

# Gifted Education Factsheet #002: Providing Services Using Educational Options

Educational Options are defined according to the Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools (OAC 3301-35-06 (G)

When made available, educational options shall require:

- (1) An instructional plan that is based on individual student needs and shall include:
  - a. Instructional objectives that align with the school district's curriculum requirements
  - b. An outline that specifies instructional activities, materials and learning environments; and
  - c. A description of the criteria and methods for assessing student performance.
- (2) Parental permission for students under age eighteen;
- (3) Superintendent approval prior to student participation;
- (4) Involvement of a credentialed teacher in reviewing the instructional plan, providing or supervising instruction and evaluating student performance; and
- (5) Credit for approved educational options shall be assigned according to student performance relative to stated objectives of the educational option and in accordance with local board policy and established procedures.

#### **Practically Speaking**

Educational options are individualized learning experiences provided by schools as an alternative, partial alternative or supplement to traditional courses. They are structured learning opportunities with defined learning goals, planned learning activities and standards for evaluating student learning coordinated by a qualified educator. Educational options may take a variety of forms, including mentorships, internships, independent studies, travel opportunities or online coursework.

## Relevance

Meeting the learning needs of exceptional students is an important challenge for schools. Gifted and advanced students require opportunities for acceleration and enrichment to ensure continuing academic growth and to maintain motivation to achieve their potential. Sometimes within an individual school there is not a sufficient "critical mass" of students with the same needs to justify the cost of creating a traditional class or course on an advanced or specialized topic. Providing educational options may be an efficient way to provide enrichment or replacement curriculum designed to meet the needs of an individual student or a small group of students. Educational options also may be useful in helping students to access traditional advanced coursework by adding flexibility in a student's class schedule. Additionally, well-designed educational options may help cultivate a sense of responsibility for learning in students and help foster life-long learning skills.

### **Targeted Learning Audience**

The educational options concept was originally developed with high school students in mind. However, since middle school students may take high school-level courses for credit, and, as graduation requirements have recently increased, academically self-motivated students not yet in high school also may benefit. While this



resource will focus on educational options designed with gifted and advanced students in mind, access to educational options should not be limited to students who have been formally identified as gifted.

## **Addressing Standards**

Like traditional courses, educational options require thoughtful planning, including alignment of learning objectives, curriculum and assessments. Educational options modules should be designed to address Ohio's Academic Content Standards and may use tools like learning contracts, work portfolios and rubrics to support authentic assessment for guiding the student and for providing evidence of successful completion of a rigorous learning experience.

# **Application**

Having a framework for an educational option is critical for maintaining reasonable demands on staff time and for monitoring and supporting student progress and motivation through the learning experience. The following are useful tools for developing an educational option:

- Create an "adaptable syllabus" for each model educational option plan that includes learning
  goals, objectives that are aligned to Ohio's Academic Content Standards, and potential online
  courses or other resources.
- Design forms for student referral, parent notification and obtaining and documenting approval from the district Superintendent for the educational option to ensure efficient compliance with OAC 3301-35-16 (G).
- Include a procedure for linking the educational option to the Written Education Plan (WEP) for gifted students.
- Create templates and exemplars of learning contracts that can be used by the supervising educator, participating student, his or her parents, and external mentors, if applicable.
- Consider the use of authentic assessment procedures, such as learning portfolios, to document student progress and provide evidence of rigor.

## **Ohio's Credit Flexibility Plan**

Senate Bill 311 (the Ohio Core legislation) raised the graduation requirements for high school students, with the goal of increasing the number of students who are ready to meet the demands of our global and technological age. Included among its several provisions is a requirement that by March 31, 2009, the State Board of Education adopt a plan that enables "students to earn units of high school credit based on a demonstration of subject area competency, instead of or in combination with completing hours of classroom instruction." Ohio's plan for credit flexibility is designed to broaden the scope of curricular options available to students, increase the depth of study possible for a particular subject, and allow tailoring of learning time and/or conditions. Educational Options are one way in which aspects of learning can be customized around more of students' interests and needs. For more information on credit flexibility, visit education.ohio.gov and search keywords: "credit flex".