

NAF Academy Standards

2026-2027



What Makes a NAF Academy?

NAF [Academy Standards](#) define the core practices for designing and sustaining a high-quality academy. Each standard is supported by strategic actions—actionable steps that guide implementation and continuous improvement.

Together, they form the foundation of the Academy Assessment—a tool that helps academy teams measure progress, strengthen alignment with the NAF design, and ensure all students are prepared for college, career, and future success.

The standards are grouped into four essential elements:

- **Academy Development & Structure:** Building a strong foundation that fosters personalized learning and collaboration among educators, families, and community partners.
- **Advisory Board:** Engaging business and community partners to guide curriculum, support work-based learning, and connect students to real-world opportunities.
- **Curriculum & Instruction:** Delivering career-connected learning aligned with industry standards, designed to build both academic knowledge and [Future Ready Skills](#).
- **Work-Based Learning:** Creating meaningful hands-on learning experiences that builds student aspirations, skills, and networks.

How the Standards Connect to the Snapshot

The Snapshot, aligned with the Academy Assessment, helps emerging academies reflect on current practices and identify development needs during implementation.

- **Assess:** Identify which strategic actions are already in place and which need development.
- **Plan:** Use your Snapshot results to set Action Plan goals.

High-quality implementation of the NAF design leads to stronger student outcomes, deeper industry engagement, and greater school-wide impact.

NAF Academy Standards

Academy Development & Structure

The academy supports open choice enrollment that produces a student body that reflects students of all backgrounds. Students collaborate in program design and decision-making, and the academy team participates in regularly scheduled professional learning activities. School and district leaders perform the critical tasks and functions required to support, maintain, and sustain implementation of NAF's design at the highest level.

Advisory Board

NAF advisory boards provide an essential bridge between schools, the workplace, and the community. Business, higher education, and community leaders volunteer on local advisory boards to help students prepare for college and careers. Advisory board members collaborate with educators to inform curricula, help organize work-based learning activities, and become NAF academy advocates in the community. Through advisory boards, students build relationships with mentors and learn from successful adults.

Curriculum & Instruction

The academy offers a career-connected program of study that includes a comprehensive sequence of courses within the academy's designated career cluster and associated pathway, incorporating competency-based assessments. The career-focused content is fully integrated through authentic project-based learning experiences designed to solve real-world challenges. Additionally, teachers receive high-quality professional learning opportunities in emerging instructional practices to enhance their ability to engage all learners.

Work-Based Learning

The academy establishes a comprehensive and high-quality work-based learning (WBL) program that provides every student with the opportunity to experience three phases of work-based learning: beginning with career awareness, progressing to career exploration, and culminating in career preparation activities.

Academy Snapshot

2026-2027



ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Overview

The Academy Snapshot is a self-reflection tool that supports academy teams in assessing current practices, monitoring progress, and developing an action plans for continuous improvement and high-quality implementation of the NAF design.

Aligned with the Academy Assessment, the Snapshot helps emerging academies evaluate development, identify areas for growth, and plan next steps throughout the implementation process.

Note: The Academy Assessment¹ is optional during the Launch Year. In its place, academy teams may complete the Snapshot at multiple points throughout the year to monitor development and inform planning.

The Academy Snapshot

- Aligns with Academy Assessment standards and related strategic actions.
- Assesses academy development and alignment with the NAF design.
- Identifies recommended evidence to document progress toward strategic action completion.

Completing the Academy Snapshot

Academy Team members indicate the status of each strategic action in the right-hand column:

- Not Started
- Underway
- Accomplished

Definitions

Definitions for terms with numbered superscripts appear at the end of the Snapshot.

Academy Snapshot

2026-2027



ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Element 1: Academy Development & Structure



Track Your Progress: Select the response that best reflects the academy's current status for each strategic action to assess the overall Academy Design Plan.

STANDARD 1: STUDENT RECRUITMENT & ENROLLMENT

The academy supports open choice enrollment that maximizes students' access to career and college opportunities and results in academy membership that reflects students of all backgrounds.

1.1.a All students are eligible to enroll in the academy, and the academy accepts students through an open choice enrollment ² process that reflects students of all backgrounds.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
1.1.b Recruitment efforts increase student enrollment each year to meet the threshold ³ criteria, with at least 20 students enrolled in each operating grade level.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

STANDARD 2: PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The academy creates a personalized learning environment that is inclusive, promotes student agency, and encourages positive relationships to enhance student well-being and achievement.

1.2.a Academy fosters a personalized learning environment ⁴ that promotes student success and attainment of college and career goals (e.g., learning plans, support network).	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
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STANDARD 3: DATA COLLECTION & REVIEW

The academy participates in ongoing review of academy data to enhance academy development and benchmark student progress.

