

Credit Flexibility Handbook

PURPOSE:

Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, students who wish to participate in the Credit Flexibility program will be required to complete one of two Credit Flexibility Applications (a short form or a long form) in which they may be asked to identify their educational goals, identify the standards they will demonstrate, and create a timeline for completion. The purpose of the Credit Flexibility option is to develop learners who plan their own research, learning objectives, and an academic agenda whereby they will attain those objectives outside a traditional classroom. The policy will provide a personalized educational opportunity for all students in which they will identify, acquire, and demonstrate the proficiency of their knowledge through standards to earn high school graduation credit. All Credit Flexibility Applications must be reviewed and approved by Fairfield City School District personnel. The Credit Flexibility Applications are available in the Guidance Office; the Long Form must be returned to the Guidance Office by **March 30** for **distance learning, educational travel, independent study, an internship, after school/tutorial program, or community service.** The Short Form should be returned on an individual basis, when appropriate, to a school counselor for **testing out and online** options.

COMMUNICATION:

The Fairfield City School District will communicate the Credit Flexibility plan with parents and students on an ongoing basis. The methods of communication will be as follows:

- a. District Website
- b. Student Planner
- c. Program of Studies
- d. School Newsletters
- e. Guidance Office Bulletins
- f. Parent/Student Meetings

“TESTING OUT” OPTION:

The Fairfield City School District will allow students to demonstrate mastery by completing a comprehensive examination (created locally, by the state of Ohio, or nationally) covering essential knowledge and skills addressed in an equivalent traditional course and/or by presenting a portfolio of work demonstrating mastery knowledge and skills addressed in an equivalent traditional course and/or through a combination of these methods. If a collaborative decision cannot be reached, the Fairfield City School District reserves the right to make a final determination regarding the evaluation tool.

Students wishing to “Test Out” of a course will be required to demonstrate mastery on a comprehensive exam identified by the Fairfield City School District. The student must earn an “A” or “B” (80% or above) on the exam to receive credit for the course. The student may **not** retake the test to attempt to earn an improved score once the 80% level has been obtained. The student who initially earns a score below 80% may retest only one time in a given subject area; the retest may not occur in the same semester.

GRADING:

The Fairfield City School District will award a letter grade (+ or – with A, B, C, D, F) for the Credit Flexibility option. **Pass/Fail options are not permitted** for Credit Flexibility. The grade awarded for the Credit Flexibility option will be decided by Fairfield City School District personnel. The grade the student earns will appear on his/her transcript. **No weighted grades will be awarded for Credit Flexibility options.**

All Credit Flexibility plans proposed by students submitting the Long Application Form must include benchmarks for monitoring progress to ensure steady gains towards their academic learning goals. A completion deadline will be included in a student's Credit Flexibility proposal. If a student does not complete the Credit Flexibility plan by the established deadline, a failing grade will be given and placed on the student's transcript.

Students can drop a Credit Flexibility course before a predetermined deadline (**the same as a traditional course**) without penalty. If a student drops a Credit Flexibility course after the drop deadline, a grade of F will be awarded and be placed on a student's transcript.

ACADEMIC ACCELERATION:

The Fairfield City School District will allow demonstration of proficiency to count towards course requirements for graduation. The district shall evaluate requests for early graduation in accordance with the district's Academic Acceleration Policy (IKEB). The district cannot compel a student who has met graduation requirements to graduate after completing fewer than four years of high school.

AWARDING CREDITS:

The Fairfield City School District shall allow students the opportunity to earn credit by demonstrating mastery of the academic content standards. The Fairfield City School District shall award a number of credits to students demonstrating mastery equal to the number of credits awarded to students who successfully complete the equivalent traditional course.

The Fairfield City School District will not limit the total number of courses or credits earned through Credit Flexibility. The district reserves the right to reassign a student participating in an educational option or Credit Flexibility plan to a traditional course or other placement at its discretion if the student fails to meet the standards for ongoing participation and satisfactory progress described in his or her educational options plan. Students who repeatedly fail to meet standards established to document ongoing participation described in his or her educational options plan may be considered truant and subject to penalties for truancy described in the Board's policy on promotion and retention. *Also, a student who has been suspended and/or expelled from school will not be eligible to apply for Credit Flexibility until the student returns to school or re-enrolls.*

Credit Flexibility plans may include, but are not limited to, activities that occur outside of school such as mentorships, internships, service learning, and educational travel. However, parents of students proposing non-traditional educational options that include such activities may be required to sign a waiver holding the district harmless for any injuries or damages that occur in the course of a student's participation in an educational options activity outside district facilities and without staff supervision as a precondition of the district's approval of the plan.

