
‘Business Partnerships for American Education’: employer involvement in the National Academy Foundation’s High School Career Academies

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ABSTRACT This article presents a case study of a particular instance of business involvement in education, the industry-sponsored non-profit National Academy Foundation (NAF). While in the USA participation by employers in schools and educational programmes has increased in the last decade, the federal funding for such partnerships through the School-to-Work (STW) Opportunities Act is ending. NAF’s efforts pre-date the federal STW legislation and have been especially effective in recruiting and retaining employer support for high-school-based career academies. Combining data from fieldwork and a telephone survey of 192 employers involved in the NAF programme, the authors explore the characteristics of participating employers, their contribution to local education experiences, and the incentives and disincentives to their involvement. The findings demonstrate that sustained, quality employer involvement in education is possible; possible indications of what accounts for NAF’s success are also given. This study should help inform policymakers and practitioners as to potential challenges and benefits of institutionalising a large-scale employer-education partnership.

Introduction

During the 1990s in the USA, according to national surveys, participation by employers in schools and educational programmes increased. With encouragement and financial support from the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, a unique collaborative initiative of the Departments of Education and Labor, structured partnerships between employers and school and district personnel spread and expanded

throughout the country. Surveys of these partnerships show that, from the mid- to late-1990s, the percentage of schools receiving employer support across a wide range of activities increased and the number of business members per individual partnership also increased (Hershey et al, 1999; Hulseley et al, 1999). Another survey shows that participation in work-based learning activities, such as internships and mentoring, expanded among even those employers not participating in formal partnerships (Shapiro, 1999).

Research also demonstrates that employers, students and even some teachers are benefiting from their collaborations. Some controversy still exists in some circles over whether increased business participation in education is beneficial, with one conservative commentator calling for the protection of curricula and standards from 'inordinate business influence' (Miller, 2001). Yet the preponderance of the existing research indicates that school-business partnerships in the USA have been a success in both their implementation and impact (see Hughes et al, 2001, for a synthesis of this research). The challenge for the coming years is whether this new cooperation will continue as the federal school-to-work (STW) funding ends. With the recent downturn in the economy, exacerbated by the unknown long-term impact of the events of September 11, 2001, there is real concern that business provision of internships and different types of resources to schools will decline with business fortunes.

In the context of these important issues, we present a case study of a particular instance of business involvement in education, the industry-sponsored non-profit National Academy Foundation (NAF). NAF's efforts pre-date the federal STW legislation, and have been especially effective in recruiting and retaining employer support for high-school-based career academies. NAF offers employers a national network of support that helps link them to local programmes, and offers them guidance in creating meaningful learning experiences for students and teachers. In return, involved employers provide funding, in-kind support, internship opportunities, and curriculum development assistance to local academy teachers and students.

We combine data from fieldwork at nine selected long-running NAF programmes, face-to-face interviews with participating employers, and a telephone survey of 192 involved employers, to examine employer support for this programme. More specifically, our focus is on exploring the characteristics of participating employers, their contribution to local education experiences, and the incentives and disincentives to their involvement. We also use other recent research on employer participation in educational programmes, particularly other employer surveys, for comparison purposes and to highlight the uniqueness of NAF-encouraged involvement. These findings should help inform policymakers and practitioners as to the potential challenges and

benefits of institutionalising a large-scale employer-education partnership.

Literature Review

Increased employer involvement in the USA education system has been seen as a way to provide young people with quality contextual learning experiences. Even among supporters of STW activities, however, there has been concern that partnerships between schools and businesses would be difficult to develop and would not be sustainable in the long term, due to skepticism that the employers would experience any benefits. Career academies, and NAF academies in particular, appear to be a successful model for creating and maintaining school-business partnerships. As such, academies can offer insight into the mechanisms that support deep employer involvement in schools, as well as potential ways to ensure that school-to-work partnerships remain sustainable over time. Before we turn to the particular mechanisms that support NAF-affiliated employer involvement, we look at three areas of literature that can inform the discussion: the growth of employer participation in education in the US, career academies in general and the NAF Academy model.

Employer Participation in Education in the USA

In the USA in recent decades, there has been much debate and research on the preparation of America's youth for the transition from secondary school to postsecondary education and work. The 1983 report *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) claimed that profound weaknesses in the education system were undermining US productivity and competitiveness. In the USA, many young adults were spending their early years in the workforce 'floundering': moving from one low-wage, dead-end job to another, rather than launching careers with growth potential (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988; Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990). A report from the US Labor Department's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) asserted that more than half of the nation's youth were leaving school without the capabilities necessary for finding and holding a good job (SCANS, 1991).

By contrast, relative international economic trends in the 1980s seemed to provide evidence that education systems that emphasised work-based learning, and that had strong ties to employers and the workplace, such as those in Japan and Germany, were more effective at preparing an entry-level workforce. The economic performance of these countries at the time and the stronger performance of their students, especially on math and science tests, seemed to suggest that the USA

might benefit educationally and economically by strengthening the connections between school and work (Dertouzos et al, 1989; Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990). The first SCANS report and a follow-up report proposed that the core competencies necessary for success in the workplace be integrated into the academic curriculum (SCANS, 1991, 1992). The now-classic book *Apprenticeship for Adulthood* (Hamilton, 1990) used the success of the German apprenticeship system to argue for reinventing such a system in the USA.

This national discussion catapulted a movement for federal efforts to create educational activities that could enhance American youths' entry into the workforce. In 1994, passage of the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA), with its goal of strong academic and occupational preparation for all youth, provided federal encouragement and economic support for business-education partnerships, and for various work-based learning activities. Although the Act was seen by some conservative groups as imposing vocational education, narrowly-defined, on all students (National Capital Strategies, Inc., 2001), the authors clearly saw it as a broader educational strategy in which pedagogies traditionally associated with vocational education and occupational themes would be used for general educational goals. Work-based learning played a central role. For example, the legislation supported 'a planned program of job training and work experiences' (US 103rd Congress, 1994) that would be coordinated with career awareness activities and academics in the classroom.

