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“Every adult helping every child learn and grow every day!”

PLAN FOR
CREDIT
FLEXIBILITY

New Emphasis on Learning

Ohio's credit flexibility plan shifts the focus from "seat time" to performance

In 2006, the Ohio General Assembly established the Ohio Core Curriculum (Senate Bill 311), which raised expectations for what all Ohio students must know and be able to do to earn a high school diploma. At the same time, SB 311 directed the State Board of Education to develop a statewide plan for implementing methods for students to earn units of high school credit based on the demonstration of subject area competency. In addition to raising the expectations for graduation, lawmakers provided flexibility to students and educators to successfully meet these higher expectations.

Developed by the Ohio Credit Flexibility Design Team, Ohio's Credit Flexibility Plan shifts focus from evaluating student learning based on seat time to assessing students' demonstrated academic and skill level or performance. The plan does not eliminate Carnegie units or "seat time" requirements altogether. Rather, it retains seat time as one option and expands the number of options for earning credit by adding demonstration of subject area competency and structures that support it irrespective of any time requirements.

Credit Flexibility:

- Offers learning opportunities not found in the one-size-fits-all factory process model;
- Focuses on performance, not seat time;
- Acknowledges and addresses students' differing learning styles, paces and interests;
- Offers students opportunities to demonstrate creativity, explore academic and career interests, and practice critical thinking;
- Recognizes that measures of engagement and ownership are as important for achievement as measures of attendance and access.

Ohio's plan for credit flexibility is designed to broaden the scope of curricular options available to students, increase the depth of study available for a particular subject, and tailor the learning time or conditions as needed (to shorten or lengthen the time necessary to complete a high school diploma and/or postsecondary degree). In these ways, students can customize learning around more of their interests and needs.

With credit flexibility, students can earn credit in three ways, or in a combination of these ways:

1. By completing traditional coursework
2. By testing out or otherwise demonstrating mastery of the course content; or
3. By pursuing one or more educational options (e.g., distance learning, educational travel, independent study, an internship, music, arts, after-school program, community service or engagement project).

Credit flexibility has numerous benefits for students and families, teachers and counselors, school administrators, employers, community leaders and Ohio taxpayers.

For students and families . . . Credit Flexibility means more choice and autonomy in deciding how, when and where students learn; more options for individually suited pathways to postsecondary and career goals; acceleration and convenience including more options for courses in school schedules (especially for fitting in electives).

For teachers and counselors . . . Credit Flexibility offers increased flexibility and autonomy to choose the best paths to support individual learning; increased opportunity for collaboration and interdisciplinary work; shared accountability for student learning and performance.

For schools and districts . . . Credit Flexibility broadens and deepens access to electives that engage students; it allows administrators to make maximum use of community resources to meet student needs.

For business and the community . . . Credit Flexibility creates options for educating and building relationships with students and educators about industry opportunities, competencies and trends; generates opportunities to attract and retain Ohio students as future employees and community partners; directly adds value to the education system by engaging them in meaningful partnership in support of education, workforce development and community outcomes.

For the State of Ohio . . . Credit Flexibility produces a strong return on taxpayers' investment in education (e.g. accelerated learning and fewer dropouts) and helps students prepare themselves for postsecondary education and the workplace.

Accelerating and Empowering Student Learning

With credit flexibility, students will be able to show what they know and move on to higher-order content they are ready to learn and have not yet mastered. They will be able to learn subject matter and earn course credit in ways not limited solely to seat time or the walls of LVHS. They may be able to customize their learning around their interests and needs, which might include a choice of modalities (e.g. online learning and community-based projects), as well as options to pursue niche interest areas, combine subjects and graduate early.

Why credit flexibility?

Research and experience shows that credit flexibility encourages student self-direction and motivates learners to develop new skills to fulfill their potential. It lets students ask questions, solve problems and manage the continuous change that underscores life. And it recognizes that while learning experiences must be high quality, not all learning happens inside the classroom or in formal education settings.

Key Facts about Ohio's Credit Flexibility Plan

The plan adopted by the State Board of Education includes the following provisions:

- The Carnegie Unit will be retained, along with options for demonstrating subject area competency and earning credit.
- All students will have opportunities to earn credits through flexible methods, although credit flexibility will pertain only to high school credit.
- There is no limit to the kinds of course work, nor to the number of credits that can be earned.
- Credit will be reported on student transcripts in the same way that seat time credit is recorded.
- Teachers will determine when credit should be awarded, but other mechanisms (e.g. the use of a multi-disciplinary teaching team, a professional panel from the community or a state performance-based assessment) may be used to determine credit.
- Local boards of education will establish implementation policies, and will be prohibited from setting policies that negate or otherwise prohibit access to the plan.

