

*This transcript has been edited for reader ease.*

**Credit Flexibility: Communicate Effectively Your  
District's Credit Flexibility Policy  
Audio Transcription**

Tuesday, October 12, 2010  
10:00-11:00 a.m. Eastern

Jennifer: Good morning everyone. My name is Jennifer Reed and I would like to welcome you to the web conference Credit Flexibility: Communicate Effectively Your District's Credit Flexibility Policy, hosted by the Ohio Department of Education and the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center. Today's event is being recorded and at this time I would like to introduce Patti Grey with the Ohio Department of Education, Patti.

Patti: It's a distinct pleasure to be doing this web conference on Credit Flexibility Communication with two outstanding school communicators in our state. I do need to tell you that Debbie Alberico was called away for a district issue and will not be one of the presenters today. Erika Daggett and Shane Haggerty will be wonderful at carrying the load and I'm glad that they're on the call with me today. Our presenters are current board members of the [Ohio Public Relations Association](#) or OSPRA. They include Erika Daggett from [Sycamore](#) and president-elect Shane Haggerty from [Ohio Hi-Point](#). OSPRA's mission is to advance education through responsible public relations and communication that leads to success for all students. No one on the call today is saying that they have all the solutions figured out for communicating their Credit Flexibility plans. However, the two today that are with us are sharing what their districts have developed along with Middletown as well. We're interested in hearing what things you may be working on and sharing your resources with us as well.

At the Department, our goal is to support you in your district efforts in Credit Flexibility and this includes discussing what guidance documents are available to help you, encouraging you to talk with other districts across the state and sharing resources. So as an overview today, our goals are to increase your knowledge of some communication strategies, to respond to questions and concerns regarding Credit Flexibility, and to foster some thinking and conversation between everyone around Credit Flexibility. We're going to start with just making sure very quickly everybody is on the same page.

Let's start with where Credit Flexibility came from. As most of you are aware, Senate Bill 311 created the Core Curriculum, which increases requirements for graduation. A component directed the State Board of Education to expand the ways that students can learn. Credit Flexibility allows students to demonstrate mastery of learning and this can be instead of traditional 120 hours in a classroom instruction or combination of classroom instruction and some creative ways to learn content. When we get at the core of communication, certainly we always look at what are the main messages that we can help districts support to their publics. There are three benefits from the Department's perspective of Credit Flexibility and they are that students will have more ways and choices of learning the content they'll be required to learn for high school graduation,

that the focus is on performance in mastering the content rather than just the time element of how many hours in the seat students spend, and to certainly begin our commitment to changing education to become student centered so that learning does accommodate different learning styles, paces, interests of students. The Ohio Credit Flexibility Design Team proposed a plan for Credit Flexibility that the State Board approved in March 2009; the plan included a requirement for districts not only to develop the policy and to implement it, but to communicate it to students and parents. The state clarified those expectations by further saying that this communication would occur annually to parents and students and that there will be a request from the state to submit data about the methods and the frequency of communications around Credit Flexibility with students and families.

I have with me in the room today, Tom Rutan and Mike Hubbell, who are here just in case other questions do arise about Credit Flexibility. While our emphasis is on communications today, there are two key issues that arise whenever we do a Credit Flexibility webinar so I thought I'd address them at the beginning. Tom and Mike may add any other comments if they wish. The first is cost and there is updated guidance on the ODE website about guidance around who pays what. I have put on this slide a focus on when schools pay. But certainly go to the ODE website, [www.education.ohio.gov](http://www.education.ohio.gov), and put "Credit Flexibility" in the search engine you will find those guidance documents. Basically a school pays for Credit Flexibility when the subject is present in your curriculum, when the subject is needed for graduation or some other qualification such as an honors diploma, when the option is already endorsed, such as online classes. If these classes are already provided to schools in a traditional classroom and that the Credit Flex option is part of the student's regular class load of the normal day. Mike or Tom, is there anything that you would like to add before we get started?

