

**FY 2025 WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE
APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES,
EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**by
Lisa Dughi, CEO, NAF**

NAF, a national education non-profit organization, brings schools and businesses together to transform the high school experience and to align the experience with workforce opportunities through career-focused academies to prepare students for college, career, and future success. Since 1980, NAF has partnered with under-resourced communities to enhance school systems and implement our academy model, one that brings the workplace to the classroom and equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in an evolving economy. NAF academies promote open enrollment, allowing students of all background capabilities to pursue meaningful, successful futures and helping to eliminate systemic, educational, and professional barriers faced by marginalized populations. NAF believes Congress must invest in programs that provide quality career and technical education for high school students, including support for paid work-based learning, through the **Department of Education** and the **Department of Labor**.

Public secondary education institutions play a critical role in preparing youth for future success through initiatives like career and technical education (CTE) programs, access to local colleges, and work-based learning opportunities with employers. As a principal public institution that teens attend before becoming adults, the secondary education system plays an invaluable role in empowering the next generation for success in the workforce. Work-based learning programs ensure a connection between schools and the working world, whether it's preparing students to enter existing jobs, encouraging entrepreneurial endeavors, or serving as a foundation for career opportunities after post-secondary education. Research shows that participation in work-based learning during high school has a positive impact on students, including completing high school, impacts on earnings, job quality and stability, and is a critical lever in addressing systemic racial and economic inequities.

Work-based learning helps students build social capital, sharpen essential skills, and expand their networks beyond their immediate communities. Relationships with adults nurtured through work-based learning opportunities are also shown to be long-lasting and beneficial to students up to a decade later. Young people deserve an education that builds workforce skills, helps them create social capital, and connects them to opportunity.

Department of Education

NAF respectfully requests a meaningful increase in the Perkins Basic State Grant program in Fiscal Year 2025. The Perkins Basic State Grant program, the main funding source for career and technical education programs across the county, remains at levels well below inflation adjusted rates from more than 20 years ago, and as such, more resources are warranted to simply keep pace. Furthermore, additional funding is needed as there is an increasing demand for CTE programs in preparing today's workforce with future ready skills. Perkins funding provides

critical programs and supports, such as career counseling, dual enrollment, work-based learning, and industry-recognized credentials, to students in every school district.

Department of Labor

NAF respectfully requests robust funding for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I State Formula Grants, including funding for Youth Programs. The budget for Title I programs falls nearly one billion dollars short of the funding in 2001 before adjusting for inflation. We remind Congress of its request to the Department to encourage local secondary education authorities to be included on local workforce development boards and furthermore to increase the availability and support for in-school youth. NAF also urges Congress to restate the need for work-based learning coordinators for high school students and to provide the necessary funding for these positions. Work-based learning coordinators are vital to help break down the existing siloes between education and workforce in our communities.

NAF asks the Subcommittee to include the following report language: The Committee includes \$5,000,000 in fiscal year 2025 for a demonstration program to provide fulltime, work-based learning coordinators in underserved communities with an already proven track record for secondary career and technical education. Work-based learning coordinators will conduct outreach, engagement, recruitment and coordination of work-based learning activities, including, but not limited to, paid internships or pre-apprenticeships for high school students, with local community employers, especially with in-demand industries of artificial intelligence, information technology, health sciences, and engineering. The work-based learning coordinators may be employed by the local education agency, local workforce development board or local workforce development agency, a group of employers, or a consortium of eligible entities. In making grant awards, the Committee directs the Secretary to ensure to require a plan for evaluations in each individual grant proposal, including types of work-based learning opportunities completed, demographics of participating students, and students' post-secondary career plan, as well as to conduct a national assessment of all grantee proposals once complete.

Conclusion

Our nation faces an unprecedented demand for skilled workers which must be addressed through better alignment of our education and workforce systems. Employers must play an active role in developing a talent pipeline aligned with their workforce needs. Opportunities for work-based learning for in-school high school students are critical to ensuring youth stay in school and are connected to essential economic support and services. Reaching youth through career preparation programs in high school can prevent dropping out and supports workforce development. There is overwhelmingly consistent longitudinal data that illustrates the significant positive, long-term impact of high school graduation. Earning potential increases and incarceration rates decrease, helping to break the cycle of poverty while contributing to a stronger economy and healthier individuals, families, and communities.

With work-based learning integrated in NAF academies, students in NAF academies are more likely to graduate on-time than their peers who are not involved with career academies. NAF has an overall positive effect on all students but is particularly impactful for those at-risk of not graduating—with full, four-year program participation in a high-quality career academy, these

students were ten percentage points more likely to graduate on-time than their non-NAF counterparts. Black and Hispanic students attending NAF academies also are shown to have higher high school graduation rates.ⁱ Students who graduated from a career academy amassed 11% more total earnings each year over the eight years following high school than those who did not attend a career academy. Youth who drop out of high school can expect to earn \$10,000 less annually compared to high school graduates.ⁱⁱ

Work-based learning is a proven way to grow the talent pipeline and help prepare students to be future ready, whether students start directly in the workforce, begin an apprenticeship, or head to a community or four-year college. Work-based learning equips students with the skills, aspirations, and connections needed in any environment and prepares them to be adaptable wherever life's journey takes them. NAF appreciates the opportunity to share its expertise and appreciates your consideration of these critical requests.

ⁱ ICF. (2017). Transforming the American High School Experience: NAF's Cohort's Graduation Rates from 2011-2015, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Kemple, J. J., & Willner, C. J. (2008). Career Academies Long-Term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes,. mdrc.

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