Students may earn simultaneous credit (e.g., more than one academic content/course area, secondary and post-secondary) and partial credit.

TRANSFER OF INCOMPLETE CREDIT FLEXIBILITY PLANS

Credit earned from a completed Credit Flexibility option will transfer between school districts in the same manner currently being used for transfer credit. Approved Credit Flexibility plans that are incomplete at the time of a student transfer from or into the Fairfield City School District are no longer valid. Students will need to re-submit the incomplete Credit Flexibility plan to the new school district following established procedures and timelines. While the Credit Flexibility plan may be accepted at the new school district, the plan will be governed by the guidelines and approval processes of the new school district.

Students may choose to use on-line education, post secondary options, and/or partnership activities. Students choosing one of these options are limited to those on-line providers and university partners approved by the Fairfield City School District. Unapproved online providers cannot be used for high school credit.

DATA REPORTS TO STATE:

Fairfield City Schools District personnel will collect performance data including, but not limited to, the number of participating students, total credits earned through Credit Flexibility and the extent to which student participation reflects diversity of the student population.

CREDIT FLEXIBILITY LIBRARY:

Fairfield City School District personnel will maintain a library of Credit Flexibility courses that were previously accepted in order to assist students, parents and teachers with the construction and availability of options.

ATHLETIC CONSIDERATIONS:

Both OHSAA and NCAA **operate independently from the Ohio Department of Education** and each set specific eligibility rules for participation in high school and college sports.

OSHAA: The OHSSA provides a Student-Athlete Eligibility Guide provides with specific eligibility requirements for participation in interscholastic sports. Students and parents should discuss OHSAA eligibility requirements with school staff, including guidance counselors, coaches, and athletic directors prior to the development of a student's individual learning plan to ensure compliance with OHSAA rules.

NCAA: The NCAA provides information regarding specific eligibility requirements through the NCAA Eligibility Center. In addition, the NCAA has developed a *Frequently Asked Questions* document for athletic eligibility. Students and parents should discuss NCAA eligibility requirements with school staff prior to the development of a student's individual learning plan to ensure compliance with NCAA rules.

The Fairfield City School District recommends that any student-athlete considering participation in college athletics, at any level, NOT participate in Credit Flexibility options.

PRIOR APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS:

Fairfield City School District requires prior approval for a Credit Flexibility proposal. There will be no awarding of retroactive credit.

APPEALS PROCESS:

Students may appeal decisions regarding access to a Credit Flexibility option and/or standards established for awarding grades and credits for Credit Flexibility by submitting an appeal to his or her guidance counselor who will forward it to an appeals committee consisting of Fairfield School District personnel. The appeals committee will consist of a building administrator, a teacher in the relevant subject area not involved in the original decision, and a guidance counselor. The student filing the appeal and his/her parents shall have an opportunity to present concerns and recommendations to the committee. Appeals shall be reviewed by the committee within 10 days from the date the appeal was submitted in writing. The decision of the committee shall be final unless overturned by the Superintendent or a directive resulting from an appeal filed with the Ohio Department of Education.

Credit Flexibility – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. Which courses are available through Credit Flexibility?

- A. All high school credit-generating courses are eligible for Credit Flexibility when taken through Fairfield Freshman School and Fairfield High School. Courses completed through Fairfield Middle School are not eligible for Credit Flexibility.

Q. What educational opportunities are available under Credit Flexibility?

- A. Students may pursue educational options such as online courses, independent study, internships, service learning, research-based projects, dual credit college-high school programs, distance learning, and educational travel in addition to testing out or demonstrating mastery learning in specific course content.

Q. Which online courses can be used for Credit Flexibility options?

- A. Students choosing online options are limited to those providers approved by the Fairfield City School District. Unapproved online providers cannot be used for high school credit but may be used by students as a means for preparing to test out of a course. Most providers recognized by an accreditation agency such as the North Central Accreditation Association will be approved.