Tom: If for some reason a school encounters a situation where a student would not be able to earn an honors diploma, say reduction of staff that would limit the course offerings, then the school still has the obligation to provide that opportunity and would necessarily then be obligated to cover those costs.

Patti: The other topic that is very frequently discussed, and in fact we got a question in our pre-submitted questions, is athletics. The key issue is - Can students do athletics in Ohio if they do Credit Flex? [The Ohio High School Athletic Association](http://www.ohioathletics.org) basically says - yes, but you still have to follow the rules that are on this slide and basically the student does have to be passing the Credit Flex Course at the end of the grading period. So what we encourage people is to have your athletic director continue to talk with curriculum director about making sure students and school counselors are understanding this issue. You're also going to see a little later a form that Sycamore has developed around athletics for their students. When you come to the NCAA requirements, basically there are opportunities to do Credit Flex options; however; the athlete does have follow NCAA requirements. Athletics is an extracurricular activity. So if a student is working for Division One eligibility, the student does need to follow NCAA rules about the approved core courses. Additionally, the very strong advice is to let those students know that the test-out option is not acceptable to the NCAA. Again, we do have guidance on our website around the NCAA requirements. We encourage you to take a look at them. Tom, Mike, any other comments?

Tom: Those have been updated recently. The NCAA does require that on a prospective Division One student athlete's transcript, any course taken in a non-traditional manner, such as online, travel, internship, be designated on the transcript. Now that runs counter to our philosophy in the state that all Credit Flexibility courses should be entered on the student's transcript in a nondescript manner, but in order for the NCAA clearinghouse to do a proper audit of prospective Division I athletes, a school must generate a special transcript and designate which courses if any, were taken in a non-traditional manner.

Mike: It would also be helpful to have a description of what that manner was and some detail.

Patti: Thank you both. We're now going to move into the core of what we're here to talk about which is communication. As a group when the presenters discussed how to proceed with this presentation, we wanted to take a step back and encourage people to take a look at their process for rolling out any district policy that they may have. Now while certainly your policy for Credit Flexibility has been accepted and approved by your local Board of Education, there may have been some communications during that process for your communication plan. Certainly that's part of any good communication plan - communication during the board process of accepting a new district policy your public. We do have a template that Debbie Alberico, Middletown, is having that she has used very successfully in her district. That template identifies the actions, the timeline and then the people responsible. She finds it very helpful when there are multiple entities doing this work, such as a curriculum director, another administrator or superintendent. Erika, can you talk a little bit about how in Sycamore you manage those?

Erika: Absolutely. In Sycamore, actually our big picture started with the curriculum director and the Board of Education. They got together and laid out the strengths, concerns and possibilities around Credit Flexibility. Then the curriculum department went to all of the departments at the high school to address those concerns and questions and get everybody on the same page. The curriculum department, Jennifer Manoukian who is our curriculum instructor for the high school really took lead on this because she had the majority of the information and was able to get with all of those groups that were necessary to be on the same page. So she addressed all of those groups and then they formed a Credit Flex Steering Committee, which was comprised of central office administrators, the superintendent, high school administrators, and the heads of guidance and eventually brought in the junior high to help those students transition and know what their options were as they headed toward high school. Then the Steering Committee started meeting and just really started hammering it out as to what Credit Flex would mean for Sycamore.

Patti: Erika, I know that even before the board policy, Sycamore did some anticipation of the Credit Flex requests they might get. Could you talk about that more because I'm guessing people could still do that?

Erika: The committees developed a survey. One survey was for parents, one survey was for students. The questions were basically the same but it helped us understand and gauge where people were with Credit Flexibility, how much they knew about it, what they were thinking about it moving forward, and how they wanted to utilize it. The example of our

survey is under the download resources for those who want to look at it on the left side of the screen. But it helped us understand how people were really interested in using Credit Flexibility and what subjects they were most interested in so that the committee could start with those options rather than implement something that people might not use at this time. It also helped us gauge how people wanted to be communicated with about Credit Flex and what else they needed to know about it. Then the Steering Committee took those results and moved forward. They had a pretty decent response and it did really help us get the plan off the ground.

