



NAF CAREER ACADEMIES

NAF implements career-focused curricula and work-based learning to prepare students of all backgrounds and capabilities for future success, especially students who may lack access to opportunity.

Scan QR code with your phone's camera to access this content online.



OVERVIEW

NAF career academies are structured as small, focused learning communities that fit within and enhance traditional high school settings. NAF brings education, business, and community leaders together to transform the high school experience for students, with a focus on college and career readiness.

NAF career academies are designed so that students have learning experiences that are personalized and connected to their career interests. Students can choose from multiple career pathways in thriving industries as the basis of their program of study and can earn NAFTrack Certification. NAFTrack is a recognition of a student's experience, career planning journey, and skill mastery as validated by local employer partners.



To support pathways toward college and career readiness, NAF provides rigorous, career-focused curricula using project-based learning that incorporates current industry standards and practices. This allows teachers to expand the curriculum by exposing students to career-focused content in real-world contexts—bringing the workplace to the classroom. NAF provides experiential learning opportunities that expand classroom boundaries by connecting students to both professionals and the workplace. As a result, students acquire the skills they need to be future-ready.

NAF has grown from one NAF Academy of Finance in New York City in 1980 to more than 600 academies across 35 states, plus DC, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands, focusing on growing industries including finance, hospitality and tourism, information technology, engineering, health sciences, and more. [▶The Power of the NAF Network](#)

What Makes This Model Innovative?



Relevance

NAF career academies provide students with real-world learning experiences and curriculum to align their education with their career interests and the workforce needs of their local communities.



Affirmation of Self & Others

NAF strives to foster environments where students' interests and aspirations drive learning. Culturally responsive practices ensure that student identities are highlighted and incorporated throughout their academy experience.



Connection & Community

Students are supported by a host of educators and industry professionals as they navigate career-focused courses and work-based learning. NAF teachers get to know their students as people and students report that they are treated equitably, regardless of race or ethnicity.

DESIGN

Goals

NAF career academies are designed to help students develop future-ready skills as a part of its outcomes-driven, work-based learning approach. These six skills were selected in collaboration with experts with insight about how to position students for success in the world of work today and tomorrow. [NAF Future-Ready Skills](#)

Collaboration

Students encourage the ideas and contributions of others, leveraging individual strengths in authentic, collaborative activities. They are mindful when providing feedback and can help navigate disagreements to achieve a common goal.

Communication

Students develop communication skills to effectively share ideas and opinions with those they engage with and organize information so that it serves the purpose of the audience.

Problem-Solving

Students identify and solve problems by considering different factors, causes, and perspectives. They generate potential solutions to a problem through analysis, evaluation, and iteration.

Initiative & Self-Direction	Students demonstrate awareness of their abilities and performance and seek knowledge and information proactively whenever needed. They can work independently and are adaptable, confident that their voice and opinion can be of value to others.
Planning for Success	Students set and prioritize goals and apply their knowledge and time management skills to successfully complete their work.
Social Awareness	Students demonstrate integrity and situational ethics, recognizing the consequences of their actions. They are able to balance their own needs with those of others and consider diverse emotional and cultural factors. Students are passionate about giving back and strive to become thoughtful stewards of their communities.

Experience

The NAF career academies design uses both project-based learning and work-based learning to support students for college, career, and future success. The interdisciplinary projects students design and develop in the classroom are connected to and complement the program of study that students follow. [▶New to NAF Student Orientation](#)



Each part of the NAF design seeks to put students in contexts where they can identify their future aspirations, find industry support, and develop their skills and self-confidence. Career pathways supported by NAF include but are not limited to:

- **Engineering:** NAF's engineering curricula inspire learners to imagine innovative solutions to real-world issues. NAF's engineering academies implement third-party curricula by Project Lead the Way, STEM 101, and Paxton/Patterson.
- **Finance:** NAF's finance curricula align with competencies identified by professional organizations, industry partners, and postsecondary institutions as essential for success in college and careers in the financial sector.
- **Information Technology:** NAF's information technology (IT) curricula enable learners to explore various aspects of IT including coding, computer systems, graphic design, and web development. [📄Career Academy Example – Information Technology](#)
- **Health Sciences:** NAF's health sciences curricula provide a rigorous and comprehensive program of study designed to prepare learners with the content knowledge and transferable competencies necessary for success in college and careers in health care.
- **Hospitality and Tourism:** NAF's hospitality and tourism curricula expose learners to the essential components of the industry, including foundational principles, customer service, event planning, and marketing with a global perspective on the geography and sustainability of tourism.

