Capstone Implementation Criteria Alignment and Creation

This is a professional document intended for use by system leaders and designers of capstone processes in their local contexts. The purpose of this tool is to support reflection and alignment to the **Colorado Capstone Implementation Criteria**, helping school and district teams identify strengths, opportunities, and areas for continued growth.

Purpose and Use of This Tool:

- Help students build a rigorous Capstone demonstration.
- Identify enabling conditions that support implementation.
- Highlight opportunities to enhance alignment to Graduation Guidelines.
- Identify who is responsible for what actions when developing a Capstone

How to use this Tool:

- **Step 1: ICAP Vision Conferencing**
  - The teacher and student meet in a dedicated advising session to review the student's Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) data, career goals, and personal interests. Together, they translate those aspirations into a focused capstone vision and co-design a forward-looking guiding question that anchors the entire project.
- **Step 2: Criteria Mapping & Action Agreement**
  - Using the Colorado Department of Education's Capstone Implementation Criteria starting on page 3, the teacher and student review the seven core criteria. For every single criterion, they select at least one Teacher Action and one Student Action that fit the student's vision. **They record these selected actions directly on a school-developed Capstone Agreement Form, establishing explicit, mutual commitments for both parties from day one.** Once the criterion is selected, the teacher and student will agree to rubric criteria linked here against which the capstone will be assessed, adding the agreed to rubric criteria to the capstone agreement form.
- **Step 3: Timeline & Milestone Scaffolding**
  - The teacher and student establish a realistic, backwards-mapped timeline that breaks the capstone vision into sequential lifecycle benchmarks. They plot hard deadlines for key deliverables directly into the agreement, building in required checkpoints to protect project momentum. Here are some checkpoints to consider:
    - Proposal & Initial Artifact Audit: Confirming the project focus and mapping existing work samples (if available).
    - Formative Mid-Point Pitch: Presenting draft artifacts, evaluating initial progress against rubrics, and identifying obstacles early.
    - Iterative Rehearsal & Revision: Running practice presentation defenses, gathering peer/mentor feedback, and refining the final product.
    - Final Public Defense: Scheduling the formal presentation before a calibrated evaluation panel.
- We completely support the flexibility Zones/Schools need tailored student Capstone experiences, but also understand the need to have common expectations when it comes to scoring these experiences. The final review of student Capstones will use a common rubric. Here is a link to that rubric.

Additional Information:

- 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 experiences organized around a central problem; and/or

- showcase a work-based learning experience including a community service project or learning experience.
- Capstone is one of 11 measures in Graduation Guidelines, which begin with the implementation of Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP), Colorado Academic Standards for all content areas, and Essential Skills.
    - These criteria are designed for schools and districts that have created a Capstone system that is personalized for students who are engaged in the capstone process to meet expectations of Graduation Guidelines.
- "Community" is defined by the local context and includes a continuum from one-to-one mentoring relationships all the way to presentations that include the public as panel members.

Capstone Implementation Criteria and Best Practices

School District 49

Capstone Implementation Criteria		Actionable District Best Practices (Teacher & Student Actions)
Evidence of Alignment to District Vision, ICAP, and Colorado Academic Standards & Essential Skills	The district capstone system is aligned with the district vision, ICAP, and Colorado Academic Standards & Essential Skills. 1. Does the capstone process invite students to co-create a guiding question that prepares them for the next stage of life? 2. Does each student have a robust body of deeper learning work (artifacts)? 3. Does the capstone process invite each student to *articulate* deep metacognition/reflection about their mastery of and/or growth?	**ICAP Integration & Co-Design** • **Teacher Action:** Administer the ICAP Handbook career conversation tool and lead advising sessions to guide students in aligning postsecondary goals with inquiry topics. • **Student Action:** Review ICAP career data and co-design a personalized guiding question that connects personal postsecondary aspirations to the capstone project. **Evidence & Flexible Showcase** • **Teacher Action:** Provide clear formatting guidelines and templates for digital portfolios, physical models, and presentation slide decks. • **Student Action:** Curate a diverse body of evidence—including academic work, industry credentials, and project models—into a flexible showcase format. **Cognitive Reflection & Transfer Mechanisms** • **Teacher Action:** Facilitate routine reflection protocols, journal prompts, and vlogs focused on skill transfer and growth mechanisms. • **Student Action:** Record regular journal entries or vlogs reflecting on personal growth and demonstrating how problem-solving strategies transfer across disciplines. **Pathways into Inquiry Models** • **Teacher Action:** Reframe capstone requirements from retrospective

