(Transcript has been edited for readability by Patti Grey, Ohio Department of Education.)

Credit Flexibility: Communicate Effectively Your District's Credit Flexibility Policy

Audio Transcription

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Patti Grey: Good afternoon and welcome to today's web conference on engaging families and the community in Credit Flexibility. Our overall purpose is to discuss the support districts and schools need from parents and the community in order for students to have successful experiences with Credit Flexibility. Of course, the trick is to engage families and your community in this effort. We know this is an important topic because we have reached our maximum registration capacity of 100. So welcome everyone out in our audience. I am Patti Grey with the Communications Office at the Ohio Department of Education. I am pleased to introduce our speakers today. Two are from the Department of Education, and they are Krista Allison, Executive Director for the Office of School Health and Wellness, and Jennifer Vargo, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator. We also welcome our speaker from the field, Patti Koslo, Public Information Officer for Nordonia Hills School District. Joining us in the room today is Tom Rutan and Mike Hubbell. Mike and Tom are the leading Credit Flexibility experts at ODE and will participate, as needed, in answering your Credit Flexibility questions.

The goals for the web series have been to point out guidance that is available on this topic from ODE and to share resources. It is also a platform to have a conversation between the Department, schools and districts to share ideas and ask questions. Specifically today, we are going to provide strategies for family and community engagement, answer your questions, and dialogue about the experience and your "lessons learned" that you're having at the district level. A few housekeeping items before we begin. There will be an opportunity after the web conference to provide feedback. This information helps us to improve future events. We promise the survey is brief and we appreciate your participation. The resources and documents that we will be discussing today are available on the ODE website, search for Credit Flexibility, or through a pod that you're going to see on the left side of your screen, which contains document resources that are downloadable resources. So you can access them either way. Finally, we do provide the recording, the transcript, the executive summary, Q & A and the PowerPoint on the ODE website. Today we are going to start with a two-question survey. Please respond now to the two questions on your computer screen. Now if you've been to previous web conferences this fall, these questions are very familiar to you. But every audience is different, so if you'll help our presenters understand who's in the audience today and the level of Credit Flexibility requests your district or school is receiving, that will be very helpful. About two-thirds of those responding are receiving Credit Flexibility requests. It does look like the majority are receiving five or under requests. So we really appreciate that input. That's helpful. With that it's my pleasure to turn the presentation over to Krista Allison.

Krista Allison: Good afternoon. Let me start by providing an overview of our conversation this afternoon. First of all, we're going to be talking about what needs to be communicated to families. When we think about Credit Flexibility - How are we engaging our families and what should we be talking with them about? Secondly, we're going to be talking about what methods are available for communicating this information. We'll dive into that a little further in terms of looking at the methods that are currently being used by one of our local districts that is joining us, as well as some other examples. Third, we're going to be discussing how can schools and districts can collaborate with families and civic engagement teams to support Credit Flexibility. As you all are aware, all school districts have family and civic engagement pieces in the Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) and in your Family and Civic Engagement (FCE) plans. How can Credit Flexibility be incorporated into that?

So let's talk a little bit about Credit Flexibility and families. What are some of the roles and responsibilities that we need to keep in mind? First of all, one of the roles is the parent or the guardian involvement. They're involved in the development and monitoring of that student's Credit Flexibility plan. That means they're part of the conversations with the school staff to build a common understanding of student expectations. So when you're having these discussions with families, please make sure that you're including them in that planning process. As a part of that, we want to make sure that there's sign off on Credit Flexibility planning and that there's an assessment used to measure the student's learning. Not only is this plan being developed for the student, it's being developed in a collaborative effort with the family. The family is agreeing and signing off on what are the types of measures that are going to be used to assess that student success within that Credit Flexibility plan. Secondly, there's also the notion of involvement in the development and implementation of the Credit Flexibility plan. So not only are we talking about this involvement during the development stages, but also the next part which is implementation. This includes the conversations with students, parents, guardians and school staff to build those common expectations on what needs to be learned as a part of that experience. We also need to keep in mind the delivery of the high quality instruction that's aligned with those standards.

