



National At-Risk Education Network (NAREN)

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NAREN Certification

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INTRODUCTION

This is a general introduction to the NAREN schema for evaluating alternative at-risk education programs. It is a succinct attempt to provide guidance and leadership in establishing a foundation for effective design and implementation of a quality program for at-risk students who deserve an equal opportunity to achieve success in school and life.

Actual evaluative spreadsheets of the NINE FACETS include criterion-referenced code points leading to location of the program being evaluated on a continuum of:

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT → BRONZE LEVEL SUCCESS → SILVER LEVEL SUCCESS → GOLD LEVEL SUCCESS

Any program that reaches *Gold Level Success* on all NINE FACETS is awarded *Platinum Level Success*, a high honor indeed (you may order the SELF-STUDY KIT from NAREN, which includes all benchmarks).

CHECKLIST FOR THE NAREN CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Steps for schools to follow when applying for NAREN Certification:

1. Submit a letter of application on official school district letterhead requesting a SELF-STUDY KIT (or download the application in *Adobe Acrobat*® PDF format). Letter should include:
 - Name of district contact person for the certification process;
 - Name of possible school program(s) applying for certification (a separate SELF-STUDY KIT must eventually be purchased for each program seeking certification);

- Location of program(s) and number of students in each program;
 - A PO number or check for \$89.95 for each SELF-STUDY KIT (if you are ordering as a NAREN member, the cost is \$79.95 per SELF-STUDY KIT — please place NAREN membership number behind your name on the form/letter).
2. Form a *Self-Study Committee* (SSC) of key stakeholders and review the SELF-STUDY KIT-WORKBOOK Section.
 3. Gather appropriate evidence to substantiate compliance with all indicators.
 4. After a minimum of 60 days, but before a period of 18 months passes, submit the completed original numbered NAREN SELF-STUDY KIT-WORKBOOK which includes the finished self-assessment and portfolio data addressing each of the NINE FACETS of NAREN Certification.
 5. Professional reviewers will review portfolios within 30 days (subject to change depending on volume).
 6. After the review, if needed and/or desired, specific suggestions will be made to program directors to encourage achievement of *Platinum Level Success*.
 7. Additional submissions may be required if NAREN certifiers need further documentation.
 8. Portfolios will be returned with comments, and
 9. Certificates and plaques will be awarded according to highest level of certification achieved.
 10. Programs will be listed on the NAREN web site as certified representatives of quality at-risk education programs in the Hall of Certification. Programs are not listed until they have achieved *Bronze Level* or above.

NOTE: There can be no blanks in the self-assessment. One, and only one, of the three rubrics must be circled for each indicator: Needs Improvement/Approaching Standard/Achieves Standard.

QUALITY FACETS OF AT-RISK EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Certification, standards, guidelines, code points, rubrics... what is that all about? It is taking a stand on establishing a structure, or scaffolding, that channels resources (time, money, energy, people, materials, etc.) in the most productive of directions. It is always a matter of opinion, but research-based opinion is less speculative and has been field-tested under controlled circumstances in an attempt to sort out the variables that truly make a significant difference towards, in our case, improving chances of success for at-risk youth.

We call our research-based scaffolding the *Quality Facets of At-Risk Education Programs*. One must see the benchmarks (order a NAREN SELF-STUDY KIT) to comprehend the full expanse of each facet. Whether mentioned specifically below, know that three major pieces reside within each facet: Curriculum-wrapping

(personalizing the curriculum as a way of acknowledging the value of each student's individuality), authentic assessment (clear indicators that a student and staff is moving in successful directions); and, monitoring & adjusting (humility to admit mistakes and a willingness to redirect efforts more productively).

THE NAREN NINE

I. ACCELERATED ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

Most at-risk students learn differently and not at all slowly when they are engaged appropriate to their learning styles and needs. High expectations that are reasonable and reachable are called for with an integration of academic and work-based learning. Meaning is a key component to learning, and especially for at-risk learners. Acceleration is accomplished by *setting high and clear goals*, with *meaningful material, matched to learning style* — meaning each student has their learning individually prescribed.

2. STRONG LITERACY COMPONENT

"Can't read? Go to jail!" might as well be the banner under which the swelling population enters our jails and prisons. Next to AODA issues, illiteracy is the number one qualifier for poverty and/or criminal behavior, and the logical and rightful place to stem this tide is in the school. All academic achievement rests solidly on the ability to read and comprehend well. A NAREN certification means that a program is:

1. assessing reading and comprehension upon entry into the program;
2. prescribing appropriate literacy activities; and,
3. monitoring and adjusting the literacy curriculum for each student commensurate with their needs and abilities to insure success.

