



JD Hoyer

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to her appointment at NAF, JD Hoyer served as President of *Keep the Change, Inc.* In 1994, Hoyer was selected by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley and U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich to head the new Office of School-to-Work in Washington, D.C. Hoyer was also Associate Superintendent of the Office of Professional/Technical Education for the Oregon Department of Education and Office of Community Colleges. She served as the leader of a 27-county organization that managed federal job training funding for rural counties in Oregon. Hoyer began her career as a youth employment counselor working directly with at-risk youth in Corvallis, Oregon.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF NAF (naf.org) is a national network of education, business, and community leaders who work together to ensure high school students are college, career, and future ready. NAF's educational design ignites students' passion for learning and gives businesses the opportunity to shape America's future workforce by transforming the learning environment to include STEM-infused, industry-specific curricula and work-based learning experiences, including internships. Since 1982, NAF has been partnering with existing high schools in high-needs communities to enhance school systems at a low cost by implementing NAF academies – small learning communities within traditional high schools. NAF has grown from one NAF Academy of Finance in New York City to hundreds of academies across the country, focusing on growing industries.

Has the original mission and vision of NAF stayed true to its roots and will you talk about how the organization has evolved?

It has stayed true, although it has evolved against the marketplace and the economy as they have evolved.

We're focused on improving things in the educational system but also on the long-term viability for graduates and the economy. Sandy Weill (NAF founder) and most of the corporate members of NAF have felt that change has been

Transforming Education

An Interview with JD Hoyer, President, NAF

very slow in coming. That said, in the scheme of improving public education, some remarkable progress has been made.

Sandy launched NAF in 1982 with a finance academy in New York City. Today, we have some 89,000 students going to more than 700 academies in 36 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. We're still reporting 98 percent of seniors graduating, with 92 percent of them planning to go on to post-secondary education.

Even though it seems slow, from a corporate perspective, in terms of quality, continuous improvement, and scaling, we're seeing success, it's affordable, and the outcome numbers are phenomenal.

The evolution has been slower than many would like but the mission of addressing the big challenges facing education and the economy remain the same. The vision of Sandy and the board for creating a world where all of the graduates and young people in this country have an equal opportunity for successful futures has remained constant.

How large can NAF become?

As the educational system over the past 20 years morphed from traditional, comprehensive high schools to charter schools to small schools to private spin-offs to try to personalize the educational experience and get some motivation tied to student learning, in all of those settings, this design still works.

Currently, we want to double-down on the magic that happens for young people when they see a connection between what they're learning in school and how they're going to use it for their future. This is a social/capital connection where, in their junior and senior year, they get to take their experience into the workplace and get real feedback from employers.

After these young people come out of their internship experience with a company, they often reposition their thinking towards wanting to become more like what they saw in their supervisor. That redirects them in terms of knowing that they need to go to post-secondary school to get the right degree.

We want to increase the paid internships offered by companies and, while many have partnered with us, there are many more that could.

How critical is it that the curriculum continues to evolve and that, as you have grown, that ability to adapt remains at the core?

When we started, we were focused on working with industry to help us build courses that

were relevant to the priorities of the marketplace at that point in time.

A huge investment was put into working with employers, identifying courses, validating the sequencing of the learning that we recommended for schools, and lining it up with the priorities that industry was saying was important. We put in a refreshment cycle because, unlike the core educational academics, the content required by industry changes very rapidly.

As we've added different themes, it becomes even more complicated because we have finance, IT, hospitality and tourism, health sciences, and engineering. There is some crossover in terms of principles, but there are discrete elements of value that particular industries want to bring into the classroom.

We have had to stay nimble and connected in that regard, but we have figured out the core learning standards that need to be present for a young person to demonstrate proficiency in an industry or an area. In so doing, the marketplace has exploded with online courses and distance learning. The technology offerings are huge, so we're pivoting a bit to not just create content but instead review content that is out in the marketplace and hold it up against industry standards.

Instead of being the creator of everything, we have been more of a curator against a set of standards the industry holds dear.

Why hasn't there been more change and reform within the system and how hard will it be to truly reform education?

It's a very difficult task, but we're at a point where the marketplace and the access to knowledge, skills, awareness, curriculum, content, and experiences through technology and virtual presence all provide an exciting opportunity to open the doors for all students – regardless of socioeconomic status. It is an extremely promising time, as the education and business communities come together to provide the best possible future for our students, while also taking a proactive role in shaping our nation's future workforce.

Over time, we have learned that leadership matters not just in the corporate space but also in the educational space. It is a responsibility of us all – the teachers, the principals, the advisory board members, the business leaders, and the community – to support and make this brilliant vision a reality. There is strength in numbers and when we combine forces within all of our organizations, we all will succeed and continue to see the return on our investment for years to come. ●