Any policy to expand or to improve the participation of employers in work-based learning must be based on an understanding of why firms would be willing to provide internships and other meaningful activities that could contribute to student learning. A 1995 volume of papers from a conference on this topic presented the possible incentives and disincentives to widespread employer participation (Bailey, 1995a). Bailey concluded that the possible incentives could be divided into philanthropic, individual (self-interested) and collective ones.[1] According to his analysis, employers may decide to provide work-based learning placements for philanthropic or altruistic reasons, such as to reach out to the community or to help youth. They may become involved in STW activities based on their belief that their individual firms would benefit through the use of student interns as low-cost temporary help or through resultant positive public relations, or because, while their company might not benefit immediately or directly, increased cooperation between employers and schools would help to generally strengthen the labour supply and therefore improve the overall economy. Bailey wrote that purely philanthropic motivation would probably not be enough to sustain a large and intensive work-based education system and noted that 'one of the most common arguments for improving education

in the United States is that employers lack a skilled workforce' (1995b, p. 20).

Even with this range of potential motivations, many analysts were skeptical about whether enough employers could be recruited to provide work-based learning opportunities for a substantial number of students (Klein, 1995; Office of Technology Assessment, 1995; Stern, 1995), one writing that 'the prospects for widespread employer participation seem bleak' (Osterman, 1995, p. 79). Mathematica Policy Research's (MPR's) study of the demonstration sites that were a model for the STW legislation found that the implementation of youth apprenticeship programmes posed 'a substantial burden on employers' and raised doubts about the potential for widespread employer participation (Hershey & Silverberg, 1993, p. 9).

Yet Jobs for the Future's National Youth Apprenticeship Initiative, a study of 10 programmes around the country from 1991 to 1994, found that while most of the programmes began with a focus in one industry, almost all increased the number of participating industries and occupational areas over time (Kopp et al, 1995). Other studies increasingly demonstrated that programmes were having success in recruiting employer partners (Lynn & Wills, 1994; Wieler & Bailey, 1997; Hughes, 1998). Cappelli et al (1998) fielded a national survey of employers and found that in 1997, 26% of all US establishments employing 20 or more people were participating in a school-to-work partnership, and 39% were participating in some form of work-based learning.

As increasing numbers of businesses became involved, researchers turned to three basic questions:

- who are the participating employers and are they different in significant ways from non-participants;
- what do the employers contribute or, more specifically, what is the intensity and educational quality of their participation;
- what are firms finding to be the costs and benefits of their participation?

This last question is related to firms' motivations for ongoing involvement.

A study of participants and non-participants in three states found that large firms, non-profit and government establishments, and those with more progressive human resource practices were more likely to participate (Bailey et al, 2000). A Florida statewide survey found, on the other hand, that smaller employers were more likely to participate (Haley, 2001). Both of these studies found employers from a wide range of industries involved. With regard to what the employers contribute, more than one study has found that work-based learning placements for interns tend to be different from the typical after-school jobs youth have (NCPI,

1997; Bailey et al, 2000). Students in paid school-related positions reported that they spent more time being trained and discussing possible career options with their employers than did students in non-school-related positions (Hershey et al, 1999).

Concerning the costs and benefits to participation, one study found that the benefits to employers of interns, such as the value of student labour, and reduced recruitment and training costs for those interns who are hired permanently, can be higher than the costs, but this is not necessarily always the case (Bassi & Ludwig, 2000). Whatever the expense, recent surveys of participating employers find that they are overwhelmingly satisfied with the performance of their student interns (Westchester Institute for Human Services Research, Inc., 1998; Almeida et al, 1999), and would recommend participation to other employers (Phelps & Jin, 1997).

Research has also demonstrated unanticipated benefits to some firms: some of the workers who supervised and mentored the young people were experiencing improved management skills, more enjoyment of their jobs and greater attention to their own skill development (Kazis & Goldberger, 1995). Orr (1997) found that participation in youth apprenticeship programmes could bring about organisational changes, with firms altering educational and training approaches for their own workers based on their experiences with high school apprentices.

In explaining what appears to be better-than-expected success in expanding employer involvement in education, some analysts give credit to intermediary organisations or individuals, many funded by the school-to-work legislation, that help broker the new relationships between the business and education communities (Kazis & Pennington, 1999; American Youth Policy Forum and Center for Workforce Development, 2000). Programmes are often better able to engage employer partners when they have funds to support a full-time, non-teaching liaison to the firms, as well as a structured way for employers to be involved, such as through advisory board membership (Kemple et al, 1999).

Career Academies

The federal school-to-work legislation, in framing its intent for employer participation in career-transition activities, did make mention of pre-existing models of employer-education cooperation. Career academies, in particular, were listed as one of several promising school-to-work programme models, in that they combine academic and occupational skill development, provide work-based learning through internships and other career exploration activities, and have employer participation. While career academies across the country vary, they generally share three basic features:

- they are small learning communities, meaning that they comprise a cluster of students sharing the same teachers and classes (but not necessarily for all classes);
- they combine a college-preparatory curriculum with a career theme (such as finance, travel and tourism, or health);
- they have employer partners, who often supply internships as well as other types of support (Kemple & Rock, 1996).

The first academy, an electrical academy, was established in 1969 in Philadelphia; there is now a network of 29 academies operating in that school district. In the early 1980s academies were developed in California and, with state support, the California Partnership Academies have flourished, with 290 academies statewide as of 2000 (Stern et al, 2000). The state has stipulated that some portion of the students enrolled must be at-risk. Also in the early 1980s, the American Express company sponsored the first Academies of Finance in New York City and, in 1987, the first Academies of Travel and Tourism in Florida and in New York. With additional corporate sponsorship, the National Academy Foundation (NAF) was chartered in 1989, and now provides curriculum, technical support and professional development for almost five hundred academies nationwide.[2] More recently, a number of states and local districts, including Illinois, Atlanta, Seattle and Washington, DC, have encouraged and funded the formation of career academies (Stern et al, 2000). With the STWOA in the 1990s, interest in career academies increased dramatically and their rate of growth accelerated so that it is estimated that over 1000 academies and possibly two to three times that number are now operating nationwide (Stern et al, 2000).