Patti: Great. Thank you. Any questions or comments about some things that you have done in your district, please feel free to do that in the chat box. We're happy to collect other ideas of what people are doing. Also, as you start the promotion and publicity of Credit Flexibility, there are multiple pieces of communications needed. We now are going to give you some ideas of what might be in those action steps that you can put in the plan template that we presented earlier. These are a compilation of forms and communication tactics that I saw not only in Sycamore, but also in Middletown. Shane, I believe that there were some that your career tech has. So Erika, can you start with some of the forms, the basic forms that you developed in your district before people started talking to students and families about Credit Flexibility?

Erika: Sure, again the curriculum department and the Steering Committee met to discuss what forms they needed, how people would use Credit Flexibility and what we needed to make sure was in place for people to sign off on. On the left side of the screen in the resources, our forms are on the Credit Flexibility handbook link and they are also on our website if people want to look at that later. But we basically have the application and how students would access Credit Flexibility, whether they wanted to do independent study and internship, educational travel, those sorts of things; and outlined how much credit students wanted to receive for the work. Then we explained how to apply for Credit Flexibility and what students needed in a plan. It also was an attempt to make sure everybody had understood the main points of Credit Flexibility and would sign off on those so the district would not be liable and that those important points would be reiterated with everyone involved one more time as they were signing the form. Another form that we created was the athletic form that outlined what a student needs to do to remain eligible for high school athletics as well as college athletics. We definitely wanted to make sure that we communicated that many times in writing and in person. So we developed a form that students and their families had to sign off on that said they understood that Credit Flexibility might impact high school and college athletic opportunities, that the district would not be liable if anyone were to lose a college scholarship or not be eligible to play, as well as make sure that students and their families knew up front might impact and might affect their athletic careers.

Patti: Shane, is there anything in the career tech centers that you have in place that would address any of these issues?

Shane: Not in terms of developing the forms, more along the lines of what is coming in some future slides in terms of the marketing of Credit Flexibility.

Erika: Patti, at Sycamore we do have another form that people may want to consider. It is called the community mentor waiver and acknowledgement form. This is for students who will be taking advantage of individual research, internships or community service, educational travel with a group that would not be headed by an employee of the district. So this is for parents to sign off and make sure that they understand that the students will be held to the code of conduct and that the person who is authorizing and giving those students their assignments and helping them work through this option of Credit Flexibility will not be an employee of the district.

Patti: There was a question in the chat box about where the athletic form is available. Erika has shared as an example in the downloadable pod that you have on your screen, the one that [Sycamore](#) uses.

Erika: Yes, it's in the Credit Flexibility handbook at the back.

Patti: Okay, great. Certainly when the forms are ready and the plan is in place, there has to be a communication to families and students about this option. There are many traditional ways - a handbook, guidelines, and a formal letter to families. Erika, how did your district handle communication?

Erika: Our district created a handbook. One of the most important steps we took with that handbook was to have people who had no idea what Credit Flexibility was read it to make sure that it was understandable. Eventually as you move through this process you become such an expert on it and know so many different things, but you really have to present it to parents on a very initial level basis because they're probably not going to have the education and familiarity with the process and the option as you do. So that was one of the big things we did. It went through several revisions and then we made it available on the website and our forms are on the website as well. We rolled it out by putting information via student announcements as well as website announcements, and the PA system at the high school announcement saying the handbook is available. Then the guidance counselors started telling their students about it.

Patti: Shane, I know that your opportunity around Credit Flexibility came about a little differently which you'll talk about. Is there a formal handbook or guidelines that your career center developed?

