

**Credit Flexibility:  
Developing Quality Student Credit Flexibility Plans  
Audio Transcription**

**Thursday, April 29, 2010  
3:00 – 4:00 p.m. EST**

- Jennifer: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jennifer Reed with the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center at Learning Point Associates. I'd like to welcome you to today's event, Developing Quality Student Credit Flexibility Plans, hosted by the Ohio Department of Education and Great Lakes East. This web conference is the fifth in a series designed to provide information related to the local implementation of the Ohio Credit Flexibility policy. The series addresses the recently released guidance and will connect participants with Ohio schools, districts, and organizations that are currently working through the policy implementation. An archive is currently available on the Ohio Department of Education's website for the previously recorded events. During today's web conference, Developing Quality Student Credit Flexibility Plans, features Tom Rutan, Associate Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Mike Hubble, Education Reform Consultant, from the Ohio Department of Education. I'd also like to introduce my colleague Tori Cirks, program associate with Great Lakes East.
- Tori: Thanks, Jennifer. We have Tom Rutan and Mike Hubble here today to talk with us about developing high quality student credit flexibility plans. Over the next hour, they're going to discuss and identify the elements in a quality plan, including what are the things you need to think about, what maybe should be involved and included in that credit flexibility plan and its relationship to additional options and existing plans. So they're going to go through a lot of content. We have a lot of interest, a lot of questions to get through. We're going to have a great hour, a lot of information to be provided. We're going to have a little break in between some content pieces to make sure that we allow extra time for questions. I'm going to turn it over to Tom Rutan to get us started.
- Tom: Thanks, Tori. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Tom Rutan and I'm an associate director in the Office of Curriculum and Instruction at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). I'd like to share some thoughts on how does credit flex work in the schools, as a school administrator, as a counselor, how we make this happen in the schools. My colleague is Mike Hubble.
- Mike: Mike Hubble here. Glad to have all of you online with us today. We'll hopefully be able to answer the questions you have. If we aren't able to answer a question today, please submit it with contact information and we'll certainly get back to you.

Tom: Okay, let's get started on how we create these individual student plans. The first thing I'd like to do is just urge everyone to go to our website, the Credit Flex page, and look at the resources that are available. There are a number of great guidance documents that help answer a lot of the questions you might have dealing with a variety of topics, including frequently asked questions, and we'll address some of those today. Let's talk about the Credit Flex Plan. Really Credit Flex is nothing that out of the ordinary, because we've had educational options for many years. Credit Flex mirrors many of those options and adds a new dimension. That is the dimension of testing out of a particular course. So, if this is true, then how do we get things started? Fundamentally, students are looking for ways to earn credits in nontraditional ways; in other words - "I want to earn a credit, but I don't want to sit in a classroom five days a week for 180 days a year." So how does it work? The student probably will be the one who will initiate the Credit Flex request. They'll contact either the school counselor, possibly the principal, possibly the individual teacher and simply say - "I understand we have a new option available this year called Credit Flex, I'd like to exercise that option to obtain a particular credit." Then the counselor, teacher, or the administrator might respond and say, "Well, tell me more. What's on your mind? What credit in particular are you looking at? What course? How do you plan to do this? Give me some idea of what your thinking is." It's simply a follow up to gain a little bit more information. The student might simply say - "Well, I'm going to Washington this summer. I'm going to take some tours, I'm going to spend time there, I'm going to be an intern in my Congressman's office, we're going to presidential classroom, as you know I'm president of the Student Council, I went to Boys' State last year and had that experience and I've already arranged for an internship with my local state representative when I come back. I want to see whether or not those kinds of experiences can qualify me for a half credit in social studies." It sounds very intriguing and certainly you know the student, all of those things were in place, it makes sense, so you say, "Okay, let's start crafting the plan." So what would go into the plan might be - What course? How much credit? What are the activities involved? How will you demonstrate mastery of either the course of study that it is paralleled to or the academic content standards? It could be an internship, it could be travel, it could be an online program, it could be dual enrollment post secondary options, or it could be testing out, or even independent study. And once you have those conversations and you, as a school official, determines yes, this student is ready to do this kind of an activity because of the prerequisite knowledge necessary, then you can go ahead and begin having discussions on how you craft the actual plan. That is designing the step-by-step process that would ensure the student would complete certain tasks and activities over a specified period of time that would reflect favorably and aligns properly with other courses of study of a similar nature. Then deal with the issue of assessment. How will you demonstrate mastery of the content? When will this be done? What happens if it isn't done? What are the consequences?