Credit Flexibility and Interscholastic Athletics

Credit flexibility plans for students participating in extra-curricular activities governed by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) shall include procedures for documenting ongoing participation and satisfactory progress on the part of the student for the purpose of satisfying academic eligibility requirements established in OHSAA bylaws. Student athletes should check with their guidance counselor (NCAA Clearinghouse) or the school's athletic director (OHSAA eligibility) for more information.

A student enrolled in credit flexibility courses must, at the conclusion of each LVHS grading period, be assigned a letter grade in all credit flexibility courses used to establish athletic eligibility. The student may not yet have completed the courses, but the student must be assigned a grade at the time the grading period ends. Eligibility requirements and timelines for credit flexibility courses are the same for regular courses. Further information is available here:

<http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/School-Choice/Credit-Flexibility-Plan/Credit-Flexibility-Guidance-Documents/Athletic-Eligibility.pdf.aspx>

College Athletics

Information sent to schools from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center regarding prospective Division I student-athletes and coursework taken in nontraditional classroom settings may impact school district credit flexibility plans. The NCAA guidance applies to all student-athletes entering a Division I NCAA college or university on or after Aug. 1, 2010.

Specifically, schools are advised to counsel prospective Division I student-athletes not to use the “test-out option” of credit flexibility. They also should advise students that any coursework earned via credit flexibility needs to be comparable in length, content and rigor to credits earned in a traditional classroom setting. The course also must be four-year college-preparatory in nature and have a defined time period for completion.

Although, in general, ODE recommends that districts list credit flexibility credits on student transcripts in the same manner as credits earned via traditional classroom settings, the NCAA requires that any credits earned through nontraditional ways (e.g. distance learning, online, credit recovery, educational options) must be so designated on the transcripts of potential Division I student athletes. Schools should note on student transcripts submitted to the NCAA for review which course credits were earned through nontraditional ways, or attach an addendum with the explanation. The designation of credits on the transcript applies only for NCAA purposes. If in doubt, contact the [NCAA Eligibility Center](#) for specific advice on this issue.

LVHS Credit Flexibility Policy

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I. Existing Credit Flexibility Options

- a. Licking Valley currently offers several flexible credit options, including but not limited to Physical Education exemption, correspondence courses, independent study, and Post-Secondary Options. Under the new credit flexibility policy, these options will be handled the same as they have always been handled, using existing policies.
- b. Questions about existing credit flexibility options should be addressed to a guidance counselor.
- c. The principal retains the right – within board policies and guidelines – to administer existing credit flexibility options and is the final authority in decisions about granting credit based on those options. inquiries about online courses should be directed to a guidance counselor and will be evaluated individually.

II. Credit Flexibility – Testing Out

The following guidelines shall apply to test-out options for students.

- a. **Purpose:** The purpose of the test-out credit flex option is to allow students to demonstrate mastery of a course's content, getting credit and a grade for the course by taking an assessment that covers that content.
- b. **Eligibility:** Any student enrolled in the Licking Valley Local School District is eligible to test out of a high school course for credit and a grade. Any student who has not yet progressed to LVHS will receive the transcribed credit and grade upon matriculating to the high school.
- c. **Schedule for test-out opportunities:** Testing-out will be offered twice per year, in December and April. For the December test, all portions of the assessment must be completed by January 7th or one week prior to the end of the second quarter, whichever comes first. For the April test, the assessment must be completed by May 1st. The principal is responsible

for scheduling testing in accordance with student and family request and availability of school resources.

