

Credit Flexibility Guidance: General Implementation Frequently Asked Questions

District Plan Development

Q1. When are local boards of education required to have a district credit flexibility plan in place?

A1. By the start of the 2010-2011 school year. Local boards of education must adopt a credit flexibility policy this school year and communicate this provision annually to parents and students.

Q2. Can local board policies limit the credit flexibility policy to elective credits only?

A2. No. Local board policies must allow for demonstration of proficiency to count toward course requirements for graduation and may not be restricted to elective courses only.

Q3. What subjects are considered for credit under credit flexibility?

A3: Any subject: mathematics, science, language, physical education, music, etc.

Q4. Can a district limit the number of courses or credits taken via credit flexibility?

A4. No. Local district policy cannot set an artificial or arbitrary cap or numerical limit on the number of courses or credits that a student may be able to earn via credit flexibility.

Q5. Must graded options be used or can pass/fail be used?

A5. While the pass/fail option **may** be used (if other students use this same option), local board policies should allow for graded options. Grading options need to be reviewed, discussed and mutually agreed upon by prior to beginning the credit flexibility plan. Credits earned via credit flexibility should appear on transcripts like all other credits earned and be factored into the student's GPA.

Q6. Which students qualify for credit flexibility?

A6. Any student (with high school status) is eligible to be considered for a Credit Flexibility Plan (CFP), but students **must be determined to be capable of being able to complete the work in the CFP in the manner specified in the CFP to earn the credits**. Schools and students need to mutually pre-identify and agree upon the learning outcomes of the Credit Flexibility Plan and how those will be measured against the graded course of study or state academic content standards.

Student Plan Development

Q7. Who initiates the credit flexibility policy in a school?

A7. The student initiates a request (written or verbal, determined locally) to take a course and/or earn a credit via the credit flexibility option. The school counselor and/or teacher of record should then meet with the student to develop the student credit flexibility plan that is to be signed by the student, appropriate school officials and by the parents to signify mutual agreement with the plan.

Q8. What should be included in the student credit flexibility plan (CFP)?

A8. Agreement should be reached on several points:

- What course content and academic credit will be included in the plan?
- How will the student demonstrate proficiency?
- What (assessment) instruments or (educational) programs will be used to demonstrate proficiency?
- What will be the minimum threshold needed to award credit (percentage of passing rate on tests, performances, demonstration of competency, etc.)?
- How will a grade be determined?
- What are the consequences of not completing the CFP or doing failing work?
- Who will serve as the “teacher of record?”
- When will the credit proficiency evidence be due?
- Who should sign the agreement (student, teacher, parent, counselor, etc.)?
- How and when will progress toward success be demonstrated?
- What measures will be used to verify completion of the credit flexibility?
- What costs, if any, must be assumed by the student?
- How does the credit flexibility appeals process work?

Q9. Who should serve as the “teacher of record?”

A9. The “teacher of record” should be a faculty member (or members) with the content expertise (HQT) to assist with the development and assessment of the student credit flexibility plan. If none are available it could be a credentialed school counselor or building administrator.

Q10. What is an “external mentor?”

A10. Examples of an “external mentor” are: (1) a local artisan who can validate the quality of the work created; (2) a private coach who can validate the time, effort and competitive level; or (3) a private music or dance instructor who can attest to the hours of study and the performance level of the student, etc.

Administrative Questions

Q11. Who determines what credits are to be earned?

A11. The local district determines the credits. This can be done by individual teachers or through the use of: (1) a multi-disciplinary team; (2) a professional panel from the community; or (3) a state performance-based assessment. Courses and educational options may be counted for full or partial credit and/or credit in more than one area, such as for both academic and career-technical credit.

Q12. We have only ONE instructor per course (small district). Can we prohibit a student from “skipping” a teacher whom he/she does not want to take that class to take an online course instead?

A12. No. The credit flexibility policy is designed to customize aspects of student learning around a student’s respective needs and interests. While it is **not** the intent of the credit flexibility policy to provide an escape for students to avoid having certain teachers, there is no approved or disapproved list of reasons why students may wish to opt for credit flexibility for various courses.

Q13. Can the student credit flexibility plan be modified once it is agreed upon?

A13. Yes. If conditions change once the CFP has been created, the school, in concert with the student and parent, can modify the terms of the original CFP.

Q14. Can a student test out of the second semester of a course after sitting for the first semester of that same course?

A14. Yes. The credit flexibility policy is designed to permit access to earned credits through non-traditional means. The plan should specify this option.

Q15. If a student requests to use credit flexibility to earn a credit in a course not offered by the school, whose responsibility is it to find the course of study or educational program that supports that academic credit?

A15. The student is responsible for locating and/or identifying a mutually acceptable course of study or educational program not offered in the school to earn a desired credit.

Credits

Q16. How can students earn credits?

A16. Students earn credits through: (1) the completion of courses; (2) testing out or otherwise demonstrating mastery of the course content; or (3) pursuit of one or more “educational options” (e.g., distance learning, educational travel, independent study, an internship, after school/ tutorial program, community service or engagement project and extracurricular activities).

Q17. Must schools accept credit from other districts and educational providers including on-line providers under credit flexibility plans?

A17. Schools **must** accept credits earned via credit flexibility for students transferring from any school in Ohio that meets the state’s minimum operating standards of OAC Chapter 3301-35. Schools **may** accept credits from other educational providers, including on-line providers, which were earned via credit flexibility and in accordance with current operating standards.