Mike: I'd like to add that we're outlining the pieces of a plan that ought to be considered. We're not mandating any specific plan format. We're not even going

to probably provide a document for you to fill out. We're not going to monitor or collect these plans. These are your plans at the local level. The guidance document that Tom has been describing has really good advice for what you should be talking about with the student, the student's parents and the teacher who will be involved in overseeing this, or the community member who is going to serve as a mentor, or the businessman where there's an internship taking place. What are all those responsibilities and what should we be doing to ensure that this is a successful project, a successful program for that student, as well as earning credit? There's also guidance that's not in our guidance document, and that is from the Operating Standards. You can go to our website and look up the Operating Standards for Ohio Schools. Right now the State Board of Education is considering the five-year revision for those rules and Rule 3301-35-06 (G) is about educational options. You will see that there are some slight changes to the language. Educational options have been around, I believe, since 1983 and, in some districts, they've been widely used and, in others, they've been very sparsely used. Things like early graduation have involved educational options. Those students who want to do credit recovery, but it's been kind of under the control of schools. With Credit Flexibility, it's going to be more of an option that students have the opportunity to present their case for doing them. But as you look at that section of the operating standards, you also see an outline of what is expected to be in that plan in some way and these things have to be considered; those things such as performance objectives, what are the specific instructional activities and materials and learning environments where this will take place, what are the criteria and methods for assessing student performance. So all of those things are those that Tom just described in pretty good detail. There's guidance on this within the guidance documents. There is guidance that will be presented formally and approved by the State Board probably within the next couple of months that will be part of the actual Operating Standards which apply to schools.

Tom: You might in your school district plan have some provision or some mechanics that says a student who wishes to choose Credit Flexibility as an instructional strategy needs to submit a formal letter of request or in some manner officially notify the school that this is something that needs to be done. The student may have this informal conversation with you initially, and you might follow up with the "tell me more" kind of question, and just try to gauge what the thinking is. Then it would probably be appropriate if you'd say – "Let's schedule an appointment with your school counselor or with a teacher who might be serving as the teacher of record, to give some thought to how we're going to craft this plan." The important point to remember is that the Credit Flexibility Plan is a collaborative effort. It's not a plan that the student designs and gives to the school. Nor is it a plan that the school designs and gives to the student. It's a mutual development of a learning plan between the school that has certain expectations of rigor and success and the student who has certain wants that they need to achieve. Obviously, you're going to have to identify someone who will serve as the teacher of record. That is very important because that helps

coordinate things. It helps with the evaluation. It helps with the monitoring of the program, and it helps with the overall counseling that goes on with the student along the way.

Mike: The details for these plans will be quite varied. You'll have that student that Tom described who is going to travel abroad and is going to work as an intern in a representative's office. You'll have those sorts of things which are going to be a little more involved maybe, a little more planning is involved, a little more follow up and follow through. But you also have those situations that are very similar to what many of you have been doing for many years and that's early graduation. A student approaches you informally or parents do about how can my son/daughter graduate in three years instead of four. In the cases where it's taking college work in the summer time or an online class on weekends, those sorts of plans are going to be a lot easier. You've dealt with those for a long, long period of time and they're a little more cut and dry. When we get to those things where the student approaches you to do an internship at a local photography studio, because that's a fine arts credit they'd love to have, it's a hobby, and it may be an avocation or a possible vocation for the student down the road, those kinds of experiences may have a little more planning on the school's end. But there's going to be a wide variety of detail on these plans. So you shouldn't think that every one of these plans is going to be some three-, four-, five-page document. We're not really pushing anyone down that road to get that detailed for every option that comes along.

Tom: Ideally, as the Credit Flexibility policy has become more commonly known in the schools and school districts have begun working on this at the district level and at the school level, the building administrators have begun to cultivate a supportive environment with their faculty so that hopefully, this is a shared decision making concept. When you start asking the question about who will serve as the teacher of record, that good strong support from within will go a long way toward having a successful program. If you're in a confrontational situation or contentious negotiation, it might be a little more challenging. So the question is asked, how do you compensate the teachers of record? If this is done during the school day, the teachers of record are already on duty. Credit flex may be done during their conference period, for example. If it's above and beyond the school day, then that's a local decision on how that will happen, whether or not it's something that is built into the collective bargaining agreement, or whether or not it's something that is an expectation above and beyond perhaps a duty assignment. Because this is such a new endeavor with regard to teacher of record concept, we really don't have much of a track record to say here's how schools are doing it. There's a variety of options and, bottom line, this is a local decision that has to be addressed. Independent study has existed for years, but not widely accessed. The question needs to be asked - How do you handle independent study with a teacher of record? Perhaps you can handle credit flex the same way.

