

CAPSTONE PRESENTATION DAY

THE CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT



After making their signature presentations of their Newark High School Capstone Project April 4th, members of the Class of 2017 were breathing sighs of relief and expressing great satisfaction because they'd successfully reached the required benchmark of their high school career.

NHS Assistant Principal Ryan Wagner, who has been the overseer of the Capstone Program since he began working at the high school nearly two years ago, said students and staff more than exceeded his expectations.

"Yesterday (April 4th) was incredible and very rewarding. I loved seeing all the hard work pay off . . . it was great seeing students making their presentations and afterward, when they learned from Mr. Roote or myself they'd passed and we congratulated them, many expressed how happy, and relieved, they were," Wagner said.

The Capstone Project is made up of several required components and the Class of 2017 was the first to have to successfully complete all of them in order to graduate.

It includes completion of:

- 20 volunteer community service hours.
- 20 healthy choice journal entries about involvement in various extra-curricular activities and about things they learned in health classes.
- A one-page paper in 10th grade espousing both sides of an argument and a conclusion.
- A three-to-four page senior research paper.
- Presenting their Capstone project in front of a faculty panel. The 8-12-minute presentation on a smart board typically included

pictures of the student; a favorite quote or two; insights about their high school experience; an explanation of and findings of their 12th grade research paper; and discussion about their future plans. Then members of the panel, made up of NHS and Newark Middle School faculty and staff, asked questions of the student before evaluating their presentation, based on a rubric, in private.

Presentations were made by approximately 160 NHS students during several 30-minute sessions in classrooms throughout the high school. High school and middle school students only had a half-day session April 4th because the entire faculty and staff from both schools served as panelists in the presentations.

Wagner said much of the credit for the successful completion of the Capstone projects by students and the success of their unveiling April 4th is largely due to the ongoing work of Capstone co-coordinators Katie Ganter, who also teaches 12th grade English and Jenn Johnson, who also teaches 10th grade math; Amy Lannon, who teaches the Finger Lakes Community College Gemini English 101 and 103 courses at NHS; John Dalton, who teaches AP English courses at NHS; and Debora Barry, a teacher assistant who provides support for both the Capstone and NHS work experience programs.





But he also emphasized the first Capstone Presentation Day was also such a success because it was a “whole school effort.”

“I want to thank everyone for their positivity, support and participation April 4th. Everyone had a hand in making yesterday a great day for Newark and it is appreciated. Thank you,” Wagner said April 5th.

Before the presentations began April 4th Principal Tom Roote briefly spoke to faculty and staff that would be involved in the day and thanked many who’d been involved in the Capstone Project

“Mr. Wagner, Ms. Barry, Ms. Johnson and Ms. Ganter thank you for your work coordinating the overall student effort in service, literacy, digital media and healthy choices. Ms. Cline from the Health and PE Department, Mr. Dalton and the English Department and Mr. Eakins and the Social Studies Department, thank you for your curricular adjustments and flexibility in the classroom to support students as they sought to meet the literacy based portions of the Capstone requirement. Ms. McGavisk and the counseling office thank you for your work “moving” kids in the most non-traditional means towards the requirement. Finally, thank you Mr. Cook and our District Office and the Board of Education and everyone with a stake in our student success. Without you the student drive to perform school

and community service per the Capstone requirement would have never happened.”

The day after Capstone Presentation Day, many reflected on the experience.

“As each student presented, I could not help but to think about the sacrifices made by our teacher assistants, monitors, coaches, nurses, counselors, and custodians. Their work ensured that students were ready to present and to do so admirably. I recall fondly, a moment three years ago, when health teacher Ms. Karen Cline pulled me aside and pledged her support for the healthy choices portion of the graduation requirement. She casually stated that she would like to work with kids on their journals in her health class. Pledges like hers have occurred in our social studies department regarding the sophomore paper, the English department regarding the senior paper and across the entire school regarding community service. Tuesday was a great day for all of us,” Roote said.

