

# AASL Executive Summary

## AASL Senior/Capstone Project Task Force Report

May 2014

### INTRODUCTION

The charge of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Senior Project/Capstone Project Task Force was to gather examples of exemplary implementation of student-centered Senior/Capstone Projects which involve librarians as integral to the information literacy process. The task force was expected to accomplish the following:

- Establish base definition of student-centered Senior/Capstone Projects involving school librarians as information literacy specialists.
- Develop a plan for locating examples of exemplary student-centered Senior/Capstone Projects.
- Gather examples of exemplary Senior/Capstone Projects.
- Identify Senior/Capstone support networks on state, national, and international levels.
- Develop plans for sharing information gathered.

Task Force members include: Chairman, Gail March (Londonderry, NH), Susan Yutzey (Columbus, OH), Brian Collier (Atlanta, GA), Carrie Turner (Omaha, NE), Janet Boltjes (Gilbert, SC), Amy Gillespie (Bryn Mawr, PA), Sarah Justice (Rosman, NC) Sandra Latzer (Englewood, NJ), Devona Pendergrass (Mountain Home, AR), and Karyn Silverman (New York, NY).

## DEFINITION

The first task of the Task Force was to formulate a definition of a Senior/Capstone Project. After an exchange of ideas on the ALA Connect site, the following definition was established:

*Senior/Capstone Projects are research-oriented courses driven by student interest rather than curricular mandates. Guidance for these projects is given collaboratively by classroom teachers, school librarians and school staff members who contribute to different facets of the projects. These projects should challenge students to direct their own course of investigation, and encourage incorporation of “real-world” resources such as professionals working in the field. Successful completion of the course requires demonstration of the student's mastery of receptive and expressive language skills, as well as the increasingly complex critical thinking and research skills required to produce an original product.*

## SURVEY

Following the establishment of a definition of these projects, the committee identified the need to assess the current involvement of librarians in the projects. Surveying high school librarians was determined to be the best way to gather the information. Questions on the survey were designed to assess librarians' contributions in several areas: administrative (project design, review, and coordination); instructional/assessment (group or individual); and professional development (teachers, mentors, parents.) The first question of the survey asked whether the school had a Senior/Capstone Project; eight questions were designed to determine involvement on a five point scale; two questions asked for examples of specific activities the librarians took part in; one question solicited demographic information and the remaining question asked for voluntary contact information. The survey was sent to members of AASL and affiliate organizations at the end April 2013, and was open for responses until May 17, 2013. A copy of the survey and summary graphs of responses are available at the end of this report.

## RESULTS

Of the 248 survey respondents, 81% are building-level school librarians, 8% are district or supervisor level, and 3% are non-certified library staff. One hundred fifty-two respondents (61%) confirmed having a senior project or capstone project as a curricular requirement or elective at their schools. Questions on the survey were designed to evaluate librarians' role in several areas: administrative (project design, review, and coordination) instructional (group or individual) and professional development (for teachers, mentors or parents.) Respondents were also able to give specific examples of their roles in these projects.

The respondents' involvement in the design of projects and development of project guidelines was spread fairly evenly along the scale from a large extent of involvement to no involvement. Eighty percent of the respondents had some input into Senior/Capstone Projects at their schools, while 20% had no input at all. The results were similar for involvement in reviewing and revising project design. Fewer librarians are responsible for coordinating the projects. Thirty-five percent reported moderate/large involvement in coordination, while 52% reported little or no involvement.

Not surprisingly, the greatest involvement was in instruction on the research process. Thirty-nine percent of respondents reported being involved in one-on-one instruction to a large extent and 26% to a moderate extent. Only 9% were not involved at all. Thirty-one percent were involved in classroom instruction to a large extent, while 22% reported moderate involvement. A sizeable 25 % were not involved in classroom instruction.

Librarians were less involved with assessment of senior projects. Fifty-two percent had little or no input into developing the assessment tools, and 48% had little or no involvement in the assessment of projects. However, 20% of librarians did have input into the assessment design, and 18% contributed to the assessment of projects.

Finally, the area with the least involvement was professional development for mentors and parents. Only 5% reported a large involvement, while 69% reported little or no involvement.

In summary, while there are many librarians who are involved in Senior/Capstone Projects through instruction in the research process, many others are taking on leadership roles in these projects. The wide variety of ways these librarians impact the success of senior projects can provide examples for other librarians to be more involved in their schools.

