Accelerating and Empowering Student Learning

With "Credit Flex," students will be able to show what they know and move on to higher-order content they are ready to learn and have not yet mastered. They will be able to learn subject matter and earn course credit in ways not limited solely to "seat time" or the walls of a school building. They will be able to customize aspects of their learning around their interests and needs, which might include flexible schedules and a choice of modalities (e.g., online learning and community-based projects), as well as options to pursue niche interest areas, combine subjects and graduate early.

Why credit flex? Research and experience tell us that it encourages student self-direction and motivates learners to develop new skills and fulfill their potential. It lets students ask questions, solve problems and manage the continuous change that underscores life. And it recognizes that while learning experiences must be high quality, not all learning happens inside the classroom or in formal education settings.

Key Facts about Ohio's Credit Flex Plan

The plan adopted by the State Board of Education includes the following provisions:

- The Carnegie Unit will be retained, while students will have options for demonstrating subject area competency and earning credit.
- All students will have opportunities to earn credits through flexible methods, although credit flexibility will pertain only to high school credit.

The Case for Credit Flexibility

In the course of their work, members of the Ohio Credit Flexibility Design Team examined the flexible time and credit earning practices of schools and districts both in Ohio and across the nation. They looked at a variety of Ohio policies and practices, including those in the areas of educational options, dual enrollment and accelerated learning. Team members concluded the following:

1. **Carnegie structures as currently designed do not guarantee learning for each and every student.** Ohio's statewide aggregate graduation rate is 87 percent. Among our graduates who become first-year college students, remediation rates in mathematics and/or English run about 45 percent. Other students never make it to graduation day—about 20,000 students drop out of Ohio schools every year.

2. **At least five provisions in the Ohio Revised Code already allow some flexibility, but they operate as exemptions to standard procedures and practices.** Not accounting for dual credit, less than five percent of all high school credit is earned through these provisions.

3. **Most states have provisions permitting flexibility, but they are not widely used.** System structures such as testing, scheduling, funding and accountability act as barriers to flexibility.

4. **Although there is evidence that schools, certain models and some states use flexibility to meet the needs of individual students and groups of students, on the whole, Ohio does not record, measure or disseminate these efforts.** Alternative education, credit recovery, dropout prevention/intervention, enrichment/acceleration, independent study, early college and dual credit have all produced positive results in Ohio, yet they are largely seen as outside the ***regular*** system.

- There is no limit to the kinds of course work, nor to the number of credits that can be earned.
- Credit will be reported on student transcripts in the same way that seat time credit is recorded.
- Teachers will determine when credit should be awarded, but other mechanisms (e.g., the use of a multi-disciplinary teaching team, a professional panel from the community or a state performance-based assessment) may be used to "inform" a credit determination.
- Local boards of education will establish implementation policies, and boards will be prohibited from setting policies that negate or otherwise prohibit access to the plan.

How Will School Boards Be Affected?

Before the start of the 2010-11 school year, local boards of education must adopt a Credit Flex plan that includes the following provisions:

- Any student is eligible to be considered for alternative ways for earning credit, but students must be capable of meeting the conditions necessary to earn the credits.
- Local board must review policy (with a suggested two-year time frame) and collect performance data including the number of participating students, total credits earned and extent to which student participation reflects diversity of the student body.
- An appeals process must be available should a student's proposed alternative learning credit be denied by the school or district.
- Local boards of education must communicate this provision annually to parents and students. and must submit data to the state about the methods and frequency of communication.

What Role Will the State Play?

The Ohio Department of Education, State Board of Education or a representative authority will build the capacity of the state's Credit Flex system.

- Identify assessments for immediate use, and for test out or demonstration purposes.
- Identify and implement a strategy (e.g., rubrics, models, standardized review process, and/or an open source platform) for developing capacity around high quality, locally developed assessments in a variety of content areas.
- Establish an appeals process, which may be conducted by a third party, for individuals who have local level complaints about having access to or implementation of the policy.
- Amend the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) for Operating Standards pertaining to Educational Options.
- Use a web-based mechanism to communicate and share research, and to serve as a clearing-house for models and promising practices.
- Offer districts an early adopter strategy to pioneer these alternative options so that the findings can be applied to the state's plan.
- Work with professional associations to build capacity and accelerate access to policy and provisions with consistency and quality.
- Communicate and encourage other entities (e.g., P-16 councils, business advisory councils, Educational Service Centers, eTech and chariable foundations) to identify regional learning opportunities, and assist with multi-district efforts.