- d. **Application process:** Students who wish to test out of a class must apply to test out, using the forms in the back of this document, by the following deadlines. Late applications will not be accepted. Deadlines will be displayed in the guidance office and in classrooms.
 - i. **April Test:** Application due by March 15.
 - ii. **December Test:** Application due by November 15.
 - iii.
- e. **Impact on athletic eligibility:** Grades and credits earned through testing out shall be used to count toward minimum credits and grade-point-average for the purpose of athletic eligibility. Upon a students' completion of the assessment, the teacher of record will record the date on the answer document, portfolio or rubric. The grade on the assessment will count toward the student's eligibility by becoming part of his or her grades for that quarter, and will be weighted and calculated like any other course grade
- f. **Format and content:** Licking Valley High School staff will design and implement assessments that are used to test out of LVHS classes, using the following guidelines:
 - i. Assessments should reflect the content and scope of the course and be aligned to the academic content standards or course of study for the course.
 - ii. Rubrics, scoring guides and gradesheets should be used to measure how student work measures up to content standards, both in knowledge and skills.
 - iii. Assessments should reflect best practices in assessment, including test reliability and validity.
 - iv. Multiple ways of demonstrating knowledge and skills may be utilized, including portfolio-based assessment, performance, and/or other means, with the goal of creating an assessment that fairly reflects the mastery required of students in the actual class.
- g. **Grading:** Test-out assessments will be graded by fully-licensed Licking Valley teachers who are the 'teacher of record' for the course for which the student is 'testing out.' For example, the teacher who grades an Algebra 1 assessment will be a licensed Mathematics teacher, but they may or may not be teaching Algebra 1 in the classroom at the time of the assessment.
 - i. **Teachers:** Assignment of 'teachers of record' is at the discretion of the Principal.**Reporting:** Grades will be reported on the same timeline as other grades are reported, as described above.

Grade scale: In recognition of the fact that testing out of a class reflects mastery of a course's content, the grade scale for test-outs is as follows:

A = 93% - 100%

B = 87% - 93%

C = 80% - 87%

F = 0% - 80%

- ii. Appeals: Grade appeals shall be directed to the Principal within one week of grade reporting.
 - iii. Grade recording: Grades from test-outs become part of a student's permanent record like any other grade. The opportunity to re-take the class (or the test) is governed by the same rules that apply to re-taking any other class. Students are urged to consider the possible impact on their Grade Point Average when making a decision about whether or not to test out. Once the test is taken, the grade will be recorded.
 - iv. Pass-fail option: Under certain circumstances, LVHS students may take courses graded as pass/fail. Using this option in conjunction with a test-out is discouraged, and doing so will require approval of the principal.
- h. AP Courses:** Any LVHS student may test out of any Advanced Placement course offered at LVHS by signing up for the test in the guidance office. As these tests are given on pre-defined dates in May, those students desiring to take an AP test must sign up by Spring Break of the year in which they desire to take the test. Any fees associated with the test are the responsibility of the student, and fees must be paid when the student signs up for the test. AP test scores will be converted to LVHS grades according to this grade scale: 1 = F, 2 = D, 3 = C, 4 = B, 5 = A+. Grade weighting for AP classes will apply to AP class grades earned through credit flexibility. AP Coursework taken outside of LVHS (i.e., online AP courses) follow this policy. Accordingly, credit is only awarded based on the AP test associated with the course. Any student who takes an online AP course is solely responsible for the work required by the course. As no grade reporting will be provided to LVHS, online AP courses DO NOT count toward minimum credit requirements for athletic eligibility or for other policies requiring a minimum credit load. Seniors should be aware grades for online AP courses aren't assigned until AP scores are provided to LVHS from College Board; thus, they won't count toward GPA / class rank until that time. Valedictorian / Salutatorian or other awards won't be affected by online AP course grades or AP test grades taken. Any student who begins an online AP course but doesn't finish or doesn't take the AP test will earn a grade of WF on their transcript for the course.

III. Credit flexibility – Independent Study

The following guidelines shall apply to independent study projects that provide credit flexibility options for students.

