Capstone Project

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A CAPSTONE PROJECT is a multifaceted body of work that is district determined and serves as a culminating academic and intellectual experience for students. Capstone projects could:

- include a portfolio of the student’s best work – curriculum or research-based;
- feature a set of experiments organized around a central problem; and/or
- showcase a community service project or learning activity.

A PORTFOLIO is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits effort, progress and achievement over time and against a set of clearly defined outcomes. Portfolios include collections of work that demonstrate evidence of:

- work in progress, including documentation of ICAP
- content knowledge or skills, including Career and Technical Education (CTE) competencies
- workforce readiness (i.e., skills in problem solving, adaptability or ability to collaborate)
- college readiness (i.e. applications, letters of recommendation, test scores)

Contents are created and strategically assembled throughout high school, and benchmark exhibitions are common in the sophomore or junior year. Ideally students present and “defend” their portfolios for continuous review and feedback. Then in the senior year, the culminating capstone project (including the senior portfolio) serves as a summative assessment of postsecondary and workforce readiness.

WHY THIS OPTION

When developed through an inclusive process, capstone experiences and portfolios offer an authentic, rigorous learning opportunity for students, and they provide school faculty and staff a meaningful professional growth opportunity. Capstone projects allow students to draw on knowledge and skills from a variety of content areas and apply it in meaningful ways. Portfolios serve as a mechanism for students to curate and display high quality work that demonstrates their mastery of course content, career and college readiness.

The strongest practice or approach helps students demonstrate academic, professional and entrepreneurial competencies, while encouraging them to develop expertise in an area of deep interest. This investigative process encourages and requires a high degree of collaboration and coordination among faculty and staff.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

If a district or school would like to incorporate capstone or portfolio projects in their graduation requirements, school leaders should:

- Plan for success by assessing school readiness, addressing the needs of students and staff, developing an action plan and timeline and creating the conditions for success
- Follow a design, planning, implementation and evaluation framework
- Implement the plan, gather data and monitor progress
- Consider and overcome challenges
- Evaluate and strengthen the capstone and/or portfolio process

COST

There is no cost to the student to create a capstone or portfolio. However, depending on the complexity of the project, the student may pay for materials.

For examples of board policies, district plans, rubrics and examples of implementation strategies, visit www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/graduationguidelines.