

THE NATIONAL CAREER ACADEMY COALITION



NATIONAL STANDARDS OF PRACTICE CAREER ACADEMIES AND SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

PREFACE

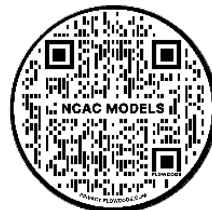
Career Academies prepare students for both college and careers. From their inception, successful academies have engaged local employers to provide authentic work-based learning experiences designed to keep students engaged in school and prepare them for successful transitions to postsecondary and employment.

In 2004, to ensure the consistency and quality of the model, a consortium of career academy organizations developed the “Career Academy National Standards of Practice” (NSOP). The NSOP are framed around ten key elements of successful implementation drawn from many years of research and experience from all parts of the country.

The NSOP help career academies continually improve their practices. They also serve as a guide or framework for new schools to implement academies.

NCAC developed a rubric allowing academies to track their progress based on the NSOP. Schools may use the rubric for self-analysis, or choose to earn NCAC accreditation through a review process.

A listing of academies achieving “Model” and “Model with Distinction” since 2015 can be found here:
ncacinc.com/model-academies



THE ACADEMY MODEL HAS THREE CORE ELEMENTS



Academies are small learning communities. An academy comprises a cohort of students who have a dedicated team of teachers from academic and technical disciplines for at least three years. The “Academy Team” meets on a regular basis, and shares in decision-making related to curriculum content, student support, and instruction.



Academies combine college-preparatory curriculum with a career theme. Core courses that meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements are linked with CTE pathway courses that focus on the academy’s career theme. Teachers have common planning time to coordinate course content and instructional strategies. College and career counseling informs students about options and planning for employment and further education.



Academies embody partnerships with employers and post-secondary education. An advisory board for the academy includes representatives from the local employer community and from local colleges and universities. Advisory boards provide advice on curriculum, appear as guest speakers in classes, host field trips, supervise student internships, provide financial or in-kind support, employment, and further education.



**National Career
Academy Coalition**

COLLEGE CAREER LIFE

NCAC continues to lead in the support, development, and implementation of the academy model, improving outcomes for students during and after high school.

Use this manual to more deeply understand the 10 National Standards of Practice, track your progress toward delivering the model with fidelity, and engage with NCAC’s Professional Learning Opportunities designed to support your efforts.

NATIONAL STANDARDS OF PRACTICE CAREER ACADEMIES

1

MISSION AND GOALS

The career academy has a written mission, goals, and benchmarks. These are developed, reviewed, available, and known by the administrators, teachers, students, parents, advisory board, and others involved in the academy. These include at least the following elements: connect postsecondary education and career; raise and maintain student aspirations; increase student achievement; show a commitment to equity.

CRITERIA:

A. College and Career Connections

A career academy's aim is to prepare all students for postsecondary education and careers. Academies enable students to complete postsecondary entrance academic requirements while exposing them to a vertical segment of the occupations within a career field, encouraging them to aim as high as they wish.

B. Student Aspirations

An academy seeks to raise, maintain, and increase the level of students' motivation while in high school by providing a focus to the program of studies that reflects their own talents, aspirations, and interests. Continued personal awareness and exploration, along with curriculum and experiential components and extra-curricular choices, also help to provide guidance. The biggest limiting factor in many youths' future plans is not ability, but how they perceive their futures.

C. Student Achievement

An academy provides support to all of its students to maintain and increase their achievement in high school. This support comes through close relationships with teachers and fellow students, rigorous and relevant curriculum, and experience with career and education options outside the high school, including a strong focus on personalization with a collaborative environment for all stakeholders.

D. Commitment to Equity

Each school ensures that the career academy intentionally reflects the diversity and strengths of its school, community, and district, and the grouping of its students is heterogeneous flexible, and equitable. The academy is equitably accessible to and serves any interested student, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, special needs, or prior academic level.

E. Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholders involved in the career academy have developed the mission and goals. Additionally, there are clear benchmarks for assessing how the mission and goals are met.

An academy has a well-defined structure within the high school, reflecting its status as a small learning community.

