

# What is the core of the capstone education essay

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Executive Summary

What is the core of the capstone? Educational systems across the country, our state, and in our rural region of Kentucky continue a concentrated effort to improve student achievement and the accountability of that effort continues to increase. The belief that all children can learn at high levels has now been put into action and is a national and state mandate. The increased rigor required by the Common Core Standards and the increased demand for schools to graduate students College and Career Ready contribute to a sense of urgency among educators while funding for public education continues to decline resulting in schools being asked to "do more with less". The PETLL (Perpetuating Excellence in Teaching Leadership and Learning) Initiative is a response to school and district needs for school improvement that adopts an approach to school improvement efforts that leads to success from the inside out. Public school systems in the Appalachian region of Kentucky are poised to emerge as a national and international leader in rural education. The region has long been measured by the challenges that face its education systems rather than the opportunities that exist. Those opportunities include: a unified consortia of school districts committed to putting students first, the willingness to share resources and strategies in an intra-district collaborative, the capacity to engage broad cross sections of the community in a systemic process for positive change, and the drive to recreate the landscape of rural public education. A consortium of seven rural school districts and one regional Education Cooperative made the commitment to share resources, and professional learning opportunities, and also work to affect policy and protocol in an effort to connect learners to highly effective teachers and educational leaders every day through their engagement in the PETLL Pilot.

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PETLL creates systems, resources, and tools which lead to a revival in educational achievement in the Appalachian region. PETLL provides support for districts to develop effective teachers, strong principals, and engaged school communities in a collaborative effort to provide students with a personalized learning environment that will result in high student academic achievement, the reduction of learning gaps, turning around low performing schools, increased graduation rates, higher college enrollment and post-secondary completion, and citizens who are responsible and capable to participate nationally and globally in successful careers. The districts involved in the PETLL Pilot include some of the most distressed counties in Kentucky and the United States as documented in the 2010 Census Bureau Data. The Census identified the poorest counties in the nation and three of the top five counties contain PETLL participating districts. Those counties are: #2 Breathitt County; #3 Lee County; #5 Magoffin County. Reporting on the data Kentucky native, and ABC commentator, Diane Sawyer said, " I think you can argue that the history of the hills and the isolation of the hills is an added mountain to climb." The collaboration developed through the PETLL Pilot is a catalyst for positive change that breaks historical patterns of ineffective behaviors while capitalizing on the strengths of the extraordinarily resilient people who are committed to bringing about a better way of life in Appalachia. The educational community must create professional development models that are sustainable and scalable; models that can ultimately be carried out by schools and districts on a long-term basis, using their own resources (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003 ). The goal of the initiative is to create schools of excellence where every student is engaged in high quality learning, where every teacher is engaged in an intentional

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instructional growth process, and where every instructional leader is engaged in growing a staff's capability to teach at an ever-expanding level to ensure college and career readiness for every child. The major emphasis areas of the initiative are Effective Teaching, and Effective Instructional Leadership. The initiative is based on the foundational belief that we are responsible to ensure a high quality learning experience for every student and supports the creation of a system where every teacher will rise to their greatest ability level by establishing a culture of growth with excellence in instruction as the overarching goal. Within the PETLL Initiative, a professional learning culture is defined as one in which we, as educators, are committed to our own growth and development as professionals. It is necessitated by a commitment to continue to develop knowledge and skills and to maximize opportunities for learning. It is our position that a professional learning culture is central to effective, high quality teaching. The intent of the PETLL Initiative is to foster a professional learning culture where educators view themselves, and are viewed by others, as lifelong learners both in the subject they teach and in the craft of teaching itself. A critical element contained in the PETLL position of a professional learning culture is a belief in "learn by doing" which requires commitment, participation, collaboration and shared responsibility which builds building level trust and is not seen as something that is done to staff. The PETLL Initiative increases educator awareness that a culture of professional learning is created through their actions. In short - a professional learning culture is the way we work and interact as a team focused on maximizing student achievement. The PETLL systemic improvement process consists of eight actionable steps: 1. Pre-condition for whole staff commitment. 2. Whole Staff Participatory Reflective

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Analysis. 3. External Team on-site Analysis. 4. School Team and External Team Collaboration. 5. Development of Instructional Blueprint for Improvement. 6. Implementation of Individual Action Plans/Instructional Blueprint. 7. Internal Review/Guidance for Implementation. 8. Ongoing Focused Reflective Visits. Fidelity of implementation is vital to the success of any programmatic model. The first action step requires the school and district to formally make a commitment to the work of improving internal capacity for the benefit of all students and to ensure high quality instruction for every child. Working with the leadership teams, the PETLL initiative becomes the catalyst for continuous improvement that starts with data analysis, helping schools unearth root causes for performance gaps, underlying assumptions and beliefs; and attitudes, values and expectations that drive decisions and behaviors. Through this process, a staff builds on strengths, identifies talents and opportunities for improvement, and focuses efforts on targeted strategies that will leverage significant gains. Ultimately the school and community take ownership for school success and provide direction for perpetual growth, increasing the capacity and range of improvement efforts to fully realize the school's potential to make positive change in the lives of students. " In God we trust; all others must bring data" (Widely attributed to W. Edwards Deming, 1986). The Whole Staff Participatory Reflective Analysis causes educators to look at themselves and their performance through a mirror focused on an accurate representation of current reality. PETLL uses a data trend analysis model that engages the entire staff in a process that enables staff to see themselves as the most important controllable factor connected to student achievement. The data analysis is conducted by the entire school staff that examines relevant data, <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-core-of-the-capstone-education-essay/>

