

Credit Flexibility Guidance: Gifted Education

Background

Senate Bill 311 (the Ohio Core legislation) raised the graduation requirements for high school students with the goal of increasing the number of students who are ready to meet the demands of our global and technological age. It included among its several provisions a requirement that by March 31, 2009, the State Board of Education adopt a plan that enables *“students to earn units of high school credit based on a demonstration of subject area competency, instead of or in combination with completing hours of classroom instruction.”* School districts, community schools and chartered nonpublic schools are required to comply with the provisions of the plan, phasing in its provisions during the 2009 -10 school year.

Ohio's plan for credit flexibility is designed to broaden the scope of curricular options available to students, increase the depth of study possible for a particular subject and allow tailoring of learning time and/or conditions. These are ways in which aspects of learning can be customized around students' interests and needs.

Students may earn credits by:

- Completing coursework;
- Testing out of or demonstrating mastery of course content;
- Pursuing one or more “educational options” (e.g., distance learning, educational travel, independent study, an internship, music, arts, after-school/tutorial program, community service or other engagement projects and sports).

Credit flexibility is intended to motivate and increase student learning by allowing:

- Access to more learning resources, especially real-world experiences;
- Customization around individual student needs;
- Use of multiple measures of learning, especially those in which students demonstrate what they know and can do, apply their learning, or document by performance.

Credit flexibility provides an opportunity for gifted students to test out of courses in which they already have proficiency. Students can earn credit toward high school graduation while participating in individualized learning experiences that are more authentic, connected, creative and that require higher level thinking skills.

Legal Requirements Related to Gifted Education

Acceleration Policy for Advanced Learners - Each district must have a board adopted, ODE-approved acceleration policy which includes procedures for early entrance to kindergarten, subject acceleration, whole-grade acceleration and early graduation. Students referred for

acceleration must be evaluated by a district committee and, if accelerated, have a Written Acceleration Plan (WAP) to guide implementation of the acceleration. Acceleration, at the high school level, works in conjunction with credit flexibility to provide students with opportunities for earning credit. For example, an acceleration evaluation committee might use objective data to determine whether or not a student has mastered prerequisite course content. Because the acceleration evaluation is not typically designed to allow the committee to award course credit, the student would not be given credit for the prerequisite and would still need to complete the required core course requirements. By using acceleration and credit flexibility students may acquire enough credits to graduate from high school earlier than their age peers.

Gifted Operating Standards – Within credit flexibility educational options are one of the three ways that high school students may earn credit. The Gifted Operating Standards specify that “educational options” may be counted in EMIS as a gifted service. These options include dual enrollment such as post-secondary enrollment; advanced online courses; and programs, internships and other educational options as defined by the Ohio Elementary and Secondary Operating Standards. Gifted students participating in these educational options may be counted in EMIS as served if they have a Written Education Plan that specifies the goals and methods of assessing progress for those goals.

Gifted Education Credit Flexibility Considerations

Multidisciplinary Credit- Multidisciplinary credit is available to students under credit flexibility and may be of particular interest to gifted students. Multidisciplinary credit is available as a single educational option where credit is awarded in multiple content areas as determined by districts. There are several ways that this may be accomplished, including, but not limited to the following:

- Partial credit can be awarded in multiple areas. For example, a student participating in an internship in which significant math and science content is covered may receive a half credit in both science and math. Career-based units at Career Centers and Joint Vocational Schools might have courses in biomechanical engineering which can include biology credit and physics credit.
- Multiple full credits may also be awarded. For example, a student conducting an independent study that incorporates a significant amount of math, science and writing content can receive a full credit in all three areas, or a combination of full and partial credit, as appropriate.
- Multidisciplinary credit may also be a combination of a full or partial traditional course working in concert with an educational option. For example, in order for a student to participate in an internship at an engineering firm, she or he may be required to attend either a full calculus course, or part of the calculus course, depending on the needs of the internship.
- The amount of credit considered for multidisciplinary credit should be comparable to the amount of content covered in a traditional course (i.e., a year’s worth of content in a traditional course is worth 1 credit, half a year’s worth of content in a traditional course

is worth .5 credits). The credit may be encompass work completed in less than one year or more than one year depending on the plan developed between the student and the district.

A critical component in creating a student plan that has multi-disciplinary credit is the participation of highly-qualified teachers or content experts as a part of the planning team. These teachers and content experts should represent the various curricular areas covered by the plan and should assure that the plan meets the grade-level standards for which the student will receive credit. They may also provide guidance that addresses how the student will fulfill any course pre-requisite requirements.

Testing Out - “Testing out” is a new option for gifted students under credit flexibility. With this provision students may take a traditional written exam approved by the district, participate in a performance or skills assessment created by the district or create (with the assistance of a content specialist) a project or performance that demonstrates mastery of course content. This option will increase student accessibility to courses that meet individual interests and potentially lead to increased post-secondary and career preparation opportunities.