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School District 49

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		checklists into forward-looking inquiry prompts. • Student Action: Synthesize prior academic artifacts to investigate and answer a new, forward-focused ICAP research question. **Build Capacity through Advisory** • **Teacher Action:** Facilitate standardized Capstone Advisory modules within existing master schedules to provide regular check-ins and peer mentoring. • **Student Action:** Participate in scheduled advisory modules to log progress, collaborate with peers, and receive regular mentor feedback.
Evidence of Student Agency	• Do students have the opportunity to co-design their capstone process to align with ICAP and Colorado Academic Standards & Essential Skills? • Is there room within the capstone process for students to personalize in ways that are culturally relevant and identity affirming? • Are students asked to go	**ICAP-Anchored Co-Design** • **Teacher Action:** Conduct professional ICAP dialogues with students to help co-author personalized learning milestones and objectives. • **Student Action:** Co-author project objectives and milestones with an advisor to align capstone tasks directly with postsecondary identity. **Guided Artifact Curation** • **Teacher Action:** Lead structured, developmentally appropriate check-ins to assist students in selecting high-impact work samples. • **Student Action:** Intentionally select, evaluate, and justify artifacts that provide explicit evidence of academic achievement and personal growth. **Transparent Rubric Scaffolding** • **Teacher Action:** Unpack scoring criteria with students at the beginning of the capstone process and co-establish progress markers.

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School District 49

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	through a curation process where they make intentional choices about what evidence to include in their capstone? • Do students have opportunities to engage with the rubric and scoring practices *throughout* the capstone process *and prior to* presenting their capstone? • Does the capstone process help each student identify and internalize their gifts and talents in order to benefit their future and their community?	• **Student Action:** Use the capstone rubric continuously to self-assess work, identify areas of growth, and set personal milestone targets. **Talent & Asset Mapping** • **Teacher Action:** Facilitate reflection protocols that help students identify technical skills, personal talents, and unique cultural assets. • **Student Action:** Complete asset-mapping exercises that connect individual strengths and cultural identity to community needs and project goals. **Transition to Student-Led Advisory Check-ins** • **Teacher Action:** Shift advisor check-ins from teacher-directed compliance audits into student-led conference formats. • **Student Action:** Lead periodic advisor check-ins by presenting current progress, evaluating work against rubrics, and determining immediate next steps.
 Evidence of a Shared Definition	• Are there school- or district-wide common rubrics and scoring practices for the capstone process aligned to Colorado Academic Standards and Essential	**Shared Core Rubric Framework** • **Teacher Action:** Apply unified district rubrics aligned with CAS & Essential Skills while customizing specific criteria to fit local school zone "Portrait of a Graduate" priorities. • **Student Action:** Align project deliverables with the shared rubric and school graduate profile to meet core district standards.

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School District 49

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of Success	Skills? • Is each member of the school community involved in the capstone process (participating students, educators, families, community members, etc.) trained and calibrated on the rubrics and scoring practices for the capstone process? • Does each member of the scoring panel use an evidence-based protocol to assess and provide feedback on the student's capstone presentation? • Is there evidence among stakeholders that students involved in a capstone process can and will successfully complete the process?	**Calibrated Evaluator Panels** • **Teacher Action:** Host calibration and orientation sessions for all panel evaluators (teachers, caregivers, industry partners) to standardize scoring protocols. • **Student Action:** Practice communicating work clearly to evaluators who share consistent, calibrated expectations for capstone mastery. **Inclusive & Accommodated Assessment** • **Teacher Action:** Establish accessible evaluation protocols and integrate Extended Evidence Outcomes (EEO) accommodations for diverse learners. • **Student Action:** Utilize personalized learning accommodations and specialized evidence formats to demonstrate growth and competency fairly. **Embedded Support Structures** • **Teacher Action:** Teach designated facilitation courses (e.g., Pathway Design) and maintain advisory tracking systems to support equitable completion. • **Student Action:** Utilize facilitation course time and advisory check-ins to access required resources, maintain steady progress, and overcome project hurdles.

Capstone Implementation Criteria and Best Practices

School District 49

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 Evidence of Deliberate School Design/ Structure	1. Are there clear benchmarks and scaffolds that support each student to successfully prepare for and complete a capstone process, i.e. time in their schedule to meet with mentors or staff members and models to support quality work? 2. Are opportunities for rehearsal/practice, feedback, and revision built into the capstone process?	**Institutionalize Mentor Access & Protected Scheduling** • **Teacher Action:** Protect designated windows in weekly schedules (advisory blocks/pathway modules) dedicated exclusively to mentor-student collaboration. • **Student Action:** Reserve and utilize protected scheduling blocks to meet with assigned staff advisors for project guidance. **Establish Sequential Lifecycle Benchmarks** • **Teacher Action:** Implement transparent progress markers (proposal, draft artifacts, mid-point pitch, final defense) to pace student workflows. • **Student Action:** Complete and submit deliverables at each established lifecycle benchmark to maintain accountability and pace work effectively. **Embed Iterative Rehearsal & Feedback Protocols** • **Teacher Action:** Facilitate practice presentation defenses and structured feedback loops prior to final panel evaluations. • **Student Action:** Participate in mandatory practice defenses, present draft artifacts to peers/mentors, and incorporate feedback into project revisions. **Curate a Zone/District "Gallery of Excellence"** • **Teacher Action:** Build and maintain a digital repository showcasing top-tier portfolios, exemplar defense videos, and high-quality student work.