Additional guidance can be found related to family and community involvement through ODE guidance on our website such as FAQ. You can look at our information regarding highly qualified teachers. There's also information on school finance - How are we paying for Credit Flexibility? Information on working with students with disabilities - What does that process entail? The next piece discusses the communication of the Credit Flexibility option and what the policy requires. Specifically, it talks about local boards must communicate and you notice that it's highlighted there. Districts must communicate the aspects of Credit Flexibility, meaning the policies as well as the program. So not only are we just going to put the policy up there, we also need to talk about the specifics of the program with students and parents on an ongoing basis using multiple communication methods. We also have a link here for a new emphasis on learning, which you can directly go to.

But we want to make sure that when this is being communicated that the policy talks about all the aspects of Credit Flexibility for parents and that it addressed their questions whether it's through an FAQ or whether you have various meetings. And we'll talk about some of those communication methods. We want to make sure that when you're talking about Credit Flexibility that the policy clearly stipulates the policy as well as the programs that will be offered. Then there's this notion of state expectations. There are expectations that we have as a state agency, as a part of implementing this policy. One is that the local Board of Education must communicate the provision annually to parents and students. Secondly, as part of that policy there's this review process, meaning local entities must submit data to ODE, about the methods and frequency of communication with students and families. So when we get into our conversation about communicating the policy to parents, it's going to be important that whomever is your lead within your district, that they keep track of those methods of communication and the frequency of those communications to parents as well as students. The other piece as an expectation is that districts should leverage their family and civic engagement team. Each of you has in the district a family and civic engagement team that consists of individual parents from families, human services and business leaders. We want you to begin to think about how you can leverage the work of that team, looking at the plan that you've put together, with the expectations of implementing the Credit Flexibility options and ensuring that communication occurs throughout the district parents and the students.

Patti Grey: Patti Koslo from the district level – What is your input on district policy and perhaps any advice you have for districts.

Patti Koslo: A little bit about the way we've shared information in our district. We've used several different methods to get this message out. We often look at the resources we already have in place. We've used our PTA or PTO meetings to share that information. We've used Board of Education meetings as we see people there. We've used our freshman orientation or our 8th-grade orientation as our students are transitioning over to the high school. In addition, we use our district newsletters. We've shared information with our local newspapers about it in case we might provide opportunities for students to partner with a local business in the community. Certainly, we use our district website along with the course catalog at the high school.

Patti Grey: Great. Thanks Patti. Have you found any particular vehicle to be the most effective?

Patti Koslo: You need to know your population, your parent population. One of the ways that we've been working to communicate with our parents here is using electronic resources as we look for ways to contain our costs. So again, we're not looking to recreate or reinvent. We need to know how our parents and our students best receive information. Certainly one area that was left out in my conversation was our students. Our students need to be aware of this programming, so we offer a number of opportunities for students to get that through the high school guidance department and class meetings they might have. It's also shared in an English class, because every student is required to take English at the high school level. So we offer that opportunity for students to learn about it there as well. It needs to be a multi-faceted approach, because we know the message needs to be heard more than one time. And we know that as we move into this new area, it is a new program, so it will take time to build here.

Patti Grey: Great.

Jennifer: Vargo Good afternoon, this is Jennifer Vargo. I'm the former family civic engagement coordinator for the Ohio Department of Education and today I will be speaking on what we need to communicate with families and effective ways to do so. In order for Credit Flexibility to be effective and used, families will need to know about it. Like most educators, Credit Flexibility is going to be new for families. Families are very used to thinking about education happening in the brick and mortar of their child's school. So anything outside of the school is often thought of as extracurricular and not having a direct impact on the child's education. So to maximize the use of this option, districts will need to communicate the benefits of this policy.

Typically, family involvement in high school drops by 50% or more from middle and from elementary school. So parents at the high school level are typically involved through booster clubs or their child's football team or some kind of extracurricular, but aren't often engaged in the academics of their child. In elementary school, parents are overseeing their child's homework and the work is at a level which parents can actually actively participate. But when it comes to high school, two things happen, parents shy away in getting involved in the academic piece because one, they don't have the knowledge to actually talk with the child about biology or mathematics at that level, and two, because there's not a lot of information that's given to parents on how to actively be engaged in academics at this point in their child's high school career. Also, students are trying to develop some autonomy from their parents. At the same time, educators are really relying on the student, as opposed to working through the parent, to ensure that child's academics are being met.