## EXEMPLARS

Utilizing the information from the survey, the committee reviewed the programs which provided contact information. Particular attention was paid to the examples of administrative, instructional and professional development contributions. In the fall 2013, the AASL Senior/Capstone Project Task Force identified nine exemplar candidates. An e-mail was sent out to the school librarians asking for demographic information and specific examples of instruction, assessment, and links to Senior/Capstone Project materials or resources. Five school librarians responded to the e-mail with the requested demographic data that can be found in the AASL Senior/Capstone Project Table as well as links or attachments. One of our Task Force members followed up with the school librarian via telephone if the school librarian requested or if additional information was needed. At the AASL meeting in November, Task Force members Gail March and Susan Yutzey met with the school librarian from Bolton High School and with the former school librarian from North Newton High School (Kevin McGrath) who was co-presenting with Stephen Chinosi on their Senior/Capstone Project. As a result of the conversation with Newton North, the Task Force now has six exemplars.

As can be seen from the AASL Senior/Capstone Project Table available at the end of the report, all of the exemplars are found in public schools; however, they represent a cross-section of public schools in terms of size (360 to 1800); location (suburban, rural, city); number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (7% to 80%); and type of school (charter, technical, college prep). For two of the exemplars the Senior/Capstone Project is an elective for students. The exemplars also represent a cross-section of the United States with one in Hawaii, two in Massachusetts, one in Michigan, one in Connecticut, and one in

western Pennsylvania. Finally, in four of the exemplars, information about the Senior/Capstone Project is found online.

A brief overview of the Senior/Capstone Project exemplars is found below. For more in-depth coverage, please refer to the URL found in the Table or contact the school librarian for their materials.

### **Bolton High School, Bolton CT | Claire Fazzina – School Librarian**

Graduation requirements for Bolton High School students include an education/career portfolio, a health/physical education portfolio, a minimum of 30 hours of community service, and a Senior/Capstone Project. The focus of the Senior Demonstration “is to engage each student in a personalized learning experience.” The Senior/Capstone Project enables students to apply and to demonstrate interdisciplinary skills and knowledge while investigating a specialized area of interest. Each student has the support of an adult mentor or independent study teacher and a faculty advisor whose role it is to guide the student through the project. A Senior Demonstration Evaluation Committee assesses the written components including the journals and research paper; assesses rubric scores of presentation on Demonstration Evening; and assesses student’s self-assessment. The research final draft is due in early January with multiple steps leading up to it. Two faculty members are responsible for the Senior Demonstration. Available on the website are two documents entitled *Senior Capstone Introduction* and *Senior Capstone Manual* as well as deadline dates for components of the Senior/Capstone Project, such as project proposal form, statement of understanding form, adult mentor information and agreement form, technology request form, and reflective journals.

### **City Charter High School, Pittsburgh, PA | Michelle Fossum – School Librarian**

City Charter High School offers an “extraordinary research program” (Fossum) that includes a certified high school librarian at each grade level. The Research curriculum culminates in two trimester-long Graduation Project classes that are taken in the junior and senior years. The City High Graduation Project weaves together a deep exploration of an area of student interest with the research and technological skills that they have developed during their high school years. Successful completion of the Graduation Project course at a proficient or advanced level is necessary for gaining a City High Diploma. Graduation Projects combine a written component (Literature Review), a Tangible Project (Action Plan), and an Oral Presentation before a panel of business and community leaders. Recent Graduation Projects have included a Prom Dress Fashion Show benefitting UPMC Cancer Institute, a Behavioral Study for a Young Epidemiologist Competition, and the organization of a Poetry Slam at a local art gallery. Additional information and rubrics are available upon request.

### **Greater Lawrence Vocational School, Andover, MA | Mary Millette – School Librarian**

The 2012–2013 school year was the first year for the Senior/Capstone Project beginning with the junior class. GLVS curriculum focuses on both academic and career. During their first year, students explore career areas their first semester followed by shop their second semester. During their sophomore year, students take a half-day shop class in a career field they have selected and a half-day of academics in English/Language Arts, math, social studies, and science. In both their junior and senior years, students alternate a week in shop and a week in academics for the entire year. During their sophomore year, students

must write a reflection of their experience in their shop class each quarter. Beginning in the junior year, each student selects an area of shop and researches it. For example, a student in auto tech might research an aspect of hybrid cars. The shop teacher works with the students to develop the research question and is responsible for the content; the English/Language Arts teacher works with the students to develop the writing, including mechanics. In the senior year each student must develop some aspect of his/her research paper into a project. Each student keeps a portfolio of writings and reflections. School librarian Mary Millette created a pathfinder for the 11th-grade students (11th CAPstone Research Paper) that includes: tasks; research sources; and research tools. Inquiries about the project should be directed to Millette.