NAF partners with districts to support additional career pathways as determined by labor market projections, industry trends, and local workforce needs.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL) is a key part of the NAF student learning experience inside of classrooms. In NAF academies, typically two or three core classes integrate course content to support projects designed and developed around real-world problems within the specific career pathways. Teachers collaborate with career pathway industry professionals so that students are working on projects that emphasize the application and relevance of core knowledge in a professional context.

As the NAF approach to instruction, PBL translates into the development of future-ready competencies and essential workplace skills for students. Whether they are using interdisciplinary perspectives to solve problems, interviewing experts, synthesizing collective insights, or creating presentations to share projects, students engaged in PBL must be active. Across multiple projects, students grow in their ability to communicate, collaborate, organize, and problem-solve with both peers and adults. PBL also helps students develop the agency, self-awareness, and growth mindset to be future-ready. As a part of their accomplishments, students gain confidence in the fact that they have engaged in projects that have value in the larger world. This answers a question often asked by teenagers, “Why do I need to learn this?”

Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning is an educational approach designed to help students connect what they learn in the classroom with what is expected outside of it in the workplace. NAF academies partner with industry professionals to structure work-based learning in three phases that connect classroom work with real-world applications. Students engage in work-based learning through career awareness, career exploration, and career preparation activities. [▶NAF's](#)

[Approach to Work-Based Learning](#)  [NAF Work-Based Learning](#)



- **Career Awareness:** Students build career awareness and begin to identify areas of work interest through observation and inquiry. They have ongoing interactions with professionals in workplace settings through a variety of experiences—guest speakers, worksite tours, and career fairs that expand their sense of what is possible in their lives.
- **Career Exploration:** Students gain a deeper understanding of the workplace by applying knowledge and playing a more active role in their experiences. Students discover careers of interest, develop professional skills, and make meaningful connections with professionals during informational interviews, job shadowing, resume coaching, mock interviews, mentorship, and skill-building workshops.
- **Career Preparation:** Students apply what they have learned in practical experiences that have consequences beyond the classroom and can be evaluated by industry

professionals. They prepare for professional experiences—internships, clinical work, mentored industry projects, and apprenticeships—with guidance from their teacher and reflect on their experience after participation. [Prepare for Internships](#) ▶ [Myth vs. Fact: High School Internships](#)

Work-based learning helps students clarify career aspirations, develop future-ready skills, and build professional connections.

Supporting Structures

The NAF career academy model has the flexibility to support students across many contexts. An annual assessment process exists for schools that want to be NAF network members. In general, fidelity to key NAF processes and structures is essential to success.

Schools seeking to become NAF career academies must offer a program of study that is aligned with work-based learning to help students earn NAFTrack Certification.



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT

NAF partners with schools to provide rigorous, career-themed curricula that align with local workforce needs. These curricula incorporate current industry standards and practices, project-based learning, work-based learning extensions, and performance-based assessments. Schools must develop this type of curricula to adopt the NAF model with fidelity.

To become a NAF career academy, schools must take the steps necessary to offer NAFTrack Certification. This certification signifies that the student has reached NAF's standards of future-readiness and represents a student's achievement through participation in a career-connected program of study, completion of multiple work-based learning opportunities, and experience with professional feedback and mentorship from industry partners.



SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Using cohorts to build a positive social-emotional foundation for learning is an integral part of the NAF student experience.

To create small learning communities within NAF academies, students are grouped together in cohorts. This helps students have a more personalized experience where they can access any support they may need. Beyond this, cohorts give students more opportunities to engage in collaborative experiences that strengthen their professional skills and personal networks.

Teachers at NAF career academies are committed to supporting students both inside and outside of the classroom.



