

# The Rigor/Relevance Connection

Rigor and relevance are intertwined. The purpose of linking these two design features is to clarify the purpose and importance for the students. In addition, it illustrates the challenges the students will face and how the work will be assessed.

## Rigor

*Increasingly, all students must learn to reason, communicate, problem-solve, and work collaboratively.*

— Tony Wagner (2002)

Rigor is a mental or physical performance that requires the strategic application of a wide range of thinking processes to a problem, set of problems, or situations that may be ambiguous, complex, emotional or provocative. It includes the ability to create new understandings and knowledge that extrapolates from existing information and place that understanding in a conceptual context. Rigorous experiences lead to a transformation in how the person sees the world or one's self. Rigor demands habits of mind such as weighing evidence, awareness of varying viewpoints, making connections, assessing value, and speculating on possibilities. A rigorous thinker has metacognition regarding the way one thinks and approaches a problem and the limits of one's knowledge, combined with the ability to generate new questions.

Complexity	Emotion
Provocativeness	Ambiguity

Strong, R.W., Silver, H.F., & Perini, M.J. (2001).

## Relevance

*By the time young people reach high school, growing numbers of them are so alienated and disengaged from school that higher expectations are necessary but far from sufficient to engage or motivate them.*

— Michael Cohen and Adria Steinberg (2002)

A critical aspect of motivating students and engaging them is to provide them with an answer to the question, "Why should I be interested in this?"

NAF curriculum seeks to generate relevance for all of its academy students. NAF is particularly concerned about student populations that have historically underperformed on national measures or are underrepresented in the business community.

NAF's new curriculum will be relevant along the following dimensions:

- Student interests derived from their culture and generation.
- Embedding significant public issues and controversies.
- Providing industry authentic experiences through project-based learning.
- Connecting students with industry experts.
- Adult work and life skills.
- Building on student experiences.

The NAF curriculum reflects the cultural diversity prevalent in our society, including the range of communities served by the network. These include history and role models that inspire students from varied backgrounds, inclusion of materials that are appealing to young urban students, and educating students about cultural diversity and its implications for the industries NAF curriculum addresses. Furthermore, the NAF curriculum recognizes the points of view of adolescents through popular media trends and attitudes toward authority.