### **Konawaena High School, Kealahou, HI | Woody Plaut – School Librarian**

An extensive Senior/Capstone Project manual is found online. The Senior/Capstone Project is elective and students must register with a counselor for the one-credit course. The project is organized around the student's solution to an actionable problem. The student must identify a problem either in the community, on the island, in the state, in the United States, or in the world that needs a solution. The student researches the problem; writes an argumentative or persuasive research paper on the problem; and creates a project that, in part, addresses a solution to the problem. There are four phases to the year-long exploration. Phase I includes a series of self-reflection activities designed to help the student hone in on an area of interest as well as find a faculty advisor. In Phase II students pick an actionable problem (each student submits a proposal for approval to the design committee via the senior project coordinator). Phase III includes a thesis-driven research paper on an approved essential question, abstract, completion of the Senior Project activity (60 hours), journal and photographic record of the project, and log of monthly meetings with a faculty adviser. Phase IV involves a formal presentation before a panel of community members, teachers, administrators, parents, peer students (grades 9–11), and counselors, as well as an evaluation by the mentor. Rubrics used are aligned to the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards.

### **Newton North High School, Newton, MA | Annette Tate – School Librarian**

Newton CAPS is the acronym for the Senior/Capstone Project. It is an elective. Students submit proposals and are selected to participate. At their AASL Conference presentation, Kevin McGrath and Stephen Chinosi reported that approximately 160 students participate in CAPS. CAPS students enroll in a research class rather than senior English for eighteen weeks. During their last quarter students engage in a service project. The CAPS Research Curriculum for 2014 can be found here: <http://newtoncaps.org/caps-senior-year-project/syp-curriculum>.

### **Swan Valley High School, Saginaw, MI | Kay Wejrowski – School Librarian**

The Senior/Capstone Project is required. Students select a topic about which they are passionate. Instruction by school librarian Kay Wejrowski includes: selection of anchor texts, research, and presentation skills. Students are strongly encouraged to complete a community project or outreach program as part of the Senior/Capstone Project. Examples of such community projects include: coaching, mission trips, fundraising for charities, volunteering at hospitals. Inquiries about the Senior/Capstone Project should be directed to Wejrowski.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, the Task Force gathered information about resources and support networks for Senior/Capstone Projects. An annotated list can be located at the end of this report. It includes organizations such as the National Service Learning Clearinghouse and the Senior Project Center. A publication of The Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center provides a summary of Senior/Capstone courses in four states. In addition, resources from states where projects are endorsed and supported on a state-wide level are listed. A newly established consortium led by Jeff Hooper at the Thatcher School in California will be holding a Summer Summit in 2014 to establish partnerships with schools to share resources and ideas about Senior/Capstone Projects.

This preliminary report on the implementation of student-centered Senior/Capstone Projects will provide school librarians with information about the many ways in which they can be involved in such projects. In addition, it offers links to multiple resources in the United States, including exemplars with specific contacts across a range of public schools.

## AASL Senior/Capstone Project Exemplars

NAME OF SCHOOL	PUBLIC OR PRIVATE	DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL	STUDENT POPULATION	REQUIRED OR ELECTIVE	WEBSITE URL OR CONTACT
<b>Bolton High School (CT)</b>	Public	Rural, suburban community with a small percentage of students from Hartford and Columbia	360; 7% eligible for free and reduced lunch	Required	URL: <a href="http://www.boltonpublicschools.com/bhs/page.php?pid=110">http://www.boltonpublicschools.com/bhs/page.php?pid=110</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:claire.fazzina@boltonct.org">claire.fazzina@boltonct.org</a>
<b>City Charter High School (PA)</b>	Public (charter)	Technology infused public school located in downtown Pittsburgh with 85% from Pittsburgh and 15% from surrounding districts	652 students; 69% eligible for free and reduced lunch	Required	URL: <a href="http://cityhigh.org/academics/project/">http://cityhigh.org/academics/project/</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:fossum@cityhigh.org">fossum@cityhigh.org</a>
<b>Greater Lawrence Vocational School (MA)</b>	Public	Regional vocational school for Andover, North Andover, Methuen, and Lawrence	1300 students; 80% eligible for free and reduced lunch	Required (first year 2013-14)	Contact school librarian, Mary Millett <a href="mailto:mmillette@glts.net">mmillette@glts.net</a>
<b>Konawaena High School (HI)</b>	Public	Semi-rural; Title 1; West Hawaii on the Big Island	700 students; 52% eligible for free and reduced lunch	Elective	URL: <a href="http://konawaenahs.k12.hi.us/SP%20Forms.htm">http://konawaenahs.k12.hi.us/SP%20Forms.htm</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:woody_plaut@notes.k12.hi.us">woody_plaut@notes.k12.hi.us</a>
<b>Newton North High School (MA)</b>	Public	Suburban, 7 miles west of Boston, MA	1800 students; 11% of district are eligible for free and reduced lunch	Elective	URL: <a href="http://newtoncaps.org/caps-senior-year-project/">http://newtoncaps.org/caps-senior-year-project/</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:annette_tate@newton.k12.ma.us">annette_tate@newton.k12.ma.us</a>
<b>Swan Valley High School (MI)</b>	Public	Suburban Saginaw, MI	612 students; 30% eligible for free and reduced lunch	Required	Contact school librarian, Kay Wejrowski <a href="mailto:kwejrow@swanvalley.k12.mi.us">kwejrow@swanvalley.k12.mi.us</a>

## Tips & Ideas for Implementation

Great Schools Partnerships. 2013. "Capstone Project Definition." *The Glossary of Education Reform*. . <<http://edglossary.org/capstone-project/>> (accessed Oct. 17, 2013).