So basically families struggle with how to actually be engaged in education at this level. They are typically hands off unless the school calls them and says your child is in trouble or the student asks their parent for some kind of help. So engaging families in high school academic planning actually is a key strategy to keeping parents engaged and involved in their child's education at the high school level. Unfortunately, as I talk with parents, there still is not a really good relationship between them and the high school in regard to academic planning. Usually the school counselor is working with the student directly to make the academic plan. Then the student communicates that information to the parent. But there isn't this sitting down and having a conversation with the parent, the child, and the school counselor about the career aspirations of that child and what is needed in school in order to be successful.

So engaging families in Credit Flexibility as an option for their child's academic classes will be a paradigm shift, not only for educators, but also for family members. This is just because they really haven't been involved as much in the academic piece. In doing so, it's going to be important to engage families in the academic piece. It's going to be a lot of communication that needs to happen with families. In this communication, you'll want to stress the importance of their role and responsibility in being engaged in this way. For example, when ODE brought parents to the table to talk about Credit Flexibility when the policy was being developed, parents were both excited about this opportunity to learn about it, but they also had a ton of questions because they didn't know how this Credit

Flexibility was going to enhance their child's education. They were afraid whether this was going to endanger their child in getting into college. There were lots of questions around - How will this be beneficial to my child and how do I use it? So when schools start to talk with families about the benefits of Credit Flexibility, they might want to give examples of how Credit Flexibility will enhance their child's coursework and will actually allow that child to tailor the learning needs to what that child is interested in.

Patti Koslo: Jennifer, if I could just jump in for two quick things that you just discussed here. One of the things is about engaging parents in the course planning for their student. Districts might want to look at, if they do not already have in place, the opportunity for parents to sign off on the course offerings that their students are selecting. In seeing that plan, we put together the four-year plan in Nordonia, you lay it out as a freshman. But certainly with the idea that you can modify it as your interest or your areas of expertise increase as you go through your high school experience. Most importantly, offer that opportunity for two-way dialogue between the guidance department and the parents. I think that one of the challenges that parents sometimes have are that our hours are business hours when they might be working. So when you're talking about a shift in paradigm, we might also need to look at doing things differently in our schools to offer parents the opportunity to come in maybe to sit down with a guidance counselor on a Saturday when they might not be working, which might be a little different than what we've done in the past.

Jennifer: Vargo Thank you Patti for adding those very specific activities that districts can do to better engage families. I think the message that I want to send is about the benefits themselves of Credit Flexibility. Parents will want to know how this is going to enhance their child's education. Parents are interested in specific examples of how other students are using it and how maybe some of the things they're doing outside of school, after school, can actually be used for course credit so it will allow their child to take other classes during the school day. You also want to give information on what is Credit Flexibility, who is eligible and when can a student access it. What is the district policy for Credit Flexibility? What is covered under Credit Flexibility and what is not? What is allowable and what is not? Give specific examples of how students have used it, what's appropriate, and why it will be very beneficial to families. Even giving examples of what's not useful or what's not allowable will be very useful to parents.

Again, one of the issues that came up for parents when we brought Credit Flexibility to the table was the issue of safety. They wanted to make sure that whoever was going to be teaching their child outside of the classroom was going to have a background check or some way to ensure that their child was going to be safe. They also wanted to know about transportation. This will be a big issue, especially for students whose families economically are struggling and do not have transportation to take their child to these activities.

Another issue that came up when talking to families was the equity around this policy. They want to make sure that all families know about it and are going to be able to have equal access to it. So when you're thinking about your students and different populations of students, you'll have to really think about what might be some of the challenges that families will have in accessing this policy and then what kind of support the district will be able to provide or will not be able to provide, because these are the questions that you're going to get from families as they're trying to figure out how to use this policy. I'm just going to spend a few minutes here to talk about methods of communication. As you saw in a previous slide, districts have to use a variety of different forms of communication in order to communicate it to families. There are a couple reasons for this. One is reason is the more ways that families receive information, the greater likelihood that they're going actually get it. But I want to go back to something that Patti said earlier today. It's really important to know how your families receive communication, so you're not just throwing communication strategies at a blank board. You really need to think about, and you may even ask your families at the beginning of the school year through a survey, what's the best method to reach them. Is it through phone call, is it through a marquee, is it electronically, is it through the newsletter? You're going to want to do a variety of these things, but you're going to want to target a variety of communications to the needs of your families. Again, along the issue of equity, there are some communities and families that will not readily receive communication in any of the ways that I've just mentioned. You may need to go out to the community and work with the community organizations where they live and activities they participate in like churches or other kind of community centers where you can hold forums and partner with the church to hold a forum to communicate and to have a conversation and a dialogue with families about what Credit Flexibility is. I encourage you when you're thinking about the variety of communication, that you really think about how your families receive information and doing what is necessary, like connecting to other community resources, in order to get this information out to families.

