

THE GRADUATION PROJECT: Service Learning Experience HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

The goal of the Graduation Project is to assure/ascertain that CMS students have acquired the skills, knowledge and concepts necessary to perform well when they leave high school. Each student will use educational tools to broaden his/her knowledge about a particular, self-selected topic related to a community or global issue. The topic should be complex and comprehensive enough to challenge the student intellectually and creatively. The topic should be viewed as one that requires cumulative knowledge. Each student will demonstrate mastery of his/her topic through the four components of the Graduation Project:

1. RESEARCH-BASED PAPER

- The content shows that knowledge has been gained and that the student is able to analyze, apply, and synthesize that knowledge.
- The paper incorporates a minimum of five sources, including at least one primary source. Students should avoid encyclopedias and other general-information references (including current technological reference bundles).
- For purposes of documentation, students should use the most current *MLA Handbook*, *APA Handbook* or an equivalent with in-text citations and technological (the Internet, for example) referencing.
- The final draft of the paper includes a works cited page.
- The paper is 6-8 pages of text.
- *Each student must complete a research paper before continuing to the product, presentation and portfolio phase of the Graduation Project.*

2. APPLICATION (PRODUCT)

- The product is an appropriate outgrowth/extension of the research and documents the service the student performs to address his/her chosen community issue.
- The amount of money spent on the product will not impact the overall evaluation score.
- Students must also complete a minimum of 15 focused/direct contact hours towards making a positive impact on the researched issue.

3. ORAL PRESENTATION BEFORE A REVIEW BOARD

- The student will make an oral presentation of the research findings on the chosen community issue and the service learning experience artifacts..

4. PORTFOLIO

- As students progress through the project, they will compile a portfolio, which should contain required documents and artifacts of the Graduation Project components. For specific contents, refer to the "Guidelines for the Portfolio."

A Review Board will complete evaluation of the oral presentation and product.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Through the completion of the Graduation Project, students have an opportunity to showcase an issue of interest through the four components that serve as a culminating project of the high school experience. The graduation project provides a process where students can select an area of interest and focus on a specific community or global issue and work toward solving that problem.

Most of the project is completed without the daily supervision of classroom teachers. Therefore, each student must take full ownership of the step-by-step process involved in the project. Only when a student has worked independently on the project will he/she benefit from completing the Graduation Project. All work completed for the project must be the student's own work.

Student responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Selecting a viable and compelling issue to research
- Successfully completing all components of the Graduation Project: research paper, portfolio, product, and oral presentation
- Working on the culminating project independently, unless otherwise approved
- Submitting all paperwork and documentation by designated deadlines
- Seeking advice and assistance when needed
- Maintaining timelines and documentation of completed tasks
- Identifying and maintaining regular contact with the English teacher or Academic Advisor (as designated by your school) and a mentor (optional), as the Graduation Project is created and developed
- Using a variety of communication techniques (electronic, written, verbal), such as the letter of intent, interviews, phone calls, and electronic communication, as project work progresses
- Researching and writing a paper on a focused issue that addresses the specified guidelines
- Completing and documenting verifiable work (outside the regular school day) on the product component
- Preparing a portfolio documenting work completed and making the portfolio available for the Review Board in advance of the oral presentation.
- Presenting to the Review Board

ROLE OF THE FACULTY AND STAFF

Every member of the faculty and administrative staff, when appropriate, should be actively involved in the implementation of the Graduation Project.

Faculty and staff are integral to the successful implementation of the Graduation Project. Members of the faculty and staff should be involved at all levels of planning and implementation. Because the Graduation Project is a culmination of all the experiences during students' secondary education, all faculty and staff members are key to students' success at any stage of the process. Some of the areas where faculty and staff may serve during the process include:

- Academic advisor
- Mentor
- Resource person
- School-based committee member
- Review Board member
- Graduation project coordinator
- Evaluator
- Graduation Project advisory council

ROLE OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER OR ACADEMIC ADVISOR

The **English teacher or academic advisor**, who may be any teacher from any content area, serves as the main contact at the school to help a student develop and complete his/her Graduation Project. The English teacher/academic advisor can help the student refine the project idea and approve various aspects of the project. The English teacher/academic adviser serves as the "go to" person and inspiration for the student throughout the completion of the project over the course of the student's high school experience. The role of the English teacher/academic advisor may include but is not limited to assisting students with the following:

- Selection and narrowing of a topic for research
- Approval of the research issue
- Research process
- Documentation of research
- Revision and editing of the paper
- Approval of the service learning experience product
- Completion of all applicable progress checks, documentation logs of service hours, notification of parents, and selection of mentor
- Completion of the student log of activities

ROLE OF THE MENTOR

The mentor component is optional, but highly recommended.

A mentor is strongly recommended for the Graduation Project, but is not required. Students who utilize a mentor, document contact, and provide a reflection will receive incentive points toward their Graduation Project grade.

A Graduation Project mentor is a community or faculty member who has expertise, experience or background with the project topic and accepts the following responsibilities:

- Allocates time and makes arrangements to work with the student on the project
- Provides suggestions and advice to the student on applicable aspects of the research paper, product, portfolio and oral presentation
- Provides accurate and honest verification of the student's work.
- Serves as a support and resource to the student in all stages of the Graduation Project process
- Signs and returns all required forms

Anyone from the community who is 21 years of age or older that has a background on the student's chosen topic or is considered to be an expert in the field the student is researching for the project may serve as a graduation project mentor. All community-based mentors must be screened through the CMS Volunteer process and approved prior to serving as a mentor.