An in-depth definition of Senior/Capstone Project (and the various names by which it is known).

Partenship for Dynamic Learning, Inc. 2013. *Senior Project Center*. <<http://seniorproject.net>> (accessed Oct. 20, 2013).

A site that offers resources and training to those looking at, or already implementing, a Senior/Capstone Project.

Thacher School, n.d. *Capstone Consortium*. <<http://blogs.thacher.org/capstone/>> (accessed Oct. 20, 2013).

Resources for those with existing Senior/Capstone Projects as well as those who are looking to create one.

## Information on Individual State Implementation

### Compilation: Connecticut, Kentucky, North Carolina, Rhode Island

Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center. 2012. *High School Capstone Courses: A Review of the Literature*. Edvantia.

<[http://sites.edvantia.org/publications/arcc/ARCC\\_Capstone\\_Lit\\_Review.pdf](http://sites.edvantia.org/publications/arcc/ARCC_Capstone_Lit_Review.pdf)> (accessed Sept. 29, 2013).

An in-depth paper on the history of Senior/Capstone Projects, as well as their current statewide implementation in four different states.

### Idaho

Idaho Department of Education, n.d. *HS Graduation Requirements*.

<[http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/hs\\_grad\\_requirements](http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/hs_grad_requirements)> (accessed Oct. 20, 2013).

Idaho high school graduation requirements, which include a senior project.

### North Carolina

Public Schools of North Carolina. 2012. *North Carolina Graduation Project: Standards of Quality and Verification Process for High School Accountability*.

<<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/gradrequirements/resources/standards-of-quality.pdf>> (accessed Sept. 29, 2013).

The guidelines for schools that are implementing the North Carolina Graduation Project (NCGP).

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d. "Overview and Getting Started." *North Carolina Graduation Project*.

<<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/graduationproject/overview/>> (accessed Oct. 20, 2013).

A guide to implementing the North Carolina Graduation Project including sample guides from various counties.

### South Dakota

South Dakota Department of Education. 2010. *South Dakota Senior Experience Framework*.

<[http://doe.sd.gov/octe/documents/SrE\\_Intro.pdf](http://doe.sd.gov/octe/documents/SrE_Intro.pdf)> (accessed Sept. 29, 2013).

An overview of criteria for South Dakota's senior project requirement.

### Washington

State of Washington: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d. "Complete a Culminating Project (Senior Project)." *Graduation Requirements*.

<<http://www.k12.wa.us/GraduationRequirements/Requirement-CulminatingProject.aspx>> (accessed Oct. 20, 2013).

Site contains an overview of Washington state requirements as well as samples of projects.

## Senior/Capstone Project Survey

### Calling all high school librarians

The AASL Senior Project/Capstone Project Task Force is in need of your input about how you are involved with the Senior Project/Capstone Project in your school/district. The Task Force has created a short questionnaire that addresses the potential role(s) or tasks of the high school librarian in the Senior Project/Capstone Project. These potential roles or tasks include but are not limited to: administrative, instruction/assessment, and professional development.

*Senior/Capstone projects are defined as: research-oriented courses driven by student interest rather than curricular mandates. Guidance for these projects is given collaboratively by classroom teachers, school librarians and school staff members who contribute to different facets of the projects. These projects should challenge students to direct their own course of investigation, and encourage incorporation of real-world resources such as professionals working in the field. Successful completion of the course requires demonstration of the student's mastery of receptive and expressive language skills, as well as the increasingly complex critical thinking and research skills required to produce an original product. (Senior/Capstone Task Force 2013)*

**As a librarian involved with the Senior/Capstone Project at your school, please respond to the questions about your role:**

Does your school or district curriculum include a required and/or elective Senior/Capstone Project?

- Yes
- No

To what extent do you provide input into the development of project guidelines and requirements?

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all

To what extent to you provide input into the review of the overall project design, changes, and/or revisions?

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all

To what extent do you provide input into the creation of assessment tools used in evaluating the project?

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- a little extent
- Not at all

To what extent do you coordinate the Senior/Capstone Project?