answers critical questions related to those findings and bravely faces the reflection of their actions on student learning. The External Team On Site Analysis incorporates the use of professionals from outside the school community as "critical friends" in a qualitative process to examine daily practice. A collection of tools originally developed through the Center for Improving School Culture have been adapted to assess, analyze, and provide feedback on the school's learning culture. The quantitative and qualitative findings are triangulated to complete a sharply focused depiction of current reality." We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are" (Max DePree, *Leadership Is an Art*, 2004). The PETLL Initiative calls for all members of the school community to realize that individual talent should be cultivated and creates an environment where intentional collegiality and collaboration lead to a team approach supporting individual and collective improvement. The quantitative analysis of school data conducted by the staff and the qualitative analysis of practice guided by the visiting team will be used as a "jumping off point" to identify existing teacher instructional strengths in the creation of a school-wide "Talent Map" (utilizing the Rutherford Learning Group's Artisan Teacher Principles) and to develop individual 30 Day Action plans for instructional improvement. According to a recent study of continuously improving school systems, "the most powerful method for developing teacher accountability came from peers through collaborative practice. By developing a shared concept of what good practice looks like, and basing it on a fact-based inquiry into what works best to help students learn, teachers hold each other accountable" (Barber & Moourshed, 2007). PETLL developers selected the 23 Artisan Teacher Principles in order to establish a common language for instructional improvement because the <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-core-of-the-capstone-education-essay/>

Principles are research based and they are couched in a best practice framework. The consistent use of an individual Action Plan for Instructional Improvement by each staff member during the PETLL Initiative will enable each building leader to engage and be engaged in the specific growth of each staff member. Staff will identify at least one specific area of strength and a specific area for individual improvement and develop an Action Plan that specifies how that improvement will occur, how it will be measured, and what resources are necessary to insure its completion. The Building Leader(s) will interact with each staff member during a specified timeframe (three times per semester or approximately every 30 instructional days) through a series of classroom observations, professional learning committee meetings and discussions in small groups and face to face settings. In a recent analysis of ten research studies focused on performance feedback, immediate feedback was the only attribute identified as effective. Promising practices for feedback to teachers included feedback that was specific, positive, and/or corrective . At the end of the 30-Day timeframe the individual and the building leader will determine whether the goal has been reached or if it is necessary to extend the learning into the next 30-Day period. The teacher and building leader will collaboratively decide when Improvement initiatives have been achieved and move those mastered skills to the Talent Map for that teacher. The creation of a school-wide electronic web-based " Talent Matrix" that identifies individual instructional strength and makes those strengths' public is an integral part of the PETLL Initiative. One of the greatest resources in our schools is the professional staff and their collected experiences. Michael Fullan writes, " for teachers to improve their practice they learn best from other teachers provided these teachers

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are also working on improvement. These exchanges are thus purposeful, and based on evidence" (2011). The talent mapping activity will make it possible to chart the specific skills and abilities of each staff member. The process will simultaneously serve to develop the confidence of each staff member and challenge each staff member to increase and build upon their talents. The use of an online electronic data-base describing the discreet expertise and capabilities of an entire staff serves as a tool to access professional resources in the building and assist in creating an environment of interdependence. In a recent interview, noted author and educational consultant Dr. Gary Phillips suggested strongly that effective school leaders insure that they " Invest in People, Not Programs" (2011, p. 2). Additionally, utilizing school wide talents to grow the staff efficacy in turn grows leadership efficacy and this is an important component of the PETLL process. Unlike most school improvement efforts the PETLL process focuses on teacher talent and the implementation of the action plans is heavily reliant on utilizing existing instructional strengths to build internal capacity. A designed critical friend program is essential to build upon strengths in the building and to build internal capacity. The school's PETLL lead team will develop a " Blueprint" for Improvement that will be written in community friendly language and identify three high leverage areas for instructional improvement. The Blueprint will be developed through an inclusive approach that contributes to the sense of urgency and the necessity to move quickly. Traditional school improvement plans are often very complex, and frequently overlook core instructional practices. That complexity makes it difficult for everyone in the school community to have a shared understanding of the plan, and that lack of understanding leads to a lack of implementation. " The <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-core-of-the-capstone-education-essay/>



