About NAF

NAF is a national nonprofit organization that brings together education, business, and community leaders to ensure high school students are college, career, and future ready. For over 40 years, NAF has partnered with high schools in historically underresourced communities to enhance school systems by implementing NAF academies – small, focused learning communities within traditional public high schools themed around growing industries, including health sciences.

NAF academies connect the classroom to the workplace by integrating career-focused curricula and hands-on learning projects into the traditional high school experience. With a rigorous program of study and a progressive continuum of work-based learning activities designed to build career awareness, exploration, and preparation, students gain the skills and knowledge needed to make informed choices and be successful in their future careers. NAF promotes open enrollment in our career academies, allowing students of all backgrounds and capabilities to participate and helping to address systemic, educational, and professional barriers faced by marginalized populations.

The NAF career academy design is replicable, sustainable, and cost-effective, and because it integrates within public schools, supports lasting systemic reform and equity nationwide. NAF has grown from one NAF Academy of Finance in New York City to hundreds of academies across the country and supports programs of study that are aligned with the National Career Clusters Framework. During the 2022-23 school year, more than 112,000 students attended over 600 NAF academies across 35 states and territories. In 2022, NAF academies reported 99% of seniors graduated with 88% of graduates planning to go to college.

NAF Academies Are Expanding the Health Care Workforce Pipeline

NAF Academies of Health Sciences (AOHS) are addressing the health care workforce shortage by equipping public high school students with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to pursue employment in the health care industry. NAF academies teach industry-focused courses, such as anatomy and physiology, biotechnology, global health, and health careers, and allow students to gain career-specific knowledge and skills through hands-on, work-based learning activities with local industry professionals. Many academies provide the opportunity for students to earn certifications such as Certified Nursing Assistant, EKG Technician, Emergency Medical Technician, Certified Medical Administrative Assistant and countless others that increase employability and earning potential.

- Michigan State Appropriation for NAF Academies of Health Sciences
  NAF worked with the Michigan state legislature to identify a solution to the state’s health care workforce shortage. The result was an appropriation in HB 5523, a bipartisan bill focused on COVID safety measures and health care sector support, designating $250,000 of American Rescue Funds for a grant opportunity in which Michigan public school districts can apply for funding to open NAF Academies of Health Sciences. In February 2022, HB 5523 was signed into law by Governor Whitmer, and the NAF AOHS grant opportunity is currently open for Michigan school districts to apply for funds. Appended to the end of this document is a two-
page issue brief providing more information about this innovative deployment of federal relief funds to address the critical health care workforce needs starting in high school.

- **NAF Medical Education & Research Academy in Fresno, California**
  The NAF Medical Education and Research Academy had an existing relationship with the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Fresno to provide its students with unpaid internships. Partnering with the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission (part of the Fresno Regional Workforce Development Board, funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which is under HELP Committee jurisdiction, enabled them to become paid internships. The Commission, high school/district, and jobsite employer took on various roles to ensure the internship was compliant with all requirements and was implemented successfully.

**Policy Recommendations**

NAF maintains a long-standing commitment to advancing policies and programs that provide high school students with work-based learning opportunities. Federal policies – such as WIOA – play an essential role in strengthening our nation’s public workforce system and helping get Americans, including youth and those who face significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers. While we recognize that typically WIOA reauthorization is considered separate and apart from health care related legislation, we believe that you should consider WIOA reauthorization in the context of the health care workforce development efforts you are currently undertaking.

In our many years of experience, we’ve found that paid internships improve career development and lead to higher levels of satisfaction for students than unpaid internships. In addition, limiting internships to those who can afford them simply perpetuates existing inequities – allowing those who can afford to work for free to gain meaningful experiences and build professional networks. Moreover, during the hearing you held in February on the nation’s health care workforce shortages, you heard testimony from several witnesses who emphasized the growing need to reach into high schools to elevate student engagement in the health sciences – including internships and work-based learning – to generate greater interest in health care careers. As such, we strongly urge you to strengthen federal efforts to support high school work-based learning, particularly in health care but also in related fields such as information technology and engineering. Specifically, we encourage you and your colleagues to:

- Authorize specific funding to support work-based learning for high school students in the health and life sciences fields.
- Authorize and fund work-based learning coordinators to develop the infrastructure necessary for quality work-based learning and internships. Coordinators can work with employers and school districts to assist with such activities as preparing students for their work-based learning experiences, placing students in appropriate roles, providing support beyond the purview of employers’ human resource departments, and evaluating success.
- Authorize and fund federal Pell grants to pay for dual/concurrent enrollment and early postsecondary credit opportunities for high school students. Concurrently, increase the number of eligible semesters covered under Pell so that students utilizing this funding in high school are not penalized when enrolling in postsecondary education.
• Authorize and fund the Federal Work-Study program to include internships tied to their academic studies for high school students and expand to employers across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

**Conclusion**

Though our world is changing rapidly, and we face unprecedented challenges, we have an opportunity to pave the way for a stronger and more equitable economy. We need a workforce that can meet these extraordinary challenges, reflect the diversity of the country, and help businesses and the nation’s health care system to continue to innovate. Work-based learning, including paid internships, is a proven, effective way to ensure high school students are future ready and prepared to meet the demands of an evolving economy. Prioritizing work-based learning within the health care sector will help students to gain invaluable experience and an understanding that will foster an interest in pursuing careers in nursing, medicine, public health, and related fields. Work-based learning benefits organizations and businesses while empowering students to develop tangible knowledge and skills to build successful careers.

The 118th Congress has the opportunity to make meaningful investments and much-needed policy changes that together will expand opportunities for high school students to prepare for careers in the health care sector, and in turn, help close the equity gap and strengthen our nation’s workforce. NAF stands ready to work with you and your colleagues to ensure we are supporting our nation’s youth in achieving their highest potential and filling the growing demand for skilled, diverse health care professionals.