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all

**To help us understand the ways in which librarians coordinate Senior/Capstone Projects, please provide two examples of how you coordinate the project:**

To what extent do you conduct classroom instruction on the research process for Senior/Capstone Project students?

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all

To what extent do you provide one-on-one instruction on the research process (e.g., topic development, developing searches, evaluating, selecting, analyzing information) with students?

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all

To what extent do you contribute to the final assessment of the Senior/Capstone Project (e.g., assess works cited, paper, service hours)

- To a large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To a little extent
- Not at all

**To help us understand the librarian's instructional role with Senior/Capstone Project, please provide two examples of how you instruct students for the project.**

To what extent do you provide professional development for mentors and/or parents about the Senior/Capstone Project?

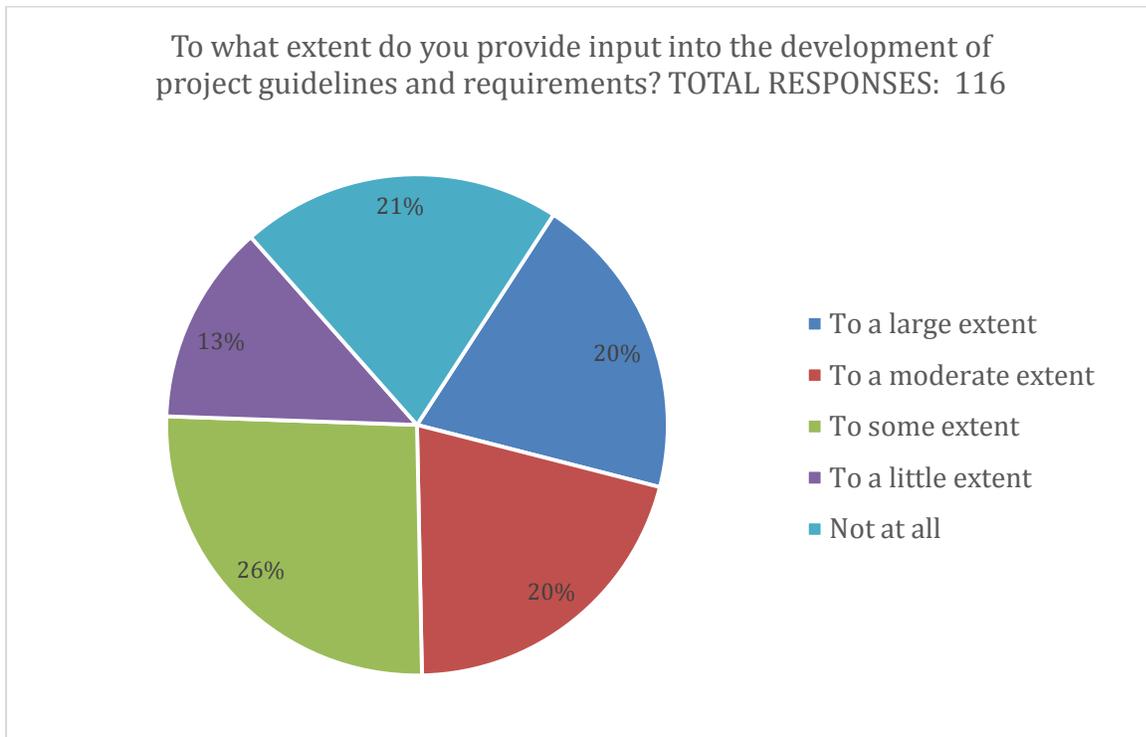
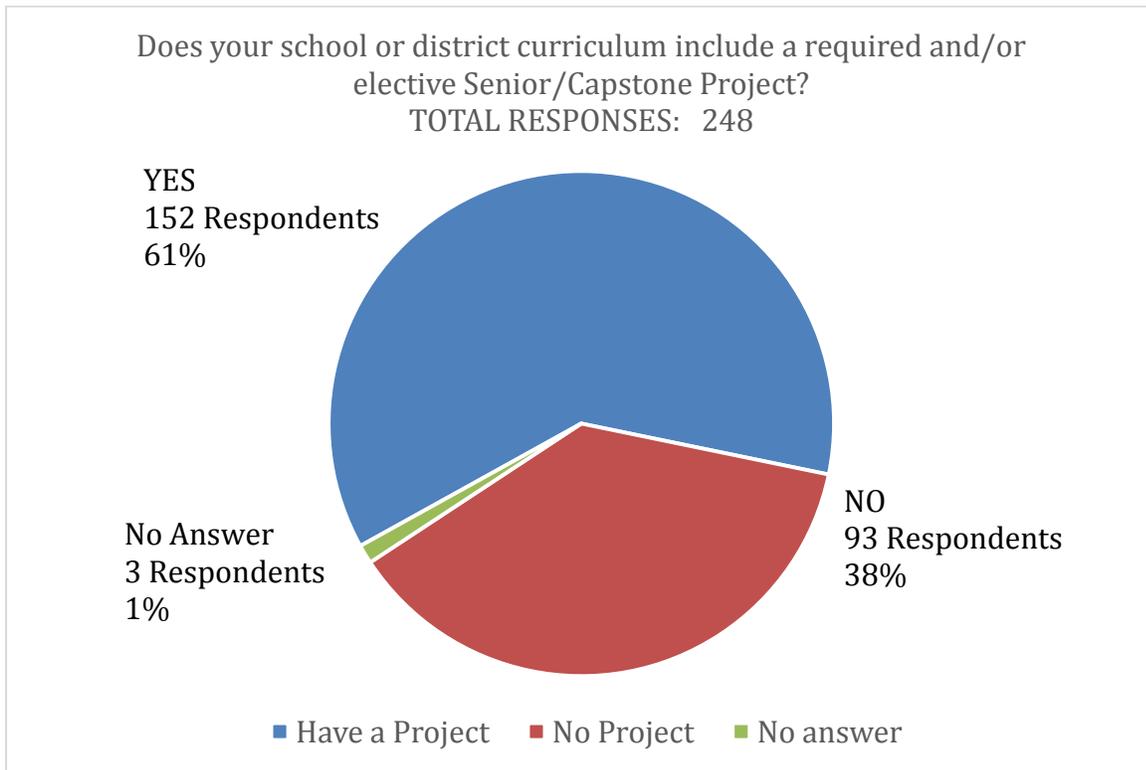
- To large extent
- To a moderate extent
- To some extent
- To little extent
- Not at all