Mentors who are not CMS employees must submit an application and be approved to volunteer by the Office of Strategic Partnerships. Mentors must also consent to a background check. Ideally, students should select their own mentors. Mentors should have an expertise or background in the student's topic that will assist the student in the successful completion of the Graduation Project.

Additional information about the role of mentor can be accessed on the district website.

MENTOR DOCUMENTATION

Mentor Confirmation

Mentor agrees to assume responsibility for mentoring.

Mentor Log

Mentor records assistance to students.

Project Proposal

Mentor (along with parent and English teacher/academic advisor) approves/disapproves student topic.

Student Project Log

Mentor initials contacts with students.

Progress Checks

Mentor (along with English teacher/academic advisor) evaluates progress of students at prescribed intervals.

Description of Product

Mentor (along with parent and English teacher/academic advisor) approves/disapproves student choice of product.

Important Guidelines

Reflections:

Students should complete a written reflection for the following components of the Graduation Project: Research Paper, Service Learning Experience/ Product, Presentation. If a student has a mentor, they must also submit a reflection for their experience in order to gain extra points. Each reflection should be a minimum of two pages hand-written (1 page typed) and should address the challenges, solutions, and growth they experienced. The reflection should focus on what the student has learned and his/her impact on the community issue they chose.

Late Submissions:

Students who turn in components of the project past the school's published deadlines are subject to the consequences set by the school.

Artifacts:

Student-generated artifacts that enhance the understanding of and demonstrate impact on the chosen issue for the service learning experience should be included in your portfolio. Only artifacts that have been created by or highlight the student are acceptable. Testimonials must directly state the student's impact.

Permissions:

Students should obtain all proper and necessary permissions before they begin any work on the Graduation Project. Parent and Advisor signatures are **REQUIRED**. Check the manual to obtain forms and include them in the portfolio. Other permissions may be required by the organization for which the student is performing the service learning experience.

Scores:

Learning from challenges, perseverance and creativity are the hallmarks of professionalism. Students will score highest for work that demonstrates mastery of skills, effective problem-solving, leadership, and honest reflection.

Evaluations:

Students should complete all three self-evaluations and obtain necessary signatures. Students also **MUST** acquire at least one evaluation of their service learning experience from someone who is directly involved. Students may include more than one evaluation if doing so enhances the judges understanding of the quality of the student's work. All evaluations should be included in the portfolio.

Some preliminary research may be helpful to the student. By reading about a certain topic, the student may expand his/her areas of interest. Additionally, possibilities for new areas of exploration may surface. For example, if a student is not able to find precisely what he or she needs but does find usable information, it is possible for him/her to change focus while keeping the same main topic. Students may find helpful information at <http://serves.cmslearns.org>.

Students should use good judgment to be certain that the issues they choose are appropriate for presentation to a Review Board and the general public. Remember that the senior English teacher/academic advisor, the mentor, and the parent(s) of the student must approve the selection of the issue.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism

All work completed for the Graduation Project must be a student's own work and must represent his/her best effort. Students who purchased and/or copied any portion of their research paper will receive a zero (0) on the paper and will be required to complete a paper on a new topic in order to be allowed to complete the three Graduation Project components in their senior year.

Research papers, products, and visuals completed for the Graduation Project must be correctly and accurately documented. Any information that is not the student's own knowledge must be correctly cited. Direct quotations must be in quotation marks and their source must be placed in internal citations. Paraphrasing must be completely in the student's own style of writing and must also have its source placed in internal citations.

Any flagrant evidence of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero (0).

Teaching as a Product
Hopewell High School Guidelines

Teaching a class at Hopewell can qualify, in part, as a product for the Graduation Project. However, certain guidelines must be followed, as listed below.

- The student must complete the **Documentation for Partnership form** to signal that the student has secured a cooperating teacher for the experience.
- The student must **choose a course that connects to the topic's focus**. For example, a student completing a project on obesity would teach a class as part of the Health class curriculum, not a Social Studies or English class.
- The student must schedule **three pre-meetings with the cooperating teacher**. These meetings are opportunities to share the lesson plan, ask for assistance, and gain feedback prior to the teaching experience. These meetings must be documented on the GP log form.
- The student must **create a lesson plan** demonstrating activities for a full 90-minute class. The lesson plan must include:
 - A pre-test/warm-up
 - Direct Instruction
 - Independent Practice
 - Group Activity
- The student must write a **one-page reflection** assessing the lesson's success and how the experience has impacted his/her own understanding of the topic.
- The cooperating teacher must submit an **observation form**, identifying the successes and growth areas within the lesson and teaching experience.
- The student must write and deliver a **thank you note** to the cooperating teacher.
- The student must document the teaching experience with a **scrapbook** that includes:
 - A copy of the lesson plan
 - Samples of student work
 - Pictures of the experience
 - A copy of the reflection
 - A copy of the thank you note
- The class must have been taught by **December 3**.