Patti Koslo: Jennifer, this is Patti Koslo. There's one other thing - understand the language barriers that you might have in your community. We have experienced here where we've sent letters home and the parents received the letter, but unfortunately it was not translated into a language or a dialect that they understood. So they were not able to read it and they were not able to respond or understand it. That's just one other suggestion as you're communicating with parents.

Jennifer: Vargo Thanks, Patti. That's a very good suggestion. There are community organizations that can help with that as well.

Patti Grey: There is a question about providing some sample policies that districts can share. Our previous web conference on communications that was in October did include two district policies. So you might look on the Department's Credit Flexibility page for web conferences and take a look at the October web conference for policies from Middletown and Sycamore School Districts. If people want to share policies, we are happy to post them on the ODE website. That's part of what we would like to build on our Credit Flexibility resources that we have on our website. You can certainly send any policies that you'd like to share with ODE and we will continue to post them.

Jennifer: Vargo As we're talking about collaboration and methods of communication, one method that you can use to ensure communication is the district's Family and Civic Engagement team. We talked about this a little earlier, but I want to go back to this now just to reiterate a couple things. First, you're all familiar with House Bill 1 that is listed under section 3313.812. Specifically in the statute, it talks about establishing family and civic engagement teams and the requirements. It discusses the fact that the local board of education of each school district shall appoint a family and civic engagement team. It also talks about the composition of that team, meaning it should include parents, community representatives, often human service representatives, business representatives and others. So as you're looking at how to best communicate credit flexibility, and as Patti and Jennifer mentioned, in a multi-faceted approach, look at your district family and civic engagement teams. Many of those members can be used to help facilitate and communicate that information out into the community, out to parents, out to families.

Patti Grey: Patti Koslo, how was your FCE team put together put together?

Patti Koslo: Our Family and Civic Engagement team was actually put together by a number of different resources that we used in the community. We looked at different agencies that helped to support the school district. We had a number of parents who came forward and were very interested in being part of this process and wanted to see it to fruition, so to speak. We have parents that represent our elementary buildings and our high school level buildings because we know that parents are at different levels of understanding and concerns as they go through the school years. Additionally, we wanted to make sure that we included some local clergy members because we do know, as Krista spoke earlier, it's very important to reach out to our local churches. So much of our support comes from them and we need to work with them to help them understand what this means for children in our school district. And we use human service agencies that help to support the processes. Going back to the Credit Flexibility, we feel it's very important that the message is communicated across the district. We start the information sharing at the middle school level before students are even at the high school, such as the different course offerings and some of the opportunities that students will have when they reach the high school. This is because, as Jennifer talked about, parent engagement declines at the high school level. We feel it is important that our middle school students and their parents, while the parents are still actively engaged in the process, hear the opportunities for children as they advance on to high school. That's a little bit about our Family and Civic Engagement team and how we've tied our Credit Flexibility to it.

Krista Allison: In addition to what Patti mentioned, one thing to consider within your districts and within your buildings are those transition conversations you conduct from the elementary to the middle school or the middle school to the high school. This is when you're bringing in your families and your parents and it's a prime opportunity to start talking about Credit Flexibility and educational opportunities. The parents are there coming to see the schools. They're engaged because they want to know what the various opportunities school presents for their students are. This is an opportunity for you to also include credit flexibility information, so that parents are aware of it. It's about the various forms of information that you can get out to them. You'll tell them once maybe in a newsletter, the next time it might be through a meeting, or the next time it might be through another community organization. If they can see it and hear it in different ways, the likelihood of them contacting you and wanting their child to participate will increase.

Let me just briefly get back to a couple other highlights on district Family and Civic Engagement teams and just a few other additional requirements that you're familiar with. You know that as a part of your team you're supposed to be working also with your local Family and Children First Council. There is a Family and Children First Council in every county throughout Ohio. Another requirement is to develop a five-year Family and Civic Engagement plan. All districts submitted their plans this year through the CCIP. And districts will provide annual progress reports on the development and the implementation of that plan. So you'll be able to go back and look at the plan and make revisions that you want. Another requirement is to devise and to provide recommendations to ODE as well as to your local family council.