Q. How do students test out of a course or demonstrate mastery of content?

- A. Students who choose to test out of a class or demonstrate mastery of course content instead of taking the traditional coursework will be permitted to do so by completing the Short Application Form for Credit Flexibility and by working with their guidance counselor. A student will be given **up to two attempts** to demonstrate proficiency by completing a comprehensive examination covering essential knowledge and skills addressed in an equivalent Fairfield City School District course; a second attempt, if needed, must occur in a later semester. The comprehensive examination may include, but is not limited to, a written examination, and/or a portfolio of assignments indicating a mastery of course content, and/or the completion of a performance task. The committee and student will work collaboratively to decide what type(s) of evaluation will be appropriate for each student's proposal. If a collaborative decision cannot be reached, the Fairfield City School District has the final decision on determining the assessment method(s). A student failing to demonstrate 80% proficiency of academic content standards will not be permitted to opt out of the traditional course.

Q. How many credits can I earn through Credit Flexibility?

- A. Under the provisions of Credit Flexibility, students are not limited in the number of courses or the number of credits earned through Credit Flexibility. Students may also earn simultaneous credit (e.g., more than one academic content/course area, secondary and postsecondary) and partial credit, as proposed and approved.

Q. Where can students and parents go to find information about Credit Flexibility?

- A. Information about Credit Flexibility can be found on Fairfield's District website and the guidance counselors at Fairfield Freshman School and Fairfield High School.

Q. Where can I find the curriculum needed to write my Credit Flexibility proposal?

- A. The benchmarks, indicators, and curriculum can be found on the Ohio Department of Education's website.

Q. How do students apply for Credit Flexibility?

- A. When applying for testing out and online courses as Credit Flexibility options, students should use the Short Application Form and work directly with their guidance counselor. When applying for distance learning, educational travel, independent study, internships, after school tutorial programs, or community service as Credit Flexibility options, students should use the Long Application Form. The Long Application Form should be completed and returned to a guidance counselor no later than March 30. Students should complete the typical scheduling process while applying to participate in a Credit Flexibility option to discuss the application in reference to college and career readiness. The application will then be reviewed by a Credit Flexibility committee. The committee will consist of a content area teacher, a building administrator, and a guidance counselor. The committee may include an outside resource person, when appropriate.

Q. What are the deadlines for applying for Credit Flexibility options?

- A. A deadline does not exist for the Short Application form; students must work on an individual basis with their guidance counselor to determine availability and appropriateness. The Long Application form must be completed by March 30 of each school year.

Q. When does the Credit Flexibility course have to be completed?

- A. Typically, the same completion timeline as a traditional course will be used. All Credit Flexibility plans proposed by students must include benchmarks for monitoring progress to ensure steady progress towards their academic learning goals. Included in the student's proposal and approved by the approval committee will be a completion deadline. If a student does not complete the Credit Flexibility plan by the predetermined deadline, a failing grade will be given and placed on the student's transcript.

Q. What if I decide I can't finish the course and want to transfer into a traditional class?

- A. Students can drop a Credit Flexibility course before a predetermined deadline (the same as a traditional course) without penalty. If a student drops a Credit Flexibility course after the drop deadline, a grade of F will be earned and placed on the student's transcript. If a student drops a flexible credit course after the drop date, the student assumes all financial responsibility associated with that course.

Q. Who reviews my Credit Flexibility Plan?

- A. The application for the Credit Flexibility Plan will be reviewed by a Credit Flexibility committee. The committee may consist of a content area teacher, a building administrator, and a guidance counselor. The committee may include an outside resource person, when appropriate.

Q. How do students get a teacher to be the teacher of record?

- A. The Credit Flexibility committee assigned to work with a student will facilitate the identification of a teacher of record.

Q. Are there fees that accompany Credit Flexibility options?

- A. Students and/or their families are responsible for all costs incurred with Credit Flexibility options that occur outside the Normal School Day. Any Credit Flexibility option that adds to a student's seven period school day is the student's financial responsibility.

The Fairfield City School District is responsible for providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The District will determine a typical cost per period for a course. The district will cover this cost within a Credit Flexibility plan when it occurs inside of the Normal School Day. Students and/or their families are fiscally responsible beyond the typical cost per period for a course. Example: a student has the opportunity to take art classes from a renowned painter; the cost for the class reflects the degree of notoriety and skill the painter brings to the class. The District will cover the cost up to what is typically covered for an art class in the Fairfield City School District – once the Credit Flexibility application has been approved by a committee.