CRITERIA:

A. Cross Grade Articulation

Cross-grade articulation. The academy incorporates a two-, a three-, or an overall four-year experience, ending in the senior year, with articulation in its teacher team, curriculum, and instruction across grade levels. An introduction to the academy's encompassing career exploration opportunities precedes the academy experience. The academy must have a clear program of study that includes a definitive course sequence.

B. Student Selection

Entry into the academy is voluntary and accessible to every student. The recruitment/selection process is written and widely available. New students are provided an orientation to the academy based upon their own talents, aspirations, and interests. Parents or guardians participate in this process and approve of the choice made by their son or daughter. Academy enrollment reflects the general high school population, including students with disabilities and English language learners.

C. Cohort Scheduling

Academy classes consist of academy students who take a series of classes together each year. The academy students take a minimum of two core academic and one CTE/career themed courses per grade level as a cohort with at least 80% of the enrollment in these courses being academy students.

D. Physical Space

Where possible, both academic and career and technical (CTE)/career theme academy classrooms are near each other in the high school building. Rooms allow for flexible configurations required by project-based learning.

E. Small Size, Supportive Atmosphere

The academy maintains personalization through limited size, academy staff teamwork (including counselors, librarian/media specialists, academy-based administrators, and other support staff), and a supportive atmosphere.

F. Academy Design Planning

There is ample opportunity for the academy staff, advisory board, and others to plan the academy together. The ideal time is during the school day.



3

HOST COMMUNITY AND HIGH SCHOOL

Career academies exist in a variety of district and high school contexts, which are important determinants of an academy's success.

CRITERIA:

A. Support from the Board of Education and Superintendent

Academies are an integral part of the high school improvement strategy for the district and school choice options. The district Board of Education is aware of the academy and its mission and goals, and is on public record in support. Likewise, the Superintendent publicly endorses the academy and offers active support. Both serve as academy liaisons to the broader community and encourage coordination of similar academies across the district.

B. Support from the principal and high school administration

Academies are an integral part of the school improvement strategy. The high school principal and other administrators are knowledgeable about the academy, advocate for it publicly, and are actively involved in its funding, staffing, and support. They contribute to a positive academy profile within the high school.

C. Adequate funding, facilities, equipment, and materials

District and high school administrative support results in appropriate academy scheduling, adequate academy funding, facilities, equipment, and learning materials. Support also advances opportunities for career and technical training. These reflect a serious commitment from the community, district, and high school to the success of the academy.



4

FACULTY AND STAFF

Appropriate staff selection, leadership, credentialing, and cooperation are critical to an academy's success.

CRITERIA:

A. Teacher Leader(s)/Coordinators

One teacher (sometimes two) and a dedicated school administrator take the lead, serving as the Academy Coordinators. They attend advisory board meetings, interact with school administrators and board members, manage the budget, help coordinate teacher professional development, and coordinate employer, postsecondary education, and parental involvement. Release time and/or a stipend may be provided for this role.

B. Academy Staff

Academy staff are credentialed in their fields, work in the academy, and are committed to its mission and goals. Since a career academy's success rests on effective teaching and teamwork among a cross disciplinary group of staff, they must be well qualified and willingly involved in this role. They understand and support the philosophy and purpose of the academy, work together as a team, and teach a majority of their classes in the academy. The academy staff design instruction and curriculum around a career academy theme and cooperatively share the duties of operating an academy.

C. Support from the Counselors, non-academy Teachers, and Classified Staff

Counselors are members of the academy team, are well versed in the theme of their dedicated academy, and are experts in supporting postsecondary and career opportunities within the academy theme. They understand the need for cohort scheduling and ensure academy students are scheduled appropriately. Non-academy staff are also important to its operation. They understand the value of the academy and help in recruiting students for the academy and providing departmental support. Classified staff help support the academy facilities, equipment, and learning materials.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Since an academy places teachers and other adults into roles not normally included in their previous training, providing adequate professional development time, leadership, and support is critical.