1.3.a Academy collects, analyzes, and reports academy and student-level data to inform academy practices and ensure educational access for students.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
1.3.b Academy uses data from various sources (e.g. Snapshot) to develop an action plan for continuous improvement.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

STANDARD 4: ACADEMY LEADERSHIP

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

1.4.a Academy has a designated academy leader with release time or an academy team with clearly defined responsibilities for managing all aspects of the academy program.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
1.4.b Academy has a designated a staff member to support college and career readiness ⁵ activities.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
1.4.c District, school, and academy leaders are ambassadors for the academy (e.g., sharing best practices, promoting academy through social media).	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

STANDARD 5: PROFESIONAL LEARNING

District, school, academy leaders, and advisory board members participate in regularly scheduled professional learning sessions and collaboration meetings.

1.5.a Academy team ⁶ (more than three members) meets regularly for collaborative planning focused on student success and academy improvement.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
1.5.b Academy team participates in NAF-facilitated, NAF-sponsored, or other Career Technical Education (CTE) professional learning sessions (e.g., NAF Next ⁷ , webinars, certifications).	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

Academy Snapshot

2026-2027



ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Element 2: Advisory Board



Track Your Progress: Select the response that best reflects the academy's current status for each strategic action to assess the overall Academy Design Plan.

STANDARD 1: MEMBERSHIP & OPERATIONS

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

2.1.a Advisory board membership includes at least ten (10) members representing business, industry, government, alumni, community, and postsecondary education leaders.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
2.1.b Advisory board creates a strategic plan with clear annual outcomes.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
2.1.c Advisory board creates by-laws to help the academy grow and sustain academy needs.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

STANDARD 2: SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Advisory board members actively support work-based learning activities, the program of study, and academy program design.

2.2.a Advisory board members actively support student learning, including helping to coordinate work-based learning ⁸ experiences that promote career awareness ⁹ , exploration ¹⁰ , and preparation activities ¹¹ .	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
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STANDARD 3: SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Advisory board members seek to increase academy success and sustainability by advocating for support and sharing academy impact with community, post-secondary, and civic leaders.

2.3.a Advisory board members work to engage community, postsecondary, and civic leaders ¹² to promote and sustain academies as an integral part of the local workforce and economic development systems.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
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Academy Snapshot

2026-2027



ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Element 3: Curriculum & Instruction



Track Your Progress: Select the response that best reflects the academy's current status for each strategic action to assess the overall Academy Design Plan.

STANDARD 1: ACADEMY COURSEWORK

The academy's career-connected program of study features a comprehensive sequence of courses that adheres to OCTAE's Programs of Study Design Framework, with a particular focus on fostering authentic project-based learning experiences and conducting competency-based assessments.

3.1.a Academy offers a career-connected program of study ¹³ consisting of a sequence of courses aligned with local workforce needs and Advance CTE's Career Clusters .	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
3.1.b Students demonstrate attainment of career-readiness competencies through extended, authentic project learning experiences ¹⁴ that involve industry-professionals and address real-world challenges (e.g., extended length project-based learning; KnoPro ¹⁵ challenges).	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

STANDARD 2: COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

Academy intentionally builds students' college knowledge, provides advanced academic opportunities, and helps students achieve certifications to enhance their college and career readiness.

3.2.a Academy intentionally builds students' college knowledge by helping them understand the postsecondary system and culture, and by providing assistance with college options, testing, applications, and financial aid.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
3.2.b Academy offers students advanced academic opportunities (e.g., Advanced Placement, Cambridge, or International Baccalaureate courses) and postsecondary options (e.g., industry recognized credentials/certifications or dual enrollment).	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
3.2.c Academy has a plan to ensure all seniors achieve NAFTrack Certification ¹⁶ to enhance their college and career readiness.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

Academy Snapshot

2026-2027



ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Element 4: Work-Based Learning



Track Your Progress: Select the response that best reflects the academy's current status for each strategic action to assess the overall Academy Design Plan.

WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAM

The academy plans and implements a high-quality work-based learning program that features a full continuum of work-based learning experiences for students including career awareness, career exploration, and career preparation.

4.1.a Academy intentionally calendars work-based learning experiences throughout the school year and develops plans for at least the Launch Year grade-level.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
4.1.b Academy work-based learning experiences include a continuum of career awareness, exploration, and preparation activities, building in sophistication, duration, and intensity.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
4.1.c Academy work-based learning plans intentionally support the development of student's aspirations ¹⁷ , skills ¹⁸ , and connections ¹⁹ .	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
4.1.d Academy uses student voice and input to inform work-based learning planning.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

STANDARD 2: WORK-BASED LEARNING PARTICIPATION

The academy collects and analyzes work-based learning data to ensure full student participation.

4.2.a Academy has a process to track and analyze work-based learning data at both the academy and student levels to ensure student participation in the entire continuum of work-based learning experiences.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
4.2.b Academy has a plan to ensure all academy students participate in at least one work-based learning activity per year.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
4.2.c Academy has a plan to ensure all academy students complete the NAFTrack Certification Career Preparation activity ²⁰ before graduation.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished
4.2.d Academy has a plan to ensure all seniors complete at least two different phases of the work-based learning continuum during their academy experience.	☐ Not Started	☐ Underway	☐ Accomplished

Academy Snapshot

2026-2027



ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Glossary

1. Academy Assessment: The culminating review of the academy team's work accomplished throughout the school year. The assessment results guide the academy's action plan revisions for continuous improvement.