Q18. Is there a list of approved on-line courses, institutions or other educational resources that schools can reference to determine if credits earned via on-line learning should be accepted?

A18. No. Schools should determine when developing their district credit flexibility plan if the credits earned will be accepted. Verifying the legitimacy of the source should be completed (i.e. accredited from a recognized organization such as the North Central Association vs. being self-accredited). The school district will determine under the authority of local control which courses will be accepted, and for how much credit, when the student credit flexibility plan is mutually developed between school officials and the student and parents.

Q19. If a student takes a course from an accredited on-line high school: (1) may the credit be treated as a transfer credit on the student transcript; and (2) may the district require pre-approval for that school’s registered students?

A19. Grades earned via credit flexibility should be entered on the student transcript in the same manner and be indistinguishable from any other grade on the transcript. When the student credit flexibility plan is developed, approval of possible credits earned should be agreed upon by the school, the student and the parent prior to enrolling in the online course.

Q20. Can credits be held in abeyance if credit flexibility work is insufficient to justify full credit?

A20. Yes. Schools reserve the right to: (1) award partial credit if student work and/or test proficiency scores do not warrant full credit; or (2) withhold credit until the student does additional work to warrant the agreed upon credit. For example: If the student credit flexibility plan established a 90 percent passing rate on a test to warrant full credit and the student only earned an 80 percent score, partial credit could be awarded based on 80 percent proficiency, with additional work required to obtain the balance of the credit that is being held in abeyance.

Q21. Can students use their interscholastic sports teams as their credit flexibility plan to earn their physical education credits?

A21. Generally speaking, no. Simply being a member of a sports team – whether sponsored by the school or by a community group – in and of itself is **not** a basis for earning physical education credit through the use of credit flex. Participation in a sports program not sponsored by the school could be a basis for creation of a credit flexibility plan (e.g., competitive AAU swimmer at a school without a swimming team, private club gymnast at a school without gymnastics, private ballet dancer who practices under the direction of professional dance instructor and performs with an adult dance troupe). In all instances, whether a student participates on a school-sponsored team or on a private community-based team, the credit flexibility plan must be developed with components that address the graded course of study and/or the elements within the physical education academic content standards.

Miscellaneous

Q22. How do schools account for attendance for students using a credit flexibility plan?

A22. Students using a credit flexibility plan should be counted in the same manner as students enrolled in PSEO programs. They are still enrolled as students in their home school.

Q23. Must schools collect performance data on the operation of their credit flexibility policy?

A23. Yes. Schools should gather performance data, including: (1) the number of students participating in the credit flexibility policy; (2) the total credits earned; and (3) the extent to which student participation reflects the diversity of the student body. The data collected will be used to assess the extent of state utilization of the credit flexibility policy.

Q24. How will the recent NCAA interpretation on nontraditional courses impact Credit Flexibility Plans?

A24. Recent information sent to schools from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center regarding prospective Division I student-athletes and coursework taken in nontraditional classroom settings may impact school district Credit Flexibility Plans. Specifically, schools are advised to counsel prospective Division I student-athletes not to utilize the test-out option of Credit Flexibility and to be certain that any coursework earned via Credit Flexibility be comparable in length, content and rigor as credits earned in a traditional classroom setting. The course also must be four-year, college-preparatory in nature and have a defined time period for completion.

Although the design of the Credit Flexibility Policy calls for including those credits on the student transcript in the same manner as credits earned via traditional classroom settings, the NCAA requires that any credits earned through nontraditional ways (distance learning, online, credit recovery, etc.) must be so designated on the transcripts of potential Division I student athletes. Schools should note on student transcripts submitted to the NCAA for review which course credits were earned through nontraditional ways or attach an addendum to the student transcript explaining that. **The designation of credits on the transcript applies only for NCAA purposes.** If in doubt, contact the NCAA at <http://www.eligibilitycenter.org> for specific advice on this issue.

This will apply to all student-athletes entering a Division I NCAA college or university on or after **August 1, 2010**.

Q25. How can middle-grade students earn high school credits?

A25. Middle-grade students can earn high school credits in the following ways: (1) enroll in a high school level class (Algebra I, Level I foreign language classes, etc.) taught at the middle school by a high school licensed teacher delivering the high school course of study (or its equivalent); (2) physically attend the high school and enroll in high school classes taught by high school licensed teachers; (3) be classified by the school district as "accelerated" either totally (all areas) or within a specific content area (mathematics, foreign language, fine arts, etc.) under the school district acceleration policy.

Q26. Can students below grade 9 use the Credit Flexibility option to earn high school credits?

A26. Yes, providing they have been classified as "accelerated" (to high school status) via the local school district board-adopted acceleration policy. Note: Acceleration in one academic area does not imply acceleration in all academic areas unless so specified under the district acceleration policy.

Appeals

Q25. If a student's credit flexibility plan is denied, does the student have a right to appeal a decision made by the district?

A25. Yes. An appeals process should be included as part of the district's credit flexibility plan to provide recourse for students whose proposed credit flexibility plan was denied by the school. The Ohio Department of Education will establish an appeals process for individuals who have local level complaints about having access to this policy or to its implementation.

For more information, contact:

Tom Rutan
Center for Curriculum and Assessment
Ohio Department of Education
(614) 728-1997
tom.rutan@ode.state.oh.us