



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
EDUCATION OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE**

“From Classroom to Career: Strengthening Skills Pathways Through CTE”

**by
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Subcommittee on the critical role career and technical education plays in building a future-ready workforce.

NAF is a national nonprofit organization that has been at the forefront of career readiness for over four decades. We bring schools and businesses together to better prepare students of all backgrounds and capabilities for college, career, and future success. We do this by partnering with school districts, employers, and community leaders to implement work-based learning experiences, including internships and pre-apprenticeships, that align with high-demand industries including engineering, finance, health sciences, information technology, and hospitality and tourism. NAF annually supports more than 112,000 students in over 150 school districts across 34 states and territories.

At NAF, we believe that learning happens best when students can connect classroom instruction to real-world applications through hands-on experiences. This design engages young people early on in career exploration, ensuring students are setting themselves up for an apprenticeship, internship, or similarly rigorous post-secondary or employment experience, and that they are invested in that opportunity. These experiences not only enhance academic engagement but also improve long-term economic outcomes for young people. 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.

To build a workforce that meets the demands of the future, NAF recommends the Subcommittee to consider focusing on, and investing in, early exposure to career opportunities. Programs that introduce students to career pathways at the high school level, if not earlier, are the most critical to preparing students for their future opportunities. 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 two 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.

The most effective work-based learning experiences provide sustained and meaningful interaction between a student and employer partner. This includes career preparation activities such as internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs. While less intensive activities –



such as guest speakers, mock interviews, and worksite tours – are important to help students with career exploration and help introduce employers to the concept of work-based learning, the more time and resource intensive activities, like internships, are where students gain the most insight into the working world and can hone their professional skills. Further, work-based learning helps students to build relationships, sharpen essential skills and expand their social capital beyond their immediate communities. The relationships with adults nurtured through work-based learning opportunities are shown to be long-lasting, positively benefiting students up to a decade later.

Opportunities for work-based learning for 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 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. 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.

Work-based learning opportunities engage multiple industries and employers and provide varying levels of involvement from these companies while still providing unique and meaningful experiences to students. Most workers today will change employers, and even change industries, multiple times throughout their career. Therefore, the overall focus on the future ready skills early on is why NAF believes work-based learning opportunities have a broader reach and should be the focus of efforts to scale workforce readiness programs. As employers are essential partners in work-based learning, NAF recommends the Subcommittee consider incentives to increase employer engagement in work-based learning opportunities. Through the NAF network, we've seen firsthand how businesses can benefit from investing in youth talent pipelines. This includes career preparation activities such as internships and mentorship programs, as well as on-ramps to formal apprenticeship programs or pre-apprenticeship programs.

Our nation faces an unprecedented demand for skilled workers, which must be addressed through better alignment of our education and workforce systems. By focusing efforts on scaling work-based learning across the country, we are preparing students for ALL career paths they may take in the future. NAF appreciates the focus and attention on preparing our students to be future-ready and the opportunity to share our expertise.