Curriculum and Instruction

The academy leverages NAF curriculum, which incorporates project-based learning. Career-themed curriculum is fully integrated with core academic content to help all students achieve the extended benefits of NAF academy courses. Teachers receive high-quality, professional development opportunities to ensure their ability to engage all learners.

STANDARD 1: PROGRAM OF STUDY/INTEGRATION

The academy uses NAF curriculum and fully integrates it with the core subject area content.

Strategic Actions

3.1. a. The program of study includes NAF courses integrated into core subjects. Each NAF course is regularly integrated into core subjects.

3.1. b. Project-based learning is the primary vehicle by which NAF course themes are integrated into core subject area content, providing a relevant context for student learning.

STANDARD 2: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

NAF instructional practices are known and used by all academy teachers.

Strategic Actions

3.2. a. Academy teachers regularly use literacy strategies endorsed by NAF (see NAF Learning handbook) to help students improve their vocabulary, reading comprehension, oral communication, and writing skills.

3.2. b. Academy teaching staff shares *best practices and demonstration lessons* with others in the academy or school and at state or national conferences.

STANDARD 3: INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

Formal supports help all students achieve the extended benefit of NAF academy courses.

Strategic Actions

3.3. a. The academy team, advisory board, and school counselors ensure that sufficient academic supports (tutoring, mentoring, Saturday classes, skill workshops, etc.) exist to help students succeed in academy and core courses.

3.3. b. There is an organized approach to identifying students *at-risk* of failure. In addition to identifying these students, the academy has developed an intervention systems to address factors that increase academic failure and dropping out.

ELEMENT 3: Curriculum and Instruction

STANDARD 4: COLLEGE/CAREER READINESS

Academy coursework prepares students to be college and career ready.

Strategic Actions

3.4. a. The academy intentionally builds the college knowledge of students, helping them understand the post-secondary system and culture, research college options, and navigate issues such as testing, applications, and financial aid.

3.4. b. All academy students take a program of study that makes them at least eligible for admission to a state college.

3.4.c. Students in the academy have access to multiple post-secondary education options through *articulation agreements*, industry certifications, *dual enrollment*, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate courses, and other formal activities.

ELEMENT 4: Work-Based Learning

The academy develops and offers students a sequenced set of work-based learning experiences that culminate in compensated internships. These standards provide academies with criteria for high quality internships for high school students.

STANDARD 1: PROVIDES A WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAM

All students complete a sequenced set of work-based learning experiences. The academy develops and offers students a sequenced set of work-based learning experiences that culminate in high quality compensated internships.

Strategic Actions

4.1. a. A three- to four-year series of coordinated and sequenced work-based learning experiences that include activities within *career awareness*, *career exploration* and *career preparation* guarantee that students are provided with learning opportunities that build in sophistication, duration, and intensity and ultimately prepare them for compensated internships.

4.1.b. Academy work-based learning experiences reinforce NAF and core curricula and emphasize the College & Career Readiness skills needed for future success in college and the workforce, including creativity, problem solving, communication, collaboration and teamwork, professionalism, self-management and critical thinking.

4.1. c. A continuous *evaluation process* is in place to assess the effectiveness of the activities in the work-based learning program. Academies develop strategies to review preparation activities, student reflections on experiences, and the effectiveness of each work-based learning activity for future refinement to implementation.

STANDARD 2: INTERNSHIP COMPLETION

The academy develops and sustains a program of high quality compensated internships for all students. Compensation may include a salary, stipend, credit or other appropriate solutions, related to the academy theme. Internships include an individual student learning plan, are connected to academic and classroom instruction, and include completion of the internship assessment.

Strategic Actions

4.2. a. All academy students completed a *compensated internship* experience before they graduate.

4.2. b. The partners (academy staff, advisory board members, and internship providers) provide a high quality internship experience by creating an internship work and learning plan for each student, conducting training for internship providers and completing the internship assessment.

STANDARD 3: STUDENTS' CAREER GOALS

Students, teaching staff and internship providers collaborate to support the student's career goals.

Strategic Actions

4.3. a. Written, individualized student learning and college/career plans allow for differentiated skills levels and alignment with student interests, personalized internship experiences, and targeted debriefing, reflection and evaluation.

4.3.b. Internship experiences are linked to students' future career goals in order to make learning more engaging and relevant.

1.1. a. *Targeted student populations*: The academy has a recruitment strategy that is specifically focused on enrolling students who are at-risk of graduating. For Academies of Engineering, the targeted population includes enrolling a high proportion of female, Hispanic, Black, and Native American students.

1.1.a. *Open choice enrollment process*: The academy accepts students based on interest rather than academic record. Students are eligible even if they have a low GPA. Academy selection may be subject to a lottery system that randomly selects students.

1.2 .a. *Students scheduled as a group*: The majority of academy students are scheduled together in career courses by grade. Academy students are scheduled together in at least one or two core courses so the career theme can be integrated into core course content. Students are scheduled together from year-to-year for the duration of their academy experience to create a small learning community environment.

1.2. b. *Equivalent courses*: Approved, non-NAF courses usually refer to Academy of Engineering course content. Examples include Project Lead the Way, Stem 101, and Paxton Patterson courses. In some cases, courses such as SAS Programming, third party adoption, approval or endorsement occur with the approval of NAF's Vice President of Programs If an academy, state, or district is involved in one of these special arrangements, academy leaders should be aware of the provisions of the agreement.

1.2. b. *Sequenced and coordinated*: Courses are taught in an order that is required by the state or district and in a sequence that enables students to receive dual enrollment credit. Courses are taught in an order suggested by NAF, Project Lead the Way, Paxton/Patterson, or STEM 101.

