



July 21, 2023

President's Advisory Commission on Advancing Equity, Excellence and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202

Re: Public Comments July 20th Meeting of the Commission

NAF is pleased to provide written comments following the second meeting of the President's Advisory Commission on Advancing Equity, Excellence and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics.

NAF is a national nonprofit organization that aims to address economic and social disparities by bringing schools and businesses together to better prepare students of all backgrounds and capabilities for college, a career, and future success. For over 40 years, NAF has partnered with high schools in historically under-resourced communities to enhance school systems by implementing NAF academies – small, focused learning communities within traditional public high schools themed around growing industries, including engineering, finance, health sciences, information technology, and hospitality and tourism.

NAF academies connect the classroom to the workplace by integrating career-focused curricula and hands-on, industry-guided learning projects into the traditional high school experience. NAF academies also embed social-emotional attributes that grow students' confidence and teach them how to establish and maintain relationships. We know the importance of exposing students to the right class, the right internships, the right mentor or just stepping through the right door and ensuring equal access to opportunities that will support them in defining their own career path and set them up for success. Through employer partnerships, students gain exposure to career pathways that they may not have known were options before and can make more informed and strategic decisions about their future.

NAF's approach works to support the development of a diverse talent pipeline through an open enrollment policy, allowing any student who shows an interest to join the academy with no prerequisites. NAF currently supports over 112,000 students annually, with 71% of all students identifying as Black/Hispanic and 65% of students coming from low-income backgrounds. NAF prepares students for careers in viable industries, including in the STEM industries of IT and engineering, where



the median annual wages are \$97,000 and \$80,000, respectively. Job opportunities in these areas are projected for continued growth, but their current workforce population is not reflective of the communities in which they reside and support. Over 64,000 NAF students are enrolled in these career pathways – each with a population that is above 75% identifying as Black/Hispanic, and over 70% of students come from low-income backgrounds. By targeting students of color, female students, and those from low-income backgrounds, NAF is actively working to change the systems that have so long worked against these populations by giving them access to opportunity and creating pathways that lead to career success.

The Commission’s efforts to increase equity in education and economic opportunity for the Hispanic and Latino community is a shared goal of NAF. We believe that providing access to career pathway programs such as NAF at the high school level is critical to ensuring students explore careers, engage in work-based learning opportunities, and identify a path to an internship or apprenticeship. However, educators often have limited time to plan and implement work-based learning opportunities and engage employer partners as they already balance so many demands.

To continue to build the infrastructure needed to support under-resourced students, NAF recommends the Commission consider advocating for work-based learning coordinator positions. These coordinators can bridge the divide between school and community employers as they provide strategic planning, schedule work-based learning opportunities and build relationships with local employers to increase access to internships and career-focused activities. Work-based learning coordinators can be employed at the local education agency, local workforce development board or local workforce development agency, a group of employers or a consortium of eligible entities. NAF has seen the difference work-based learning coordinators can make in the quality and quantity of experiences students have access to during high school. We hope the Commission will advocate for the inclusion of work-based learning coordinators in local communities as they continue to promote career pathways and equitable access for Hispanic and Latino students.

NAF would be happy to continue to support the Commission’s work in any way we can. Please contact Jennifer Pautz, AVP of Policy & Advocacy (jpautz@naf.org).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.