Patti Koslo: Krista, this is Patti. I'd like to add on to that. One of the tools that we use here are our board of education meetings. We have started to provide updates to the board about our Family and Civic Engagement teams at our board meetings because they're televised and they go out to our whole community. Again, it's just another method of streaming that information out. Additionally, we have some business leaders who are part of our Family and Civic Engagement team. They were unaware that we offered these opportunities for students and, as a result, several of them have contacted the high school to see how they could partner and become a mentor for one of the students who might be interested in creating a Credit Flexibility plan.

Krista Allison: You're so right about utilizing your local Board of Education meetings. Many are communicated via the local access channels in communities, and believe it or not, families watch them, they really do. They watch those communications because they can't always come to the meetings, but they will tune it in. I know that for some channels they replay those meetings, some are replayed maybe at 2:00 in the morning. But families can access and they do watch and listen.

Patti Koslo: Correct.

Jennifer: Vargo One of the other last pieces that we want to talk about is collaboration and benefits. I want to reiterate the importance of engaging families in their child's learning. Especially for kids that are struggling, it's important to contact that parent to find out what type of support is needed in order to make that child successful. For some students they're just disengaged, school is not exciting or interesting for them. But parents will know what interests their child. They're with them most of the time, more than schools are. So actually having the conversation with the parent about what interests the child has may help that school counselor or the teacher design an activity, a class, to re-engage a child once they start to be disengaged. You can also use your community organizations to promote service learning. Some of you might already be engaged in service learning. I know that some districts have incorporated service learning as a part of their graduation requirement. They require their students to go out and to actively provide service within the community. The benefit of Credit Flexibility promotes service learning by engaging students within their community and giving back to their community.

Patti Koslo: Jennifer, if I could also add another resource. As you talked about utilizing local resources, consider your Chamber of Commerce. Consider a partnership within the Chamber, because so many of the local businesses, the small businesses, will be members and would help to partner. Sometimes we only go to our businesses when we're looking for that donation of that supply or that item that our high school would like to have. We ought to look at educating the children to become successful in the future and many of our local businesses have expressed a very extreme interest in helping to do this.

Jennifer Vargo: Another benefit - when you're using your Family and Civic Engagement team, because you have businesses and you have health and human services organizations, they can collaboratively think through how to support maybe those children who do not have the funds for transportation or who cannot afford to take a class somewhere. They may be able to problem solve with the resources that they have collectively through the social service agencies or through businesses to actually provide equity to this policy.

Patti Koslo: Talking a little bit about our Family and Civic Engagement team and the connection as I talked earlier to our Credit Flexibility. We had our first meeting for this year of our Family and Civic Engagement team in September and we shared the information about the program with that group of people. As I described, members of our team included business leaders, church leaders, parents, community members. We make sure we also included in that group residents who do not have children in our schools. We felt that was important as well. So with that said, we are expanding opportunities for students to engage in Credit Flexibility. We're also creating stronger relationships with members of our community who might not ever interact with our school district, which is key in today's tough economic climate that we're all facing.

We've created some new partnerships for the school by working with local businesses. The most important piece here in Nordonia is that we are supporting student learning and achievement. We recently, as many school districts in the State of Ohio, were not able to pass the school levy. We are looking at some pretty rough cuts as many other school districts in the state are looking at. So we're trying to identify those opportunities, not only for that child that might need some different type of learning, but also to provide for those students of elective courses that will probably be eliminated here in the very near future. One example, we have a very strong photography department at our high school. Our students have excelled and have received numerous scholarships over the years. Unfortunately, that's one of the items that is currently listed for reduction in the very near future. So we're looking for ways that we can get those students who have that interest in photography and want to use that for their future, to set up an opportunity for them to get Credit Flexibility working in an actual camera photography-type environment so they can continue to get those credits and possibly continue to get those same levels of scholarships. We also linked everything in our district on our family and civic engagement plan to our Ohio Improvement Process. Our curriculum director plays a key role in the family and civic engagement team as well. So we have links as we said. We tie everything back to student learning and achievement, providing opportunities for children to learn.

Mike Hubbell: Patti, I think there are a couple of good examples you gave there of how the community can partner with the school. One of the hidden pieces that we sometimes miss in engagement is about a one-way communication from the school to the community. But there's actually a recruitment piece that you just talked about, of trying to actively recruit those partners. That's a big piece that the Family and Community Engagement team can certainly do and others have mentioned the importance of that team. But I think there's a recruitment aspect here of what can the community members bring to the table to support Credit Flexibility. Maybe they can't support a whole credit or a full time internship, but there are some things they can do. The recruitment is a big piece I think we often overlook.