CRITERIA:

A. Common Planning Time

The site administrator ensures that academy staff are provided common planning time within the high school schedule for purposes of program coordination, curricular integration, business involvement, and resolution of student challenges.

B. Professional Development

Experts from outside the high school provide academy staff with training in the academy structure, project-based learning, performance assessment, curricular integration, student support, employer involvement, and other relevant academy specific professional development.

C. Volunteer and Parent Orientation

Business, community, and postsecondary volunteers are adequately prepared for their roles as speakers, field experience hosts, mentors, internship supervisors, and other volunteer activities in the academy. This may include orientation and/or written guidelines.



6

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

The academy has a governing structure that incorporates the views of all stakeholders and the leaders of the advisory board.

CRITERIA:

A. Network of Support

The academy is connected to an advisory board at the school level or the district level and has industry representation and a voice for each academy pathway. It has members from the district and high school administration, academy staff, employers, and postsecondary education. It may also include community representatives, academy parents, and students. Persons from the academy industry are heavily represented. The board incorporates viewpoints from all members.

B. Regular Meetings

Meetings of the advisory board are held at least quarterly, with defined agendas, outcomes, and meeting minutes. The advisory board helps to set policies for the academy. It also serves as a center of resource development.

C. A Productive Partnership

There is evidence of a partnership between the academy/high school and its host community. There is a set of By-laws and/or a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly defines all roles.

D. A Student Voice

Students have avenues through which they can provide input to the academy policies and practices, thus providing opportunities for student leadership such as through Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs).

7

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The teaching and learning within an academy meet or exceed external standards and postsecondary entrance requirements while differing from a comprehensive high school by focusing learning around a career theme.

CRITERIA:

A. External Standards

The academic curriculum is framed around national standards, or approved state standards. The career and postsecondary curriculum is framed around national, state, postsecondary, Common Career Technical Core, and/or career readiness standards.



B. Rigorous Learning

Coursework reaches high levels of English and mathematics, in addition to substantial coursework in science, social studies, and career and technical education. All graduates are qualified to attend a full range of postsecondary education options without the need for remediation because they have mastered curriculum that meets postsecondary entrance requirements.

C. Sequenced, Integrated, and Relevant Curriculum.

Curriculum articulates from the beginning of an academy through the senior year, with a defined course sequence and at least two core academic classes and one career/theme class each year. Curriculum is integrated among the academic classes and between these and the career class. Learning illustrates applications of academic subjects outside the classroom, incorporates current technology and 21st Century Skills, and includes authentic project-based learning.

D. Postsecondary Planning

Students have access to career and postsecondary information, are provided guidance and advisement in these areas, and begin a post-graduate multi-year plan during their sophomore year, which will be reviewed and refined each semester. The plans begin with goals that each student sets, which become an ongoing personalized learning plan. Progress on this plan is reviewed by the student as well as parents/guardians, counselors, and advisors.

E. Dual Credit

Options for postsecondary credit exist in a variety of ways and may include articulation agreements, dual credit and/or college credit for upper grades, concurrent credit, transcribed credit, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education, and other relevant postsecondary program credit. The academy upper level curriculum articulates to relevant postsecondary programs.

F. Development of a Portfolio

The student portfolio is created and sustained throughout the academy experience.

EMPLOYER, POST-SECONDARY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A career academy links high school to its host community and involves members of the employer, postsecondary education, and civic community in certain aspects of its operation.

CRITERIA

A. Local Industry/Economic Needs

The academy career field is selected to align with the economic and workforce development needs of the community and state. This will ensure that there is adequate preparation of the future workforce and that there are sufficient opportunities for persons currently in this field to be engaged in the academy.