If a student drops a flexible credit course after the drop date, the student assumes all financial responsible associated with that course.

Q. How will Credit Flexibility affect a student's GPA?

- A. Credits for courses that students take through any of the Credit Flexibility options will be reported on students' transcripts as regular classes, complete with letter grades which will figure into the GPA. There will be no notation about the way in which the credit was earned. No weighted grades will be assigned for the completion of Credit Flexibility options.

Q. How will Credit Flexibility affect graduation?

- A. Credit Flexibility may allow some students to graduate early from high school. The Fairfield School District shall evaluate requests for early graduation in accordance with its policy on Academic Acceleration (IKEB). The district cannot compel a student who does not wish to do so to graduate after completing fewer than four years of high school.

Q. How will Credit Flex impact a student's written educational plan (IEP, 504, etc.)?

- A. Taking advantage of Credit Flexibility options requires careful consideration of both long- term and short-term academic goals. Students with any kind of written educational plan must meet with the teacher who facilitates the plan and a guidance counselor before any decisions are made about accessing Credit Flexibility options.

Q. Can a student who participates in sports outside of the school day earn Physical Education credit for these activities?

- A. Generally speaking, no. Simply being a member of a sports team -- whether sponsored by the school or by a community group -- in and of itself is not a basis for earning physical education credit through the use of credit flex. Participation in a sports program not sponsored by the school could be a basis for creation of a Credit Flexibility plan (e.g. competitive AAU swimmer at a school without a swimming team, private club gymnast at a school without gymnastics, private ballet dancer who practices under the direction of professional dance instructor and performs with an adult dance troupe, etc.). In all instances, whether a student participates on a school-sponsored team or on a private community-based team, the Credit Flexibility plan must be developed with components that address the graded course of study and/or the elements within the physical education academic content standards.

Q. Can a student who participates in marching band, interscholastic athletics, or cheerleading earn Physical Education credit for these activities?

- A. Participation, in and of itself, is not a basis for earning physical education credit through the use of credit flex. Participation in any of these activities could be a basis for the creation of a Credit Flexibility plan. In all instances, the Credit Flexibility plan must be developed with components that address the graded course of study and/or the elements within the physical education academic content standards.

Q. Can students take courses through Credit Flexibility and still play sports and/or participate in extracurricular activities?

- A. Yes. Students using Credit Flexibility options are eligible for interscholastic athletics as long as they meet the eligibility requirements established by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA). The student's Credit Flexibility plan must include procedures for documenting ongoing participation and satisfactory progress for the purpose of satisfying the OHSAA academic eligibility requirements. Student athletes should check with their guidance counselor (NCAA Clearinghouse) and the school's athletic director (OHSAA eligibility) for more information.

Q. Will a student's participation in Credit Flexibility affect their college athletic eligibility or scholarship opportunities?

- A. Students who plan to participate in athletics at the college level should be aware that some Credit Flexibility options may not be included as part of the NCAA Initial Eligibility Center's qualifying core courses required for Division I and II eligibility. For this reason, the Fairfield City School District recommends that any students who plan to participate in athletics at the college level NOT participate in Credit Flexibility options.

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Last revised by ODE on October 15, 2010

Credit Flexibility: Who Pays the Costs?

Questions have arisen about whether the school of the student pays when costs are incurred under a student's Credit Flexibility plan. While Credit Flexibility in many ways is similar to Educational Options, this is ODE's guidance on how to determine responsibility for those associated costs.

Policy

The school should pay the costs when:

- The course of instruction is a part of the school's regular program of studies;
- The course of instruction is needed by the student to fulfill a graduation requirement, honors diploma or other educational need not otherwise provided by the school district;
- The course of instruction is endorsed and recommended by the school as a part of the district's regular program of study (e.g. online educational program);
- Students in traditional classrooms are supported in the same manner; or
- The course of instruction is a part of the student's regular class load taken during the normal school day.

The student should pay the costs when:

- The course of instruction is accessed outside the normal school day/week/year;
- The course of instruction is in addition to a full load of classes and is taken outside the normal school day;
- The course of instruction is not part of the school's regular program of studies;
- Those same costs are passed along to traditional classroom students;
- Costs for consumables that are charged to the Credit Flex student far exceed comparable consumable costs charged to traditional classroom students (e.g. art studio, auto repairs, etc.).