Mike: There are schools who have discussed with us that they're going to pursue this through tutor rates that are contractually agreed to. There has been talk about supplemental contracts, there has been talk about just finding teachers who are willing to volunteer their time outside the school day to do this. You may have things like department chairs who have assigned duties. There are a lot of options available. I don't think there's any one size fits all. So much is dependent upon the locally negotiated agreement and what can happen in a district under the umbrella of that agreement.

Tom: A lot of it depends on the nature of the Credit Flexibility Plan itself. Although there will be some effort expended initially in the collaborative development of the plan, the ongoing monitoring of the plan might not be too taxing for anyone, because the teacher of record is not the teacher who is doing the instructing, but merely the teacher who is touching base periodically with the student. It might be that the student stops in once a week to update the teacher of record on how he or she is doing, how he or she is making progress and at the end of the program the teacher of record will probably be charged with determining some degree of evaluation. How will the grade be determined and what are the expectations at that point in time? So a lot of it is dependent upon the plan. A lot of it is dependent upon the local school district. Some may have set aside a class assignment for multiple Credit Flex Plans that a teacher would work with, others may substitute a supervision, tongue in cheek I say, like bus duty in January with Credit Flex responsibility. So there's some different ways administrators can exercise some discretion on how this is done.

Mike: One question that has come up - Is this plan actually collaboratively developed between the student and the school? The thought was this is a student-driven option. It is student driven in the sense that students have the right to come forward to the district and ask to have a credit flexibility option put in place. The responsibility for the school is to guarantee that this kind of plan is actually doable, that this kind of plan is appropriate for the student, because the school is responsible for providing an education and students have to graduate, they have to meet the graduation requirements for the school. So when a student who comes forward with a Credit Flex Plan that is related to earning six or eight credits in high school in fine arts, at the expense of the required social studies, science and math, you determine that's not appropriate. The school has a responsibility to also make sure that the student is on track to graduate. We think students will come forward and ask about alternative ways to meet graduation requirements. But the school does have a responsibility to make sure that there is a proper learning environment, that the alternative way is aligned to those things which students need to know and do through the content standards. They do have a responsibility to be part of that plan and ultimately the school is the one who grants the credit. There is that oversight function that the school does exercise. If it is a plan initiated by the student, we feel the school should do whatever it can to collaborate with that student and the parents to see if the option that the student wishes to exercise is feasible and doable. The student getting a D in algebra who

comes forward and says –“I’d like to Credit Flex this year out of calculus by testing out.” That may not be an appropriate thing for that student to do and the school has some authority there to say that’s not appropriate, but here’s what we can do maybe in your next math class. So keep those things in mind. It is a collaborative effort. It’s not one sided. In the past, most of the educational options were one sided. The school said yes, you can do that. Now it’s going to be much more student driven.

Tom: It’s very similar scope to an IEP, although it doesn’t carry the same kind of legal clout, because the different stakeholders who are involved in this process should come together and should agree upon a plan and those stakeholders obviously are the student and the teacher of record. One would also think a counselor ought to be involved and informed, probably even the school administrator and, most certainly, the parent. If all of those stakeholders agree on a specific plan and sign off on the plan at the beginning, then you go a long way toward having success. If a modification has to take place midway for one reason or another, then you reassemble the plan just as you would doing a modification to an IEP and reach consensus and make changes to the plan so you can move forward. Other questions - Do students have to be in class all day long if they take Credit Flex? The idea of Credit Flex is to provide access to learning in a non-traditional way. If it is an internship, the answer would be not necessarily. That would be designed in the plan. If a plan called for a dismissal of a student so they could access credit flex in a particular manner, then the answer to that would be no, they would not be required to be on-site at school. Even though they’re not there, they are still counted as part of the ADM membership for attendance purposes. That’s an important point to keep in mind. The Credit Flex Plan is a student plan as far as attendance is concerned. However, Credit Flex is not designed to give kids an early out. If that’s what’s driving the decision, then it should not be something that the school should sign off on. But it is possible that if you are doing an internship in a law office, in a veterinarian’s office, you’d do that during the school day because that’s when business operates.

