

Credit Flexibility Live Chat Transcript

August 31, 2010

Jennifer Reed: Thank you everyone for joining us today for this live chat. This is a new feature that is designed to serve as a follow up to the credit flexibility web conference series in order to provide more time and additional opportunities for you to ask specific implementation questions. My name is Jennifer Reed, and I am with the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center at Learning Point Associates (Great Lakes East). I am excited to help facilitate today's discussion.

First, I would like to remind everyone that this is a "chat only" discussion; there will be no audio portion. We have had quite a few questions that were pre-submitted and we would like to thank everyone for sending those in. We will get started with those in just a few moments. If you have additional questions, please feel free to submit those at anytime by typing your question in the QA Pod.

I would like to introduce the Ohio Department of Education staff and would like to ask them to say a few words at this time.

Ohio Department of Education: Welcome to today's Live Chat on credit flexibility. This is a follow-up to the August 17, 2010, web conference for school counselors. We are pleased that we again reached our maximum registration capacity. The technology we are using is text only through your computer. There is no audio in the chat. This is the first use of this technology by the Ohio Department of Education and we are interested in knowing your satisfaction with this tool, which is another way to share information and discuss common issues.

The intent for today is to spend the majority of our time answering your questions. We know this topic is important to school districts and that you have many questions about implementation, so we invited Dr. Bill Wagner, principal of Lakewood High School in Lakewood City School District, Cuyahoga County, to chat with us. He will share briefly the experience his school is having with implementing credit flexibility and then open the chat to your questions. After "chatting" with Bill, Tom Rutan, Ohio Department of Education, will respond to your questions.

Jennifer Reed: Thank you – at this time I would like to introduce Dr. Wagner. Dr. Wagner thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule, we are looking forward to hearing from you today. If you would like to say a few words and then start with some of the questions we received.

Dr. Wagner: Good afternoon, everyone! I hope you all have had a wonderful opening to this new school year and I wish you all the best during the upcoming months. As we all continue to work toward developing the best possible Credit Flex [CF] program for our schools, opportunities like these provided by the Ohio Department of Education and Great Lakes East allow us to share what has worked well and what has created a multitude of headaches so that others may avoid the pitfalls.

This afternoon, I will do my best to share our story at Lakewood with the clear disclaimer that we don't profess to have it "all figured out." We, too, are still making changes as new information and guidance is

provided. That being said, I will type as fast as my little fingers will allow so I may answer as many questions as possible. (Thank you for your understanding toward typos and minor errors in grammar.)

Question: Who was involved at the district and school level in the development of the credit flex processes?

Dr. Wagner: We involved our department facilitators (our LHS Building Leadership Team) our administrators, central office curriculum staff, parents (we have an active PTA), guidance counselors, our district data management people and, of course, asked students how credit flexibility could help them. We were guided by what our returning alumni and teachers (who were taking classes) were doing in their college experiences.

Question: How long did it take to develop your credit flex processes?

Dr. Wagner: We've worked on our plan continuously for about two years. However, it started with a lot of conversations and a first stab at an application. The process really moved fast after that. DATE EACH VERSION and throw out old versions. That way you can see the progression and not get confused as you make changes.

Question: Who developed your independent study/credit flexibility application and guidelines? Did you already have something for independent study that was modified for credit flex?

Dr. Wagner: As principal, I made the first application from a previous Independent Study application we used. I called around to areas schools and asked them to send me what they were using. I then ran the first few drafts by the various groups who were involved and piloted them with students who wanted to take an Independent Study class.

Question: How have you laid out a plan for Credit Flexibility Option 2 – Testing Out of or Demonstrating Mastery of Course Content? How has your faculty evaluated exams and other assessment instruments that may be utilized?

Dr. Wagner: We're still refining this, but we have been using the PLATO Learning® system since about 2003. We use the courseware and PLATO Test Packs with Prescriptions on PLE™. PLATO is very well aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards.

Question: Do you have a test-out schedule where students can only test out during certain times in the school year?

Dr. Wagner: Currently, we have students apply for test out in May. Here's our language: "District developed and/or approved tests/assessments used to determine advancement and course credits will be given annually in May to facilitate planning for the subsequent school year. Applications for credit by assessment are due on or before May 1. To qualify for credit by assessment, the student must show mastery in the subject as determined by the Teacher of Record to receive credit. A student failing to achieve this score may not apply for credit by assessment for the same course credit until the following school year. Any credit by assessment for a particular course may only be attempted two times." Clarity and detail in each individual application is the key!

Question: Have you had students ask for the test-out option? What instrument are you using and do all courses, including lab courses, have something for the test-out option?