Patti Koslo: Mike, one other thing. Many districts had business advisory councils in the past or something similar to that name. We've incorporated a lot of those same concepts within our Family and Civic Engagement team. We do feel very strongly about the opportunity not just to push information at people, but to bring them in to establish relationships, to recruit them so to speak.

Patti Grey: Patti, there was a pre-question submitted that I'm going to ask you now. Are mentors assigned to the students participating in Credit Flexibility? If so, what staff do you use? If you utilize teachers, are they compensated?

Patti Koslo: Here in Nordonia if the Credit Flexibility proposal is a project-oriented credit proposal, then the student is required to have a mentor. The students are asked to find their own mentors; however, if they're not able to do that, our department chairs at our high school will serve as the mentor. Currently, we are not paying them any additional salary for that.

Patti Grey: Patti, you also talked that you found out about some specific Credit Flexibility plans that are going on currently in your district. Can you talk about them?

Patti Koslo: Again, I'm going to suggest that there are a lot of different ties here for the students who are coming forward to put these programs together for themselves. One was around physical education. We actually had a student who completed an online physical education course and the rationale or the reason behind it was he needed that time to participate in two other programs that he felt would enhance his whole educational experience at the high school. So by putting this program together, he was able to get the physical education requirement and meet graduation requirements, but expanded his opportunities for education in other areas. The photography and arts programs are a couple of other areas where we have students who are currently participating in credit flex so they can continue to expand their learning opportunities. Then certainly we have some students that it's helping them to be in that nontraditional classroom, that internship, that opportunity to not have to sit behind a desk and to have a lecture given to them, because we know that all students learn differently and we know that we need to provide those opportunities for them to succeed. So we see this as a win/win for students no matter where they fall on that academic scope.

Patti Grey: Would you be so kind as to answer this poll question for us? Has your district's Family and Civic Engagement team been involved in the Credit Flexibility discussion? Maybe there will be some thought around doing that, if you're not. We're hoping you have your thinking cap on and can foster some thinking around that and additional resources.

Jennifer : Vargo The Ohio Department of Education put together some resources on strategies to effectively engage families. One is the ODE framework for building partnerships among schools, families and communities. It is on our website and you can see the link on the screen if you go the Department of Education website and, in the search engine, type in "ODE framework for building partnerships among schools, families and communities" all one line. You'll find a nice framework on strategies on how to do effective outreach to families. Then if you have questions around Family and Civic Engagement or want to learn more about Family and Civic Engagement, what the requirements are, there are webinars that we have put together on how to use Family and Civic Engagement. Again, if you go to the ODE website and just type in “family and civic engagement professional development” into the search engine that resource will come up.

Patti Grey: We are open to taking questions that you have for Credit Flexibility. I see one now - How do you monitor or evaluate what is being learned and how do you map that with curriculum line items? I think I’m going to turn this over to the curriculum people here.

Tom Rutan: The key to this is in the development of the plan. The Credit Flexibility plan should thoroughly reflect the graded course of study or the academic content standards in that particular case. As you design the plan, and it is a collaborative process between the student and the school, ensure that the critical elements of the course of study are included in the plan. Make certain that there is a way to adequately measure those, not only on an ongoing basis, but in a summative manner, and to ensure that there is some type of a summative assessment in place with specific expectations. Those expectations may be - What if they fail to meet the level? Plan for that contingency. It’s all in the design of the plan. The better developed going in, the easier it is to assess coming out.

Mike Hubbell: One of the monitoring pieces can be some of those benchmark assessments along the way to monitor student progress to see if things have been happening on a regular basis. That could happen every couple of weeks or it could happen every month, depending on the plan as Tom mentioned. One of the other pieces was in the last polling question, there are a lot of folks who haven’t involved their family and civic engagement teams in this discussion, and that’s probably because historically Credit Flexibility has been around a long time. It’s been a lot of things like independent study, or taking an online course, correspondence course in the old days. Those are the typical kinds of things. We’re now into a realm where students are expanding and finding opportunities within their communities beyond the traditional. So it’s a new realm of possibilities out there for students as well as for staff. Get the community involved in that. But back to the actual question, it’s all the upfront planning. The students should know what the expectations of content standards are.