Mike: Tom’s last point is another example of where the school does have authority to actively be involved in the plan and at times say no. One of the key areas of question has always been related around finance. A question - Are there any funds to pay teachers to do these sorts of activities, being teachers of record and grading assessments, reading, looking over portfolios and that sort of thing? The real short answer is no, there are no special funds for that. But there are state and federal funds that flow to the school district that could certainly be used to do that through contracts as we’ve indicated. In times of dwindling resources, you don’t always have that option to reallocate resources as freely as you’d like. We understand that. But this is something that the school has a responsibility now under law and rule in Ohio to provide these options for students. It’s one of your responsibilities. It’s going to become part of the cost of doing business in most cases and no additional funds are going to be coming. I would encourage you to take a look at the finance document that is online in our guidance documents. It

was developed by Jeff Jordan, director in finance, and Tom Gumpf, an area coordinator. Many of the finance questions are actually answered by that guidance document.

Tom: There's another important factor to consider in the plan. Each plan is individually crafted based on the wants and the abilities of the student. You should include in the plan the possibility that something may happen midway and the student might not complete the plan. I call this the "What if?" factor. What if the student changes his mind part way through? What if the student stops doing the internship? What if the internship is terminated by the employer? So have, not consequences necessarily, but some alternative plans, what if a student is going to choose the test out option and everyone agrees that there will be an 80% proficiency demonstrated in order to achieve the credit, and they only get 70%, what do you do then? Do you A) withhold the credit all together, B) have them keep studying and take the test again like the OGT until you hit that 80% mark, C) require them to do additional work that more than compensates for what they missed or D) give them 70% of the credit, because that's certainly an option in the school. So looking forward, if you factor in some of those potential issues, then you will save yourself a lot of heartburn later on, rather than trying to deal with those issues after the fact.

Mike: As you craft these plans, they are individual and you will need to spend some time with each one of them and with the student. Some of the plans will become easier over time. Let's say, for example, you have a business in town that is going to sponsor three or four internships each year as a way for students to Credit Flex business or economics or something like that, or they might be science, medical, vet related. Those internships become a little more cut and dry every year. So the plan is kind of laid out based upon the service that the provider in the community has. The school just makes sure that the student understands his or her responsibility. The internship, the mentor's responsibilities, and the expectations for the interns have already been established. The school makes sure that the student is aware of the performance levels that are needed, the project or the work is understood and the student signs off on that. You do not need to start every plan from scratch. So over time they will be easier. Use some of the things you're already doing. A student comes to you and wants to graduate early. Well, what do you do with that request now? Start as an informal conversation, and then formalize it. These are the courses you need to take and this is how you're going to do it. Use the same approach that you've been doing for many of these things for a long time in your district.

Tom: Often times when I get a call from the field and a particular question is asked, I'll respond, instead of answering the question, by asking the question - What are you doing now? Can we use pass/fail for Credit Flex? Do you use pass/fail for your traditional students? If you do, the answer is probably yes. If you don't, the answer is probably no. Treat the Credit Flex students in much the same manner as your traditional classroom students, the only difference is how they are

accessing learning. Do we have to factor in the Credit Flex grades into the GPA? Yes, if the other students' grades go into the GPA, so should the Credit Flex students' grades. So it's sort of a rule of thumb: #1 - What are you currently doing? Do that for Credit Flex students. #2 - How do you treat your normal traditional students? Those are a couple good guides that can help you as you make decisions.

Tori: We're going to take a quick break for questions, and then we're going to talk about measuring performance. One question we're getting a couple different versions of is: What is the relationship of the student Credit Flexibility Plan to other existing plans like the IEP, the written education plan, your Ed options plan? Can they be folded together, is it supplemental, what supersedes what? Can you talk a little bit about the relationship of this plan to other existing plans that students might be working on?

Mike: We do have an archive for the gifted and special ed webinar so I refer you to that. In general, they become blended. Obviously, if you have a WEP or an IEP, those are really the documents that take precedence. But we would suggest that when students are doing things that are outside what would be the normal things that you've been putting in the WEPs and the IEPs, and they are those Credit Flex things where students are doing something outside the school setting that they normally wouldn't have been doing (they are receiving services in maybe an alternative setting or having alternative experiences provided) that those pieces of the Credit Flex Plan actually become part of the WEP and some part of the IEP. There's not a sense from ODE that a student who is on an IEP, who might also be gifted in one area, and is also doing Credit Flex, has three separate plans. That's not appropriate. The plans should be blended together. Quite honestly, the IEP is already, in essence, a Credit Flex Plan that's pretty well documented and been in existence for a long period of time. We don't see these as being separate stand alone documents for those students.