Continued research demonstrating the positive impact of academies has contributed to their proliferation. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is presently conducting a longitudinal random-assignment study of the impact of career academies. Their results so far find that the programme creates a community of support for students, as well as teachers. For students, higher levels of interpersonal supports and increased participation in career awareness enhanced student motivation and long-term educational and career goals (Kemple, 1997; Kemple & Snipes, 2000). At-risk participants in the academies had better attendance and lower dropout rates than control group students (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). However, a follow-up study, released in early 2002, showed that the advantages to the academy students had largely disappeared by the fourteenth month following their scheduled high school graduation (Kemple, 2001). Other evaluations of the academy model, albeit lacking MDRC's rigorous design, have examined high school, post-secondary and employment outcomes (for reviews of these studies see Stern et al, 1992, 2000; Hughes et al, 2001; see

also Linnehan, 1996). Some of the evidence on career academies' effectiveness in academic and career preparation is quite promising.

The little research that exists on employer involvement in career academies seems to indicate that employers offer broad, long-term support to schools. MDRC did examine their sites' employer partnerships and found that while each programme had succeeded in engaging a group of local employer partners in supporting academy activities, there was much variation in terms of the management structure of the partnerships and the staff dedicated to them (Kemple et al, 1999). Other research on career academies has not focused on employer involvement, indicating that this is an area that could benefit from further study.

The National Academy Foundation

The National Academy Foundation began as the Academy of Finance, an educational programme conceived by a leading business executive in the early 1980s. Sanford I. Weill, then chairman of Shearson Loeb Rhoades, a leading New York City brokerage house and financial services firm, saw a way to prepare needy young New Yorkers to fill entry-level back-office positions in the financial services industry. Through a combination of coursework in accounting, economics, computer science and finance, together with a variety of work-based learning experiences in the industry, a pipeline of young people would be prepared for careers in the industry.

Through a partnership with the New York City Board of Education, the first Academy of Finance (AOF) was begun at John Dewey High School in Brooklyn in 1982. The programme grew in New York and spread to other states. In 1987, a new programme, the Academy of Travel & Tourism (AOTT) began in two states, sponsored by American Express. As the programmes proliferated, it became necessary to create a national office to coordinate the expansion and provide quality control. In 1989 the National Academy Foundation (NAF) was formed, with business executives, labour representatives, and educators on the board of directors. NAF currently has 470 academies^[3] operating in 40 states and the District of Columbia, plus an Academy of Finance in London. A new academy, the Academy of Information Technology, was begun in 1999. The national, New York-based organisation has not received any of the federal school-to-work funds; however, school-to-work monies distributed through the states have contributed to the support and expansion of some of the local academy programmes.

The story of NAF has been told in detail elsewhere (Hamilton, 1990; Stern et al, 1992), the important point is that the programme was conceived and initiated by a business executive. The national board has remained strong, with well-known corporate leaders participating. To ensure that individual programmes have close industry ties, programmes

must have their own local, business-based advisory boards. The roles of local advisory board members vary, but many help to raise funds for programme activities, consult on curriculum and other programme content, and most importantly, provide paid summer internships for students and sometimes work-based learning experiences for teachers as well. Two years ago, NAF hired a National Director for Business Partnerships, who provides support and assistance to the local boards across the country.

Some research has already been conducted on the NAF programmes. A follow-up survey of New York City Academy of Finance graduates in 1990 found a very high rate of college attendance – 89% had attended 4-year colleges or universities, and nearly a third had completed their degrees (Orr, 1990). A 1995 study conducted by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) of the Academies of Travel and Tourism surveyed programme graduates between one and four years out of high school and found that 90% had enrolled in post-secondary education or training upon high school graduation (Orr & Fanscali, 1995). Additionally, over three-quarters were working at the time of the survey, regardless of their enrollment in post-secondary education and 40% were in travel- and tourism-related fields. Although no comparison group was included in this study, the results indicate a high level of post-secondary education and labour force participation among academy graduates.

As in career academy research in general, previous research on employer involvement in NAF-sponsored academies is sparse. Thus, the present study offers an important contribution to the literature regarding employer involvement in education and in the NAF academy model in particular.

Research Questions

Until now no research had been conducted wholly on the employer participants of the NAF programme; previous studies included employers from a variety of academy or other school-to-work models (just two of the programmes in the MDRC career academy study are NAF programmes). How a national network serves to encourage or shape participation has not been studied. Examining employers who are part of a national network also reduces programme variation that can influence employer involvement. In addition, as the programme has expanded, NAF itself has become interested in examining their own employer partnerships more closely.

The present study was undertaken in order to examine:

- who the participating employers are – what sector they are in, how long they have been participating, and so on;

- what the participating employers do – what are the ways in which they support the programme;
- why the employers participate – what are their motivations for becoming involved and staying involved, what are the benefits to their involvement, what are the perceived barriers and/or drawbacks to involvement.

These research areas closely follow other recent research on employer partnerships with education for comparative purposes. Given NAF's unique history as an employer-initiated, well-established non-profit running educational programmes, it is instructive to understand the views and substance of participation of the employers in their network. The longevity and expansion of NAF's academies allow researchers to investigate the mechanisms that encourage stable, long-term and even growing employer support. Thus, beyond NAF's interest in these data, our findings can help to inform policymakers and educators as to the ways in which employers perceive their involvement in education. This can be used to strengthen existing school-business linkages and create new ones. Particularly in light of the concern that newly formed partnerships will fade with the end of the federal funding from the school-to-work legislation, understanding employer motivation for involvement can help states and local school districts continue the momentum that the legislation began.

Methodology

This article draws on research conducted for the National Academy Foundation (NAF) on 10 geographically dispersed, long-running career academies. The career academy programmes, all affiliated with the National Academy Foundation, include seven academies of finance and three academies of travel and tourism. The sites were selected based on diversity of geographic region, diversity of student background characteristics and longevity.[4]

The research relies on two primary sources of data:

- a telephone survey of 192 participating employers;
- case studies of each high school's career academy programme, which included in-depth interviews and focus groups with teachers, administrators and students, selected classroom observations, review of relevant documents, and face-to-face one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews with participating employers.