Patti Koslo: Mike, this is Patti and I’d also like to add to that. As we put together some of the correspondence with our parents, we make sure that our parents sign off on a form that they understand that their student is responsible for meeting certain assessments in order to receive credit for these courses. It’s very clearly outlined - the deadlines for application, for their work, for their assessment, when they’re going to be given their different assessments. So make sure that parents are aware of expectations as well, in case that student isn’t communicating with their parents, that they’ve failed to complete something, that the parent does know that there will be a consequence. Just like in any course work at the high school if you don’t complete your work, you’re probably not likely going to be successful in that class.

Tom Rutan: That’s most advisable because this is a customized learning plan, very similar to an IEP in so far as you identify what is expected, you identify time frames, you identify assessments, you have all interested parties sign off on it to ensure that everyone is in agreement. Then, if things change during the year and you need to make modifications, just like an IEP, you bring that team back together, you make the changes, you reach consensus, have everyone sign off on the modifications and move forward.

Patti Koslo: I will add to that as well. If all fails and the coursework is not completed and the student has not performed at the level that he/she needed to, the failing mark is given and is entered on the transcript.

Jennifer: Vargo Can I just make the remark that if a child is not doing well in the class to notify the parents as soon as possible so they can be partners in trying to get that child to do what he or she is supposed to do or maybe to brainstorm with the parents as to why that child isn't meeting the expectations. The earlier that a school notifies a parent and starts this problem solving conversation, the parents will be able to do something about it.

Patti Koslo: Right, Jennifer. We also make that modification for a student who might have a physical illness, something with a medical excuse, to provide some flexibility by offering an opportunity for the student to have an extended period of time.

Patti Grey: Another question for ODE is - Although we've submitted our Credit Flexibility plan to ODE, can it be modified, if it is deemed necessary by the school?

Tom Rutan: Yes. It's a local plan.

Participant: What if at a local, comprehensive high school, a student and the parents develop a plan to work in a vocational area? For example: To work along with an auto technician or traditional vocational program, can that be allowed in a comprehensive high school as the student's Credit Flexibility program?

Tom Rutan: If it is going to be a career credit, it's going to have to go through the career center and you're going to have to utilize a teacher of record such as an auto body instructor, in order to receive that credit. But it should go through the career center or the school that the comprehensive high school sends students to for the career program, since it's a career-based program.

Participant: So a student who is enrolled at JVS can have Credit Flexibility plans along with the JVS program?

Tom Rutan: Yes, that should be possible. Ideally that JVS has communicated with all the feeder schools. We certainly make that recommendation since there are career centers or joint vocational schools that have ten to twenty schools feeding into them. We recommend the career center or JVS develops a Credit Flexibility plan that is compatible with the home district. Now that's challenging because you're balancing a lot of balls. But if it is a career course, not a core academic area like math, English, science or social studies, then it should go through the career center and the teacher of record should be someone from the career center serving in that capacity, even though there might be a third-party mentor in the community who they're working with through an internship of some nature.

Mike Hubbell: There must be some collaboration between the career center, the parents, the school and this external provider or mentor. The mentor needs to know that the student has to meet the career program requirements for credit. So there's going to have to be a lot of collaboration and communication amongst all those parties.

Tom Rutan: And, in some of those instances where there's a credentialing agency involved, for instance - cosmetology, or practical nursing, the student is going to have to meet the seat time requirements for that class. Those requirements will hold precedent even though Credit Flexibility gives some great latitude. If there's a credentialing agency involved, you must still adhere to the credentialing agency requirements.

Participant: Okay. Thank you.

Tom Rutan: I'd like to make one comment while we have people on the line. Many people are approaching this as a Credit Flexibility program, as though it is a program sponsored by the school. This is an opportunity for students to earn credits in nontraditional ways. So it should be initiated by the students, not a program that the entire student body has to do because a school decided to do it. There's a clear distinction here. This is a learning opportunity for students and it should be initiated by the students rather than the school. The school develops policy within which the Credit Flexibility plan is developed, but the students are the ones who should drive the initiative on developing the plans.

Participant: I want to go back to the communication aspect of this. We have a policy in place and we do a lot of the things that Patti was talking about to get it directly to parents and students. In addition to our business advisory council, we've been very proactive at working with our business community. We've somewhat centralized that and enlisted the help of our Chamber of Commerce. If people have an active Chamber of Commerce, you might want to add that to the list of entities that you inform. Even though they may not all be involved in this and we solicit them pretty specifically for specific involvement, it just gets the conversation going in the community. Many business people are also parents or have influence to have these conversations about the credit flexibility. We're hoping that it trickles down and trickles out and creates some additional interest.