B. Community Involvement

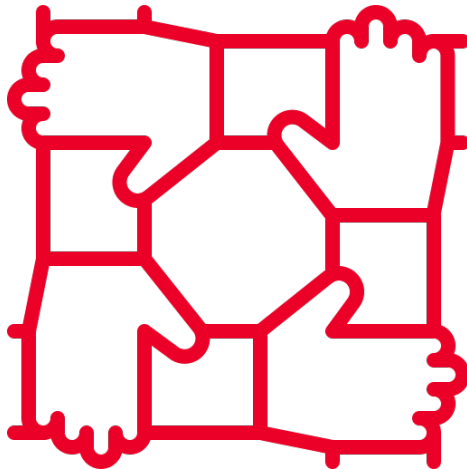
Representatives of employers, postsecondary education, and the community help guide the academy's curriculum, and provide experiential components such as guest speakers, real-world projects, field experience sites, shadowing opportunities, mentors, student internships, community service opportunities, college and other post-secondary education tours, and teacher externships.

C. Citizenship

The academy fosters a culture of respect for others, regardless of background, and encourages student contributions as global citizens.

D. Work-based Learning

The academy offers work-based learning opportunities for all interested students either through internships, community service, or other community-based work programs that the advisory board and the school district planning team determine are the best approach for that academy and community.



Improvements in student performance are central to an academy's mission. It is important to gather data that reflect whether students are showing improvement and to report these accurately and fairly to maintain the academy's integrity.

CRITERIA:

A. Student Data are Collected

These data include those necessary to describe the student body within the academy (e.g., grade level, gender, race/ethnicity) and its relationship to the high school in general, as well as student performance on a variety of outcome measures.

B. Multiple Academic Measures

Measures include a variety of accepted indicators of performance (e.g., attendance, retention, credits, grade point averages, state test scores, graduation rates, college going rates), as well as rubric-based assessments on performance tasks. Multiple measures are aligned to approved state standards, and longitudinal data are collected.

C. Technical Learning

Measures include knowledge of the field's terminology, technical concepts, and ability to apply academic skills to authentic real-world projects. Where appropriate, industry-recognized credentials, certifications, or licenses are incorporated.

D. Data Analysis

Analysis of the data elements takes place in various settings to support student achievement.

E. Evidence of Impact

These measures show whether, and how much, the academy improves student performance. Teacher teams use student assessment to evaluate the quality of the education provided in the career academy and to make improvements to the curriculum, instruction, and program structure. A longitudinal study shows whether there are improved student outcomes in terms of reduced dropouts, increased academic success, career readiness preparation, and greater entry into post-secondary education.





10

SUSTAINABILITY

No new academy functions perfectly. Even well established and highly functioning academies benefit from self-examination and refinement. Ensuring and improving the quality of a career academy requires engaging in a regular cycle of improvement.

CRITERIA:

A. Academy Implementation

Program leaders regularly assess the academy's functioning, studying its strengths and weaknesses. This involves gathering feedback from key stakeholders, including students.

B. Academy refinements

Regular assessments generate plans to address any academy problems. Such plans include benchmarks for improvement that reflect on an academy's mission and goals.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES

NCAC provides meaningful professional learning to impact sustainable systemic change aligned to the career academy model. Below are resource you can use to assure that you are implementing the model with fidelity and providing the best possible career-connected experience for your students.

Professional Learning Commitments

We will:

- Champion the Career Academy Model and Career Connected Learning Approach.
- Design a professional learning experience customized to meet the goals of each school.
- Develop the learner's understanding, expertise, and skills to ensure the best outcomes for students.
- Strive to continuously update and create new professional learning that is data-driven and research-based.
- Provide practitioners and facilitators who have demonstrated the ability to effectively design and lead professional learning for adults that are anchored in past teaching experience.

Sessions can be delivered in person, hybrid and virtually.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



LEADERSHIP

Academy Action Planning

An NCAC coach will work with school leaders to design a three-year action plan written in a SMART format and aligned with the National Standards of Practice. This action plan will serve as a three-year guide for implementation of quality career academies. Included in the workshop is the design of a graduate profile and a college and career continuum of experiences for 100% of your students. The workshop is one and a half days and includes follow up, action plan edits, and a finalized copy of the action plan. NSOP 1-10

