

# Credit Flexibility: Mastery-based Assessment Models

## Web Conference Summary

Thursday, April 22, 2010  
1:00–2:00 p.m. EST

### Opening Remarks

Sarah Luchs, associate director of Student Success with the Ohio Department of Education, provided opening remarks. This was the third web conference in a series, co-hosted by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center, related to the implementation of the credit flexibility policy. ODE hopes the series will help foster communication between the Department, schools and districts. Superintendent Delisle's weekly e-newsletter, [EdConnection](#), and the educational service centers (ESCs) will continue to communicate additional updates and guidance as the work continues. A set of [guidance documents](#), currently posted on ODE's website, can support schools and districts move forward with their own policy development and implementation. In addition, [case studies](#) of five sites in Ohio have been posted on the ODE's website and include informative examples with additional resources. This web conference focused on Credit Flexibility and Mastery-based Assessment Models and provided participants the opportunity to hear from staff within the Ohio Department of Education as well as experts from the field.

### Credit Flexibility and Mastery-based Assessment Models

The focus of this web conference was to unpack Mastery-based Assessment, starting with its definition, how it is working for two specific sites, and where schools can start by putting certain tools in place.

Two sites were highlighted during the call. Participants heard from Marcy Raymond, principal at Metro Early College High School in Columbus, Ohio, and from Jeff McClellan, principal at Metropolitan Cleveland Consortium for STEM High School in Cleveland, Ohio.

*What does Mastery-based Assessment mean for these two demonstration sites?*

- Examining the criteria and the quality of what it's going to take for a student to go from one content specialty to another, sometimes within the same content and sometimes across content;
- Looking at what it takes to earn a credit and be successful in the next system or level;
- Changing the dynamic from time being the constant and what kids know being the variable to identifying what is important for kids to know and giving them whatever they time need to show that they have mastered the knowledge.

*Do you have a specific example of how this works?*

- One example is a 16-year-old student who, due to his academic progress, is now a full time student at Cleveland State University. The student still participates in some of the project work at MC<sup>2</sup> and is somewhat integrated into the other activities at the school, but is able to pursue academic challenges that would not have otherwise been offered. This happened by examining the English benchmarks for 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grades. We assessed knowledge and skills not yet mastered by the student and then worked on these through

the Accelerated Reader. The student is able to show mastery without sitting for the entire class, which would have gone over skills already mastered.

*What is necessary to have this type of system in place?*

- Be very strategic about what the benchmarks are going to be and how you are going to assess the benchmarks;
- Remember that it is not necessarily that you need more time, it is that you will have to use the time differently;
- See the assessment at the same time as the instruction – not as two separate things;
- Change the dynamic from time being the constant and student learning as the variable to identifying what is important for the student to know (benchmark) – and then use time as the variable by which the student masters the knowledge. The outcome is common, but the time it takes the student to get to mastery is the variable.

## Questions and Answers

***Q: Did you develop your own benchmark assessments and did you use the same format as the statewide assessments?***

**A:** MC<sup>2</sup> uses a combination of different assessments; most of which have been developed in house and most of which were developed specifically to project outcomes that are a part of the larger capstones that the students are participating in. It is never really enough to have one specific measurement determining whether a student has achieved mastery or not. Teachers are constantly evaluating progress towards mastery on specific benchmarks within the ten-week capstone window, but also throughout the course of the year and sometimes over the course of a number of years.

***Q: How much time is built into the teacher's day for collaboration, professional development and planning? What kind of professional development do teachers need for this kind of model?***

**A:** METRO teachers were originally hired four weeks before school started to allow eight to nine days of prep time. Now they use a more systemic approach of having teachers come in for a set number of days before school starts. An instructional coach works with teachers individually and then as a group through one professional meeting per week on Mondays right after school for 1.5 hours.

With a year-round calendar, MC<sup>2</sup> is a little different. There are ten weeks of instruction, followed by a three-week break for the students. During that first week of break, the school hosts a professional development institute, which is an intense week of professional development for all staff in the school. There is also time during the ten-week period built into the week. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, there is a 50-minute morning session and then a two-hour collaborative session on Thursdays after school. All professional development is part of a negotiated memorandum of understanding with the teachers' union that defines the work conditions that teachers are under.

**Q:** *What about students who are not able to demonstrate mastery on the benchmark, or continue to need time and support – how do you help that student?*

**A:** METRO stated that this is the good thing about having the mastery system where performance is the standard and time is the variable. If students were in a typical class, they might not be able to learn the materials as quickly or they might not be able to master a certain aspect and then get lost in the end. With the mastery-based approach, you can slow down your material to each student's needs. So while it might take some students a little longer than an average student, eventually they all perform at the level required.

**Q:** *Do you permit observers from other schools to come and see for themselves how you function? It is difficult to change time paradigm unless teachers can see it.*

**A:** Metro and MC2 are both demonstration sites for the State of Ohio and welcome visitors!

**Q:** *Can you talk a little more about the importance of mastery-based assessment for students looking to use credit flex to gain HS credit?*

**A:** Neither Metro and MC2 look at getting students to do only the minimum number of credits. Graduates average 29 high school credits. The idea isn't that they want to achieve the minimum and move forward; instead, students are able to move through more coursework.

**Q:** *Who assumes the responsibility for out-of-school costs, e.g., credit for travel abroad, university courses, etc?*

**A:** It is a component of the school's budget. Both locations stated that they do not have travel abroad that is paid for without fund raising, and PSEO covers university coursework.