Shane: Actually, we're going to use a lot of what Sycamore and Middletown have already developed. We did not develop any documents for this year. Like a lot of districts, we have taken this in a slower method of rolling it out. One of the things we did this year was obviously make all of our parents and our students aware of the opportunity during our student orientation sessions at the beginning of the school year. In terms of actual handbooks or documents or collateral like that, we don't have those in place right now. As a career technical school, we're embracing this as something that we think will fit in nicely with what we already do here. We have a lot of opportunities for independent study, school-to-work opportunities, different programs that have already been in place that we think that we can market as Credit Flexibility options and certainly we are going to embrace those things.

Patti: Erika, you had some events, right? You actually advertised about an information session on Credit Flexibility?

Erika: Yes. Sycamore did. That was the final step in the – well, it's an ongoing process - but a recent final per se step in the Credit Flex process. Our curriculum department did a lot of research to make sure that they were going about this the right way in meeting the needs and wants of the parents and students, So they held some Credit Flexibility forums for parents. We had a postcard that went out to the parents and tried to make it eye catching so they would pick it up and make sure that they read it. It outlined what would happen, very briefly said what Credit Flex was, and then invited parents to a forum. We limited the forum to 75 participants so that we could better answer questions and make sure that the people who were there got the information they wanted. They submitted questions via index cards as well and passed those in to the moderators of the forums so that we could not only keep the evening moving, but it also helped us track where the majority of the questions were. It was a great reference for later, which we used to create an FAQ that we put online to make sure that students and families always had a reference, some place to go if they had any questions as well as let them know who to contact for more information. We also advertised those forums in local newspaper ads, which mimicked the postcards so there would be a familiarity. We did about six ads in two weeks to really drive it home. We also issued a press release to get people encouraged to come and let them know what Credit Flexibility meant for students and parents as well as providing a way for them to share their thoughts with us as we worked toward meeting those state mandates in developing a program.

Patti: Great. When the presenters talked about all the tactics that could be in a communication plan, we realized that there are other opportunities for communication. Again, as I said at the beginning, we don't have all the answers, but even in our brainstorming we started talking about what should be the communication between the Credit Flexibility provider or mentor as Sycamore calls it, parent communications between while Credit Flex programs or courses are occurring, teacher communication. Some of this, of course, overlaps with the process of doing a credit flex option, educational option, but certainly we recognize that as credit flexibility continues there may need to be more formal communication processes developed. We had some ideas around feedback and reflection for both students, educators, the mentor/provider at the end of every Credit Flex course to give feedback for how courses should be developed or changed in the future. Erika, you talked about a little earlier that you actually have a mentor communication?

Erika: We do. This form goes to an outside community resource or educational travel. In part, this is just to communicate with that person or persons. The names of these individuals would come up during the proposal presentation that the student does so that we know who these individuals are, they know what is expected from the district for the student to do credit flex and to get credit for what they're doing. We also have that person come in at the end of the plan where the student is demonstrating his or her mastery and help verify anything that has been going on, just be present so there's always that connection between the district and the person who's actually working with the student. We also, to back up a little bit, put some of our credit flex information in the course planner at the

high school so that students can start to access that information. We included a description of Credit Flex in the programs and options that were available. Additionally, those students who wanted to access the credit flex program met with a mentor over the summer and just walked through his/her plan and the mentor helped advise the student on what to do and make sure everything was in line. So we put credit flex options in the summer school handbook and course catalog as well.

Patti: Thank you. Moving on to Shane's explanation of a unique engagement that occurred at [Ohio Hi-Point](#) last year that resulted in a marketing program that students actually earned Credit Flex credits for. Shane.