Ohio's plan for credit flexibility is designed to ***broaden the scope*** of curricular options available to students, ***increase the depth*** of study available for a particular subject and ***tailor the learning time or conditions needed*** (to shorten or lengthen the time necessary to complete a high school diploma and/or postsecondary degree). In these ways, students can customize aspects of their learning around more of their interests and needs.

With Credit Flex, high school students can earn credit in three ways, or in a combination of these ways:

1. By completing traditional coursework
2. By testing out or otherwise demonstrating mastery of the course content; or
3. By pursuing one or more "educational options" (e.g., distance learning, educational travel, independent study, an internship, music, arts, afterschool program, community service or engagement project and sports).

Credit Flex has numerous benefits for students and families, teachers and counselors, school administrators, employers, community leaders and Ohio taxpayers.

For students and families . . . Credit Flex means more choice and autonomy in deciding how, when and where students learn; more options for individually suited pathways to postsecondary and career goals; and acceleration and convenience including more options for courses in school schedule (especially for fitting in electives).

For teachers and counselors . . . Credit Flex offers increased flexibility and autonomy to choose the best paths to support individual learning; increased opportunity for collaboration and interdisciplinary work; and shared accountability for student learning and performance.

For schools and districts . . . Credit Flex broadens and deepens access to electives that engage students; and it allows administrators to make maximum use of community resources to meet student needs.

For business and the community . . . Credit Flex creates options for educating and building relationships with students and educators about industry opportunities, competencies and trends; generates opportunities to attract and retain Ohio students as future employees and community partners; and directly adds value to the education system by engaging them in meaningful partnership in support of education, workforce development and community outcomes.

For the State of Ohio . . . Credit Flex produces a strong return on taxpayers' investment in education (e.g., accelerated learning and fewer dropouts) and helps students prepare themselves for postsecondary education and the workplace.

> *Credit Flex awards credit based on competence. Research confirms that varying time and instructional methodology, while maintaining quality, can cultivate the kind of self-directed learning that is essential for success in postsecondary education and careers — and throughout life.*

To read ***New Emphasis on Learning: Ohio's Credit Flexibility Plan Shifts the Focus from "Seat Time" to Performance,"*** and other materials generated by the Ohio Credit Flexibility Design Team, visit www.education.ohio.gov/Credit Flexibility, or contact the Ohio Department of Education at 614.466.3904.

New Emphasis on Learning

Ohio's credit flexibility plan shifts the focus from "seat time " to performance

In 2006, the Ohio General Assembly established the Ohio Core Curriculum (Senate Bill 311), which raised expectations for what all Ohio students must know and be able to do to earn a high school diploma. At the same time, SB 311 directed the State Board of Education to develop a statewide plan for implementing methods for students to earn units of high school credit based on the demonstration of subject area competency. In addition to raising the expectations for graduation, lawmakers provided ***flexibility*** to students and educators to successfully meet these higher expectations.

Developed by the Ohio Credit Flexibility Design Team, Ohio's "Credit Flex" plan shifts focus from evaluating student learning based on "seat time" to assessing students' demonstrated academic and skill level or performance. The plan does not eliminate Carnegie units or "seat time" requirements altogether. Rather, it retains seat time as one option and expands the number of options for earning credit by adding demonstration of subject area competency and structures that support it irrespective of any time requirements.

Credit Flex …

- Offers learning opportunities not found in the one-size-fits-all factory process model.
- Focuses on performance, not counting seats and hours.
- Acknowledges and addresses students' differing learning styles, paces and interests.
- Offers students opportunities to demonstrate creativity, explore academic and career interests, and practice critical thinking.

"Under ORC §3313.603, 120 contact hours equals one high school credit. While useful for management purposes such as scheduling students and staff, the value of seat time as an accurate measure of student learning is limited. It's a proxy at best. Students can earn an A or a D and still get credit. Have we really prepared a student who gets a D? There's no question that students master content standards at different rates. To learn Algebra, I've seen them need as little as six weeks and as much as 20 weeks. The time doesn't matter to me, but the mastery does."

Design Team Member

- Recognizes that measures of engagement and ownership are as important for achievement as measures of attendance and access.

The State Board of Education adopted Ohio's Credit Flex plan in March 2009, allowing for phase in during the 2009-10 school year. Local school boards, community schools, chartered non-public schools and providers of career-technical education are required to comply with provisions of the plan by the beginning of the 2010-11 school year.