One site at the time of our study had decreased its focus on the work-based learning aspect of the programme and had little structured employer participation, so only nine sites are represented in this article.

We developed an employer survey, drawing several questions from previous surveys of employers participating in work-based learning programmes for comparison purposes (see Bailey et al, 2000; Haley, 2001). The questions were written to gain information on the characteristics of the participating employers, the ways in which they participate, and the motivations for their involvement.

At each site, we were provided with a list of current members of the local advisory board, as well as any other employers who had provided internships to students during the summer of 2000. We received a list of 347 names from the nine sites. The survey was fielded by telephone and the responses tabulated by a professional survey research firm. Surveys were conducted during the fall of 2000. In all, 198 employers were located and interviewed, for a total of 192 completed, usable questionnaires. As shown in Table I, our response rate was 62%.

Total number of firms given*	311
Completed surveys	192
<i>Not completed</i>	
Located, no NAF participation	50
Refusals	9
Not located	66
Never reached, reason unknown	26
Response rate	62%

* Because occasionally there were interns working for the same parent corporation, but at different locations, we considered each location of a firm as the unit of analysis. We were given a total of 347 names at 311 firm locations; all individuals were contacted in order to complete surveys for each location. For example, at one location, an executive could have completed the survey section pertaining to advisory board participation, while a human resources manager completed the section about internship coordination, resulting in one completed survey.

Table I. Response rates.

While the surveyed employers are likely somewhat representative of all of those participating in the nine programmes, it is likely that they are not representative of the population of NAF employers participating in all 470 programmes nationwide, due to our strategic site selection. New employer participants involved with younger programmes might have characteristics and motivations different from our sample. Additionally, the sample consists only of active NAF employers, and therefore cannot speak to any differences between current employers and those who no longer participate. Still, a snapshot of employers from these long-running sites can offer insight into retaining employer involvement over time, which is of potential usefulness to employer-education partnerships everywhere.

In addition to the survey, a one- or two-person research team visited each high school's academy programme either in the spring or fall of 2000. During the site visits, the researchers interviewed the programme coordinator, a sample of academy teachers (individually or in groups), groups of students (where possible), a selection of employers (individually or in groups), the principal and other relevant staff. They observed two or more academy classes, and collected relevant academy programme documentation. The interviews and observations were guided by semi-structured data collection guides. These guides were designed to collect information on the implementation and operations of all core academy programme components, programme management, student and staff benefits, and any other relevant information.

Survey data were analysed using basic statistical techniques, in order to allow for comparison with prior research. Because of the small number of respondents and the lack of a comparison group, only descriptive analyses were performed and only inferential conclusions can be drawn. The findings from the fieldwork were integrated into standardised case studies, which were used for comparison across sites. Results were triangulated among data sources.

Findings

The findings are organised into the following areas. We first describe the characteristics of the NAF employers, using other studies of employers participating in work-based learning for comparison. We then discuss the ways in which the employers are involved, again using relevant comparisons. Next, we move to the motivations and incentives of the employers for their involvement. Finally, to give a sense of the effects of the employers' participation, we include a brief discussion of how the schools, teachers, and students involved in the NAF academies benefit from the employers' contributions, based upon our own related research. We include illustrations from our field visits to the programmes.

Characteristics of Participating Employers

Of the 192 employers surveyed, 122 said they served on a local advisory board and 128 said they provided summer internships to students (the two are not mutually exclusive categories and 36% of the sample said that their firm did both). When asked how they first became involved with the programme, the majority (53%) responded that they became involved through the local Academy programme. About 30% were recruited through the national organisation, and much smaller percentages replied that they were recruited through another employer, an intermediary organisation, or a current or former student (not shown). That the majority were recruited locally indicates that the site-based programme

staff are effective in their outreach to their employer community. In fact, we found that, of the total sample, 21% were not at all even familiar with the national organisation; of firms not on advisory boards the percentage unfamiliar with NAF more than doubles to about 46% (not shown).

The characteristics of the participating employers demonstrate that both NAF and the individual programmes have succeeded in recruiting large, established, for-profit firms, many of which stay with the programme for a lengthy period of time. First, as found in other research (Bailey et al, 2000), large firms tend to participate. One-half of our respondents were from firms with more than 100 employees; with more than one-half of those from firms with more than 500 employees. Only about one-quarter of the firms are small firms with fewer than 50 employees.

Secondly, respondent employers come from established firms, with firms having a mean age of 39 years. About half are with an establishment that is part of a larger corporation, and 70% of those say that other parts of the corporation also participate in the NAF programme (see Table II). In addition, almost three-quarters of the respondents are from private, for-profit firms. In contrast, other analyses of firms participating in internship programmes found a stronger reliance on non-profit and government placements (Bailey et al, 2000; Wieler & Bailey, 1997). This difference may be due to the fact that NAF views its mission as involving corporate America in education, as reflected in NAF's slogan, 'Business Partnerships for American Education'.[5]

		%
Firm size	Small (less than 50 employees)	26.6
	Medium (50 to 199 employees)	31.3
	Large (Over 200 employees)	42.2
Sole facility		47.3
Part of a large corporation		51.5
Do other parts of your corporation also participate in the Academy (<i>n</i> =86)	Yes	69.8
	No	9.3
	Not sure	20.9
Firm sector	Private, for-profit corporation	73.4
	Private, non-profit organization	13.5
	Local government agency	5.7
	State government agency	4.2
	Federal government agency	1.0

Table II. Firm characteristics.

Finally, of particular significance is that half of the interviewed employers had participated since 1995 – more than 5 years – and nearly 20% had

been participating for 10 years or more. Of advisory board firms, almost one-quarter have been participating in the programme for 10 years or more, and about one-third have served on the board for more than 5 years. Less than 10% of the total sample were new to the programme in the year before the survey. This stability is in sharp contrast to other case study research. For example, a study of the co-operative programme at LaGuardia Community College found that only about half of the employers stayed with the programme from one year to the next (Wieler & Bailey, 1997). While our data cannot give a clear sense of turnover, our figures do give an indication of lasting employer participation for those affiliated with the NAF academy programme (Table III).