size and prettiness of the plan is inversely related to the quality of action and the impact on student learning" (Doug Reeves, *Leading Change in Your School*, 2009). The PETLL Blueprint for Improvement will identify clear goals that address key instructional leverage points and systemic follow-up - making it easier for everyone in a school to work together to dramatically improve teaching and learning. Ongoing implementation of the PETLL processes will include significant building leader and teacher collaboration focused specifically on classroom learning and professional growth. It is essential for participants to understand the significance of collaboration in a systemic approach. Purposeful collaboration focused on a common goal (student achievement) will establish clarity and coherence. Top-down change often will not work because staff will resist a leader's efforts to intensify improvement processes. Bottom-up change creates an environment that allows some staff to thrive while others remain stagnant. The PETLL Initiative calls on the leader to enable, facilitate, and cause staff to interact in a purposeful and focused manner. In *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, (2009) author Daniel Pink argues that we will work diligently to accomplish goals we set for ourselves, but goals imposed on us by others seldom motivate us to change. According to Pink there are Seven Deadly Flaws associated with extrinsic rewards: 1) they can extinguish intrinsic motivation, 2) they can diminish performance, 3) they can crush creativity, 4) they can crowd out good behavior, 5) they can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior, 6) they can become addictive, and 7) they can foster short-term thinking (2009). In *Linking Leadership to Student Achievement*; (2012) authors Leithwood and Louis discuss three elements from their work that led to a significant difference from the district level: <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-the-core-of-the-capstone-education-essay/>

1) District efforts to develop principal and teacher capacity to implement targeted improvements in teaching and learning, 2) Efforts to identify and support the diffusion of effective practices linked to specific needs for improvement, 3) Continuous monitoring of the process and effects of improvement efforts on leadership, teaching, and learning, with changes in practices where needed. The PETLL Initiative internal review/guidance action step is designed to ensure that there is support and guidance from the central office to the PETLL School to ensure fidelity of implementation, provide needed professional support and to ensure impact on student achievement is evident. PETLL districts are required to meet monthly with schools engaged in the PETLL process for review of implementation of the Instructional Blueprint, 30 Day Action Plans and address necessary adjustments/support at this time. Additionally, it is recommended that district staff visit schools on regular basis to monitor and provide onsite assistance with the implementation of PETLL. The "PETLL Reflective Visit" component of the Initiative is a formative growth opportunity designed to support a school's ongoing improvement efforts by involving "critical friends" in a continuous feedback loop focused on classroom instruction and instructional leadership. A visiting team of experienced educators selected by the facilitator will visit each school in the initiative at specified way-points (three times per semester or approximately every 30 instructional days) and discover evidence specific to the goals outlined in each school's Instructional Blueprint for Improvement. The visiting team will collect tangible evidence based on observed instructional practice, student work, staff interaction, etc. The team will provide the host leadership team with a report of their findings and collaborate in an on-going dialogue focused on instructional

improvement. In an article titled " Learning is the Work", Michael Fullan writes, " It is not sufficient for schools to work out collaboration on their own. External facilitation is required. And since we are interested in system change we also need schools to learn from each other" (2011, p. 3). The PETLL Initiative moves a school to be a part of a learning community that extends beyond itself and not develop an " Island" mentality. The Initiative's design brings multiple schools from multiple districts together and enables them to look to each other for support and positive pressure to improve. Participation in the PETLL Initiative allows staff members to interact in a meaningful way with staff from other schools. The interaction across school and district boundaries causes a greater level of learning to occur and creates an atmosphere of collegial competition. Negative competition dissolves and a collective pride in overall student success increases. Improving instruction is a complex and difficult task during the best of times. In this era of declining revenue, increasing accountability, and challenging student needs we need a clear, cohesive, and simple process to cut through the complexity and maintain our focus on the core business of student achievement. When principals, teachers, teams, coaches, and district leaders consistently work toward a shared vision with a plan of action implemented with fidelity, schools can and will dramatically improve teaching and learning for KIDS. Who is the capstone meant to impact? The PETLL Initiative will impact principals, teachers, students and the respective school communities in each school participating in the initiative and those educators who utilize research drawn from studies associated with PETLL Implementation. The PETLL Initiative is designed to address challenges specific to rural school districts and to districts that have traditionally struggled to attract the most

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talented educators. That specificity focuses the impact toward those schools and districts that share common challenges. The Appalachian region of Kentucky is among the most distressed in the United States in terms of poverty, education, and employment. Table 4 provides data by county on poverty, degree attainment, and unemployment. The poverty level for every county exceeds the Kentucky and US poverty level average. Every county is below the average degree attainment, is below the average high school graduation rate, and is below the bachelor degree attainment of Kentucky and the US. Every county has a higher unemployment rate than the average unemployment rate for Kentucky and the US. This region needs dramatic supports and resources so it may lift itself out of generational poverty, unemployment, and poor educational outcomes. A 2012 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index Survey based on interviews with 355, 344 people across the nation in regards to basic access to food, safety, shelter, and health care; emotional health; physical health; healthy behaviors; work environment; and life evaluation; an assessment of one's current situation and outlook on the future, found that of the nation's 435 congressional districts, Kentucky's fifth district - the most rural in the U. S. -scored at the very bottom in terms of its well-being. This district, to which all of the school districts in this application belong to, reported the poorest physical and emotional health in the nation, and also scored lowest on a more general measure of " life evaluation".