2. Open choice enrollment: NAF academies facilitate access by accepting students based on student agency rather than educational records. Students who can accommodate the academy's program of study are eligible to enroll in the academy regardless of academic or disciplinary history. Academy selection may be subject to a lottery system that randomly selects academy students.

3. Threshold: NAF's Academy Assessment establishes thresholds or minimum performance requirements on selected strategic actions in the Academy Assessment. Academies must meet the designated thresholds as one of the prerequisites for achieving a Model or Distinguished level. See [Threshold requirements](#).

4. Personalized-learning environment includes:

- Connecting learning to students' interests, abilities, and aspirations.
- Implementing academy structures that encourage peer relationships and develop a sense of belonging among academy members.
- Developing personalized academy learning plans that the academy team regularly reviews to assess student progress toward college and career goals.
- Engaging a network of teachers, family, mentors, and advisory board members who connect with academy students to provide support for accomplishing their college and career goals.

5. College and career readiness elements include:

- Building students' knowledge of college through an awareness of the postsecondary system and culture, and completing credit-bearing college courses that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials or certificates
- Engaging students in work-based learning opportunities throughout high school, including career awareness, exploration, and preparation activities that culminate in paid internships and develop students' competency in employability skills for entry into the workforce

6. Academy Team: A collaborative group of at least three members who meet regularly to support student success and continuous academy improvement through data review, curriculum integration, coordination of college and career readiness activities, and goal setting.

7. NAF Next (NN): NAF's annual professional learning conference brings together teachers, education decision-makers, industry leaders, and innovators committed to shaping the future of education and workforce readiness.

8. Work-Based Learning: Work-based learning is an educational approach designed to help students connect classroom content with workplace expectations. Students learn through integrated, real-world experiences led by industry professionals.

9. Career awareness activities: Students are introduced to careers and pathways through short work-based learning engagements where they can interact with industry professionals in small to large groups. Awareness activities are appropriate for all levels of students.

10. Career exploration activities: Students continue to hone their career interests while building Future Ready Skills in one-to-one or smaller group settings with industry professionals. Students receive feedback on their skill development from industry professionals and make connections to begin their professional network.

11. Career preparation activities: Students apply their learning through immersive industry-based experiences. Career Preparation activities allow students to establish connections and build a professional network. Industry partners are more directly involved in student development and provide feedback on applied skills in an industry-based setting.

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ACADEMY NAME:

DATE:

Glossary

12. Civic Leaders: Advisory board members engage with the civic community by attending or convening meetings, forums, and events to network and build relationships, and they volunteer to coordinate fundraisers that promote workforce engagement of high school students through internship and employment opportunities for all students in the community (e.g., local chamber of commerce; mayors' programs).

13. Program of Study: NAF's Program of Study maximizes students' opportunities for achieving NAFTrack Certification by capitalizing on multiple options to pursue career pathways. The academy's program of study features a comprehensive sequence of courses that adhere to OCTAE's Programs of Study Design Framework, with a particular focus on fostering authentic project-based learning experiences and conducting competency-based assessments.

14. Authentic Project-Based Learning Experiences: Authentic project-based learning experiences promote students' transfer of their expertise as they solve real-world challenges in their career industry or community. Students exercise agency in selecting their passion projects to demonstrate content knowledge and career-readiness competencies by developing innovative solutions with industry-professional guidance to design and produce original, relevant, and community-connected outcomes.

15. KnoPro: KnoPro is a 100% FREE new platform provided by NAF for high school students who want to develop in-demand skills by completing real-world projects for cash and other prizes. KnoPro is an educator-designed platform that connects students and teachers with authentic industry challenges and professional mentors that help students build skills and develop their career aspirations. Unlike similar products that tend to focus on college students using text-heavy interfaces or charge schools or students for access, our platform was built specifically for (and with) high school students and teachers, with engaging videos, fun activities, essential resources, and opportunities to earn rewards and recognition.

16. NAFTrack Certification (NTC): NTC is NAF's employability credential that serves as NAF's seal of college and career readiness.

17. Student Aspirations: Each student will have defined and mapped a plan for at least one career path. [Learn more.](#)

18. Student Skills: Each student will have worked to develop the [six Future Ready skills](#), received continuous feedback from industry partners, Advisory Board members, and/or local community professionals, and be able to articulate their strengths.

19. Student Connections: Each student will develop at least three professional connections. [Learn more.](#)

20. Career Preparation Activity requirements for NAFTrack Certification:

Students, and subsequently their academies, will get credit for internships, clinical experiences, youth apprenticeships/apprenticeships, and mentored industry projects that meet the following criteria:

- 80+ hours (or two 40-hour experiences)
- Paid, compensated, or volunteer
- Direct supervision by an accountable adult who is not the student's teacher
- Proficiency on an employer-validated skill assessment completed by the student's supervisor (not teacher, parent, or guardian)

These experiences should seek to strengthen students' skills and resumes, support student career exploration, increase students' social capital and network, and ideally and where appropriate, result in student payment.