

SOUTH DAKOTA

Senior Experience

FRAMEWORK



**SENIOR EXPERIENCE CAPSTONE:
A GUIDE FOR SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOLS**

Senior Experience: Enter to Learn, Leave to Achieve

2010

**South Dakota Department of Education
800 Governors Drive
Pierre, SD 57501**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Senior Experience Capstone Framework Committee wishes you the best of luck in implementing Senior Experience Capstone in your school district. We have tried to include in this initial framework the most relevant information, guidelines, and materials for school districts. In your journey to implement this Framework, let us know what worked and what didn't work for you. We would also be interested in any new materials or strategies that you used in addition to the Guide. Please send this information to:

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USING THE SENIOR EXPERIENCE CAPSTONE (80019) FRAMEWORK

The Senior Experience Capstone Framework is intended to be a menu for school districts to use in designing a local Senior Experience Capstone program. The Senior Experience Capstone is divided into four components – the research paper, project, portfolio and presentation.

The Framework is available on the South Dakota Department of Education website including downloadable forms that may be used for the local program. Refer to the Senior Experience and Entrepreneurship Experience Capstone: Resources and Rubrics handbook for additional forms.

The Senior Experience Capstone is implemented as a stand-alone course or integrated into a Senior course. The Senior Experience Capstone is one of the three capstone options to fulfill the high school graduation requirements.

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INTRODUCTION

SENIOR EXPERIENCE CAPSTONE OVERVIEW

The Senior Experience Capstone is a high school capstone experience that requires students to demonstrate not only what they know, but what they can do.

The Senior Experience Capstone consists of four components. **The first component includes the research paper by each student.** The research paper contains a thesis that the writer proves (supports) or disproves through research evidence. A student should carefully consider a possible product before selecting a research topic. The paper exhibits the acquisition of knowledge through researching, writing, interviewing, and synthesizing an application of the real-world skills of time management, organization, self-discipline, persistence, and problem-solving.

The second component includes the creation of a product that is an appropriate and logical extension of the research paper. The product must demonstrate the application of acquired knowledge through a reflective, physical, and/or intellectual stretch.

The third component is the portfolio, which includes specific writing throughout the Senior Experience period. These writings will include reflective and informative journals, business letters, brochure, overviews, and a final Senior Experience Capstone reflection.

The fourth component is a presentation before a Senior Experience Capstone panel. The presentation is ten to fifteen minute formal speech on the paper, the Experience, and personal growth. A question and answer period will follow the presentation. The portfolio will be provided to the panel of judges for review. The Senior Experience Capstone panel can be composed of teachers, mentors, parents, and community members, preferably with knowledge or background of the product or research content. The panel and portfolio provide the student with an opportunity to synthesize their information, Experience, and self-growth journey using communication skills related to fluency, knowledge depth, listening, explaining, defending, comprehending, and application.

Throughout this process, students will benefit greatly from the expertise of a carefully selected Experience mentor and faculty advisor. They will serve as resources to the student during all components of the Senior Experience Capstone. This Framework was developed with the following quotation as its guiding theme: “Enter to Learn; Leave to Achieve.”

Senior Experience Capstone allows students the opportunity to consolidate and showcase the learning from their high school years into a meaningful and relevant Senior Experience. It is their venue to connect with the world outside of school and to demonstrate they have the skills to go on to further education and/or enter the workforce.

Senior Experience Capstone allows schools an avenue to promote the relevance and increase the rigor of the high school experience. Senior Experience Capstone allows students to see the connections between what they are learning now and the application to their future lives. They become an “expert” in their chosen topic area and showcase the skills and abilities they have gained through their high school experience.

The Senior Experience Capstone also provides students with focused and structured learning, gives them experience with the responsibility for meeting timelines, making decisions, doing research, preparing a presentation and making presentations – all skills needed for success in the workplace. Senior Experience Capstone provides an opportunity for students to model the 3 R’s for schools – rigor, relevance, and results!