Tom: Another question: Are any sample plans available? There are none that are posted and available on the web. We do have some early adopters, some case studies and you can go onto the website and take a look at those. We are also now trying to identify some schools that are out front and comfortable with where they stand and be able to refer other schools to them to have those conversations on developing a plan. In the guidance documents, under frequently asked questions, question # 8 is a bulleted question with specific elements that ought to be included in an individual student plan. So you might want to refer to that document and some of those FAQs to help guide you as you develop those student plans.

Tori: It looks like we have a couple questions on the phone.

Jessica S: Hi, Tom, Mike and Tori. This is Jessica Spears from the Ohio School Board Association. I love the guidance documents, great work. I just have more of a clarification to make sure that I'm disseminating the correct information from our

end. What you are talking about today is when students are submitting their requests for options that they would like to pursue. What OSBA is telling districts to do is to go ahead and put a plan in place, so they have the parameters in which to consider the individual student requests. I just want to make sure that we're consistent in communicating that to our member districts.

Mike: We would be in agreement that a district really needs to get those parameters or those outlines of what's going to be in a plan, because students need to know that information ahead of time. If I'm going to ask for a Credit Flex option to be available, what are the kinds of things that I'm going to be held responsible for? What's the school going to provide for me? It's key that those kind of documents should be developed locally right now for implementation next year.

Jessica S. I just want to make sure because when I say Credit Flexibility Plan to every district in the state, I mean their actual district internal plan that they've put together, which considers all these individual Credit Flexibility Option requests. When you're using Credit Flexibility Plan today, you mean the actual plan requested by a student.

Mike: Right. And I know your group has supplied a lot of good documents and guidance for districts on planning. So I want to thank you for that.

Jessica S. No problem. I just want to make sure everyone was on the same page.

Mike: I refer everybody to the Operating Standards on educational options. That's where we've put in the Credit Flex language. The first item in the section - All educational options shall require: An instructional and performance plan is based upon individual student needs and shall include the following. Those are the key pieces that we've been talking about. It's the plan that we've been talking about today, the instructional performance plan at the student level. Districts need to have that other plan in place so students know what their expectations are.

Jessica S. Do you think that the Revised Rule 3301-35-06 is going to be adopted by the State Board of Education this summer?

Mike: It actually has gone through the achievement committee and been voted out to the full school board last month. It's on track to be in effect for the start of the 2010-11 school year.

Jessica S. Great, thank you.

Tori: I think we have one more question Jen.

- Karen: Can a school limit the number of flex credits? For instance, if a school were to decide that a sequence of three science credits for graduation had to be achieved in a certain manner, could they put those off limits for Flex Credit eligibility?
- Tom: No, everything is on the table and a student is not to be limited by the number of Credit Flex courses, other than what is unreasonable. If it's beyond the scope of the student's ability, if it's beyond something that is manageable in the eyes of the school, then you would have the right to put some constraints on it. But all courses need to be available through Credit Flex.
- Karen: Thank you.
- Mike: Also, I would look at what you're doing in your schools in terms of PSEO. That's another statute about when students take coursework outside the school day on their own. The requirements of those statutes are that that credit has to be counted. So you may have a certain sequence of courses that you want all your students to take and, in good faith, you've developed these and these are the things which you think provide the proper progression. If a student can find an option that would meet the criteria for one of those classes through say, PSEO or a college course, even through some kind of an independent study or program, they're going to have the right to pursue that and request that a plan be developed that allows that to move forward.
- Tom: There's a couple points I want to make here that are kind of odd situations. One question that we've been asked: Can we deny a student the right to take Credit Flex because they want to avoid a particular teacher? No. If you have a lot of students that are requesting Credit Flex to avoid a particular teacher, you do not have a Credit Flex problem, you have a teacher problem that needs to be addressed. Secondly, it is not the intent of Credit Flexibility to encourage students to take Credit Flex in a particular subject so that you can reduce staff. That's been brought to our attention and that is certainly to be discouraged.
- Mike: Other questions: Can a student opt for a better grade or pass/fail options? How do you do that in your schools right now? Many schools do give students this opportunity. The student takes Algebra 2 and gets a C. The school allows the student to take the course again and get the higher grade or a blend of the grades. The same opportunity should be available in Credit Flex. That's going to be under the policies you already have in place. Can you make all Credit Flex pass/fail? No, unless you allow all of your courses to be taken pass/fail. Many times pass/fail is a disadvantage to the student because they're looking to have a grade, GPA evidence that they have performed very well in a class and pass/fail doesn't give any of that kind of information. On the other hand, students might want to take pass/fail because it's a very difficult course and they are not sure that they're going to be able to perform at the level they'd like and pass/fail is an option. This is something that would be decided at your planning sessions with the students and the parents about the grading option. But if it's an option that

