

Developing Civically Rich Culminating Projects

What is a Culminating Project?

All students in the state of Washington are required to complete a Culminating Project to graduate. These projects provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their academic skills by planning and implementing a real project. The Culminating Project and presentations can also help students clarify what they plan to do after high school.

Each school district defines what the project includes and its deadlines. Your student will likely receive a handbook that outlines the components (paper, project, presentation and post high school plan) and how each will be evaluated.

Here are some ways you can help your student complete this project so both of you are celebrating at the end-of-the-year presentations.

Know project expectations and time lines.

This information should be given to your student early in their senior year. This information may also be available on the school's web site. Be sure you know how to get copies of the forms just in case students misplace them. Make sure you understand the purpose, expectations and timeline. And don't hesitate to ask for clarification if something is unclear.

Help students develop a project that matters to them and the community.

The *Culminating Project Student Tip Sheet* has some questions that can help students formulate a project they value. This is probably the most important step. If students choose to just "get it done" they frequently lose interest and they may even grow to resent what they are doing.

What if they cannot identify something they want to do?

Not all students will easily find engaging projects. The following questions may help you identify a potential



focus that may not be obvious to your child:

- What is something they have complained about — lack of cultural activities for youth, bullying at school, no safe ways to bike to school, difficulty getting around town, drab looking community buildings, or speeding in the neighborhood?
- Have members of your family been impacted by a disease, homelessness, obesity, a learning disability, or mental illness?
- Has your family been active in a religious or cultural organization that they enjoy?
- What are their interests and passions? What type of activities do they enjoy?

Students can develop projects that build upon these personal experiences. By working with neighborhood associations, cities or school districts students can enliven the quality of life in their schools.

Check out this web site to learn what others have done: <http://www.youthactivism.org>

Be Inventive

When students approach a community organization they provide them with a list of standard volunteer opportunities. Many of these will not engage students because they do not encourage youth to use their unique gifts and talents. Help your students approach an agency to develop a project that they might not have considered. The very process of inventing a project helps students develop a greater sense of ownership.

Concern/ Hope	Talents/ Gifts	Project Possibilities	Civic Action (sustainable; impacts policy)
More beautiful community	Visual Artist	Design and paint a mural for the community	Establish a youth advisory board for the local mural society
Too many animals in shelter	Web Design Marketing	Develop a youth-friendly web site about adoptions	Establish an on-going youth web presence on the Humane Society's web site. Establish links between this site and key community web sites.
Loneliness / depression for youth with long-term illness	Video games	Host a video game events at hospital care center	Work with hospital to establish a program.
Positive after school options for youth	Can relate to kids who do not feel they have a place to go.	Work with Parks Department to establish an after school program that is built around interests of students in your neighborhood elementary school.	Work with the city to develop a local levy to fund after school youth programs.

Finding Mentors and Allies

While many students have family members or community connections with people, others need adults who can provide helpful knowledge, skills and relationships. Help your students find young people and adults who share their interests and can support students as they refine, plan and implement the project.

Who has the knowledge/skills that can help with the project?

Who believes in your child and enjoys working with teens?

Who is willing to provide support throughout the process?

What resources can your student's school or teachers help connect them with?



Consider finding more than one person so they can assist with different stages of the project and so someone is available throughout the project.

When student meet with their Community Mentors it is helpful

if they bring a short explanation of the project's purpose, their hopes, the project timeline and required paperwork. It may be helpful for students to practice what they want to say before meeting or talking with their community resource. First impressions and clarity can make all the difference.

SAFETY!!



Be sure any community mentors have completed background checks and all meetings need to occur in a public, supervised location. Information about background checks and safety should be available in the Culminating Project Guidebook provided by your school.

Who can help?

Start with people you know – friends, relatives, church members, family members. See if the school's Culminating Project Advisors or Career Specialist can identify a community member who might help.

Reduce Procrastination!!

Because these projects are supposed to be done **by students** and on their own time, many students have a tendency to procrastinate. Help your student find a system that reminds them of the various deadlines. To avoid hounding and reprimanding, clarify with your students how you can help them meet **their goals** and deadlines. Once they have a plan you need to back off so they can take responsibility for the project.

Getting a Jumpstart

Some juniors will help other students do their projects. This both helps the seniors and helps your child learn first-hand the steps of the project.

Summer volunteer or internship experiences can help students acquire helpful skills and/or interests.

If possible, encourage your child to explore lots of possibilities before they finalize their plan.



SERVICE adds value

Infusing the project with service will enhance its value for the student and the community. Service enriches the project because

- Authentic projects are more genuinely valued by the community
- Community members will be more motivated if the project contributes to the community.
- Civic projects develop important citizenship skills and foster a sense of caring and empathy.



The Self Interests of Service

Completing a project that helps the community also

- Gives students an advantage on college admission and scholarships.
- Helps define career and/or college interests.
- Strengthens resumes

SAFETY!!

Be careful not to put students in harms way.

Check out the **Culminating Project Safety Tip Sheet** or district guidelines to help

you plan a safe project. Even though students are to plan and implement the project on their own, they need parents to help them think through the project to prevent problems they may not foresee. Many districts have certain prohibited activities so be sure you comply with these guidelines.