Patti Koslo: In addition, we use our Rotary Clubs and our Kiwanis Clubs to share the information with so that we're getting a large cross section of our community and businesses covered in those different meetings.

Participant: That's a great idea. I think sometimes when we think about parent communication, we tend to focus on those people who are just parents and forget that there are grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors. And service clubs are another great way, I agree with that.

Patti Grey: We have a question in the chat box. Do you have any idea on the number of districts that are paying teachers to mentor the Credit Flexibility students versus the number of districts that are just using the department leader or volunteer teachers? The Ohio Department of Education is not gathering that information. I'm sorry we can't help you with that. Another question - How can a community organization, such as a park, communicate Credit Flexibility opportunities to students and parents?

Jennifer: Vargo One way they can do that is to work directly through the district. The district has channels to communicate information to families. That would be one way, to really brainstorm with the district about how they can communicate this opportunity in a variety of venues. Sometimes schools do fairs where they invite community partners to come in and set up booths to really talk about what resources they have to offer families and students. This actually happens very nicely if you could do it several times throughout the year and just not once at your open house. But maybe during parent teacher conferences throughout the year, have these booths set up in the building so that parents get numerous opportunities to see that these resources are available. Patti, I think you would be answer that question as well.

Patti Koslo: Jennifer, I agree with what you said. I also think about our local public libraries. We make sure that when we have a communication we feel is important for the community to be aware of that the library is one place we still distribute some printed materials. Another audience that we're sometimes missing when we're looking at in our community are our senior citizens. One might ask - Why is this important for them to know about Credit Flexibility? It's another opportunity of something that is different in the schools than when they attended schools. So this is more about relationship building for them to understand some of the opportunities that students have today that they may not have had. In addition, we also reach our young parents at our libraries. We have five different communities that make up our school district, so we work with all our elected officials as well. When you're talking about a park district, we have an active park that we communicate with on a regular basis through one of the communities. So we are sending our communications to the park. On our website, we also offer a community link to community and events program. When we're reaching out to them to share information, we also tell them about how they can share information with parents through our website or community members on our website.

Krista Allison: In many communities, you have local youth organizations like YMCA. Many of them provide a vehicle and opportunity to communicate this information to parents. These entities are also willing to work with schools in terms of figuring out a way to communicate this information with parents, whether it's setting out information at the front desk or, as Jennifer mentioned, having those fairs or events where they're already involved in the schools. That's another vehicle that you can utilize right in your back yard to distribute not only information about Credit Flexibility, but overall the activities that you're promoting in terms of family and civic engagement. I also encourage schools to often use intermissions in sports or arts events as infomercial time. Think of it in terms of a thirty-second advertisement of resources that are in the community or a simple message that you want to get out to families, like come hear about Credit Flexibility on this day. Any opportunity where parents are already so it's not one more thing that they have to try to find. Take advantage of that time and give a thirty-second infomercial.

Patti Koslo: I also see that a participant added one of the ideas that I was also going to share, the use of Facebook or Twitter. Again, knowing your audience, if your community will utilize these electronic opportunities, then certainly go with those social media methods. Often we'll just send out that quick tweet telling them that there's going to be a meeting about Credit Flexibility and we'll get some inquiries from the community as well there.

Patti Grey: We want to let you know and encourage you to continue this discussion by joining the Ohio Credit Flexibility community of practice. It's a blog-like tool that you can learn more about on the download resources pod and we will also follow up with an e-mail that will include this information after the web conference as well. The PowerPoint and the family involvement policy are immediately available to you. The recording, transcript and Q & A will be available in early December. The online room will be open for an additional 30 minutes, so you can download materials today if you'd like. I do want to thank again, all the presenters and encourage you to contact Tom Rutan for Credit Flexibility questions and Krista Allison for information on family and community information. This does end our fall series of web conferences on Credit Flexibility. After the new year, we'll let you know about our winter series. There are ten web conferences on a variety of Credit Flexibility topics on the ODE website available for you to view for the first time or to review by going to Credit Flexibility web conference page. Thank you again for your time today. We hope everyone is having a good school year and we wish you all a wonderful holiday season.