Dr. Wagner: We had our first request for test out just last week. We are putting together the composite assessment as we speak!

Question: Can a student who fails a course take the test-out option?

Dr. Wagner: Yes, we DO permit that. We have found that sometimes, students become more motivated when they have an opportunity to craft the course and assessments.

Question: So when you say the “Teacher of Record” is that one teacher of record per course?

Dr. Wagner: Yes, we have a single teacher of record assigned to each CF application applied. However, we do have several teachers who facilitate several CF applications at once.

Question: How is the teacher of record compensated for additional work beyond his/her regular classes when taking on credit flex students?

Dr. Wagner: Our teachers volunteer, but we also have duty periods in various teachers' schedules to accommodate their time working with CF applications.

Question: What is your plan when a teacher of record doesn't volunteer?

Dr. Wagner: Being a large school, we have several other teachers. The CF application goes to the teacher with the release period who is HQT in that area.

Question: So when they fail, students have the option to take the course over, put in an application for credit flex, or the test-out option?

Dr. Wagner: Yes, they can attempt the course again any of those ways... nice flexibility.

Question: How are you planning on reimbursing staff who will be part of the evaluation of portfolios and performance work? Is it written into their contracts? Done on a voluntary basis?

Dr. Wagner: Currently, most of our credit flex options are voluntary. However, we have what most would consider a tutoring lab called our TLC: Teaching and Learning Center. A small number of teachers are assigned to the TLC (usually one period duty) to assist students who need remediation for the OGT, who need tutoring/help in classes, and who are working on credit recovery or credit advancement. One teacher in each of the core content areas is designated as the Credit Flex teacher of record (as HQT allows.) We have negotiations this year and we've already identified the “Teacher Work Day” as an area we will need to clarify given demands that may be outside the contractual contact time for teachers who are facilitating credit flex applications.

Question: We need to write a policy. Are there examples that can be shared?

Dr. Wagner: Absolutely! The Lakewood City Schools Credit Flex plan is available as an attachment. You can also e-mail me at william.wagner@lakewood.k12.oh.us and I can e-mail it to you.

Question: How do you determine if standards are met?

Dr. Wagner: The teacher of record needs to be very careful in the designing of the course and the assessments that are used to identify mastery. Time spent in the creation of the CF project/course is well worth the end result and helps eliminate a lot of problems.

Question: Dr. Wagner, I have noticed in your district Credit Flexibility guidelines you indicate that custom learning activities will be granted credit based on the equivalence to a 120-hour (Carnegie unit) course. How is that determined?

Dr. Wagner: Many of our courses in PLATO have hour equivalents assigned to the course. In addition, the teacher and student will often contract together with a specific amount of time they will work together.

Question: What information, if any, needs to be submitted to the state?

Ohio Department of Education: EMIS data and general reporting of the extent of credit flexibility from a state perspective.

Question: So, does your teacher design the course or does the student come up with the plan?

Dr. Wagner: Actually, both are pretty involved. The student actually has the core responsibility for the creation of the plan, but we really want to guarantee the quality of the application.

Question: Clarification on a grade for AP on student's transcript – we understand they can take the test, but what grade should be assigned on the report card?

Ohio Department of Education: The grade for testing out would be determined by the agreed upon Credit Flex plan. The College Board has taken in recent weeks the position that the AP credit could appear on the grade card if a 3, 4 or 5 was earned on the test (which must be taken in May when all other tests are administered). Otherwise, whatever the CF plan dictates is how the grade is to be determined. High school credit could be awarded based upon the results of taking the AP test for a particular course without participating in the classroom instructional portion, but that may not be all that is required by the CF plan. The AP test might be only one of the test-out requirements. Other measures might also be included. These might include such things as a portfolio of literary works read, essays, interviews, etc. All would depend upon the plan developed. Test out should not automatically mean that the HS credit is earned by one paper-pencil test alone.

Jennifer Reed: A lot of questions have come in regarding the CF application, and we are going to show that to you at this time.

Dr. Wagner: I would like to thank Bay Village City Schools for the assistance they provided Lakewood in the development of our plan.

Question: How do you handle dealing with a community liaison person who is “teaching” the student, such as a dance teacher or a YMCA soccer coach, to make sure the person has had BCI/FBI checks or do you have the parents sign a waiver?

Dr. Wagner: The parent signs the application and the community liaison is listed on the application prior to it being approved. We have BCI/FBI checks required for anyone who works with the students directly (when not in the presence of a district employee).

Dr. Wagner: The community liaisons pay for their own background check.

