

*Credit Flexibility Guidance Letter #2010-1*  
*Effective date: March 30, 2010*

## Credit Flexibility – Design and Selection of Assessment Instruments

### Objective

To provide guidance for sound practice in designing and selecting appropriate assessment instruments under Ohio's credit flexibility laws and rules.

### Definitions

- **Proper Alignment:** The degree to which coursework expectations and assessments are in agreement and work together to guide the teaching and learning of students of what they are expected to know and be able to do.
- **Setting of Performance Levels:** Establishing categories, scores and grades indicating the expected quality of a student's work in a content area.
- **Sound Practice in Educational Testing:** The appropriateness of the test instrument, test reliability and validity, proficiency in scoring tests, test security, opportunities for the student to learn the material, and other factors related to ensuring student access and fairness.

### Policy

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) may design and/or select paper-and-pencil, performance and other kinds of assessment instruments for purposes of awarding credit and assigning course grades for students accessing credit flexibility. Design, selection and use of test instruments involve proper alignment, the setting of performance levels and sound practice in educational testing, as described above. Students should be advised of the performance expectations prior to committing to a program of credit flexibility.

### Guidance

This guidance letter provides sound practice in designing or selecting various types of assessment instruments for students who seek to opt out of a course through use of credit flexibility. Partial or full course credit is often contingent on the student's performance on one or

more types of assessment. Traditional paper-and-pencil test results can be combined with other forms of assessments (the determination of which should be based upon the totality of performance expectations for the totality of the course being tested) to determine a student's grade.

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Question:** Is testing out the best option for students under credit flexibility programs?

**Answer:** Perhaps. However, a student may be better served under the school district's student acceleration policy. This will vary, depending upon each student's unique educational experience and learning needs.

2. **Question:** What should LEAs consider when offering students the option to test out?

**Answer:** LEAs should determine the depth and breadth of the knowledge and skills expected from the course and ensure that any test-out measures cover the entire content of the course. Test questions should proportionately match the content. In addition, LEAs should determine how many measures are needed to reflect the scope, depth and breadth of the course, when the measures should be taken and how they will be graded. This information should be communicated to students and families in advance of a decision to exercise a test out option.

Another important consideration is ensuring that those who are testing out are required to comparably demonstrate proficiency as those students seeking traditional credit for the same course. The criteria for passage (or the basis for a grade) should be clearly predefined and demonstrable.

3. **Question:** Will the Ohio Department of Education provide a list of approved paper-and-pencil test instruments?

**Answer:** No. Because of the individualized nature of the credit flexibility concept and the unique circumstances of each student's situation, local districts are responsible for selecting or designing any paper-and-pencil instruments they choose to use to award course credit.

4. **Question:** In choosing an instrument, what should LEAs look for to ensure alignment with Ohio's academic content standards?

**Answer:** LEAs are advised to look for:

- The extent to which categories of content appear in the standards, syllabus and assessments.
- The complexity of the knowledge tested within the content area and how it relates to the standards and syllabus of what students are expected to know and do.
- How the span of student knowledge as stated in a standard or syllabus matches what students need to correctly answer assessment items and activities.
- Whether emphasis given on the assessment is comparable to the emphasis of the learning objectives that fall under a specific standard or syllabus.
- The primary difficulty of the assessment items which should be significantly related to the level of student content knowledge as represented in the standards and syllabus.

5. **Question:** If an LEA designs its own instruments, how might it satisfy all five criteria?

**Answer:** LEAs could devise a comprehensive end-of-course exam, a performance-based project and/or successful completion of one or more educational options (e.g., distance learning, educational travel, independent study, internship, music, arts, after-school/tutorial program, community service or other engagement projects and sports). The primary rule of thumb is to make sure that the assessment reflects the scope, type, depth and content that the course is intended to cover.

6. **Question:** Can LEAs select existing instruments?

**Answer:** Yes. In selecting existing instruments, LEAs should determine if the instrument is assessing the majority of the content for the course, rather than just a subset of course content. It is possible that an existing instrument may need to be supplemented in order for the assessment to reflect the totality of the course expectations. In addition, assessment of content that is found in an existing instrument but is not taught in the course should be avoided.

7. **Question:** How does an LEA ensure that grades for a paper-and-pencil assessment of credit flexibility students are comparable to grades of students seeking credit through classroom instruction?

**Answer:** To the extent possible, LEAs should follow their local grading policies when administering testing opt-out provisions. It is a district's responsibility to determine what a comparable measurement of achievement is.

8. **Question:** What if there is no comparable cohort in classroom instruction?

**Answer:** LEAs are encouraged to collect and present student performance evidence to a panel of experts in that content area selected by the LEA for advice. In addition, data from other sources, such as expectations in course syllabi from other LEAs that most closely resembles the coursework being tested, may help LEAs determine an appropriate course grade.

9. **Question:** Who sets performance levels?

**Answer:** Each LEA establishes its own system, often using letter grades and/or weighted or unweighted quality points, consistent with the LEA's grading policies.

10. **Question:** If a student challenges a test, how should the LEA respond?

**Answer:** The LEA should look to its district grading policy to ensure the test adheres to the policy. Exercising good judgment is an important part of assessment. LEAs should predefine and communicate to students and their parents the basis for issuing grades and avoid selection of arbitrary score interpretations.

## References

Ohio Revised Code 3313.603(J)

See Ohio Revised Code and Ohio Administrative Code as applicable.

## Resources

Sound practice in educational testing: Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education. 1999.

[http://www.aera.net/publications/Default.aspx?menu\\_id=46&id=1407](http://www.aera.net/publications/Default.aspx?menu_id=46&id=1407).

<http://www.apa.org/science/programs/testing/standards.aspx>

Proper Alignment: Web Alignment Tool (WAT) Training Manual. Webb, N., 2005.

<http://wat.wceruw.org/index.aspx>

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