Academy Mission/Vision/SMART Goals/Use of Data

An NCAC coach will facilitate the identification of key data points that may include attendance, discipline, graduation rates, failure rates, retention rates, student achievement data, and other key leading and lagging indicators. NCAC will assist in the development of SMART goals for each identified area and for all academies. Each academy will also develop mission and vision statements that parallel the developed goals. This will include the creation of a data tracking system aligned with the Graduate Profile and the College and Career Continuum developed in the action planning session. NSOP 1, 9, 10

Program of Study Development

The most critical exercise when framing a college and career academy is the identification of academy pathways and courses. Ensuring that the selected pathways are fully aligned with local and regional postsecondary offerings and workforce opportunities is essential. Participants will learn the key non-negotiables of undertaking this work and will experience identification and decision-making in real time. The customized training is one to two days based on the needs of the client. NSOP 1, 2, 4, 7

Academy 101

This training provides an in depth look at career academies and the ingredients that comprise highly successful ones. This work session helps you delve into the rationale behind each academy component, as well as identify strategies to approach the topics. Participants will receive guidance based on the ten National Standards of Practice (NSOP) and learn strategies of how to get started in the right direction. NSOP 1-10



Distributed Leadership

Instructional leaders lead for the overall improvement of teaching and learning. A distributive model shares responsibilities for outcomes, builds a system of support and creates sustainable structures and accountability systems that build the capacity of others to lead. This session includes characteristics of an academy leader and understanding the various academy leadership responsibilities and practices necessary to build highly-effective teams. Participants will discuss and create their own team roles and responsibilities to ensure distributed leadership within their academy. NSOP 2, 3, 4, 10

Team Leader

This session is for academy team leaders to learn how to lead productive, effective teams in order to leverage the strengths of team members and meet the goals of their academy. Team Leaders will begin to create and identify systems, processes, and protocols to maximize common planning time. Participants will leave with the processes, tools, and leadership skills they need to empower team members and improve the effectiveness of the academy team. NSOP 4

Academy Coach/Director

Academy Coaches/Directors are an integral part of the academy structure. This session will assist people in this position to learn how to lead the implementation of academies in their school or district and how to be a liaison between the school and the community. A focus will also be on the National Standards of Practice and leading academies through the certification process. NSOP 2, 4

Project Based Learning for Leaders

If we want students to experience ongoing, daily integration of academy themes and academic subjects and to participate in high-quality project-based learning, there needs to be a systematic plan for this to occur. Implementing project-based learning takes time but it also takes leadership, guidance, and work. This session is for building and district leaders and will address the importance of knowing and understanding PBL, how to encourage implementation, and support teachers efforts to implement PBL in their own classrooms as well as part of an academy team. NSOP 3, 7

The Use of Data: The Knowledge and Tools You Need to Effectively Use Data in Schools, Classrooms and/or Counseling Programs

This workshop will help you determine the key data elements and reports that are essential to Academy and student success. Participants will explore demographic data, attainment data, achievement data, student behavioral data, and opportunity data. NSOP 1, 9, 10



STRUCTURE

Master Scheduling

The implementation of career academies requires special attention to the master schedule development. An academy master schedule needs to shift from the traditional approach to a student-centered approach. The correct schedule allows schools to place students and teachers into cohorts so common planning can be used to meet students' needs and for the development of interdisciplinary projects. Components of the training include creating time for common planning, a focus on class and student purity, and building a community of practice around master scheduling. Processes for building the master schedule will also be provided. Assistance with master scheduling can be customized based on a school's needs. NSOP 2, 4, 7

School Counselors Central to Academy Success

This workshop teaches school counselors, principals, and district administrators how to implement an effective developmental, comprehensive school- counseling program that directly aligns with the NCAC National Standards of Practice for Academies. This workshop will demonstrate how merging the academy team model with the ASCA National model can accelerate an Academy's progress in meeting school improvement goals while also developing the social -emotional, career and college ready competencies of all students. NSOP 2, 3, 4

Effective Teaming

This session identifies the stages of development of academic teams, the processes and protocols that support focused and effective meetings and steps to creating academic and behavior interventions for students that is data driven and personalized for each student. Attendees will understand the processes and protocols that support effective and efficient working meetings and will also write a vision and/or mission statement for their team as well as identifying goals that are aligned with the school and district's goals. NSOP 2, 4, 9, 10

