

National Standards of Practice

The National Standards of Practice for career academies were developed by an informal consortium of national career academy organizations. Drawn from many years of research and experience, they are framed around ten key elements for successful, sustained implementation of academies. There are several reasons why these NSOP were developed. First, research was showing that academies were making a difference in graduation and dropout rates and in career choices for young people. What was not being demonstrated was the difference academies make in academic achievement. These Standards are a way to ensure that academies are adhering to rigor on multiple levels, including academics. Secondly, the term "career academy" was being utilized in many ways to define all types of schools and programs. These Standards become a way to define a career academy which is a smaller learning community and provide a vehicle for academies to share strategies, challenges and successes on a level playing field.

The NSOP were introduced nationally at a press conference in December 2004 in Washington, DC. Endorsing the Standards were a variety of organizations, as well as the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor.

The Standards are defined below.

- I. **Defined Mission And Goals:** The career academy has a written definition of its mission and goals. These are available to the administrators, teachers, students, parents, advisory board and others involved in the academy. Criteria include: A well-defined mission and goals, focusing on careers and college, raising student aspirations and increasing student achievement.
- II. **Academy Structure:** An academy needs to have a well-defined structure within the high school, reflecting its status as a small learning community. Criteria include: cross-age articulation, a student recruitment and selection process, cohort scheduling, physical space for the career academy, a career or industry theme and a small size supportive atmosphere.
- III. **Host District 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 include: support from the Board of Education and the superintendent, support from the principal and high school administration, adequate funding, facilities, equipment and materials.
- IV. **Faculty And Staff:** Appropriate teacher selection, leadership, credentialing and cooperation are critical to an academy's success. Criteria include: a leader (teacher leader, team leader, coordinator, directors, etc.),

teachers who are credentialed in their field and committed to the mission and goals and counselors and non-academy teachers who are supportive

- V. **Professional Development:** 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 important. Criteria include: common planning time for academy staff, professional development for teachers and an orientation for parents and other district employees.
- VI. **Governance & Leadership:** The academy has a governing structure that incorporates the views of all stakeholders. Criteria include: an advisory board with broad representation from all aspects of the industry as well as all stakeholders, regular advisory meetings, evidence of a healthy partnership between the school and the community and an opportunity for student input.
- VII. **Curriculum & Instruction:** The curriculum and instruction within an academy meets or exceeds external standards and college entrance requirements, while differing from a regular high school by focusing learning around a theme. Criteria include: a curriculum framed around state or national standards that is sequenced, integrated and relevant, rigorous learning meeting college entrance requirements, dual credit and articulation options and post-graduate planning.
- VIII. **Employer, Higher Education & Community Involvement:** A career academy links high school to its host community and involves members of the employer, higher education and civic community. Criteria include: a career theme that fits the local economy, community involvement, work based learning, experiential components such as shadowing, mentoring, guest speakers and the incorporation of citizenship.
- IX. **Student Assessment:** Improvements in student performance are central to an academy's mission. It is important to gather data that reflects whether students are showing improvement and to report these accurately and fairly to maintain the academy's integrity. Criteria include: the collection of student data, multiple measurements which include items such as student attendance, retention, credits, grade point averages, state test scores, graduation rates and college going rates, accurate reporting, the assessment of technical learning and skills and the evidence of the impact of the academy on student performance.
- X. **Cycle of Improvement:** No academies function perfectly all the time. Ensuring that an academy remains high quality requires engaging in a regular, well-defined, objective self examination. Criteria include: the examination of an academy's mission, design and implementation, planned refinements for the academy which include timetables and measurable outcomes.