		Total %	Advisory Board %	Non-advisory Board %	AOTT %	AOF %
First year of participation in the Academy	Before 1991	19.8	23.0	14.2	16.7	22.7
	1991-1995	31.8	30.3	34.3	33.3	30.2
	1996-2000	42.2	38.5	48.6	43.8	40.6
	2001	0.5	0.8	0.0	0.0	1.0
Number of years on the advisory board (n=122)	1 year or less	11.5				
	2 to 5 years	55.7				
	6 to 9 years	17.2				
	10 years or more	16.0				

Table III. Firm characteristics by type of participation.

Activities of the Participating Employers

The participating firms, particularly the advisory board members, provide a variety of programme support and educational services to NAF-affiliated schools, indicating a high level of commitment and active involvement in the programme. The majority of advisory board firms help to develop internships within their firms and in other firms, plan events and activities for students, provide direct financial assistance, secure financial assistance elsewhere, provide advice on curriculum and programme design, and serve as an advocate of the programme to the school district. The majority of the total sample said that they also provide other learning experiences for students, including mentoring, workplace tours and job shadowing (not shown).

The paid summer internship for students between their junior and senior years is considered a vital component of the academy programme. It includes several career preparation and work exposure activities and experiences. Students generally have preparation in resume writing and

interviewing, and then interview for positions. The internships tend to be full-time positions that last 6-8 weeks. Students are to learn about the industry, as well as acquire basic employability skills. We heard in our site visits that it is common for students to stay with their internship employer past the summer weeks.

The surveyed employers appear to be strongly committed to the internship component of the programme. Of the employers that provided internships, the majority sponsored more than one, and 16% took 10 or more interns in the summer of 2000. More advisory board firms provided 10 or more internships than did non-advisory board firms. The firms averaged more than five interns each. Such support is in sharp contrast to other studies, which found that employers participating in work-based learning programmes tend to take only one or two interns or apprentices at a time (Lynn & Wills, 1994; Phelps & Jin, 1997). Not only do employers tend to take a high number of interns, they also offer relatively high wages to the students; the average wage paid to interns was \$6.75 per hour, significantly more than the minimum wage of \$5.15.

During the internship, most firms provide a worksite supervisor or worksite mentor, document and assess what the students are learning, and have a structured way for students to learn all aspects of the firm and industry, such as weekly presentations from a variety of departments or planned job rotations. As these are important components of a quality work-based learning experience (Urquiola et al, 1997), their prevalence indicates that NAF-affiliated employers provide meaningful educational experiences to their interns (Table IV). This form of on-the-job learning is likely to be more educationally significant than the typical experience for young people in the workplace. Such activities also indicate that the NAF experience closely mirrors the intent of the federal school-to-work movement; the latter component, learning all aspects of an industry, was stated as an explicit objective in the school-to-work legislation.

Smaller percentages of the employers add other structures to formalise the programme as an educational experience, such as a formal agreement with the programme, a written agreement with the intern, training for mentors or supervisors, or an orientation programme. There was considerable variation within sites in providing these components (data broken down by programme site is not shown). For example, in one AOTT programme, about half of the employers said they had a formal agreement with the programme regarding their responsibilities, but the other half said they did not; 60% said that they document and assess student learning at the worksite, but one-third did not. The survey results also showed inconsistency in intern hiring practices in and across sites. Even within particular sites, only some employers request references or school transcripts.

Does your firm's sponsorship of academy interns include the following: (<i>n</i> =128)	Yes %	No %	Not sure %
A formal agreement with the local program regarding responsibilities and expectations for internships generally	45.7	45.7	8.7
A written agreement between your firm and the student intern, outlining responsibilities, pay, hours, and so forth	46.5	47.2	6.3
A workplace supervisor who teaches students their job-related skills and oversees their work	83.5	13.4	3.1
A workplace mentor who counsels students and offers them advice with problems they may have	69.3	26.0	4.7
Training for internship mentors or supervisors	43.3	50.4	6.3
An orientation program for students, parents or teachers	43.3	50.4	6.3
Documentation and assessment at the work site of student learning	66.9	29.1	3.9
A structured way for the intern to learn all aspects of your firm and your industry	52.8	42.5	4.7
Review students' resumes before accepting an intern	78.0	17.3	4.7
Interview potential interns either in person or over the telephone	93.7	3.1	3.1
Administer a written competency test prior to hiring interns	11.0	83.5	5.5
Get references for each potential intern from the school or any other sources	68.5	26.8	4.7
Request transcripts from the school prior to hiring interns	15.7	78.7	5.5

Table IV. Components of internship sponsorship.

Motivations, Incentives and Benefits of Participation

Several previous employer surveys have sought to identify firms' motivations for participating in educational programmes, but the

outcomes are varied (Lynn & Wills, 1994; OTA, 1995; Bailey et al, 2000; Haley, 2001). Some employers participate for philanthropic reasons, while others indicate that self-interest is their primary motivator.

Our results are consistent with this prior research in that the NAF employers surveyed cite both philanthropic and individual reasons for participating. The NAF advisory board employers, when asked to choose their most important motivation for participating, tended to (62.3%) select the philanthropic response ('contributing to education and the local community'; see Table V).