**ADULT ROLES, HIRING
& LEARNING**

NAF teachers, advisory board members, mentors, and staff build relational trust with students as a foundation for the path toward graduation and postsecondary goals. NAF students report that their teachers make an effort to get to know them as a person and they feel that they are treated fairly, regardless of race or ethnicity. Students also report that most teachers teach in a way that relates to their cultures and experiences.

Outside of the classroom, teachers work with industry professionals to develop curriculum and organize work-based learning activities, including internship opportunities.

NAF career academies are required to establish an Advisory Board to drive engagement with industry professionals that supports student development and the workforce goals of the local community.



**FAMILY & COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS**

NAF Advisory Boards provide an essential bridge between schools and the workplace. They are the foundation of the partnerships that NAF academies use to drive work-based learning. People from business, government, and nonprofit organizations volunteer on local advisory boards to play an active role in developing their future workforce by shaping talent in high school.

Advisory board members collaborate with educators to inform curricula and help organize work-based learning activities. They also serve as mentors who build relationships with students and serve as positive role models.

Open enrollment is a critical element for schools adopting the NAF model because improving outcomes for all students is essential to its mission.



**BUDGET &
OPERATIONS**

Schools that want to become NAF academies must maintain an open enrollment admission policy. While the NAF design is effective for students of all backgrounds and capabilities when implemented with fidelity, districts and communities facing historical and systemic challenges are prioritized for partnerships. This is exemplified by the fact that NAF enrolls students of color and students in free-and-reduced-price lunch programs at a significantly higher rate than the national average.



NAF career academies must undergo an annual assessment that allows them to review their progress against NAF's standards and engage in a systemic evaluation process to validate the quality of their program of study.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The annual academy assessment helps schools implement the NAF design with high fidelity and also determine the academy's quality level (i.e., under review, member, certified, model, and distinguished). They also ensure that academies are engaged in high-quality personalization of learning, increased engagement with employers, and increased student exposure to work-based learning experiences. The emphasis on continuous improvement is reflected in student outcomes that are assessed annually.

[NAF Academy Standards](#)

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[NAF](#) offers the following supports to help you implement their approach.

NAF Academy Support Hub (ASH)

Free



Resources are a crucial element of the NAF design. The Academy Support Hub (ASH) provides curriculum, work-based learning, and advisory board resources, and a variety of other information about NAF practices and processes.

[Access Now](#)

NAF Network Membership

Cost Associated



Various professional development opportunities and online tools and resources are available to schools that join the NAF Network.

NAF Next is an annual conference focused on key strategies to improve academy quality, work-based learning, and student and employer engagement efforts. Enhancing Personalized Learning Environments is an online micro-credential course developed in collaboration with Digital Promise.

[Express Interest](#)

NAF Year of Planning

Cost Associated



The Year of Planning (YOP) program is a structured, developmental process in which NAF academy portfolio managers provide guided technical assistance to plan and align resources for the yearlong implementation of a NAF academy. The YOP program establishes a sustainable foundation that ensures the success of a NAF academy to prepare college- and career-ready students.

[Express Interest](#)

Reach

NAF supports schools that adopt their full model design as well as those who adopt individual career academies as a part of their programs. Beyond its direct work with current students, NAF actively engages members of its broader alumni network.

384

Schools

600+

Academies

170,000+

Students &
Active Alumni

72%

Students of
Color

Impact

NAF has demonstrated it is effective at improving postsecondary outcomes for students. [NAF Four-Year Graduation Study Infographic](#) [NAF Impact Report 2022](#)

NAF students across different demographics are more likely to graduate on time than their non-NAF counterparts. A 2017 study found:

- NAF students were 6 percentage points more likely to graduate on time, a total of 1,695 students.
- NAF students considered “at risk” were 10 percentage points more likely to graduate on time.
- Male NAF students were 3.3 percentage points more likely to graduate on time.
- Hispanic NAF students were 4.2 percentage points more likely to graduate on time.
- NAF students who are multilingual learners were 7.9 percentage points more likely to graduate on time.
- NAF students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch programs were 4.6 percentage points more likely to graduate on time.

NAF graduates were prepared for college and career. In the 2021-2022 school year:

- 99% of seniors graduated.
- 39% of seniors had an internship.
- 87% of graduates were college-bound.
- 11% of graduates joined the workforce.