Question: Can gifted middle school students obtain high school credit by setting up a plan that will be assessed by a high school certificated teacher?

Ohio Department of Education: Possibly. Credit Flex (CF) applies only to HS credit. Middle school students could only be eligible for high school credit under two circumstances: 1) students take advanced work below the ninth grade. The district board of ed must approve the course as being advanced (content standards for grade nine or higher) and the instructor must have high school credentials. This is really not CF but is under the statutory requirement for a totally separate provision of ORC 3313.603; or 2) students could be accelerated, either whole grade or in a subject area. In this case, students would earn credit, because they are no longer a MS student for that particular course or because they have been promoted to the higher grade level. Again, this is not CF, but a provision from the “acceleration policy” adopted by the State Board of Education a couple of years ago.

Question: How are you handling honor level students who are trying to test out of lower level courses, just to get out of classes?

Dr. Wagner: We have found that if a student is capable of testing out of a lower level course, we should encourage them to progress to their ability.

Question: Dr. Wagner, how did you approach the development of test-out measures for courses offered in your school (for demonstration of mastery)? Which courses did you begin with?

Dr. Wagner: We are working on Algebra test outs right now. We craft the test-out measures one class at a time. We will keep track of what we develop for each course and build a bank of test-out “packages” for classes.

Question: This is costly for some districts, particularly after some cuts had to be made. Will the state offer any financial assistance to struggling school districts?

Ohio Department of Education: Regrettably, no funds have been allocated for credit flexibility implementation.

Dr. Wagner: I have found that working cooperatively with the teachers, teaching associations and a little creativity with a master schedule, there are ways to keep the cost small.

Question: How do you manage the paperwork?

Dr. Wagner: The paperwork begins with our Guidance Counselors working with the student. The student may also have a teacher he or she has discussed the CF option with and begun the process. Sometimes, I am having a conversation with a parent and we discuss options. However it begins, the paperwork starts with the School Counselor.

Question: Can some courses not be offered via Credit Flex due to a large participation component?

Ohio Department of Education: This is a complicated issue. This is a capacity issue and each case should be judged on its own merit. Feel to contact Ohio Department of Education to discuss further.

Question: On the test-out option, do you record a grade for what they received on that option? Or is it just pass/fail?

Dr. Wagner: Our test outs are grades. It is important in the application to be VERY clear in defining how the grade will be determined.

Question: Will any other Credit Flex option other than credit by examination affect NCAA sports eligibility?

Ohio Department of Education: The NCAA requires notation on a grade card/transcript for non-traditional courses. The test-out option is not accepted (applicable only to Division I athletes).

Question: How many total students applied for the Credit Flex Option, how many were approved and how large is your building?

Dr. Wagner: Lakewood High School has around 1,800 students. Most applications are approved because they often go through several rounds of revision. I have approved eight applications already this school year.

Question: Is a district able to require a student to get a certain grade like an A or a B on a test feature (e.g. Spanish I) before continuing with that series of classes (e.g.. Spanish 2)?

Dr. Wagner: We have required, in certain applications, that students meet 80% minimum of all content standards.

Dr. Wagner: We have a test-out situation right now where the student is taking Geometry concurrently and is interested in taking Advance Algebra II next year. We want to be sure the student is well equipped to be successful.

Question: Does the teacher of record for a class such as Theater, Art and PE have to be certified in those content areas or just certified as a teacher?

Ohio Department of Education: HQT is required for fine arts. A credentialed educator is required for PE, but we recommend certification in PE.

Question: Need clarification on the geometry student.

Dr. Wagner: He is taking geometry now and we are creating his Algebra test out now.

Question: So what happens to the student who only gets 75%? Do you help them to get to the 80% or do they then have to take the course?

Dr. Wagner: Our teacher of record will work with the student until he/she progress to the required passage rate.

Question: I listened to the Counselor Webinar for Credit Flexibility. I thought I heard you say the following regarding reimbursement to parents of costs: If it is for graduation, the school pays. If it is online during the school day, the school pays. If the school recommends a program, the school pays. If the course is outside of the offerings of the district, the parent pays. HELP!

Ohio Department of Education: This is fairly accurate, but an updated guidance document will be available in late September.

Question: How are you managing the concerns with your education association? Have you created contract language regarding compensation, teacher of record, HQT?

Dr. Wagner: We have worked with our teacher association in conversations about the many demands involved in facilitating CF options. That is where the release periods for our Teaching and Learning Center evolved. It has been a group learning experience. We will be engaging in negotiations this year and it will surely be a topic of our work. The teacher work day has changed dramatically since we entered the 21st century.