3. DELIBERATE SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

NAREN research reveals that if an at-risk program is to be effective it must include a deliberate atmosphere and program of social skills in self-management and responsibility. School personnel must work towards objectives that increase student self-control, school success, attachment and commitment to education, self-efficacy expectations, and belief in a structure (e.g. guidelines, rules). In schools where such a program is well implemented, student conduct improves significantly and substantially.

4. PERSONALIZED CURRICULUM

NAREN research reveals that if an at-risk curriculum is to be effective it must shape itself to the student. NAREN strongly encourages deliberate curriculum wrapping (a NAREN-unique phrase) as an intervention procedure with a curricular foundation. Each student is different in his/her own needs, problems and life journey. A personalized curriculum holistically recognizes that one cannot separate academics from personal issues and is structured to deliberately and definitively address issues interfering

with achievement and success in all facets of a student's life.

5. PROJECT-EXPERIENTIAL-WORK ORIENTATION

NAREN research reveals that if an at-risk curriculum is to be effective it must offer a whole-to-part curriculum — students fully engaged in a productive enterprise that makes learning relevant to their learning style. A solid work component with major emphasis on developing a positive and productive work ethic is essential to high school age at-risk students. School-based businesses run by students are highly encouraged.

6. SMALLER SCHOOL & CLASS SIZE

Research does not conclusively show a direct correlation between smaller class size and increases in achievement scores. NAREN believes that success is not only about content-centered scores but also about self-esteem, confidence, and the ability to be productive and healthy. A key factor in this kind of success with at-risk youth is often the creation of closer student-teacher and student-student relationships. Smaller classes allow teachers to individually prescribe instruction and monitor progress and encourage more interactivity. Smaller schools foster a sense of family/community, identity building and caring relationships that enable successful adjustments and transitions.

7. SOLID PLANNING & ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SYSTEM

NAREN research reveals that if an at-risk curriculum is to be effective it must have a clear mission statement, based on a definitively stated philosophy of education, and commensurately cohesive teaching and learning strategies that soundly are research and theoretically based. A collaborative, communicative, and supportive administration model is highly recommended with obvious evidence that staff and students are highly prized.

8. COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY MODEL

NAREN research reveals that if an at-risk program is to be effective it must involve collaborative efforts with various educational stakeholders in the community: parents, business leaders, law enforcement and the judicial system, social service agencies, churches, etc. Evaluations of community involvement programs indicate that these programs can consistently affect positive outcomes for attendance and persistence in school. The effects range from small to substantial, but always positive. Not to be ignored is the positive influence of local higher educational institutions. They are often influential with students prior to high school graduation in numerous ways and set a tone of expectation regarding life-long learning as a viable option for all.

9. COMPREHENSIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Many new alternative programs come and go with few lasting benefits for their students, and teachers often become suspicious and reluctant to buy into further "promising" reform efforts. Alternative at-risk models are very complex and often require intensive study, effort and time to effectively implement. A successful

program must include a deliberate and pertinent staff development schema in which teachers are in contact with skilled trainers in a variety of professional development settings at the school and in the classroom. Distance learning, in-house interactive involvement with experts, video-conferencing, attendance at conferences and trainings, and professional association membership offer both substantial assistance and support for modern teachers in the new educational world of a needs-based curriculum.

NAREN CERTIFICATION FEE SCHEDULE

How much does the NAREN Certification process cost?

- ▶ **Self-Study Kit:** \$79.95 for NAREN members. \$89.95 for non-NAREN members. Two parts:
 - 96-page easy-to-use **WORKBOOK** with NAREN NINE benchmarks and rubrics; plus
 - 35-page **COORDINATOR GUIDEBOOK** (these books are serially numbered and may not be duplicated). Once the **SELF-STUDY KIT** is purchased, extra **WORKBOOKS** can be purchased for \$49 (NAREN members) or \$59 (non-NAREN members).
- ▶ **Registration & Application Fee for Certification by NAREN:** \$75 (non-refundable). *Some fees may vary depending on extraordinary circumstances — these will be clarified up front.*
- ▶ **Portfolio Review Fee (United States):** approximately \$500-\$700, depending on the size and number of programs within the district and number of portfolios to be reviewed, plus mailing expenses.
- ▶ **Annual Certification Fee:** \$100
- ▶ **Renewal Fee (every third year):** approximately \$300-\$400, depending on the size and number of programs and portfolios to be reviewed, plus mailing expenses. *Fees are subject to change without prior notice. Payment of fees does not guarantee certification at any level.*

For detailed information, e-mail to director@AtRiskEducation.net, or write to:

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REFERENCES

The NAREN NINE are referenced with 4 pages of bibliography and suggested readings in the NAREN SELF-STUDY KIT'S GUIDE BOOK and 5 pages in the WORKBOOK.

(The Nine Facets of Quality At-Risk Education, copyright © NAREN, 2001)