



Nassau County Senior Year Network



What are Senior Projects?

Senior projects allow high school seniors to participate in a capstone activity that requires students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in real-world settings. As described by Lorenz (1999) senior projects involve a multitude of skills that are required of college students and entrants to the workforce and the military. These skills include the ability to research, write, interview, work with a mentor, produce a tangible product, present findings to an audience, and reflect on the experience. Currently implemented in over 60% of Nassau County high schools, senior projects differ depending on the needs of stakeholders. Projects are implemented most often in English and social studies classes.

Your school's participation in the Senior Network is free of charge, funded through the Nassau County Perkins Consortium. Even if you are not yet ready to implement the program, participation in the network will provide answers to questions such as how to motivate stakeholders to adopt higher expectations for high school seniors, how to involve local agencies and businesses, how to recruit mentors for program activities, how to structure and schedule classes, and other questions of importance to your schools.

What are the Benefits to Students?

In their study, The Colorado School to Career Partnership (1999) found that students are more motivated to learn when:

- They participate in active hand-on learning focused on real-world problem solving
- They participate in projects that are related to future career interests

In this study, approximately 80 percent of students who had career experiences in high school enrolled in post-secondary education, selected a college major based on career interests, and selected a college major. The number of career experiences in which high school seniors have engaged has been found to be positively and significantly related to being excited about the future, and being comfortable with their career plan. Conversely, number of career experiences was found to be negatively associated with being unclear about their future directions and not having enough information to make educational and career decisions.

In another study conducted in the Southeastern U.S., Egelson, Harman & Bond (2002) compared four high schools that used Senior Projects with four high schools that did not use this educational model, matched by school demographics. The research design included surveys of students, teachers, and graduates.

- **Three quarters of project students reported that they developed public speaking skills, research, writing, interviewing planning, organizing, interpersonal and work-related skills**

Consistent with National Studies Calling for Higher Learning Standards

Kirst (2001) reported that use of Senior Projects helps prevent the phenomenon known as “Senior Slump”. Evidence of the slump includes the high numbers of college freshmen requiring college basic skills remediation, the high drop out rate among college students, and the poor skills of students entering the workforce or military. He asserts that senior projects strengthen the high school curriculum and link project work to first year college standards. Most importantly, he reports that **Senior Projects give students incentives to work harder.**

Bottoms (1999) in his report on *High Schools That Work* identified ten key practices that differentiated exemplary high school programs. These included: high expectations, vocational studies, academic studies, program of study, work based learning, teachers working together, students actively engaged, guidance, extra help, and keeping score. **Senior Projects incorporate just about every one of these practices.**

How Are Projects Evaluated?

Egelson, Harman & Bond (2002) found that Senior Project schools reported using more rubrics, performance based assessments, portfolios and journal writing than non-project schools.

Finished Projects: Climate of Celebration

The culminating activity of Senior Projects is a presentation of the project to the class. In addition, many schools hold exhibitions of student work that are showcased for the entire school. In particular, these exhibitions are used to celebrate student accomplishment as well as recruit future students from the lower grades to become interested in undertaking such a project.

Article by: Dr. Renee J Blumstein, 2005. rjb@researchforeducation.com

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