Question: If we cannot limit the courses requested by a student under credit flexibility and a school district does not have an HQT for teacher of record in a requested subject....then what?

Ohio Department of Education: HQT only applies to the core content areas. All schools have HQT in core areas.

Question: Has there been any clarification regarding the impact of flexible credit on OHSAA/NCAA eligibility?

Ohio Department of Education: Refer to OHSAA PowerPoint on the credit flex web page on Ohio Department of Education website.

Question: So HQT is required for core and fine arts as stated earlier?

Ohio Department of Education: Yes. Fine arts is considered a core curriculum federally.

Question: How many people are normally involved in the team to approve the credit flex plan? Is most of the evaluation of components completed by the teacher of record or is it done by committee?

Dr. Wagner: The guidance counselor, the teacher of record, the parent, the students, a non-school mentor (if applicable) and me!

Question: Do you set a time limit?

Dr. Wagner: Yes. However, we do provide extensions if the teacher of record believes that it is appropriate.

Question: On Plato, do you charge students to take online courses if they want to through credit flex?

Dr. Wagner: No, we do not charge students since they are often facilitated and monitored during the school day.

Question: Back to your earlier statement about a student who does not achieve 80%; does the student ever “fail” a test-out option ...an educational options plan?

Dr. Wagner: We haven’t had a student fail a test-out option yet, but we haven’t had more than just a few.

Question: Some courses seem to lend themselves to being available via certain CF options, like public speaking through demonstrated mastery only not testing out. Is this okay to limit how they are able to do it?

Ohio Department of Education: There are a number of test-out options that might be considered for courses that appear to be based primarily on “demonstrated mastery.” Even a course such as public speaking might have a paper-pencil assessment piece that could be part of a test-out plan. There could also be an actual public speaking component to the test out. It could be in a live-judged situation (ex: FFA public speaking competition), presentations via video recording or some other means. Additionally, there could be required readings. The plan developed for the CF option would layout the learning, performance and assessment components. Again, it should not necessarily be the starting position that the test out means a simple paper-pencil only assessment.

Question: Do you have a limit on how many credits can be obtained by one student per year or during their high school experience?

Dr. Wagner: No, we do not limit the number of credits the student can take. When they find out that CF is not as easy as they think and they learn how much time a good CF option requires to complete, they appreciate the traditional classroom a little more!

Question: Do you have a district/school appeals process? What is it/how was it developed?

Dr. Wagner: We have a process in place where a student can appeal to the principal, then to the assistant superintendent. We do not currently have an appeal board or committee. This is one area where LHS has to do more to communicate and solidify the process. However, since the application process is a joint endeavor between teacher and student, we have not experienced much resistance. The grading process has also been very personalized, so again, we haven't had problems in this area.

Question: What lessons learned can you share for schools and districts who are working on their credit flexibility processes?

Dr. Wagner: Our biggest lesson learned is that WE need to be flexible. It is far better for us to give the extra effort working with a student to develop a plan so we can meet a given educational need or desire. Otherwise, students resort to seeking outside resources (and they are all over the place trying to hook our students). By keeping these efforts internal, we maintain quality control of the content and delivery of the curriculum and student learning. This is our #1 goal at LHS.

Jennifer Reed: We are reaching the end of our scheduled time, at this time I would like to ask Bill to wrap up this discussion with a few thoughts.

Dr. Wagner: CF has been an ongoing process for us. We have shared with many districts throughout the state and have found the process to be very invigorating. The Ohio Department of Education guidance documents are outstanding and the support is very helpful. We're all in this together. Feel free to e-mail me [william.wagner@lakewood.k12.oh.us] if I can assist in any way! Good luck to all of you.

Jennifer Reed: I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who has participated in today's live chat! A special thanks again to Dr. Wagner for helping share his insights and expertise with us today. We want to thank everyone for the questions that were submitted, and to let you know that a transcript of today's event will be posted to the Ohio Department of Education's website. We will also be reviewing the questions submitted, and if there were any questions we were not able to answer or get to today, we will be working with Bill Wagner as well as staff at the Ohio Department of Education to create an additional Q&A Document. At this time I would like to invite the Ohio Department of Education staff to say a few words in closing.

Ohio Department of Education: Thank you again for joining us in this first "live chat" on credit flexibility. We plan to continue "chatting" monthly so please watch for information or check the Ohio Department of Education website at: <http://bit.ly/9fqM5W>. Have a great week!

Jennifer Reed: Thank again for your participation! At this time we would ask that you complete a very brief survey, which will aid us in developing future credit flex events. Both the application and the waiver will be available to download at the end of this event. That concludes the live chat event for today.