- a. **Purpose:** The purpose of the credit-flex independent study option is to provide students with a way to customize their learning through creative means outside the walls of LVHS. Examples might include distance learning, educational travel, independent study, an internship, music, arts, afterschool program, community service or engagement project, or in-depth experience with an expert in a given field. Students, parents, teachers or community members can design independent studies; it is up to students to create a proposal that meets the guidelines below and submit it for consideration.
- b. **Types:** There are two types of independent study available:
 - i. Independent studies that emulate the experience of an existing LVHS course: Students who wish to pursue this option should work with a teacher or other subject-matter expert to craft an independent study that aligns with an LVHS Course of Study and/or Ohio Content Standards. For example, a student could propose an experience which will lead to them learning the knowledge and skills of a certain LVHS class.
 - ii. Independent studies that fall into a general field of study offered at LVHS, but don't cover specific content standards for a class within that field: Students who wish to pursue this option should work with a teacher or subject-matter expert to design the course.
- c. **Teacher of record:** In the case of either type of independent study, a licensed Licking Valley Local School District teacher who is Highly Qualified will serve as the 'teacher of record' for the independent study course, according to Ohio Department of Education guidance found here: <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/School-Choice/Credit-Flexibility-Plan/Credit-Flexibility-Guidance-Documents/HQT-Requirements.pdf.aspx>. His or her role is defined below.
- d. **Process for proposing an independent study:** Students should follow these steps to successfully propose an independent study for credit:
 - i. Identify an area of interest or an opportunity for learning.
 - ii. Understand the criteria for independent study proposals (See criteria, below). Direct questions to a guidance counselor.
 - iii. Identify a mentor (a teacher or subject-area expert from outside the school) who can help design an educational experience that can serve as an independent study.
 - iv. (Recommended but not required) Identify a Licking Valley teacher to serve as the teacher of record for the independent study.
 - v. Fill out the attached application that details the proposed independent study and submit to their guidance counselor, who will approve or deny the request in consultation with LVHS teachers
 - vi. A decision will be rendered within one week and will be one of two results: If the proposal is approved, work on the independent

study can commence immediately. If the proposal is denied, the review board will indicate, in writing on the proposal, the basis for their decision and suggest modifications that would make it acceptable. It is up to the student and mentor to make modifications or address issues noted by the board and re-submit the proposal.

- e. **Guidelines / Criteria for acceptance of proposal:** While the Licking Valley School District wishes to provide a number of options for students, a comparable academic rigor and challenge must exist in the independent study proposal to ensure that it meets the criteria of preparing the student for college and career. What follows are guidelines for proposals.
- i. Rigor: The proposal must demonstrate a rigorous educational experience.
 - ii. Relevance: The proposal must show that it contains experiences that are aligned with the learning goals present in LVHS courses or fields of study.
 - iii. Mentor: The proposal contains all the information necessary for the teacher of record, counselor and principal to contact the student's mentor. That mentor should have sufficient experience in the field of study, and that experience should be detailed in the proposal.
 - iv. Content standards: The proposal should detail what the student should know and be able to do by the end of the experience.
 - v. Credits requested: The proposal should detail the number of credits the experience will be worth. Most LVHS year-long classes are worth one credit, with semester-long classes being worth one-half credit. Judging the credit equivalency of an independent study is within the discretion of the principal.
 - vi. Grading: Each proposal should detail how a student will earn whatever grade will be assigned by the mentor and teacher of record. Clarity is important: what demonstration of knowledge and skill on the part of the student will earn an A? What will earn a B? What will earn a C? Communication between the teacher of record and mentor will be essential to produce objective criteria for grading. Taking independent study courses for pass/fail credit is discouraged.
 - vii. Timeline: Each proposal should specify the time that the project will take to complete, with special attention given to the grading timelines utilized at LVHS. The application shall specify the grading period in which the project will be submitted to the teacher of record. **All submitted proposals with a time of completion longer than one academic quarter must include an acceptable method of assigning a grade at the end of each quarter.** The proposal must specify how a grade will be assigned at the end of each quarter.

- f. **Role of the Teacher of record:** The teacher of record is a key person in any independent study because of his / her role of liaison in the school-student-mentor relationship. It is expected that mentors will be able to offer expert guidance and leadership, bringing a wealth of knowledge and skills – along with life experiences – to the independent study project. At the same time, it is to be expected that they will not have the same academic background and experience of guidance counselors or teachers. The teacher of record communicates with the student and mentor, ensuring a quality experience for the student and serving as a resource for the mentor. At the same time, the teacher of record fulfills the responsibility to the school of making sure the experience is academically rigorous, aligning with LVHS educational goals and state requirements. Most importantly, the teacher of record is responsible for approving the grade from the mentor.
- g. **Transcribed credit for independent study:** Independent study courses and a student's grades in those courses will be recorded in that student's academic record in the same way as traditional classes. **Students and parents are asked to give due consideration to the impact of an independent study grade on a student's grade-point-average and make decisions accordingly.** Rules that govern the grade recording and academic history entry of traditional classes are the same for independent study classes. The same applies to a student re-taking a class for a better grade. Grade weighting will not apply to grades earned through independent study.
- h. **Appeals:** Two different decisions in the independent study process are appealable to the principal:
 - i. Proposal denial: In the event of a denial of a proposal the student must attempt to make the modifications suggested in the review board's written decision. Clarifying questions should be asked of the teacher of record. In the event that the review board doesn't accept the modifications, the student and/or mentor may appeal that decision to the principal in writing or request a hearing in person. The principal's decision shall be final.
 - ii. Grade appeal: Students may appeal their quarterly grade or final independent study grade to the principal, whose decision is final. This appeal must be made in writing or in person to the principal within one week of the assignment of the grade.