1.2. c. *Planning time or other collaborative time*: Planning time is a formal, regularly scheduled weekly event. Teachers are compensated to conduct these meetings when they occur before school, during lunch, or after school.

1.2. c. *Academy team/staff*: The academy team consists of more than three staff. These staff members meet on a weekly basis to discuss academy issues, students, and curriculum integration.

1.2. d. *Career-themed guidance*: Do students at all grade levels receive guidance regarding college and career readiness that is related to the career theme and students' individual aspirations?

1.3. a. *Retain students*: Students remain in the academy for the duration of the academy experience. Steps are in place to conduct interviews with students exiting the academy to learn about the factors causing them to leave. Programs and activities are in place for students on the verge of exiting the program.

1.3.a *Academy data*: Academy data is available, and has been flagged so the academy team can review academy students' data across courses and grades and compare it to the school population.

1.4. b. *Uniquely qualified academy staff*: When hiring, academy staff looks for candidates that have experiences working in a field connected to the career theme. The academy seeks candidates with dual certification in both a core and career content area.

GLOSSARY

1.4. b. *Retain staff*: Academy staff are often trained to deliver specific, career-themed content, particularly Project Lead the Way instructors, NAF Curriculum Fellows, and academy coordinators. These staff are dedicated to the academy and not sent to work in other departments or schools so that consistency in the career-themed courses is sustained over time.

1.4. c. *Academy director*: The academy is led by a site-based staff member called a coordinator or a district leader called the director.

1.4.d. *Designated counselor*: Academy has a counselor or multiple members of the counseling team directly involved in the academy. Guidance staff helps to provide college and career planning and does counseling staff assist with scheduling students in academy specific courses.

1.5.a. *Professional development activities occur regularly*: Academy staff participate in monthly trainings to improve instructional integration, design personalized supports for students, and develop academy practices such as work-based learning, finding partners, and recruiting teachers and students.

1.5.a. *Professional development activities occur occasionally*: Academy staff participate in monthly meetings and trainings to improve instructional integration, designing personalized supports for students, and strategize academy practices such as work-based learning, and recruiting teachers and students, and partners.

1.5.a. *Integrated projects*: Integrated curriculum is a series of conscious and informed strategies used to connect the content of one or more academic and career courses so that what is learned in one discipline is combined with and reinforced in the other disciplines over an extended period of time.

2.2.b. *Work-based learning*: Work-based learning is an educational approach that engages students in real world activities by linking learning in the workplace to learning in the classroom. Work-based learning intentionally promotes students' exposure and access to future education and career opportunities. The work-based learning program includes interactions with employers, from career exploration discussions to mentoring, field trips, and job shadowing, to internships.

2.2. b. *Project-based learning*: Project-based learning is a teaching method that engages students by focusing on complex questions or problems and having them investigate answers to problems over an extended period of time, often resulting in presentations or products. Presentations and products are often judged by experts, in a field related to the project. The duration of the project is at least two to four weeks and it:

- Specifies products that solve problems, explain dilemmas, or present information generated through investigation, research, or reasoning.
- Includes multiple products that permit frequent feedback and consistent opportunities for students to learn from experience.
- Uses performance-based assessments that communicate high expectations, present rigorous challenges, and require a range of skills and knowledge.
- Builds in collaboration in some form, either through small groups, student-led presentations, or whole-class evaluations of project results.

2.3.a. *Human, technical and financial resources*: Advisory board members spend time directly supporting students and teachers and reviewing curriculum, student reports, or teacher professional development that enhances state of the art knowledge of the career theme. Advisory board members conduct fundraising events, provide in-kind services or materials or other activities to provide financial resources to the academy.

3.2.a. *NAF endorsed literacy strategies*: Instruction is focused on using research-based literacy strategies such as Cornell Notes, Know - Want to Know - Learned (KWL), Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review (SQ3R).

3.2.b. *Best practices and demonstration lessons*: Academy staff share project-based learning and project-based learning plans, and the academy team shares and critiques student presentations or products.

3.3.b. *Students at-risk*: Students are at-risk when they have high absence rates, high course and test failure rates, and low classroom participation. The academy has a systematic way to identify these students with interventions in place to support and monitor these students over time.

3.4.c. *Articulation agreement*: This is a practice of aligning curriculum from one educational segment to another to enable a seamless transition between courses, grades, and educational institutions. Most commonly, high school courses articulate to community college courses that allow high school students to earn college credit.

3.4. c. *Dual enrollment*: Students in the academy enroll in college courses, offered at the high school or at a college campus, for which they receive college credit.

4.1.a. *Career awareness*: Students are involved with activities that help them understand how school relates to the world of work. Classroom experiences link the theme to academic coursework and to career content that will assist them in entering the field.

4.1.a. *Career exploration*: Students have direct interaction (actual or virtual) with professionals from industry that provide the opportunity for two-way communication between the partner and the student. All students are involved in activities that provide a full understanding of the range of occupations within their academy's industry including skills and education required.

4.1.a. *Career preparation*: Students have direct, systematic interaction with the professionals from industry over a period of time at a level of depth sufficient to enable students to develop and demonstrate specific knowledge and skills. Students participate in selecting their internship based on their interests.

4.1. c. *Evaluation process for work-based learning*: Student performance is evaluated by the partners and the teacher/coordinator before, during and after any work-based learning activity, such as job shadowing, presentations. The student internship experience is evaluated through the internship assessment.

4.2.a. *Compensated Internship*: Students are compensated for internships, which may include a salary, stipend, credit or other appropriate solutions, related to the academy theme. NAF's goal is for every academy student to participate in a high quality paid internship. See the Academy Support Hub for internship resources.



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