Which of the following best describes your current position?

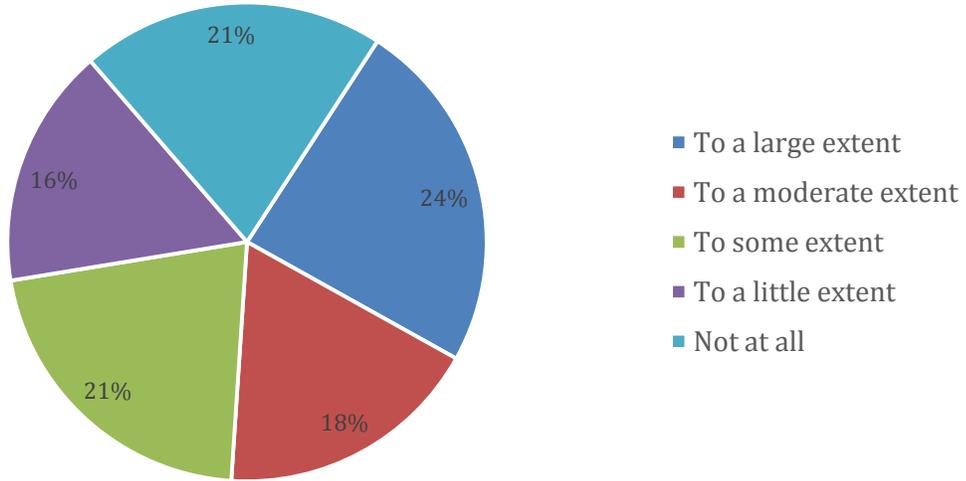
- District-level/supervisor
- Building-level school librarian
- School library staff (non-certified)
- Other (please specify)

If you would like to assist the task force in identifying exemplary senior/capstone projects, please include your name, school name and e-mail address so that we may contact you about the work you do in your school.