Freshman College and Career Planning Design

A well-designed freshman experience sets the foundation for college and career readiness for all high school students. In this one-day workshop, NCAC will facilitate the design of a freshman experience that sets this foundation for your academies. From planning a college fair to career interest inventories, a well-designed freshman experience will prepare your students for the next level. NSOP 2, 7

Business Engagement Structure

Career academies are set apart as a high school reform model with a major ingredient: the involvement of the business community. A critical component of the career academy model is the engagement of the business, college and broader community in the organization and leadership of the academy, as well as helping to provide the experiential components that make the academy model unique and powerful. This training provides a step-by-step approach to working with the business, college and broader community and includes some planning documents and forms that can be used. The ROI (return on investment) can be approached from both the education and the business side very successfully and strategically. NSOP 2, 6, 8



INSTRUCTION

Project Based Learning

This rigorous, real-world approach to teaching and learning takes students beyond textbooks and teachers to facilitators of in-depth, engaging learning! It provides students the opportunity to learn the required content and skills embedded in the project while creating and developing solutions to current and potential problems and challenges in their chosen career areas of interest. NCAC facilitates a two-day PBL training for your academy team with touch points throughout the year to ensure successful implementation. NSOP 5, 7

Interdisciplinary Project Based Unit Planning

Teachers learn the process of looking deeply at content standards through an interdisciplinary lens to discover common concepts and skills. Once these concepts and skills are identified then universal concepts, or big ideas, begin to emerge. Utilizing the elements from PBL, Teachers leave this session with the skills necessary to design rigorous and relevant interdisciplinary PBL units of study that are standards-based and aligned to the cognitive level demanded of the standards being taught. NSOP 5, 7

Portfolio Development

Student portfolios should be created and sustained throughout the academy. NCAC will facilitate with teams in designing a customized portfolio system. NSOP 7

Senior Capstone

Capstone projects are designed to encourage students to think critically, solve challenging problems, and develop skills such as oral communication, public speaking, research skills, media literacy, teamwork, planning, self-sufficiency, or goal setting. NCAC will facilitate with teams to design a customized senior capstone. NSOP 7

Learning Bell to Bell

Teaching on the Block focuses participants on thinking about how to structure the planning and delivery of instruction in approximately 90-minute blocks of time. This training takes one class period and develop thinking and knowledge on how to introduce concepts and learning targets in engaging ways, deepening skills and knowledge through designing activities as well as individual and group work and applications of that new knowledge and skills through student designed work. The session also discusses strategies for transitions between activities that keeps students focused and sees the relevancy of the work and pacing of instruction based on assessing where students are at any given moment. NSOP 7



INSTRUCTION

PLC's and High-Performance Teams

Effective PLC's share three important characteristics: 1. A focus on learning, 2. A collaborative culture, and 3. A results focused orientation. This workshop will help PLC leaders develop all three. We will explore strategies for cultivating individual and team-level autonomy within a culture of accountability within the PLC. Also discussed, developing meeting agendas, establishing a meeting schedule, facilitating meetings, and keeping records. NSOP 2, 7

Externships

Externships provide academy teams the opportunity to step out of their classrooms and work directly with their business partners to see and understand their content is applied within that partner's industry. NCAC will work with teams and business partners to design an externship process and experience. NSOP 5, 6, 7



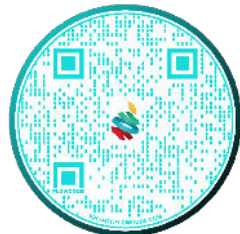
STUDENTS

Student Ambassador Leadership Training (Elementary, Middle, High)

Word of mouth is the most effective and efficient way to communicate the benefits of career-connected education - and there is no better way to employ this strategy than through a Student Brand Ambassador Program. NCAC's Student Brand Ambassador Certification Program ensures that your Ambassadors have the training they need to successfully represent their Academies, High School and district. NCAC delivers the training at your school making sure the students are prepared in their own environment and in a cost efficient manner. Choose from a customized one, two, or three-day training package.

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