Shane: Obviously at the career technical level, we are very heavily engaged in marketing because we have to recruit our students each year from our partner school districts. So, for us, the opportunity for Credit Flex is just an extension of our marketing program. We will include credit flex next year as part of our overall marketing mix, instead of treating it as side program that students can find if they go explore or whatever. We really want to make it something that when we are recruiting our students that they know that they can come to Ohio Hi-Point and have those opportunities. So I just listed some of the opportunities that are going to be included in our marketing mix, things that already exist. We already do student orientation nights, and most school districts do that especially for freshman or junior high students. As a career tech school, obviously we're welcoming a bunch of new students each year, so we do student orientation nights over two nights and we presented Credit Flex.

Like Sycamore, we are going to do a specific well-defined event for Credit Flex and call those Credit Flex information nights so that we can meet one-on-one with students and help each student define his/her pathway. Obviously, we do an open house every year and Credit Flex opportunities will be a big part of that event. Then we will include in marketing collateral like a view book, brochures, fliers, anything that we do during our recruiting season the Credit Flex opportunities will included in those marketing collateral pieces just like our health technology program or our engineering programs or something like that. Credit flex will be treated as an equal. We're heavily engaged in social media and using our website as a means of communication and put information in terms that people can understand, I think social media especially is a great opportunity to do that. If you have a [Facebook](#) page, which a lot school districts have now, Facebook is a great place, Twitter is a great place to kind of reach people where they're at, at a level that they understand it, utilizing things like video or photography and making information visual can help people understand the Credit Flex opportunity and try to avoid all of that "education speak" that all of us educators get caught in sometimes.

Patti pointed out our [Hi-Point Journeys](#) campaign. Hi-Point Journeys is a campaign that we started. We wanted to allow our students to tell the story of our school district. One thing with career tech, we must go out and recruit our students - we do school visits, we do sophomore career days, we do the open house, but there are all kinds of gaps during the recruiting season where there's no contact with students, just because of budget constraints or just because it's not a feasible opportunity. So we started the Hi-Point Journeys campaign to create an online place where students and parents who were interested in our programs could go to throughout the year and find out what life was

really like within our school. To accomplish this, we equipped each student in our campaign (last year it was ten students) and gave the flip cams so they could film what was going on in their classroom, in the lab, and with their extracurriculars. Then they blogged and had blogging assignments that they were responsible for each week. They also took pictures and created photo albums of their different experiences at Hi-Point. The campaign was highly successful. These students became really PR representatives in our community. We used them at different recruiting events. A lot of them were student ambassadors already, so it tied in nicely to that.

This year we have 16 students. This opportunity became a way to use Credit Flex because the students are kind of meeting many standards in terms of what they could earn for an English credit. I'm actually a certified English teacher, so that worked out in terms of having those standards met. We have a schedule for them to blog, we have topics for them to blog on, they do the filming, and it's completely student run. The opportunities that they have with this program as an extension of the classroom, it's not a class where they meet each day; they're doing this as an extension of the classroom. It creates an educational opportunity.

So you can see what the website is if you want to go explore what the students are doing. The opportunities, for this Credit Flex opportunity, obviously involve the students blogging, creating videos, in photography, and they're also engaged in public speaking. We tell the students they're our mini celebrities and they are required to be at public events. We get them out there in front of our prospective students, in front of parents, in front of community people, and they serve as the ambassadors for our school district. So this was just one way a marketing program initially became a great opportunity for a Credit Flex as well.

In summary, as a career tech center, we really embrace Credit Flex as an opportunity for our students to explore a variety of options through one experience. We have some international travel opportunities that we're creating, online courses, and just many different things that we think from a marketing prospective can help our career technical school district provide even more opportunities than what we have with the current career technical programming. Does anybody have any questions about the Hi-Point Journeys campaign or anything that I've talked about?

Patti: You can put questions in the chat box and I think in a minute Jennifer is going to help us open up the mikes as well. In the meantime, a question is in the chat room, that I'm going to ask Tom to briefly respond to about Credit Flexibility and IEPs.