you allow for all of your students, then that option should be allowed for any Credit Flex credits or courses that would be taken by the student.

Tom: I have a question that has to do with athletic eligibility. The first thing we want to say is we work very closely with the Ohio High School Athletic Association on this particular topic. And, just this week, we received a PowerPoint slide show that is really excellent and does a wonderful job of explaining all the nuances of athletic eligibility. It's posted on the ODE website under Credit Flex guidance documents. The Credit Flex courses can count toward athletic eligibility in much the same way as any other classroom course, but the specific point there is that needs to be monitored to ensure that progress is being made and passing work is being completed. So I want to refer you to the document on our website on athletic eligibility and in particular to that PowerPoint slide show. It addresses primarily scholarship bylaw 441 in the Ohio High School Athletic Constitution bylaws. If that doesn't answer your questions, then call OHSAA, Dr. Debbie Moore, associate commissioner, or Roxanne Price, assistant commissioner. They are the two who are most proficient in answering your questions on athletic eligibility.

Mike: Another question has come up about transferring between schools and how Credit Flex credits are viewed by the incoming school. What should the school that's sending those records provide? First of all, one very specific thing is that there's not going to be any designation of Credit Flex options. A Credit Flex credit is a credit like any other one. It's really the same as courses today. There might be a course description for a Biology 1 class that sort of fits your Biology 1. No one has any issues with accepting that credit, but those courses could be quite different in actuality. Credit Flex courses are really dependent upon the integrity of your planning process, the integrity of those levels of rigor and performance that you demand of students. So I think it behooves all of the districts to look at rigor, look at high expectations for students, and once those are set and established, we hope that when schools see records coming from another school, that they're very confident those credits measure up to their standards. We have those same issues that happen right now without Credit Flex being involved. Our science program chemistry is much more rigorous than someone else's. But the fact is, the legislature and the State Board said there's really not going to be a difference in how these courses are designated in transcripts. I know Tom has done a little bit of work on that.

Tom: On the electronic transcript that is the next generation of transcripts, which hopefully will be piloted next year and implemented the following year, we'll be gathering data. Any Credit Flex grade should be as non-descript on the transcript as any other grade. So anyone looking at a transcript would not know whether or not a student sat for the class or took the class online or earned the credit by an internship. It should be entered on the transcript in the same way. To answer another question we received: How do you report it? You report it through EMIS. There is a course code for everything and for those that are those unusual courses

in the four core areas, there's that "Other" EMIS code. I can speak to social studies 150000 "other social studies course" and it could be that you'll be using those codes in ELA, math, science and social studies to report that. We have another question: Can we purchase test out tests from the College Board or ACT, if you're going to utilize the test out option? Certainly, it's the local decision. If this is something that you wish to do, to reflect the test out provision, you certainly can do that. Be mindful of some of the constraints that those organizations have in using the tests. I think there is a question specifically with regard to advance placement on the gifted guidance document, or the guidance document for gifted and talented. You may want to take a look at that because they have certain parameters that the College Board requires when you do that. Keep in mind when you test out, this does not always mean paper and pencil. It would be extremely difficult for a talented cello player to take a paper/pencil test to demonstrate mastery or proficiency of playing the cello, but they very well may be able to perform. They may very well be able to document concerts. They may very well be able to document hours of practice and so forth. There may be justification that through performance-based assessment they could test out in much the same way as a portfolio for a visual arts student could demonstrate their talents.

Mike: One of the case studies, I believe its North Union, has a little section in there about testing out options. That district is taking the approach that the test out will not be a single test. There will be some other things that are involved and it might be some kind of a performance measure, it might be a portfolio, it might be some kind of work, it could even be a defense, like a thesis defense or dissertation defense to a committee explaining what you've done and answering questions about it, so testing out is not always going to be that single test in a single bubble and ABCD.