		Important %	Un- important %	Not Sure %	Most important %
Reasons for advisory board participation (n=122)	Encouragement from industry groups or other employers	56.6	41.0	2.5	9.0
	Shortage of entry-level employees in the industry	48.4	50.0	1.6	4.9
	Contributing to education and to the local community	95.9	4.1	0.0	62.3
	Increasing your organization's positive image in the community	83.6	13.9	2.5	19.7
	Networking with other firms in the industry in a non-competitive environment	50.0	49.2	0.8	2.5
	Building a client base for the company	23.8	71.3	4.9	0.8
	Not sure				0.8
Reasons for providing internships (n=127)	Shortage of entry-level employees in the industry	42.5	52.8	4.7	1.6
	Contributing to education and to the local community	93.7	2.4	3.9	62.2
	Good way to hire part- time or short-term workers	66.1	27.6	6.3	9.4
	Encouragement from industry groups or other employers	46.5	47.2	6.3	3.9
	Testing the performance of potential employees	51.2	42.5	6.3	2.4

Opportunity to diversify your workforce by attracting young minorities and women	56.7	37.8	5.5	5.5
Increasing your organization's positive image in the community	80.3	14.2	5.5	6.3
Building a clientele for the company	29.1	64.6	6.3	0.8
Improving the personal development and morale of your other employees	46.5	48.8	4.7	1.6
Not sure				6.2

Table V. Motivation for academy participation.

The second most frequent response was 'increasing your organisation's positive image in the community' (19.7%). Other choices, such as encouragement from other employers, shortage of employees, networking with other firms and building a client base were cited less often. Of the employers who provided internships, a similar percentage (62.2%) said they did so as a way of contributing to education and the local community. The second most frequent response (a large decrease to 9.4%) was 'a good way to hire part-time or short-term workers' with only 9.4%. However, when simply asked if 'a good way to hire part-time or short-term workers' is important or unimportant to their participation, two-thirds of the entire sample responded affirmatively, with the AOTT-affiliated employers tending to agree more than the AOF-affiliated employers.

Thus, while most of the NAF employers agree that individual motivations are a factor in their participation, they say they are primarily motivated by philanthropic reasons. It appears from the survey results that the employers may be motivated in more than one way to participate. While our research does not explore employer motivations over time, other researchers suggest that firms must initially be convinced to participate on the basis of self-interest, but begin to view their participation in more philanthropic terms over time (Bailey et al, 2000). This perspective was evident in some of our face-to-face interviews with employers at the different sites. For example, one Florida employer described how her thinking about participation evolved over time:

There are projects that our regular employees don't get around to because of their other job requirements. The idea of having someone there who could help us catch up, and who could cover while people were on their vacations, was important. We had our first intern in 1994 ... The kids are outstanding, and when we read their scholarship applications, I think that's when you get the

picture of the impact the Academy had on them. You'll hear it made such an impression on their life, you realize that you really are making a difference.

Another employer said:

We have a lot of new immigrants. They come from dirt floors, no refrigeration, no bathrooms. It's a wonderful thing to see them realize that a career path is something that they can choose, that they can look at what they want to be and go in that direction. They get to touch that a little in the internship, and see that it's there for the taking.

Employers were also asked about their concerns about participating in the programme, as well as disincentives to participation (Table VI).

		Critical concern	Some concern	Not of concern
Concerns about advisory board participation (n=122)	Expected financial contributions are too costly	1.6%	23.8%	73.0%
	Lack of support or assistance from the national-level organization, the National Academy Foundation	1.6	21.3	73.8
	Lack of support or commitment from the local Academy program	5.7	22.1	71.3
	Problems working with the local school district	3.3	31.1	63.9
	Changes within the local Academy leadership	1.6	27.0	68.9
	Organizational changes in your firm, for example, downsizing	3.3	32.0	63.1
	Lack of commitment or interest at your firm's managerial or executive level	2.5	26.2	68.9
	Lack of understanding of the benefits of participation to the company	6.6	23.0	68.9
Concerns about offering high school students internships (n=127)	Lack of understanding among school personnel of the needs of your company	1.6	24.6	71.3
	Lack of productivity of workers who train and supervise the students	6.3	22.8	67.7
	Students might leave after training is completed	3.1	20.5	72.4
	Opposition from unions	3.1	4.7	88.2
	Students lack basic skills	5.5	37.8	52.8
	Concern about child labor laws or OSHA health and safety regulations	4.7	17.3	73.2
	Students are not always available when needed	6.3	44.8	45.7
	Students are unreliable or immature	3.1	34.6	59.1
	Student wages are too costly	0.0	10.2	85.6
	Problems working with schools or districts	0.8	12.6	83.5
	Changes within the local Academy leadership	2.4	14.2	78.7
	Organizational changes in your firm, for example, downsizing	2.4	24.4	67.7
	Lack of flexibility in internship program design	1.6	20.5	74.8
	Cost of internship development	0.8	11.8	83.5
	Prior, unsuccessful experiences with Academy interns	1.6	9.4	85.0
	Prior, unsuccessful experiences with high school interns from other programs	0.8	6.3	86.6
	Lack of benefits of participation to the co.	1.6	4.7	89.0

Table VI. Employer concerns and disincentives to participation.

When the school-to-work legislation was being debated and drafted, there was discussion over whether the Act should specifically advocate paid work-based learning experiences, or whether that would make the cost of participating too high for employers. As found in other surveys (see Bailey et al, 2000), the NAF employers expressed little concern about the cost of student wages. Of those employers who offer internships, not one indicated that student wages being too costly was of critical concern and only 10% said it was of some concern. Advisory board employers were also asked if they were concerned about the financial contribution expected of them through their participation; the vast majority said they were not.

On the other hand, when asked about other factors that could be effective in encouraging employers to take interns or additional interns, the majority of employers agreed that financial support for interns and supervisor training would be effective. They also favoured the idea of tax benefits or credits for participation.

Other issues that were of concern to employers in other studies were not of concern to the NAF employers. Unlike in a prior study of school-to-work employers (Haley, 2001), most NAF internship providers agreed that they had no concerns regarding opposition from unions, students' basic skills, or working with the bureaucracy of the school system. It is likely that NAF's intermediary role helps to mediate potential problems by distancing employers from the dysfunction, or at least the perceived dysfunction, of the school systems. Additionally, as long-standing employers, any difficulties working with the schools would likely have been worked out over time.

For internship providers, the only common employer concern was 'students are not always available when needed'. A few of the AOTT employers rated this as a 'critical concern'. This issue was raised a few times during our face-to-face interviews, particularly from southeastern tourism employers whose high season is during the fall and winter months, and not during the summer, when the students need internship positions.