Tom: In general, follow the language of the IEP. If the IEP calls for an accommodation, then the Credit Flexibility plan should include that same accommodation specifically to the reason for that accommodation. There is a question on who pays the cost of students with IEPs. While the district is obligated to provide a free appropriate public education, if the IEP identifies that the student will use a program or activity outside of school that does not include the purpose of the IEP, then the cost is still the student's responsibility. The advice we continue to give is follow the language of the IEP with regard to any accommodations. Then if a change has to occur, make the modification in the same way that you would make a modification in the student's IEP. This brings everyone back together who helped to develop the Credit Flexibility plan to reach agreement on the

change, sign off on it again, and move forward. The best advice we can give with regard to students with disabilities is to follow the language of the IEP. If the IEP specifically addresses a learning disability or an accommodation that needs to take place and that is required for the student to access a particular credit or content area through the use of Credit Flexibility, then you should make the accommodation and pay for it. If it's not connected, then there's no obligation to do so.

Patti: A follow-up question -Can we reasonably ask outside sponsors to make accommodations?

Tom: If they're going to serve in the role of the mentor or the provider and the IEP calls for the accommodation, absolutely. If they can't make that accommodation, you may not want to use them as a third-party provider.

Patti: Another question -How about a student who part way through the year decides he wants to drop a traditional classroom and do the same class as Credit Flex?

Tom: What does your district policy say? If the district policy doesn't address it, you might want to include that in modifications of the district policy. A student certainly has that option, but again, sometimes the district policy will say that all Credit Flexibility requests must be made by a specified date. If the request is past that date, then the policy addresses the issue. It would behoove everyone to keep that possible consideration - Could you take the first half of American History in a traditional setting and the second semester in a Credit Flex setting? It's possible and it should be approached the same way as any other Credit Flexibility course. But once again your district policy needs to address that particular issue. So that's something we learn as we go through this process.

Mike: There may also be situations where a student and a teacher (or instructor) come to an agreement that this student is a little more advanced in class than was thought originally and it might be appropriate for that student to maybe test out of second semester. Again, that would be something that would need to be mutually agreed upon. So there are a lot of things that are possible. Again, looking ahead if you can include some of those possibilities in the plan, you don't have to revisit them down the road.

Tom: The opposite could be true also, that a student might start a Credit Flexibility plan at the beginning of the year and at mid-year decide to go back to the traditional classroom. So it works both ways and it's a modification. Bring everyone back together, reach agreement, sign off on it and move forward, but unilaterally.

Patti: We are doing a poll right now about whether your district has had credit flex requests and, if yes, how many? It's interesting, you can watch the poll as you all are contributing to it. There was a pre-submitted question - Do you have to offer a class that's offered anywhere in Ohio? Mike:Yes, that's an option that is really available to students regardless of what your particular curriculum course of study is. The one we use as an example - because it's becoming more popular across the state - is a course like Mandarin Chinese. If a student wants to take that and you only offer say French and Spanish or maybe Spanish and German; yes, the student has the option to try to do that. Now, part

of that is going to be how are they going to earn that credit if it's something that you don't offer and you don't have the staff expertise to work with that student or locally it's not available. Sometimes students requests maybe can't be honored because it's just impossible to meet them. However, that student might be able to hook up with somebody from a nearby university, or maybe someone in the neighborhood to serve as the mentor and that would be a possibility. We'd also suggest that if that's what the student wants to do, he/she might want to look into not just Credit Flexibility per se, Seniors to Sophomore -type programs. So it is possible that a student will come to you and ask for a credit flex option and you need to try to meet that accommodation somehow. But the student also has the responsibility to bring closure and be done.