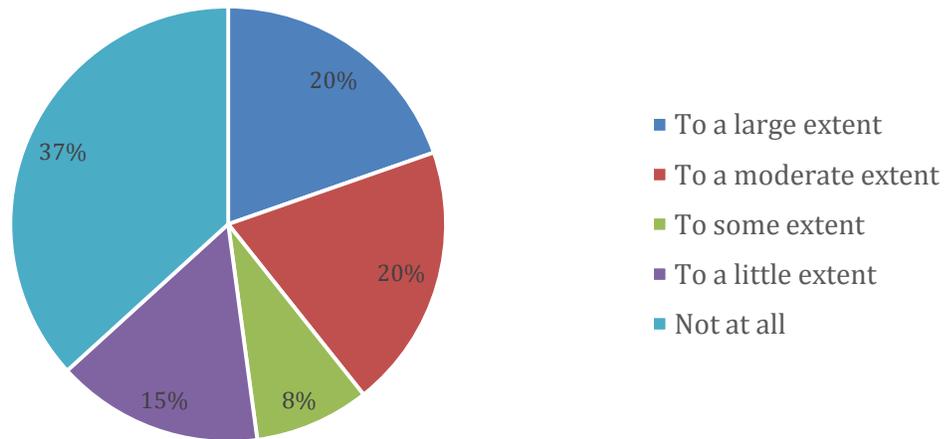
## Survey Result Summaries



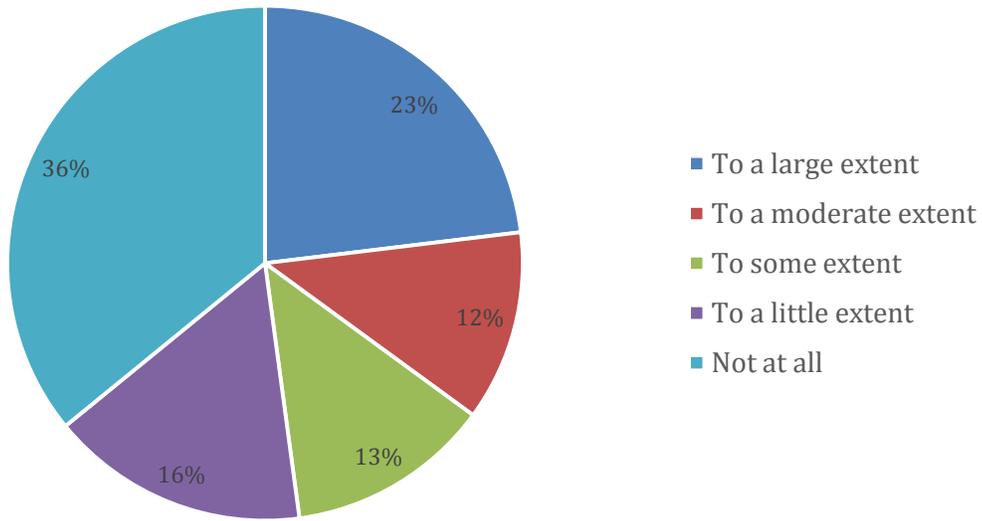
To what extent do you provide input into the review of the overall project design, changes, and/or revisions?  
TOTAL RESPONSES: 117



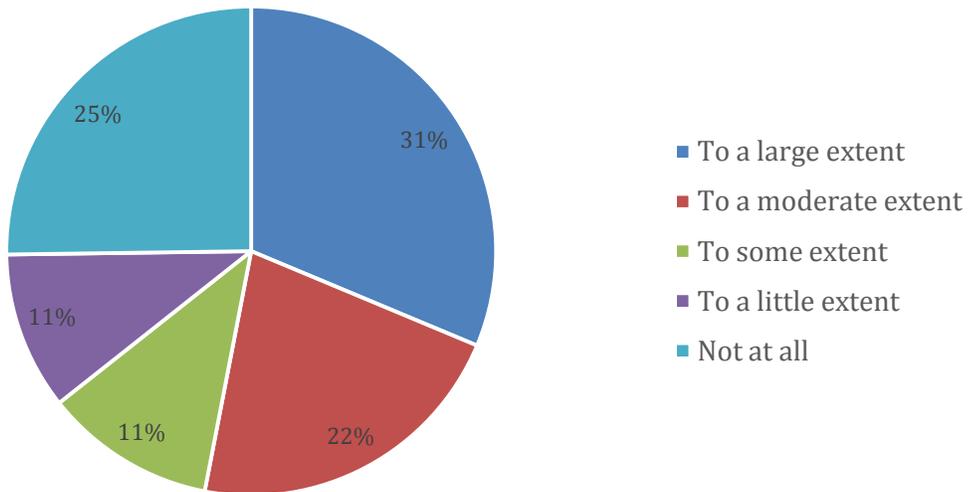
To what extent do you provide input into the creation of assessment tools used in evaluating the project? TOTAL RESPONSES: 117



To what extent do you coordinate the Senior/Capstone Project?  
TOTAL RESPONSES: 117