Guidance

Caution must be exercised not to create a tuition situation by charging students fees, since school districts are funded by the state and students are entitled to a free public education. Costs associated with a credit flexibility option must be actual, reasonable and necessary for providing that option to the student. No additional fees or cost allocations to cover costs beyond the direct cost to the student are permitted.

Frequently Asked Questions**What about an administrative fee?**

Administrative fees may not be charged for a student to access the Credit Flexibility option. Doing so could well constitute the creation of a tuition status in violation of ORC §3313.64.

Are students on free lunch exempted from all costs under Credit Flexibility?

No. The exemption from school costs only applies to courses of instruction within the school district. ORC §3313.642 should not be interpreted to obligate a district to pay fees from Credit Flexibility providers that the district or board of education have no control over.

What about students on IEP's? Who pays those costs?

While the nature of the IEP will provide guidance on a student's educational plan, the mere existence of an IEP does not necessarily obligate the district to absorb any costs beyond what would be normal and customary for any other student in the schools. In making credit flex and fee decisions, follow the language of the IEP.

A district is obligated to provide a FREE Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students with disabilities. If the IEP identifies that the student will use a program or activities outside of school for the purpose of credit flex which requires a fee, the school district is required to pay the fee. The IEP documents the FAPE that the district will provide and if a fee based credit flex option is identified, the district is obligated to pay for it as part of the FAPE. If the credit flex program is not related to the student's disability, and not identified on the IEP such as one that the student/family proposes, then the student would pay the fees in the same way as for any other student.

For additional information on this topic, go to www.education.ohio.gov key words *Credit Flexibility* and select the *School Finance Guidance Document* and the *Fee Flowchart*.

FAIRFIELD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Last revised by FCSD on February 25, 2011

Credit Flexibility: Who Pays the Costs?**Normal School Day**

Answering questions related to costs associated with Credit Flexibility are based upon the definition for "Normal School Day":

A student is participating in a *Normal School Day* when **ALL** of the following criteria are met:

- Classes are taken while physically in attendance at Fairfield High School or Fairfield Freshman School; and
- Classes occur within the established starting and ending times for each school; and
- A maximum of 7 courses / periods / credits are scheduled; and
- The course being taken is part of the school's regular program of studies

Costs WITHIN the Normal School Day (ALL criteria listed above must be met.)

- Fairfield City School District will cover up to \$818.86 per course / period / credit.

- Any costs within Credit Flexibility Plan for a course / period / credit beyond the \$818.86 limit are assumed by the parent / student.
- If a Credit Flexibility Plan requires consumable materials, the cost for these materials is assumed by the parent / student.

Costs *OUTSIDE* of the Normal School Day

If a student participates in any portion of a Credit Flexibility Plan

- while physically outside of either FHS or FFS; and/or
- earlier or later than the established starting and ending times for each school; and/or
- as a course beyond the typical 7 period day; and/or
- as a course which does not appear in the Program of Studies for Grades 9 through 12 in FCSD,

the parent / student assumes all costs associated with the implementation and completion of the Credit Flexibility Plan.

Payment Should Be Made

- following the approval of a Credit Flexibility Plan, and
- prior to the start of any course work.

Payments should be made to the Bookkeeper's Office in FHS or a secretary in the Main Office at FFS.

If a Credit Flexibility course is dropped after the Drop Date listed on the application form, the total cost of the Credit Flexibility Plan is assumed by the parent / student.

Make Sure Your Online Program is Accredited by the Right Association

When selecting an online provider, your best bet is to choose an online school accredited by one of the six regional accreditors. These regional agencies are recognized by both the United States Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). They are the same regional accreditors that grant most brick-and-mortar public and private universities their accreditation.

To determine whether or not an online school is regionally accredited, find out which state the online program is operating from. Then look to see what regional agency grants accreditation to schools in that state. The following six regional accreditation agencies are recognized as legitimate accreditors:

Fairfield City School District will consider Credit Flexibility online proposals to be of valid content and rigor if accredited by one of the following:

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

Accredits schools in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA)

Accredits schools in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Navajo Nation, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (MSA)

Accredits schools in Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Central America, Europe, and the Middle East.

Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS)

Accredits schools in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Latin America.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

Accredits schools in California, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Palau, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Marshall Islands, and other Australasian locations.

Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NWCCU)

Accredits schools in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.



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