Tom: One thing to ask the student is - What course content are you seeking and how much credit do you expect? For example, if a student came to a school official in May 2011 and said my church is building a mission down in Columbia, can I get academic credit for that? Well, what course content is that? Is it industrial arts, construction, sociology, humanities? You have to reach some sense of agreement. Whether or not we want students inventing courses, that's kind of a suspect situation. But, if in fact there's a clear understanding - I'm going to do an internship with a local veterinarian because I want to go to medical school; well, there's a clear pathway right there as far as it might be an anatomy physiology credit they're looking for or some existing course that is clearly specified. This is individual, so you're going to have to make a judgment call on whether or not that credit is going to fit within something that you're going to send to our big brother EMIS and EMIS will recognize it.

Mike: Also, I want to point out, and again I'm not sure how the two presenters today do it in their districts. Not every Credit Flexibility plan should be viewed as an automatic one-credit, two-credit type thing. Sometimes what the student wishes to do may not actually rise to the level of being a full credit. It might be a quarter credit or half credit; just as you have courses in your district that are only worth a half credit or quarter credit. So those are all things that we say are negotiable, based upon the level of the student's activity and their performance.

Patti: Erika and Shane, one other question that was asked in a pre-submitted was - What are any obstacles that you would give people a heads up around working in the Credit Flex environment? Do you have any perspective right now?

Erika: One thing that really can become an obstacle is the fact that this is new and change can be difficult and arouse fear. So it's something that you can address by addressing questions and concerns of parents and students and not leaving them out there to fester. You really want to allow students to take advantage of these wonderful options for their education. By addressing the concerns and fear and getting the right information out there, it will help you refine your program and reduce obstacles.

Shane: I would say worry about internal communications as much as external options, because we had some teachers that necessarily weren't on board with this and expressed their concerns. Obviously you have to gauge what's going on within your school. I was just talking to a friend who worked at another school district, a K-12 and he was saying that pretty much the whole teaching staff was upset about Credit Flex. So it has to start

internally and certainly bring people to a level of understanding about it, what your school is going to do with it, making sure that you have strict standards and guidelines and that all those pieces are in place before you start promoting it out externally.

Patti: Any other questions? There was one geared toward Erika about paying your providers or your supplemental mentors. Erika, are you familiar with any arrangement that you would or wouldn't have in your district?

Erika: I do not believe we do because the majority of the mentors right now are either teachers or subject teachers that would oversee a Credit Flex option of the same subject or guidance counselors. So they're currently working with the students anyway.

Patti: Any other perspectives, Tom or Mike?

Tom: This is purely a local decision. It's something that the school district needs to approach rather cautiously, because you're going to establish a precedent. As soon as you do it for one, then everyone else is going to expect the same thing. Where are the funds coming from? This is not necessarily a charge back to the student. If you do that of your own volition, it may be coming from your general fund. You just want to approach it very, very cautiously.

Patti: A question, Shane and Erika maybe you can give some input as well. We would like more information on how to address the issues internally? How do you communicate this with staff and how do you handle negativity and unwillingness to get on board? Any thoughts?

Erika: Well, a lot of it went back to our curriculum department. They really went out there and were proactive with it. They met with board members, with subject leaders, teachers and all of the departments at the high school. They really went out and gave accurate information, talked about how this is an innovative, creative way to get involved in education, answered any questions, addressed concerns. They alleviated concerns proactively so that they didn't develop as they moved through implementing this program and requirement.

Shane: And have your staff be part of giving input and in the creation of your guidelines and your standards. Some concerns from teachers were - We're doing all this work, taking these classes, and now a student can just go out and get a credit anywhere. Well, that's not necessarily true, but that was the initial reaction. How is this going to take away from what I'm working so hard to do as a teacher. So getting their feedback and making them feel a part of the process are definitely things that you have to do.

Patti: Another question - Students who work with outside mentors, lawyers, vets, etcetera are not HQT, so who do you use to be the teacher of record and what if the HQT teacher in your district does not want to participate?