Of particular importance to gifted student athletes is the option for a student to test out of a traditional course. Students, parents and districts should be aware of guidelines from OHSAA and NCAA. Though the district is to place no caps on flexible credits earned or to differentiate flexible credit from traditional credit, athletes functioning under the rules of OSHAA and the NCAA should be cognizant of potential limitations within their credit flex plan. To be eligible under OSHAA rules (By-Law 4-4-1), a student must be currently enrolled and passing and must have been enrolled in school and have passed five full credit courses during the immediately preceding grading period. Since this requirement necessitates enrollment in five courses, testing out of two courses for two credits, for example, and then enrolling in three traditional courses would make the student athlete ineligible to participate in athletics. NCAA has limitations for testing out of courses that apply to student athletes planning to play at the Division I level.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q.1 How can gifted services be enhanced by credit flexibility?

A1. The “educational options” portion of the credit flexibility initiative is already an approved service in the Gifted Operating Standards (Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-15). Distance learning (which can include online educational options) is also an approved service for gifted students.

Educational Options

- Educational options are individualized learning experiences that provide an alternative to traditional courses.

- Educational Options require defined learning goals, planned learning activities, and standards for evaluating student learning, all coordinated by a qualified educator.

Online Educational Options

- Online educational options are simply educational options that take place online.
- Online educational options can provide opportunities for isolated students or students with niche interests.
- Current, collaborative (and free) web 2.0 technologies lend themselves to facilitating, sharing and developing online educational options for gifted students. These technologies are also a modality with which the “millennial” generation are comfortable.

Resources for Online Ed Ops

- Traditional courses are available for a fee (Stanford EPGY courses, Northwestern, etc.).
- Open education is a movement to open up educational materials to be shared, remixed, and reused. Teachers/Gifted staff can use these materials to create and share their own Online Educational Options. MIT is a good example of open education since they have recently put all of their course materials online and opened them to the public. Others are following MIT’s model.
- A comprehensive site of all colleges with their course materials available free online can be found at <http://www.ocwconsortium.org/>.

Q2. How do acceleration and credit flexibility interface?

A2. Acceleration is an approved service for gifted students that can be coded in EMIS during the student’s first year of acceleration. Acceleration is a service setting that may be utilized from early admission to kindergarten through high school. District acceleration policies require that an acceleration evaluation committee determine the student’s readiness for a higher level of coursework than his or her age or grade level peers. The process for “skipping” K-8 courses involves district acceleration policy procedures and review by an acceleration evaluation committee. Typically acceleration evaluation committees do not award high school credit for content that they judge a student may “skip.”

The credit flexibility provision is applied only to courses that receive high school credit. Students in middle school who have been accelerated are often provided advanced courses for high school credit. These courses that are taken at the middle school for dual credit (middle and high school credit) fall under the credit flexibility provision.

Students may combine acceleration and credit flexibility to demonstrate academic knowledge or skill levels at the high school level (e.g. A student may be accelerated and skip Algebra I to begin his or her high school mathematics requirements with geometry. The student then receives credit at a later time by “testing out” of Algebra II).

Q3. How does credit flexibility apply to music and art for gifted students?

A3. Educational options are available for music and art classes. Courses from outside the school can be approved as options for credit at the high school. Online courses are available and may be approved by the district for credit. Though school districts are not required to fund flexible credit opportunities, the district should consider providing a resource list of low cost options for economically disadvantaged students. Districts may also want to consider flexible pathways to provide what would typically be independent instruction given to individual students at a studio. For example, districts may choose to contract a qualified dance teacher to come to the school to teach a small group of students.

Q4. Can a student “test out” of a class by taking an Advanced Placement (AP) test?

A4. Yes. AP has revised their earlier position regarding credit flexibility. An AP subject area can be listed on a student’s transcript if either of two conditions is met: a) the student takes an authorized AP course; b) the student scores 3 or better on the associated AP Exam. Students will only be able to take an AP exam during the national administration in May. AP exam scores will not be available until July.

Q5. Is the “test out” option for credit flexibility, including AP tests, limited to a single measure (e.g. a paper and pencil test)?

A5. No. “Testing out” is not necessarily limited to a single measure such as a paper and pencil assessment. “Testing out” might include multiple assessment pieces: a paper pencil test, an oral examination, a presentation, written works (such as essays or papers), a portfolio of works, a lab project, a music performance or other pieces that are part of the collaboratively developed instructional and performance plan. While a district could certainly permit a student to test out of AP English by only using an AP English test and earning a 3, 4 or 5, it is also possible that the district approved plan might have additional requirements beyond a single test score.

Q6. How will credit flexibility affect class standing? If a student takes many courses through credit flexibility will that affect salutatorian/valedictorian placement?

A6. Since credits will be reported on student transcripts in the same way that seat time credit is recorded as a graded option, the student grade point average (GPA) should not be impacted negatively by courses taken through credit flexibility and should not negatively affect class standing. If a district has a weighted system for computing GPA based on the rigor of the class (such as honors classes), then courses taken through credit flexibility can be designed to meet the same requirements for rigor.

Questions or Additional Information

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