

## Portfolio and Capstone Guidebook

Asia Society – Partnership for Global Learning  
Capstone Work Group, January 2015

The information for the capstone project was created by the Graduation Guidelines Capstone Work Group. For a list of the members of the work group or for a copy of the [Capstone and Portfolio Guidebook](#), click [here](#).

### Implement and Monitor

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### Implement the Plan

The next phase in the process is the execution of the action plan, and ongoing monitoring. As stated earlier, implementation may look different from one school to another. The implementation may range from a small pilot with a department or subset of students to a whole-school roll-out. Ideally, the plan is understood and transparent for all.

### Gather Data and Monitor Progress

It's important to regularly collect data and information related to the effectiveness of the process and how it could be improved (see insert below for examples) with key benchmarks or progress checks built into the action plan. Progress checks may include meetings on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis depending on the plan and the type of feedback you're collecting. During these meetings, encourage staff encouraged to share honest feedback and to offer suggestions that will improve the implementation process. It is important to stress that the school is exploring a process that is an ongoing, and that it is not yet perfected.

While monitoring progress, you may find gaps or weaknesses in the action plan. When user feedback calls for a change, stay flexible and open. In some cases, change is not warranted, just persistence.

#### Examples of Data to Collect:

- Meeting agendas, minutes
- Student work samples
- Informal and formal classroom observations
- Surveys (students, teachers, parents, etc.)
- Newsletters, communication to the community
- Written reflections (students, teachers, etc.)
- Focus group interviews (students, teachers, community members)

When developing the action plan, include a section or strategy for training or updating new staff members, new students, and new families. Orienting new stakeholders with this approach in mind will make the process easier moving forward since it will be a recognized culture shift from the beginning.

Clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the plan helps prevent missteps or misunderstandings. Teachers and advisors need to understand their roles in the instruction, assessment, and oversight of the process. External parties such as parents and local community partners need clear guidance for their roles, especially if they will be involved in the review of student work or serve on student defense committees. Providing training and support to understand what quality work looks like will be essential to their success and ongoing involvement.

Throughout the implementation process, expectations across classrooms are calibrated through collaborative scoring of student work to ensure the reliable and consistent use of the rubrics (see p. 14). These sessions can result in productive and critical conversations about what high quality work looks like, common expectations for all students, and approaches to assist students to produce their highest quality work.

## **Common Challenges**

Students often struggle with organization and time management toward meeting deadlines. In response to this challenge, teachers continually work to provide scaffolding and structure as well as increased frequency of check-in points along the way so no one falls so far behind that catching up is daunting. While portfolios and capstone projects are ultimately intended as summative demonstrations *of* learning for assessment, in practice the process is an ongoing assessment *for* learning, providing multiple opportunities for students to learn how to organize and structure completion of a big task—an essential skill for college and career.

Students also fall behind because of they have insufficient language skills, they do not understand the evidence required to demonstrate proficiency, and they lack an intrinsic purpose for engaging. When advisors and teachers are aware that more than one student struggles with a particular aspect of the task, they can develop school and classroom opportunities to teach and support these skills and habits.

If many students don't seem to care about their portfolio or capstone project, it might be time to hear from them about how they experience the process. For students who didn't participate in rubric development, they may not have grasped the purpose for this seemingly more labor intensive assessment process for graduation. They may feel they did not have a voice in the development of the required standards for graduation; so, the process is just another hoop for them to jump through on their way out of high school, rather than an authentic opportunity to demonstrate their competency.

It is important to make this culminating assessment an integral part of the school experience, and students must be aware of the process throughout their school years. Teachers can help students identify work and experiences they might want to include in their portfolios. Students should be encouraged to attend presentations of learning all throughout high school. They will have a chance to use the rubric to assess their peers, and they will gain practical knowledge about the process.

Look at the process for students with a critical eye. Is it fun or drudgery? Is it tedious or relevant? Usually, the answer lies in giving students more voice and choice, scaffolding to identify what they need to do make this a true demonstration of their readiness for the next stage of their lives.

When your school community sustains clarity of vision and deeper purpose for portfolios and capstones as an assessment for graduation, decisions about evaluation and revision can be systematic and effective along the way.