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School District 49

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		• **Student Action:** Study exemplar projects in the Gallery of Excellence to understand expectations and guide personal artifact creation. **Institutionalize Formative "Mid-Point Pitches"** • **Teacher Action:** Coordinate mid-point benchmark defenses to help students present initial artifacts and receive actionable guidance on anticipated obstacles. • **Student Action:** Deliver a mid-point pitch outlining initial progress, highlighting potential challenges, and refining project strategies based on feedback.
 Evidence of Professionalism and that Student Learning is Public	• Are students asked to demonstrate strong public speaking and presentation skills? • Are all participants (students and adults) demonstrating the importance of the capstone process through attire, timeliness, language, etiquette, etc.? • Are students presenting their capstone to a robust, diverse	**Rigorous Public Presentations** • **Teacher Action:** Establish clear public speaking guidelines, oral defense rubrics, and presentation skill lessons. • **Student Action:** Present capstone findings publicly, demonstrating effective oral communication, clear structure, and professional delivery. **Professional Expectations** • **Teacher Action:** Publish and enforce explicit professional norms regarding attire, punctuality, formal communication, and digital etiquette. • **Student Action:** Demonstrate professional workplace norms by arriving punctually, wearing professional attire, and using appropriate language during presentations. **Defense Panels**

Capstone Implementation Criteria and Best Practices

School District 49

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	panel? (A panel could include staff members, other students, caregivers, alumni, local college staff, community members, industry experts, etc.) • Does the panel ask high-quality reflective questions and offering meaningful feedback related to mastery of and/or growth in Colorado Academic Standards and Essential Skills?	• **Teacher Action:** Assemble diverse presentation panels incorporating school staff, district leaders, caregivers, and community/industry representatives. • **Student Action:** Present defense materials to a multi-member panel composed of internal educators and external community partners. **Standards-Aligned Panel Interrogation** • **Teacher Action:** Provide panels with structured, standards-based questioning guides to prompt deep student reflection on CAS and Essential Skills. • **Student Action:** Respond to reflective panel questions by articulating specific examples of academic growth, essential skill development, and future application.
 Evidence of Community Involvement	• Are there opportunities (work-based learning experiences, college visits and classes, work study, volunteer experiences, etc.) for students to learn in and with community partners (staff members, other students, caregivers, alumni,	**ICAP-Anchored Community Problem Solving** • **Teacher Action:** Guide students to frame inquiry topics that address concrete local community issues linked to their ICAP career pathway. • **Student Action:** Identify a local community problem related to their career field and design a service or research project to address it. **Integration with Work-Based Learning (WBL)** • **Teacher Action:** Align capstone criteria with existing CTE, internship, apprenticeship, and volunteer frameworks to allow cross-credit

Capstone Implementation Criteria and Best Practices

School District 49

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	local colleges, industry experts, etc.) during their capstone process? • Does the capstone process provide students opportunities to positively impact their school, local, or greater community (short or long-term)? • Are students provided access to existing community structures and partnerships to support graduation readiness?	accumulation. • **Student Action:** Integrate learning experiences from internships, CTE courses, or community service directly into capstone project artifacts. **Community Partner Advisory & Feedback** • **Teacher Action:** Recruit and connect external partners (business owners, higher education staff, alumni) as project advisors and panel evaluators. • **Student Action:** Consult with community mentors during project development to obtain professional feedback and refine project outcomes. **Launch a District-Wide "Community Challenge Bank"** • **Teacher Action:** Maintain a searchable directory of real-world problems and research requests submitted by local civic and business organizations. • **Student Action:** Browse the Community Challenge Bank to select an authentic community project or partner-backed research topic.
 Evidence of Data Collection, Self-Analysis & Continuous	1. What systems are in place to monitor and track progress for individual students? 2. What types of student data/information from the capstone process were collected and analyzed to	**Systematic Progress Tracking** • **Teacher Action:** Maintain standardized progress-monitoring dashboards across buildings to track student milestone completion and flag intervention needs early. • **Student Action:** Log progress regularly in building tracking platforms to maintain visibility of milestone completion with advisors. **Holistic Data Gathering**

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School District 49

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School District 49