Senior Experience Capstone

Criteria for *Exemplary* Programs

Program Description:

The purpose of the Senior Experience Capstone is to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and maturity they have gained during the course of their high school education. The Senior Experience Capstone is a four-part process consisting of a research paper, a portfolio, a project/product that is an extension of the research and an oral presentation. The Capstone must be a “learning stretch,” meaning that it must go beyond what the student already knows or has experienced.

1. Seniors complete the Senior Experience as a requirement for graduation.

- The Senior Experience should reflect the student’s chosen career cluster/pathway and be reflective of their Personal Learning Plan.
- Students have a teacher advisor.
- Students have a professional mentor.
- Students evaluated on each of the four Capstone components.

2. Students complete a research paper.

- The research paper is based on the Senior Experience project topic and relates to the students chosen career cluster/pathway.
- The research paper should be adequate in length to meet the student’s goals and formatted using the appropriate formatting style guide (APA, MLA, Chicago).

3. Students complete a portfolio.

- The portfolio should reflect new information learned and demonstrates how that knowledge was applied in new and creative ways.
- The portfolio should include all forms, journal entries, references and activities associated with the Senior Experience.

4. Students create a product related to their research topic.

- The product should be oriented around performance of a skill, the development of some physical product or the study of a profession.

5. Students present their final product/project to a panel of judges.

- The presentation should last from 8-10 minutes and include time for questions from the judging panel.
- The presentation should cover what was learned from doing the research, from writing the paper, and from completing the Senior Experience.
- The presentation should also include what worked and what did not work, how the problem was solved and the nature of personal growth.

6. School district has the structure in place to offer and operate the Senior Experience Capstone.

- A Steering Committee comprised of school staff and students is in place.
- The school has designated a Coordinator for the program.
- The Senior Experience Coordinator is allotted time during the school day to manage the program.
- A program guide provides information on the purpose, operating structure, all forms and documents, and program and student evaluation.

ELEMENTS OF A HIGH-QUALITY SENIOR EXPERIENCE CAPSTONE PROGRAM

1. **Clear and Aligned Purpose** - Student learning outcomes are aligned with school, district, and state mission and goals.
2. **Explicit, Rigorous Criteria** - Performance is assessed by application of established criteria.
3. **Student-Directed Learning and Youth Engagement** - The student takes leadership for selecting, planning, and implementing his/her own learning goals.
4. **Clear Scaffolding of Skills** - Students need instruction and practice for the skills required in the Experience. Some schools include a culminating project in elementary and middle school levels as well as high school.
5. **Learning Stretch** - The Experience poses a challenge that requires significant new learning.
6. **Authentic Experience** - Students apply core academic knowledge and skills beyond the traditional classroom setting to address a real problem.
7. **Community Involvement** - Members of the broader community play an important role in Experience as mentors, panelists, advisors and/or resources.
8. **Authentic Audience** - Expert individuals and community organizations are critical members of the audience to hear and review the Experience.
9. **Coordination and Comprehensive Communication** - Students, parents, community members, teachers and administrators understand the purpose and processes of the Experience.
10. **Adequate Staffing and Supervision** - There is sufficient staff to coordinate the program and provide support to teachers, parents, and community partners.
11. **Mechanism for Training Community Partners** - Community partners are provided training to perform their role as co-educators and authentic partners.
12. **Mechanism for Parent Involvement** - Expectations are developed for parent involvement in the design, implementation, and celebration of the Experience.
13. **Ongoing Professional Development and Program Improvement** - School leaders and community partners organize formal training sessions, reflection activities and opportunities to continuously improve the program.
14. **A Plan for Risk Management and Liability** - Schools and communities ensure the Experience takes place in a safe environment and risk is managed.
15. **Celebration and Recognition** - All collaborators are provided opportunities to be recognized and celebrate the success of the Experience.

Education Commission of the States, 2004