	Better %	The same %	Not as good %	Don't know %
Problem-solving skills	34.6	45.7	12.6	7.1
Willingness to work as part of a team	51.2	41.7	3.1	3.9
Reliability	44.9	44.9	6.3	3.9
Attitude	56.7	38.6	0.8	3.9
Productivity	31.5	55.1	8.7	4.7
Industry-specific knowledge	16.5	48.8	29.9	4.7

Communication skills	34.6	44.1	17.3	3.9
Writing skills	29.1	44.1	14.2	12.6
Math skills	30.7	51.2	7.1	11.0

Table VII. NAF interns as compared to entry-level employees ($n=127$).

We asked the employers about the preparation and skills of their NAF interns; the employers' overwhelmingly positive response indicates that they value highly the quality of work provided by their NAF interns, providing a strong incentive to continue their participation (see Table VII). Employers compared their interns to entry-level employees along a range of different skills. For every item, the vast majority of employers agreed that the NAF interns' skills were better or the same as the skills of their entry-level employees. This assessment was illustrated by one interviewed employer, who said: 'It's a wonderful programme. I jokingly say, and there's truth to it, that some of these interns are better than the employees'. For a few of the items the AOTT employers were more enthusiastic about the students' skills than the AOF employers (AOTT and AOF differences not shown).

Some employers also had other high school and college interns. In comparing the preparation of their NAF interns to others, one-third of the employers said that NAF interns are better prepared than other interns they have. Over half said they are about the same, while 13% said they are less prepared. The six employers who said the NAF interns were less prepared were comparing them to college interns or interns who were friends or relatives of employees (not shown). In a face-to-face interview, a Florida employer explained how NAF interns were better prepared:

I've hired non-Academy and Academy interns, and there's such a difference. They [Academy interns] know they have to be accountable, and they want to learn.

While the NAF employers we surveyed seemed pleased with the preparation and skills of their interns, the internships are also supposed to provide the young people with further skills. Thus, as in a previous survey (see Bailey et al, 2000), we asked the employers how long it takes on average for a student intern to learn the job or duties associated with the internship. Almost 60% of the employers said that it takes 5 or more days to learn the work of the internship (not shown). This suggests that most positions are not so low-level that students can perform the work immediately, or only after a day or two of training. It also indicates that employers benefit from the internship experience in that, while providing workplace learning opportunities, they are also gaining productive employees. In our site visits, employers underscored the skills the interns learned and the productive work they accomplished. One airline employer described his summer internship programme:

We gave them vests with question marks on them. The students acted as 'meeters and greeters'. The students had a dress – we all have dress code. The students wore khaki pants and sneakers, and polos. They put on the red vests and they were throughout the airport. People with questions came to them, the people with the red vests, and they could ask for help. As the interns gained experience, they could offer more and more assistance. We taught them not to pass the problem on, but to take the people by the arm and walk them to the gate. That worked out really well. Before we put them out on the floor, we had a training program. We gave them a tour of the airport, which was helpful because the airport is just so big. A lot of the students had never been on an airplane. We took them on one each week. They looked in the galleys, sat in first class, played with the earphones, went on the ramp – they got a feel for what really happens in an airport. We're busy all summer long, and the kids now know that there is always work at the airport, good work, if they want to get into tourism.[6]

Some employers did express concern that they were giving their interns rewarding experiences. One said:

We have a dilemma; is it better to get a few great jobs, or to give jobs to more kids, knowing that a few will not be doing great stuff?

Employers seemed to feel that their interns are valuable members of their firm, as indicated by their willingness to offer permanent employment to NAF students. We asked the employers who provide internships whether they make offers of permanent employment to their interns (not shown). About half of the employers said they have offered the interns positions right out of high school, and almost 30% of employers said they offer the students positions once they complete college. Only 15% of the employers said they have never offered interns permanent positions (but 22% said they were unsure) and, of those, 63% said that they might do so in the future. About one-quarter said they offer permanent positions to half or more of their interns.

In order to determine how NAF can work with their participating employers to spread involvement throughout their firms, we asked in what ways the employers encourage their own employees to participate (not shown). The majority of employers allow their employees to serve as mentors or trainers for students, and half give them release time to do so. Half consider academy participation positively when evaluating their employees. Less than half give recognition and/or rewards to employees who lead or participate in academy activities.

Finally, we asked several questions to gauge the employers' commitment to the programme and the likelihood of their continued

participation (not shown). More than half of the advisory board members said that, over the course of their involvement, their enthusiasm for and commitment to the programme had increased. About two-fifths said it had stayed about the same. Only one advisory board member said that his/her enthusiasm/commitment level had decreased. In addition, over 90% of the employers who provided internships said that they would continue to do so. A small percentage said that they were not sure or did not know. Of course, we interviewed only currently participating employers and so it is possible that those who lacked dedication had already left the programme. However, these results demonstrate a very strong level of interest in the programme on the part of current participants.

*Benefits to Schools, Teachers, and Students from
Employers' Involvement in the Academy Programme*

While the focus of the survey was on employer motivations and benefits from involvement in the NAF academies, site visits, interviews and surveys conducted for other parts of this research indicate that employer involvement has meaningful benefits for the schools involved in the NAF programme.[7] The scope of activities provided by employers is wide, with one district coordinator telling us that employers provide funding for programme administration, a student conference, overnight job shadows (sponsored by a hotel) and an auction. In addition, this district's employer partners review the curriculum annually, provide internships and offer mock interviews for students to practice their skills.

Survey results demonstrated that such employer involvement impacts teachers' work. Approximately half the teachers surveyed had participated in formal employer-sponsored professional development, such as job shadowing, having an internship, or consulting with employers on course content.[8] In one academy, an employer-teacher mentorship programme was initiated, in order to facilitate communication between school staff and the business world. This allowed teachers, many of whom have no business experience, to 'bridge the disconnect' between school and the business world.