IV. Other important information

- a. **Prior approval: Under no circumstances will credit be granted for any flexible credit option retroactively. Pre-approval of any project or assessment is necessary to get credit for that project.**
- b. **Reassignment:** Licking Valley High School reserves the right to reassign a student participating in a credit flex option to a traditional course or other placement at its discretion if the student fails to meet the standards for ongoing participation and satisfactory progress as defined in his or her plan.

- c. Courses required for graduation:** It shall be the ultimate responsibility of the student and his or her parents to ensure that traditional and independent study classes align with LVHS graduation requirements, which are more stringent than those minimum requirements in Ohio law. Guidance counselors have the responsibility of advising students how the courses they take and their success or failure in those courses impacts their progress toward graduation and their decision may be affected by students' progress toward graduation, or lack thereof, and the timing of the request. For example, the review board may require more frequent grade reporting in a course required for graduation that a student completes through independent study in his or her senior year.
- d. Incentives:** Licking Valley High School reserves the right to create incentives for students to pursue independent study and award those incentives as it sees fit. At the same time, LVHS guidance counselors and administrators bear the responsibility of ensuring fair treatment of all students. Examples of incentives might include preferential scheduling of classes or granting exemptions to our attendance policy.
- e. Academic majors:** Licking Valley High School utilizes a system of academic majors for juniors and seniors. Independent study credits can and should be a valuable part of an academic major that features in-depth study in an area of a student's interest. Requirements for academic majors are available in the guidance office.
- f. Students with disabilities / gifted students:** Licking Valley High School is committed to serving its students with disabilities and complying with state and federal laws regarding the education of students with disabilities. Similarly, we want to serve the needs of gifted students. Credit flexibility represents a unique opportunity for both groups of students:

 - i. Test-out: Students with disabilities will be provided all of the accommodations specified in their IEP for any assessments which are used to demonstrate mastery and earn credit for LVHS classes.
 - ii. Independent study: All students can benefit from the flexibility inherent in the independent study option, but it is even better-suited for gifted students and students with disabilities. Gifted students can accelerate their education by pursuing in-depth, complex, higher-level learning that may not be available in their area of interest in the traditional high school classes. Students with disabilities can choose independent study options that allow them to maximize their learning by fitting their strengths. For example, a student with a reading disability can choose an independent-study option that plays to his or her best mode of learning, whether it is kinesthetic, auditory, or any other. Students are encouraged to choose independent projects that suit their abilities.
- g. Disclaimers:** Nothing in this policy shall be construed as making Licking Valley Local School District responsible for the following:

- i. Any costs associated with any flexible-credit independent study option outside of Licking Valley High School, to include, but not limited to: transportation, fees for courses, testing, curriculum materials, supplies, equipment, entry fees or membership costs.
- ii. The inability or unwillingness of outside entities to acknowledge, accept or understand the IEP of a student with a disability, provide testing accommodations or modifications or change established programs to meet the needs of the student.
- iii. Liability for any risks inherent in participating in independent study activities of their choice outside of Licking Valley High School.

V. Review process

A review process will be conducted every year and performance data will be submitted to the Ohio Department of Education. The data will include the methods and frequency of communication with students and families, the number of participating students, total credits earned and the extent to which student participation reflects the diversity of the student body.

VI. Library of Credit Flexibility Options

Licking Valley High School will maintain a library of credit flexibility options (independent study projects, approved online courses, etc.) that were previously accepted in order to assist students, parents and teachers with the construction and availability of options.

VII. Publicizing credit flexibility options

Licking Valley High School will publicize this credit flexibility plan through various means throughout the year, including but not limited to:

- Describing it at parent orientation meetings.
- Presenting it to Freshman Foundations classes, Career Journey classes, and other classes as requested by teachers and guidance counselors.
- Placing flyers and advertisements around the school, particularly in the guidance office.
- Making paper copies of this policy available in the guidance office and administrative office.
- Posting it on our website.
- E-mailing it to parents who subscribe to our parent listserv.
- Presenting it at open meetings of the board of education.
- Summarizing it in newsletters sent to parents of LVHS and LVMS students.