Tom: As Mike mentioned, the concept about defending your thesis before a panel, some schools are considering using a multi-teacher panel to serve as the teacher of record. It might be the department chairs of math, English, science, social studies working together to review Credit Flexibility Plans so it's not an individual teacher. Then when the EMIS report would go in, it would be the teacher of record in that particular content area. So in a perfect world, if it is going to be a government class, it would be a social studies teacher who would be the teacher of record, who is HQT. If it were a music course, it could be your band director for someone playing the cello; even though you might not have an orchestra, but you have a band and the student is playing the cello in a concert band. In that type of situation, the band director has a certain expertise.

Mike: I think that's a good point to raise, we've also been describing this as a half a credit here or a credit here in terms of the plan. Many of these plans may come forward and the decision is made that this isn't a single credit in a single subject area. It could be multiple credits, but it also could be one credit, but it actually is a half a credit in social studies and a half a credit in English. It could be half a

credit in science and a half in math. You have students who might be able to do some things with a local engineering firm as an internship and not only do they have to do some things that are science oriented, but they have to brush up on their math skills. So they might be able to earn some math credit and work toward an Algebra 2 equivalent credit while they're working on science related things as well. There might be some things that are very involved in technical writing with one internship and someone might decide that would be appropriate to consider for some English credit in terms of writing. So these aren't always individual subject area projects. They could be multi disciplinary and go across more than one content area.

Tori: So following along the assessment track: What recommendations would you give to certain schools around how they can show performance or measure performance within a student Credit Flexibility Plan?

Tom: The first thing they need to do is be sensitive to a course of study of a similar nature for which the student is requesting credit. If they're doing it in a particular area, such as one of the four arts areas, then is there a course of study? Are there academic content standards that should be reflected? Many times we get a question about using a sport or band to achieve a physical education credit. There are six standards in physical education, physical fitness is one of those six. So in and of itself participating in sport or band activity can't work. But you want to test out, maybe it's the President's physical fitness test or the Marine Corp physical fitness test. That demonstrates one aspect of the credit, but there's also knowledge and skills and about nutrition, wellness and so forth that would have to be included. The testing out should involve something that reflects a course of study or the content standards for that particular discipline and should be monitored by a teacher of record that has particular expertise, ideally highly qualified in that area.

Mike: Again, I'm going to go back to something we talked about earlier. The school does have a responsibility, as a matter of fact a requirement, that they present programs that allow students to earn credits to receive a diploma. That's Ohio's statute and rule. So as we're looking at those assessments that exist and the credit flex plan being developed - Is the plan going to allow the student to do the things that will be in the assessment? We've got the Core requirements going into place next year formally for the very first time. You're going to have life science, physical science and advanced science, all of which have inquiry-based laboratory experience as a part of courses. If a student is going to Credit Flex out of one of those requirements, how are you going to determine that inquiry-based laboratory experience is included? How do you take an online chemistry class without doing some laboratory work? How will that requirement of the course be fulfilled? So as you develop these plans, you really have to look at what are we assessing and what are the academic content standards that we're required to actually make sure the student has access to and participates in? Which things are purely elective? The alignment to the standards for taking your fourth or fifth credit in English

language arts or the fourth of fifth credit in social studies, may not be that critical in terms of getting that student prepared for graduation or for passing the OGT, but there are still standards for those subjects and somehow you have to assess the student's ability to show that they've mastered those indicators.

Tori: We've talked about a couple different scenarios, maybe educational options, an internship, independent study. We had one question that came in which I think is interesting. They wanted to know if a student has a paid job, is there a way that he/she could earn credit through that and how would that be reflected in a student Credit Flex Plan?

Tom: Whether or not the student is paid is a nonissue as far as credit is concerned. Maybe the student has a job working for a veterinarian, and that's an internship, but they're also being paid for it. This does not deny them the opportunity to utilize that experience as one of the elements in the Credit Flex Plan toward earning that particular life science credit, if that is what they're going to do through an internship. So yes, that's something that is permissible.

Mike: Many of the districts already have programs for students, have an early release to go to a job and there are certain responsibilities that the student has to meet in terms of not just showing up for the job and doing it, but reporting back what they've done. The employers have responsibilities and students are earning some partial credit for that now. So Credit Flex might be a way to expand those kinds of opportunities to other students that aren't involved in your school to work programs that you have. That's already being done across the state right now. It's been done for a number of years.

