



50-State Scan of Course Credit Policies

As part of the Carnegie Foundation’s re-evaluation of the Carnegie Unit, we have explored K-12 credit policies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to better understand which states define credit based solely on seat-time and which allow districts to define credit more flexibly. Based on a scan of state policy language (code, regulation, board policy, etc.) and conversations with officials from state departments of education, we have organized our findings into five informational categories:

- Category 1)** Carnegie Unit abolished as primary measure of student learning. Credits must be awarded based on students' mastery of content and skills rather than on seat-time. (1 state)
- Category 2)** Districts define credits and may use seat-time OR another measure (e.g. proficiency or competency) to award credit in core courses. (30 states)
- Category 3)** Districts may apply for special-status or waivers to use measures other than seat-time to award credit for core courses. (4 states)
- Category 4)** Districts do not have any flexibility and must use time-based credits. (9 states)
- Category 5)** Districts have some flexibility, but it is limited to special circumstances, such as credit-recovery programs or out-of-school learning, and may require approval from the state. (7 states)

The table below represents our most up-to-date research on states’ definitions of course credit. It provides states’ basic definitions of credit and recent changes to relevant policy. Some states may have additional policies for special populations or programs, or for digital learning, but those are not the focus of this scan.

Questions about this working draft can be directed to Taylor White (white@carnegiefoundation.org).

State	Policy Details	Category
Alabama	Credits must be based on seat-time, but some flexibility exists for credit recovery programs.	5
Alaska	Districts can elect to award standards-based ¹ or time-based credits.	2

¹ Because there are not universally shared definitions of “standards-based,” “proficiency-based,” “competency-based” and “mastery-based” credits, we have elected to use each state’s preferred terminology in this scan. When state language is not specific, we have used the term “competency-based” to describe credits that are not tied to seat-time.

Arizona	HS's may offer competency-based coursework and diplomas through Move On When Ready initiative / Grand Canyon diplomas	2
Arkansas	Credits must be time-based. Charter schools and schools of innovation could, in theory, submit plans that seek flexibility from the state's seat-time requirement, but few have done so. This option does not extend to traditional schools or districts.	5
California	State sets minimum graduation requirements using "courses." Courses correspond to Carnegie Units, as do the state's A-G graduation requirements.	4
Colorado	Districts define credits and may base them on time or any other measure approved locally. CO recently passed competency-based diploma requirements, but will not require districts to abandon time-based credits.	2
Connecticut	Districts may issue mastery-based or time-based credits (as of June 2013).	2
D.C.	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4
Delaware	Credit is generally defined as the "acquisition of skills and knowledge at a satisfactory level as determined by the district and charter school boards through 135 hours (a Carnegie Unit) of actual classroom instruction." (DE Administrative Code, Title 14, Chapter 505) Delaware also allows students to earn credit for completion of internships, independent study, volunteering, etc., but policy does not allow schools to award non-time-based credits for in-school learning in core courses.	5
Florida	Districts may issue competency-based or time-based credits.	2
Georgia	Districts with "Alternative" or "Non-Traditional" status can seek waivers to use competency-based credits rather than time-based credits. The state is revisiting how they define "alternative" in response to complaints from many traditional schools seeking flexibility from the state's time requirements (seat-time, calendar length, etc.). Georgia has a "test out" option for students to earn	5

	credit for courses they have not completed.	
Hawaii	Students can earn traditional credits or credits through "proficiency-based equivalencies." In July of 2013, the state board of ed took the first step in defining these equivalencies and will continue to issue guidance to schools interested in using them to issue credit.	2
Idaho	Districts may award time-based on mastery-based credits (as of 2010).	2
Illinois	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4
Indiana	State dept. of ed issued a blanket seat-time waiver offered to all districts in 2009, providing them flexibility to award proficiency-based credit instead of time-based credit.	2
Iowa	Districts may award competency-based or time-based credit. The state has recently launched a concerted effort to encourage innovation in competency-based education through reports, pilots, etc.	2
Kansas	Time-based credits are the norm, though districts can issue proficiency-based credits to individual students in unusual circumstances.	5
Kentucky	Kentucky regs allow districts to issue "A standards-based performance-based credit, regardless of the number of instructional hours." (KY Admin. Code, 704 KAR 3:305) More recently, the state has introduced "Innovation Zones" which also allow for LEAs to waive seat-time requirements.	2
Louisiana	Districts may apply for seat-waivers to free themselves from the constraints of time-based credits, but students must still meet time-based attendance requirements for entire school year (60,120 minutes).	3
Maine	Districts may use proficiency-based or time-based credits. Beginning in 2017, all high school diplomas must be proficiency-based (students will earn credits, but those credits be issued primarily based on proficiency).	2
Maryland	Maryland defines credit as the "successful demonstration of a specified unit of study; individual districts define these "unit[s] of study" and are not	2