Tom: That's a real life situation and that's why the approach of engaging your staff in a proactive manner makes real good sense. You're talking about management style and leadership style. If it's a top down decision making district, you're going to get push back, you're going to have problems and it's going to be a fight all the way. If you use your site-

based management council that all schools should have, and the staff is part of the process, then they'll be part of the solution. Yet you still may encounter those individuals who will resist being drafted into this and hold out for a supervisory assignment or a supplemental contract. There are ways to get it done. If push comes to shove and it can't happen and you still approve it, then you're probably going to be flagged on EMIS. I don't think there's any way around it. I know this is a grave concern to the OEA right now. I've had contacts with a couple of their consultants. They've very much concerned that teachers be engaged in the developmental process and a monitoring process, which I think makes good sense from a leadership standpoint.

Mike: Marketing is going to be a key thing to staff. Erika's district has about 100 students who have put in requests for Credit Flexibility. I don't know how many of those will actually have an approved plan and move forward with it and actually earn the credit. Some of the initial fears were that every student is going to want to take every possible course that they have through their high school career as credit flex. This will result in numbers going down and staff will lose their jobs. I don't think the data are going to show this happening this year. So this provides an opportunity for staff to really look at the profession. They have students now who may be able to work in a much narrower field and much more in depth, which gives the teacher an opportunity to expand their work with students as well and to work with students on some really innovative things that go way beyond what could happen in class. While some of the students are going to take general type classes, there's a lot of opportunity in credit flex for staff to really expand what they do with students as well. So I think it all goes back to this marketing with your staff what your expectations for staff are, what is available to them, what do they get out of this as well as what the student might get out of it.

Patti: Great.

Tom: It's a little bit like do you see the glass half empty or half full. The optimists see it half full and it's filling up. The pessimist sees it the other way around.

There was a question that came in about using standard end-of-course comprehensive tests as the test-out option. That is certainly possible and I want to stress at this point, even if a student chooses to test out of a particular credit, you still need to develop the Credit Flexibility plan including use of advanced placement courses. Those have to be requested in advance, not after the fact. The plan will determine what will be covered, when will the test be administered, what happens if you don't hit that score, what happens to the student in the meantime prior to the test, what happens to the student after the test, all of those questions need to be answered in that Credit Flexibility plan. You also need to know that the test-out option is not necessarily a paper/pencil test or a one-time test, it could be a battery of tests spread over the entire year, it could involve performance-based assessments as well as cognitive recall questions, or it could be the same tests that are going to be given to the traditional classroom students at the same time with an expectation of mastery that you define. Then you have to interpret what that means as far as a letter grade to go on the student transcript. Likewise with AP, if they get a four on an AP test, is that a B, is that an A, is that C? You still have to make those determinations. I want to stress those plans need to be done prior to taking the test, especially when you utilize the advanced placement examinations.

Mike: One of the other questions that came in was about mentors and background checks. It probably is a very good guidance to let anyone who wishes to be a mentor, a student who suggests someone could be a mentor, or an outside provider from the get go that a background check is required. These are individuals, adults who are going to be working with your students. You probably have a policy already in place about volunteers and a requirement for background checks. The issue is might come down to who pays for that and, I would say - if you want to be a mentor, you're probably going to do that. Some districts actually do pay the background check costs for their volunteers. They feel that part is their responsibility of having those people work with students. So that's a local piece. But I would certainly suggest that be part of your guidance from the very, very beginning. Any adult who is not a school employee who hasn't a background check, really needs to get one. This is simply a safety issue and has nothing really to do with Credit Flexibility.

Patti: I want to thank very much Erika Daggett and Shane Haggerty for joining us on this call about communication and Tom Rutan and Mike Hubbell for being here to answer the questions that people have about Credit Flexibility. This was recorded and will be posted. I want to thank you very much today for your time, your interest. You will be getting an evaluation, which helps us to continue to make things better. Technology is always interesting, and some days it works better than others. I hope that everything has gone fairly well. Thank you very much for your time today and have a great rest of the week.

Jennifer: Thank you everyone for joining us today and that concludes today's web conference.