Students also benefited from employer involvement, beyond their workplace learning experiences. Survey responses and interviews revealed that employers serve as a source of adult support and as role models. Almost two-thirds of the students who had paid summer internships through the academy programme said that they had discussed possible careers with their employer. They also agreed that someone in the business took an interest in them (83.1%). Over half said that their academy summer internship or an academy mentor were significant influences in their future career direction. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, 40% of the alumni surveyed said that, the fall after high

school graduation, they held a job with a NAF-affiliated employer (not shown).[9]

Implications and Conclusion

The National Academy Foundation has been uniquely successful in gaining and increasing employer support for and participation in their educational programmes. Survey results show that NAF employers are well-established firms with a long-standing commitment to the academy programme. They are actively involved in creating educational experiences, providing quality work-based learning activities and other support for students and teachers. NAF employers are primarily motivated by the desire to contribute to education and the community; disincentives were few, focusing most often on students' limited availability. Overall, employers were pleased with their interns' performance, frequently offering them permanent employment.

When viewed in the context of other research and policy concerns, these results are particularly encouraging. The goal of the federal school-to-work legislation was to build employer-school partnerships that could lead to quality learning experiences for students, but the precise mechanisms by which to do this were unclear. As discussed above, many writers expressed concern that employers would not participate in meaningful ways or that their participation was not sustainable over the long term. The results of the present study demonstrate that sustained, quality employer involvement is possible and can also give us some indications of what accounts for NAF's success.

Industry-specific Support

The NAF academy programme was initially founded by a business leader, in support of the finance industry. Having an industry focus for the programme has likely contributed to the ease of employer recruitment and retention. The students take courses in industry-specific topics; for example, finance and other economics-related subjects in the AOF programme and geography and tourism in the newer AOTT programme. This helps to prepare students for interactions with industry professionals and internship placements. Thus, participating employers host student interns who have an interest in the field and preparation for their workplace. This is different from some other work-based learning programmes where students may find a placement based on their interests but have no related classroom instruction in that particular area (see Hughes et al, 1999). For employers with immediate or future labour needs, participation in the programme can provide them with a pipeline of potential employees.

Programme and Support Structure

The NAF organisational structure – a national-level employer board, local employer advisory boards and intermediaries at both levels – contributes to its success as well. Nationally, the initial business sponsor has stayed with the organisation over the years and has recruited other executive-level partners who contribute ongoing advice as well as resources. The national organisation, in addition to working to keep this high-level support strong, funnels the advice and resources to the local level programmes, partly through the position of the National Director for Business Partnerships, who assists in the start-up and strengthening of the local advisory boards. These boards are necessary in guiding the local programme staff and providing work-based learning experiences, because while the powerful national board members do recruit their subsidiaries and contacts across the country, these efforts are still insufficient to support hundreds of local programmes. For local employers, serving on a NAF board provides relatively unproblematic and legitimate access to the local education system, and to potential employees. Finally, the structure also includes local programme directors (some are school-based and some are district-based) who take the lead in the local employer outreach and board relations.

This structure that includes national and local levels of operation and intermediaries for both levels is an arrangement that could be replicated in other employer-education partnerships. The NAF case demonstrates that staff need to be specifically designated as business liaisons; schools should not be expected to create and run employer partnerships on their own. While the school-to-work legislation recognised this, in philosophically and financially supporting stand-alone partnerships, as the federal funding ends, the NAF case shows that such partnerships are still viable as long as they have strong employer support.

Employer Satisfaction with the Programme

The lack of overwhelming concerns on the part of the employers, and the longevity of the participation of many, indicates that once they become involved they tend to remain involved. Thus, the challenge may be to ensure initial involvement of employers, rather than maintaining involvement over time. This does, however, contradict another study that found high turnover in employer participation (Wieler & Bailey, 1997). It is possible that the findings discussed above, particularly the industry-specific preparation of the students, may encourage employers to remain active in the academy programme after their initial experience. Of course, we did not interview employers who left the programme. No study has

yet been done on former participants of such programmes, although research of that type is needed.

Conclusion

Structured partnerships between schools and employers have expanded over the last several years, in part due to encouragement from the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act. Many observers were initially skeptical as to the possibility for such an expansion, as well as dubious as to whether such partnerships could endure. Our case study of the industry-sponsored non-profit National Academy Foundation, which included an employer survey, as well as programme-based fieldwork, gives an example of a partnership that pre-dated the school-to-work legislation, has endured for almost 20 years through economic variability and has expanded across the country. The employer survey demonstrates the depth and breadth of involvement and commitment of many of the participating employers. Certainly, the NAF model must be providing something of value for both business and schools. This analysis of some of the factors contributing to the success of the NAF model should provide lessons of particular help now as the federal support of school-to-work comes to an end.

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Notes

- [1] Theoretical reasons for employer participation are also discussed in Hershey & Silverberg (1993), Klein (1995), Osterman (1995) and Urquiola et al (1997).
- [2] Some academies in California are in both the NAF and California Partnership Academies networks.

- [3] These include 260 Academies of Finance, 151 Academies of Travel and Tourism, and 59 of the newest programme, the Academy of Information Technology. Approximately 100 of these are new programmes in 2001-2002. There were approximately 4000 graduates of the NAF programmes in 2001.
- [4] As part of our larger study, we also conducted a survey of graduates from the programme in 1990, 1991 and 1995. Because of our intent to survey alumni, programmes that were operating by the late 1980s and early 1990s were selected for the study.
- [5] In the winter of 2001, this slogan was replaced with a new one – ‘Partnerships for America’s Youth’ – as part of a new marketing campaign.
- [6] All of the students interning at airports are subject to background checks.
- [7] As part of this research, IEE also conducted studies of NAF teachers, students, and alumni at the ten sites. These consisted of: a survey and interviews with 34 academy teachers and 26 comparison teachers, to understand the impact of the academy model on teaching; a survey of 233 academy seniors and 215 comparison seniors, to explore the relationship between the academy experience and college and career preparation; and a telephone survey of 177 graduates of the academy programmes from 1990 and 1995, to understand the long-term impact of the academy on young peoples’ transitions to postsecondary education and careers.
- [8] This analysis is available from the authors. A paper on the teacher survey results is currently in draft form.
- [9] These tables are also available from the authors.

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