	required to use seat-time in doing so.	
Massachusetts	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4 ²
Michigan	Local may use proficiency-based or time-based credits. Districts must apply for waivers to award credit for non-traditional learning experiences like online courses, internships, etc.	2
Minnesota	Course credit "is equivalent to a student successfully completing an academic year of study or mastering the subject matter, as determined by the local school district." (MN Statute 120B.023)	2
Mississippi	Credit by Carnegie Unit (140 hrs=1 credit) is the norm, but the state has provided flexibility for some credit-flexibility programs in the past (credit recovery, Early College). Recently, the state added language policy extending this flexibility to allow for a handful of pilots aimed at broader populations of students.	2
Missouri	Districts may award proficiency-based or time-based credits.	2
Montana	Credits are typically based on seat-time, though local boards may grant exceptions for "specially designed courses" (e.g. outdoor environmental science intensive) or for students to test out of courses. Districts interested in offering a proficiency-based curriculum <i>could</i> request permission from the Board of Public Instruction, but none has ever attempted.	2
Nebraska	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4
Nevada	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4
New Hampshire	Credits must be based on students' mastery of course-level competencies. The term "Carnegie Unit" was removed from the state's Minimum Standards for Approval in 2005.	1

² Massachusetts does allow seat-time waivers, but they can only be applied to online courses. In 2013, in a letter to his state board of education, Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester floated the idea of extending seat-time flexibility to traditional schools but no action has been taken as of summer 2013.

New Jersey	The state's "Option Two" would allow districts to issue proficiency-based credits, but it hasn't been widely used to do so.	2
New Mexico	Districts may award proficiency-based or time-based credits.	2
New York	Districts can approve and issue credit for alternative opportunities (e.g. online courses, competency-based courses, out-of-school opportunities) that offer a level of instruction and rigor that are comparable to traditional course offerings and meet state standards, even if they meet less or more frequently than state minimums require (180 minutes/week per course). NY State also allows students to pass out of courses if they can demonstrate proficiency by earning minimum scores on Regents examinations.	2
North Carolina	"Beginning 2013-2014 Credit by Demonstrated Mastery [CDM] shall be available for all NC students in grades 6-12," but CDM <u>applies to individual students</u> interested in accelerating or in special circumstances. (State Board of Ed Policy Manual, GCS-M-001) State also has credit recovery options that do not require strict adherence to seat-time. Will begin exploring policy for "mastery-based learning" options later this year (e.g. whole school or course mastery approaches for all students).	5
North Dakota	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4
Ohio	Waivers are available to exempt districts from state seat-time requirements, but they are not widely sought.	3
Oklahoma	Districts may award time-based credits or credits based on students' completion of "sets of competencies."	2
Oregon	Districts may use proficiency-based or time-based credits.	2
Pennsylvania	Districts may use proficiency-based or time-based credits. State would like to move away from the term "credit" to make room for non-traditional learning experiences (e.g online, out-of-school time).	2

Rhode Island	Students must complete "courses" rather than accumulate "credits." Districts have flexibility in defining "courses"; a "course" may be a traditional two-semester course, an intensive two-week long summer ELO that meets particular set of standards, or any other learning experience that meets districts' standards.	2
South Carolina	Districts may apply for seat-time waivers, but must do so for every course for which it seeks exemption. The policy has been used primarily to accommodate online courses, but can be applied in traditional classroom settings.	3
South Dakota	Districts may use proficiency-based or time-based credits, but they do not report method to state, so unclear if any districts using proficiency.	2
Tennessee	Credits must be time-based, but students can earn two elective credits for out-of school time experiences.	5
Texas	Districts may issue credits based on a student's "demonstrated proficiency in the subject matter, regardless of the time the student has received instruction in the course or the grade level" (Texas Administrative Code, 74.25).	2
Utah	Districts may use competency-based credits or time-based credits as of April 2013.	2
Vermont	Districts may use proficiency-based credits or time-based credits.	2
Virginia	Credits must be based on seat-time (and students must earn passing scores on state end-of-course assessments).	4 ³
Washington	Districts may use proficiency-based credits or time-based credits as of November 2011.	2
West Virginia	County districts may apply for a waiver to offer courses longer/shorter than the mandatory 8,100 minutes and must demonstrate that students have the chance to reach and demonstrate mastery of the same standards as those of a comparable full-length course. Innovation Zone districts may also waive seat-time requirements to	3

³ Virginia does allow seat-time waivers, but they can only be applied to online courses.

	offer more personalized learning opportunities.	
Wisconsin	Districts may use proficiency-based credits or time-based credits. In August 2013, the state will convene a working group on credit flexibility to provide support and additional flexibility to districts.	2
Wyoming	Credits must be based on seat-time.	4