“Mr. Roote and I were in the room with the first group of students that had completed the first round of Capstone presentations yesterday,” Wagner said. “Going into today, we were not completely sure what to expect as this is the first Capstone presentation day since the program began in 2013-2014. We were both excited to hear students talking about their presentations with their peers while they anxiously waited for one of us to talk to them. You could feel the positive energy in the room

and sense of accomplishment. As the day went on, I heard one positive comment after another from staff and parents expressing how impressive our students were. The students absolutely exceeded my expectations. I was eager to hear their perspective on the day and this is what a few of them shared:

“It was a very helpful experience . . . People always talk about preparing for college and I think this helps us prepare for college . . . I liked that I knew the teachers and had my aunt there to support me . . . It was also meaningful to talk about my personal experiences . . . ”

“There was a lot of academic pressure put on the Capstone presentation, but it was not that hard . . . It was a great experience . . . It was nice to look back to see how much we’ve grown and be able to share that with people who have educated us and our family. . . ”

“I really liked it . . . It gave us the opportunity to speak in front of people and provided us with skills we will need in a professional interview . . . I am going to study business so it’s very valuable for me . . . I have to be able to speak in front of people to sell a product. . . ”

“I liked it . . . I was happy with my panel . . . I would not have presented in front of people I didn’t know if you guys didn’t make me . . . It helped me step outside my comfort zone . . . I don’t normally do that.”

Ganter, who worked with 11th and 12th graders in the Capstone Program said while many seniors April 4th “were nervous” about making their presentations, they were happy about doing it after it was over.

“The kids thought it was positive because they had to do public speaking but also share how they’ve grown since they began high school,” Ganter said. *“I think it was a great experience for students to showcase what they’ve learned inside and outside of the classroom during their high school years. And they liked the feedback they received from their teachers.”*

She said NHS and NMS faculty alike reported it was one of the greatest experiences of their teaching careers and it was wonderful to see how kids had progressed over the years.

“All the staff was really supportive of the entire process and it was very encouraging,” Ganter said.

Johnson, who works with 9th and 10th graders in the program, expressed similar sentiments.

“Many seniors were nervous presenting in front of a panel, but they all faced that fear and I think they did awesome,” she said. *“Overall, it was a great experience for staff members as well as the senior class. I truly enjoyed the experience. . .”*

“The Capstone presentations gave students the opportunity to reflect upon their growth and accomplishments over the past four years of high school,” Lannon said. *“Many were proud of how much they have achieved and emphasized their confidence about their readiness for the future. Students worked in class to create a digital presentation that captured their academic, social and physical development throughout high school. Much of the presentation assignment required self-reflection of their high school involvement and progression into adulthood.”*

“I felt that the first Capstone Day was a great success,” Dalton said. *“I felt the students took a great deal of pride in what they accomplished and what they prepared. You could sense this through the level of concern that was in the building during the lead up to Tuesday along with the manner they approached the task. It was also great to see them dressed up. Speaking to them today, the students expressed a great deal of pride in themselves and were pleased they went through this. Some didn't like it because of nerves, but they were aware that presenting and speaking in front of crowds will help them down the road.”*

After they made their presentations April 4th, Sarinah Hernandez who will be on a pre-med track at the College of Western in Ohio next fall said she liked doing the presentation that included information about her senior research paper on the alleged corruption in the pharmaceutical industry.

“ . . . It was good preparation for college because you are going to be tapped to do these kinds of things there,” she said. *“I think it is a good end to high school. Putting things together and see the growth from your freshman to your senior year.”*

Tiffany Gilligan, who will attend American University in the fall on her path to becoming a lawyer someday _ and whose presentation included an overview of her senior research paper on the growing use by U.S. Presidents of executive power _ said the thing she liked most about presenting April 4th was that it was before a random panel of teachers.

“It took us out of our comfort zones and helped us to better prepare for the unknowns of college,” she said.





Ian MacTaggart, who will begin studies in bio-medical engineering in the fall at either RPI or the University of Buffalo, said he enjoyed the presentation experience that included him explaining his research paper on the societal effects of pornography.

MacTaggart said the best part of developing his presentation was that it helped him to realize how much he had grown as a student and an individual during his high school career.

"I think it is beneficial for each and every student to have exposure to and experience doing presentations," he said.

Brian Sharp, who is undecided about which college to attend, but wants to become a physical therapist, also enjoyed his presentation that included discussion of his senior research paper of the negative effects of receiving participation trophies.

"I hear there are a lot of presentations in college and this introduced us to the process of putting one together," he said. "I also like the fact the presentation incorporated us and how we experienced high school. It was personal to us."

"It has been rewarding to hear students reflect on their presentations as a valuable experience that helped them become more college and career ready," Wagner said.

Superintendent Matt Cook agreed.

"When I came to Newark four years ago, Capstone plan was in place already and I'm so happy to have been part of the team to carry it out," Superintendent Matt Cook said. "The seniors who just did such an amazing job on their presentations were freshmen when I started here, so I feel like we have gone through this process together. Hearing them reflect back on their own growth was a powerful learning experience for all of us!"