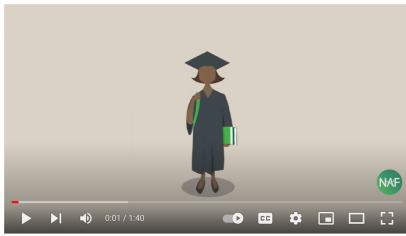
Contact

Reedy Wade

Vice President, Academy Development & Impact

rwade@naf.org

RESOURCES



The Power of the NAF Network

NAF
674 subscribers

Subscribe

3

Share

...

[The Power of the NAF Network](#)

A video explaining the NAF career academies model.

FUTURE READY SKILLS OVERVIEW



Student development of the 6 Future Ready Skills is an essential element of NAF's outcomes-driven approach to work-based learning, along with clarifying career aspirations and building professional connections. These 6 skills were carefully selected after working with MHA Labs to build upon their thorough research and holding conversations across the NAF Network. By building these skills through work-based learning activities and receiving feedback from professionals, students will be positioned for success in the world of work today and tomorrow.



COLLABORATION

- Encourages the ideas, opinions, and contributions of others, leveraging individual strengths
 - Provides feedback in a manner that is sensitive to others' situation and feelings
 - Clarifies areas of disagreement/conflict that need to be addressed to achieve a common goal
 - Seeks to obtain resolution of disagreements/conflicts to achieve a common goal
- Also referred to as: accountability, cooperation, helpfulness, leadership, participation, conflict resolution, teamwork

[NAF Future-Ready Skills](#)

A document explaining NAF future ready skills.



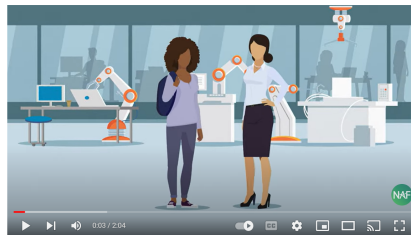
[NAF New Student Orientation](#)

A video explaining what new students will experience at NAF.



[Career Academy Example - Information Technology](#)

A document describing the NAF Information Technology Career Academy.



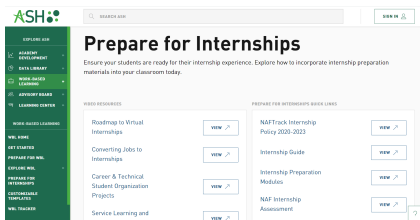
[NAF's Approach to Work-Based Learning](#)

A video explaining how NAF approaches work-based learning.



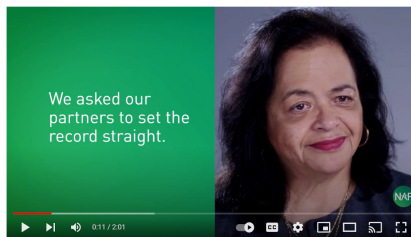
[NAF Work-Based Learning](#)

A website of resources regarding work-based learning.



[Prepare for Internships](#)

A website of resources to prepare schools for internships.



Myth vs Fact: High School Internships

NAF
674 subscribers

Subscribe

1

Share

...

[Myth vs. Fact: High School Internships](#)

A video explaining the value of internships.



NAF Academy Standards

2022-2023

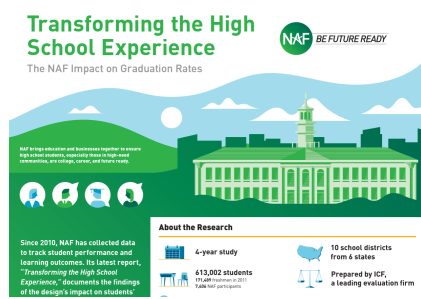
[NAF Academy Standards](#)

A document explaining how NAF academies are assessed.



[NAF Website](#)

The main website for information about NAF.



[NAF Four-Year Graduation Study Infographic](#)

A document about NAF graduation rates.



[NAF Impact Report 2022](#)

A document about the impact of NAF.



[PROJECT SHOWCASE Learner Guide](#)

[NAF Project Showcase Learner Guide](#)

A document to guide learners through projects.