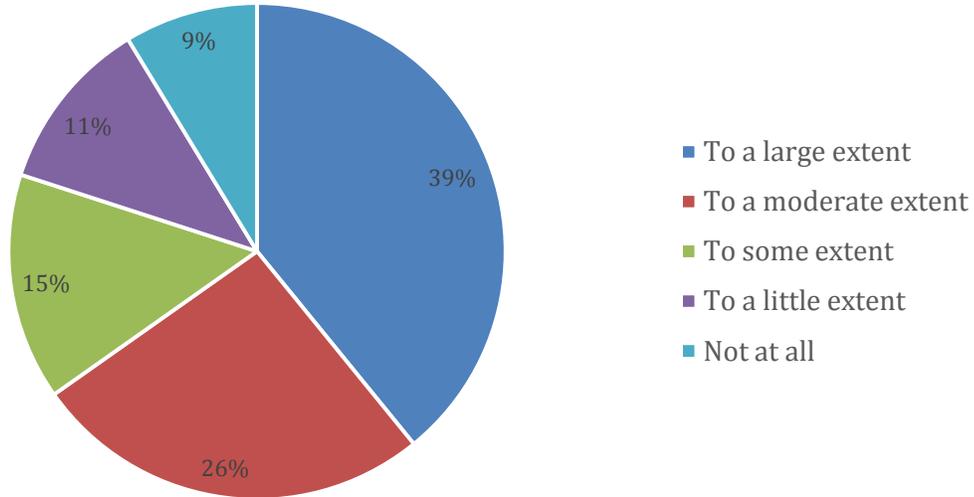


To what extent do you conduct classroom instruction on the  
research process for Senior/Capstone Project students?  
TOTAL RESPONSES: 115



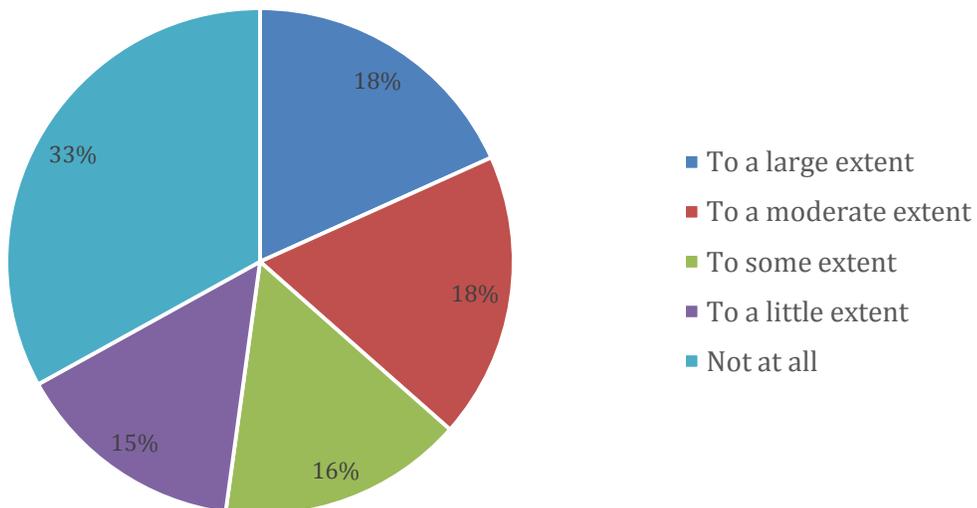
To what extent do you provide one-on-one instruction on the research process (e.g., topic development, developing searches, evaluating, selecting, analyzing information) with students?

TOTAL RESPONSES: 115

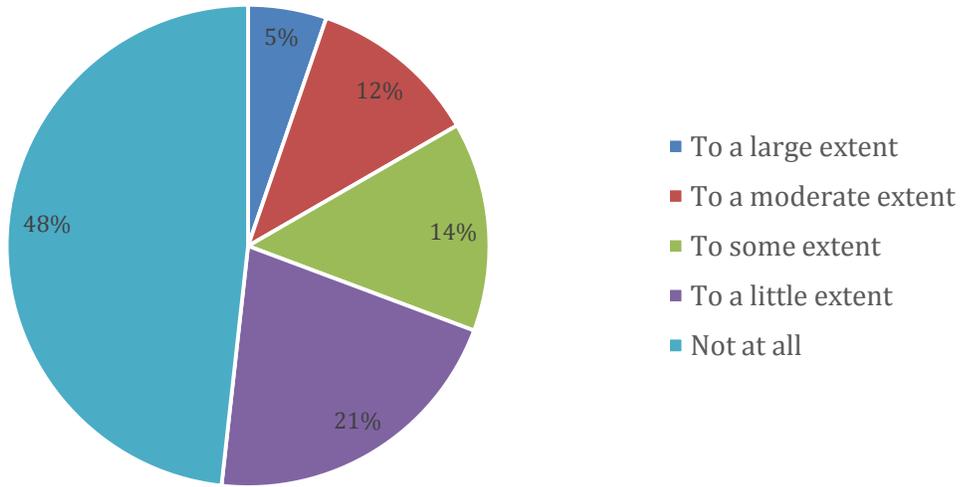


To what extent do you contribute to the final assessment of the Senior/Capstone Project?

TOTAL RESPONSES: 115



To what extent do you provide professional development for mentors and/or parents about the Senior/Capstone Project?  
 TOTAL RESPONSES: 114



To what extent do you coordinate the Senior/Capstone Project?  
 TOTAL RESPONSES: 112

