

Credit Flexibility: Communicate Effectively Your District's Credit Flexibility Policy Web Conference Summary

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

Opening Remarks

Patti Grey, with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), introduced the third web conference in the fall series, co-hosted by ODE and the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center. The web conference series relates to the implementation of the credit flexibility policy and ODE hopes the series will help foster communication between the Department, schools and districts. The goal of the web conference is to increase participants' knowledge in regard to communication strategies, to respond to questions and concerns regarding Credit Flexibility, and to foster thinking and conversation between everyone around Credit Flexibility.

Highlights

- Senate Bill 311 (Ohio Core legislation) requires local boards of education to adopt a plan that allows students to earn units of high school credit based on demonstration of subject area competency, instead of or in combination with completing hours of classroom instructions.
- Benefits of Credit Flexibility include: creating more learning choices, provides for focus on performance, not time, and accommodates different learning styles, paces and interests.
- Local boards ***must communicate*** the aspects of Credit Flexibility (the policy and programs) with students and parents on an on-going basis using multiple communication methods.
- When designing a communication plan, there are two important things to consider: typical or standard methods of rolling out new district policies and existing mechanisms or materials that can be used to share information

Communication Plan Actions:

- Announce the board's policy on credit flexibility
- Meet with school counselor and district curriculum leaders to anticipate/research areas of credit flex requests and outline the process for credit flex requests
- Develop forms for the:
 - Application
 - Agreement to participate from family
 - Credit flexibility plan
 - Description of evaluation, assessments and demonstration for mastery
 - Other related options such as the athletic waiver
- Design information for print and digital media (e.g. handbooks/guidelines and student/family announcements)

- Create events that promote two-way dialogue about Credit Flexibility with internal staff and external publics
- Use social media to communicate information on Credit Flexibility

Additional resources mentioned during the web conference included:

- [Hi-Point Career Center](#)
 - [Hi-Point Journeys](#)
- [Middletown City Schools](#)
- [Sycamore Community Schools](#)
 - [Credit Flexibility Information](#)
- [Ohio Department of Education](#)
 - [Credit Flexibility Guidance Documents](#)
 - [Credit Flexibility Web Conference Series](#)

Questions and Answers

Q: When schools and districts are starting or in the early phases of developing the credit flex plans is there something that can be done to help anticipate some of the questions that may come in?

A: Sycamore shared and discussed the surveys that they had created. One survey was for parents and one survey was for students. Both surveys helped them to understand and gauge where people were with Credit Flexibility, how much people knew about it, what people were thinking about it moving forward and how to utilize it. The survey also helped to gauge what subjects people were most interested in using credit flex for, which allowed the committee to start with those options rather than implementing something that people would not utilize at this time. It also helped Sycamore gauge how people wanted to be communicated with about Credit Flex and what else they needed to know about it.

Q: When creating forms, handbooks, and communication plans what are some important things to consider?

A: When creating any documents, it is very important to make sure that they are understandable. The general public will not have the background or familiarity of the process as those developing the documents so it is important to make sure that the documents can be understood. It is also important to make sure that the information gets out – having the documents and tools are wonderful, but people need to know that they are available and have access to them. A few different ideas on communication tools include using the school and districts websites, placing announcements via student announcements as well as website announcements, the PA system at the school can be

used to have announcement saying the handbook is available, the guidance counselors can also play a role by telling students about the resources available.

Q: *What other ways might a school use to help make sure that it is meeting the needs of parents?*

A: One option that Sycamore found very helpful in meeting the needs of parents was to hold special forums. To attract parents' attention, postcards went out explaining the information that would be talked about and also provided some additional information on credit flexibility. Participants were allowed to submit questions via index cards that were passed to the moderators of the forums. This process not only helped keep the evening moving, but it also helped track where the majority of the questions were coming from. The questions and answers were then used to develop a FAQ documents to further assist parents in understanding credit flexibility and the options that are available.

On a similar note, Ohio Hi-Point listed ways that they used marketing to disseminate information on their credit flex programs. Some tactics included: Credit Flex Information Night event, Student Orientation Nights, Open Houses, marketing collateral materials, the use of social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), and the Hi-Point Journeys Campaign. Ohio Hi-Point also noted that using video or photography and making things visual seemed to help people understand the Credit Flex opportunity and helped to avoid the "education speak" that educators get caught in sometimes.

Q: *Were there any obstacles faced in the creation of the Credit Flex plans? Is there any advice when working in the Credit Flex environment?*

A: It is important to remember to look at both internal communications as much as external options. The staff at the schools needs to feel comfortable and on board, as well as making sure that the parents are well informed. Having staff be part of the process by asking them to provide their input and being part of the creation of guidelines and the standards are great ways to makes sure that everyone is on the same page and comfortable with the process.

Q: *Is there any guidance or recommendations for districts in regard to paying your providers or your supplemental mentors?*

A: This is purely a local decision. It's something that the school district needs to approach rather cautiously, because it will establish a precedent. As soon as a district does it for one provider or mentor, others will expect the same thing. Districts then need to look at where the funds are coming from, because this is not a charge back to the student necessarily. If a district does do that of its own volition, it may be coming from the district's general fund. Just approach this issue very, very cautiously.