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Students' Capstone Projects Show Off Knowledge Depth and Technology Skills

Middle-school students from Cincinnati Public Schools took their work to GE Aviation recently to show off their Capstone Projects — in-depth, technology-rich looks at topics students learned about in core classes.

It was a fitting venue — situated among displays of giant GE aircraft engines — for Capstone Projects to shine, Board President Eve Bolton told students.

"This is a Job Fair, and you didn't know it!" Bolton joked. "GE is looking for future employees....You all are pioneers because all the kids who follow you will be learning differently. You are our first wave of new-curriculum students."

The Capstone Project Showcase at GE's Rowe Learning Centre in Evendale featured projects from students at 40 CPS schools in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Districtwide, about 2,000 students in 50 CPS schools completed Capstone Projects this school year, the first year CPS placed Capstones in middle-school grades.

In 2012-13, CPS will introduce Capstone Projects to students in fourth and fifth grades, said Deputy Superintendent Laura Mitchell.

Though challenging to accomplish, the Capstones proved to be powerful learning tools, students and teachers said.

"I've been at CPS for two years and a teacher for 10 years, and this is the best project I've ever been involved with," said Marcy Berns, a teacher at Roberts Paideia Academy. "It gives all students opportunities to get engaged, even youngsters who are not good at expressing themselves with paper and pen. They really took to the technology."

"I learned how to use the computer to make a PowerPoint, and I did a lot of research," said Carolina, a sixth-grader at the Academy of Multilingual Immersion Studies (AMIS).

Her Capstone Project team looked into what the Black Plague in Feudal Europe taught mankind about the spread of disease and how people in present day



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Cincinnati can decrease the pollution that reaches the water supply. The topic aligned with content from her science and social studies classes.

Capstone Projects, a mainstay at colleges and CPS' high schools, were introduced into CPS' middle schools as a way to reinforce the project-based and problem-based learning emphasized in the new, more-rigorous academic content standards now being phased into the curriculum, said Carolyn Pedapati, social studies curriculum manager.

The new standards fall into two categories: Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English-language arts and mathematics, which have been adopted almost nationwide; and the revised Ohio Standards in science and social studies.

"The new Common Core standards place real value on 21st Century skills, such as technology fluency and the ability to work in teams," Pedapati said. "With the GE Foundation, we developed a long-range plan

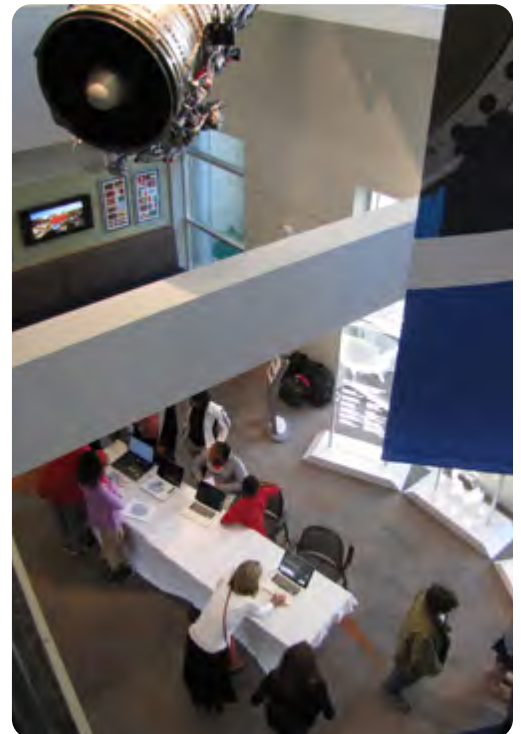
to figure out how to get students ready for the rigor of these new standards. We knew we had to start at middle school, to prepare students for high school and college."

For the middle-school Capstone Projects, students create multimedia presentations to show what they have learned, researching interdisciplinary topics aligned to the academic standards in social studies and science. Each project includes a writing portfolio piece and a PowerPoint embedded with original video.

The GE Foundation paid for the purchase of digital backpacks for students' use, with such innovative tools as MacBook Pro laptops, Sony Bloggie video cameras and Bamboo Connect tablets.

Capstone Projects demonstrate "not only the depth of the new academic standards but also highlight the way in which technology and project-based learning connect for students," according to Superintendent Mary Ronan.

Read the Capstone Driving Questions that CPS' middle-school students used as the starter for Capstone Projects.



GE Foundation