Tom: We used one example of the veterinarian. As you craft your Credit Flex plan, if you're going to do an internship and the student is going to be working with an artisan or a skilled professional in the community, that individual who is providing that mentorship or that oversight ought to be involved in the development of the plan in some manner and ought to be signing off on it so that we can ensure that there is an appropriate amount of professional oversight and nurturing going on in the community, if they're using that as the primary instructor.

Mike: Those folks can, and should also be part of the assessment process, because they certainly contribute to the types of things that ought to be assessed, the types of things the student has learned, experiences they've had and their performance level. So they should be involved all along the way.

Tori: Similarly, related to that, how do issues around HQT come into play for the student Credit Flex Plan, if they're out in the field at an internship, a job, an independent study, a volunteer opportunity? Can you talk a little bit about how HQT should be addressed within that plan?

Tom: For the perfect world, we have a guidance document on HQT that is out of our Center for the Teaching Profession. Let's talk about the practical world now. You're going to have a teacher of record at the school and you're also going to have someone with professional expertise in the field who will be working as a mentor to that student. Ideally, the teacher of record will be the HQT person and that person who will be tagged with the EMIS code when it's submitted to the school. Failing a person of HQT, a credentialed educator may be put into that role. Who are those credentialed educators? Those are the counselors, those are the gifted coordinators, those are the building principals and so forth who could sign off on those Credit Flex Plans. There will always be someone at the school who will serve in that particular function in addition to the mentor who is a third-party provider.

Mike: Again, the guidance is to do what you been doing over the past several years for those students who have been doing educational options, they've been doing independent studies, they've had a tutor, they've been taking some kind of online class. How have you been handling that? This is going to be no different. We certainly urge you to have, in the core areas as defined, the areas that HQT is needed, to try to get those folks involved. I've got a comprehensive science certification and I don't think I taught chemistry more than about six years, so I don't know that I would consider myself highly qualified as the chemistry instructor. But I certainly might as a department chair, for example, to be the one who serves as the teacher of record. So HQT is an issue. We certainly want you to try to do that whenever possible, but a department chair, guidance counselors, all those credentialed folks in the district might be your fall back positions.

Tom: We have a question on whether or not a district can refuse to permit Credit Flex for graduation requirements. An example is physical education. Credit Flex has everything on the table; all programs in your course of study, and even some programs that are not in your course of study, which you might not be offering. To deny the student that right is in direct contradiction with the Credit Flex policy. However, when it comes to physical education, if a student says I run marathons and I want to flex out because I run marathons. Well, that answers one sixth of the Credit Flex issue and that is physical fitness. Talk about nutrition, talk about wellness, take a look at the six benchmarks of physical education, develop a plan that monitors that, put together an evaluation document that maybe has a log and a paper and some other things, then perhaps you can have that quarter credit of physical education based on the performance and fulfillment of the Credit Flex Plan that reflects all of those course of study benchmarks.

Tori: We're running low on time, and the bad news is we still have quite a few dozen questions related to this. The good news is, however, that when you submit those questions we do take them down. Any questions that we didn't have time to address this afternoon will be addressed in the future or in future webinars. As Mike and Tom have mentioned, we do have quite a few webinars and guidance documents that are currently available on the ODE website including HQT,

School Finance, Special Education, Gifted Education, General Implementation FAQs, Athletic Eligibility that addresses again the Ohio High School Athletic Association and NCAA Eligibility requirements. So there's a wealth of information on the website. In terms of next steps, if you have additional questions you can e-mail Tom or Mike. Our next web conference in the series is specifically on assessment, not only paper/pencil tests, but also performance-based assessment.

Tori: Tom and Mike, any last thoughts?

Tom: With Credit Flexibility, we take the position - How can we make this happen for the benefit of kids? Students want to do things in non-traditional ways, they're teenagers, they typically do it that way. It's up to us as the adults in their lives to help them be successful in achieving their goals.

Mike: I want to ditto that. The next webinar is on assessment, which is the next logical piece. We've talked about plans, and about some of the fundamentals that we should be looking at in terms of plans. The next step is the assessment of the student's performance and fulfillment of the requirements of that plan. So I would encourage you to log into that and register for that.

Tori: Additional information about student Credit Flexibility Plans will be, of course, coming on the ODE website and in future guidance documents. This isn't the end of the conversation; it's just kind of the beginning. Thank you for joining us.