



Credit Recovery Practices in Tennessee High Schools

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Key Points

Credit recovery is a strategy that permits high school students who have failed courses to recover course credits, allowing them to graduate. Successfully providing credit recovery options for students may also help schools, districts, and states improve their graduation rates, an issue that has gained urgency in the last several years of education reforms.

Schools may provide credit recovery in a variety of settings, including traditional classrooms and online or a combination of the two, and at various times, including before, during, and after school, as well as during the summer months. Students may repeat entire courses or credit recovery may be designed to target student deficiencies in specific concepts. The latter approach is more likely to occur in an online setting. Though states and schools do not generally report information about credit recovery programs, information from software vendors suggests that credit recovery is increasingly provided through online options.

In Tennessee, as in many states, credit recovery programs are designed and implemented at the district and school levels, with a modicum of oversight by state education officials. To learn more about the implementation of credit recovery in Tennessee, OREA partnered with the State Board of Education to conduct a 2015 survey of the state's school districts with high schools. The survey had a response rate of 71 percent. Among the findings:

- Most districts with high schools provide a credit recovery option for students in the high school grades.
- Students are eligible for credit recovery after failing one or more high school courses that are required for graduation.
- Districts that reported data for the survey served more than 7,600 students in credit recovery during the 2014-15 school year. Because some districts that provide credit recovery did not supply data, the actual total number of students in credit recovery was certainly higher.
- Most districts' online credit recovery courses focus on areas of student deficiencies rather than requiring students to re-take entire courses. Districts may require some students to take complete courses, however, depending on the results from diagnostic tests that determine what skills and knowledge students have and have not already learned. Some districts require all students to re-take complete courses.
- Districts have different methods for grading students in credit recovery. Most give students a letter grade and some give students a pass/fail grade in credit recovery courses. Some districts include the original course grade on the student's transcript and some weight the credit recovery grade to include the original grade.

Critics have raised some concerns about credit recovery programs, including a lack of basic statistical information about states' uses of credit recovery, a lack of evaluative research about the effectiveness of credit recovery programs, variance in grading practices among districts, the potential for fraudulent use of credit recovery programs to impact district graduation rates, and concerns about little teacher involvement paired with greater student autonomy in some online programs.

Some states make no or only a general reference to high school credit recovery in state laws or education policies, though schools within those states are implementing credit recovery programs. Other states have adopted state laws or policies that prescribe, to varying degrees, how local programs should be administered. In an effort to provide more clarity around the administration of credit recovery courses, the State Board of Education is actively working to consider what additional policies or guidance may be needed concerning credit recovery.

Introduction

Credit recovery is a strategy that permits high school students who have failed courses to recover course credits, allowing them to graduate. Successfully providing credit recovery options for students may also help schools, districts, and states improve their graduation rates, an issue that has gained urgency in the last several years of education reforms.¹

Credit recovery is not a new concept: schools have long conducted summer school programs for students who failed courses during the school year. As online education options have expanded in the last several years, schools have increased their use of technology-based credit recovery programs, which frequently allow students to focus more on areas of academic deficiency rather than repeat an entire course.² The Center for Public Education describes credit recovery as “the fastest growing area of online learning.”³ The National Center for Education Statistics found that 55 percent of school districts reported using distance learning during 2009-10 (the most recent school year available). Within those districts, 62 percent of the distance learning classes were taken for credit recovery.⁴

Little is known nationally or in Tennessee about how many students are enrolled in credit recovery courses during their high school careers, how effective the approach is at increasing high school graduation rates, or how students taking credit recovery courses fare after high school.⁵ Data is not available at the state level because credit recovery is generally a locally-determined strategy, and there are no reporting requirements. In Tennessee, as in most states, credit recovery programs are designed and implemented at the district and school levels, with a modicum of oversight by state education officials.

This report includes results from a 2015 survey of Tennessee school districts with high schools.^A OREA partnered with the State Board of Education (SBOE) to conduct the survey. SBOE is using the survey results to consider credit recovery policies or guidance for districts. This report provides background information on the practice of credit recovery, describes the state’s involvement with credit recovery, provides an inventory of current district practices using survey results, and considers other states’ credit recovery policies and practices.

High school course failure and dropout

The 9th grade, the year that students transition to high school, is considered a critical year: research shows that a disproportionate number of students fail the 9th grade and drop out by 10th grade. Research conducted in 2010 in Tennessee school districts with severe dropout and retention problems found that 9th grade students who fail two or more courses have a high probability of dropping out of school. The finding is mirrored in similar research conducted in other locales.

Sources: National High School Center, *The First Year of High School: A Quick Stats Fact Sheet*, Oct. 2012, <http://www.betterhighschools.org/>; Robert Balfanz, Antonia Wang, and Vaughan Byrnes, *Early Warning Indicator Analysis: Tennessee*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, Oct. 2010, pp. 4-5, 8-10; John Burgette, Margie King, Christine Lee, and Heidi Park, *Tennessee Dropout Policy Scan*, Center for Research in Educational Policy, March 2011, p. 20; Jessica B. Heppen and Susan Bowles Therriault, *Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts*, National High School Center, July 2008, <http://www.betterhighschools.org/>.

^A There are Tennessee school districts that do not have a high school, and these districts were not included in the survey.

Methodology

The information in this report was derived from:

- a literature review concerning credit recovery implementation throughout the U.S.
- a review of various states' laws, regulations, and policies concerning credit recovery
- a survey conducted by OREA and the SBOE of school districts in Tennessee that serve high schools (119 school districts were sent a survey; 84 responded for a 71 percent response rate; see [Appendix A](#) for a copy of the survey questions)

What is credit recovery?

Although commonly used as an option for high school students throughout the United States, no standard definition of credit recovery exists, either at the federal or state levels.⁶ An Education Commission of the States 2011 brief describes credit recovery as “an alternative to course repetition for students who have previously failed a course needed for high school graduation.”⁷ A 2014 webinar sponsored by REL Northwest⁸ describes credit recovery as “a structured means for students to earn missed credit in order to graduate.”⁹

Schools may provide credit recovery in a variety of settings, including traditional classrooms and online or a combination of the two, and at various times, including before, during, and after school, as well as during the summer months.¹⁰ Students may repeat entire courses or credit recovery may be designed to target student deficiencies in specific concepts. The latter approach is more likely to occur in an online setting.¹¹ Though states and schools do not generally report information about credit recovery programs, information from software vendors suggests that credit recovery is increasingly provided through online options, many of which are provided by for-profit companies.¹² Other online credit recovery programs are provided by state virtual schools, nonprofit groups, and locally-produced efforts.¹³

Comparing credit recovery courses and traditional coursework

Depending on how credit recovery programs are implemented, courses can be similar to or quite different from traditional classroom courses. The basis on which credits are awarded and the level of teacher involvement are two areas where distinctions can be made.

Traditionally, states award academic credits based on the amount of time that students have received classroom instruction in a school year, sometimes referred to as “seat time.”¹⁴ Credit recovery courses, in contrast, frequently cover only the content that a student failed to understand in the original class and award credits based on mastery of content or demonstrated competencies. Online credit recovery courses typically include diagnostic tests and assessments to analyze students' understanding of the material and focus instruction on specific areas.¹⁵ Many credit recovery programs require that students fail a traditional course before being eligible for credit recovery – thus, students have already completed the typical seat time requirement before taking a credit recovery course.¹⁶

Credit recovery courses may be conducted much like traditional classes with a seat-time requirement and with a certified classroom teacher in a face-to-face setting, and may cover an entire course or may be abridged. At the other end of the spectrum, courses may be fully online and self-paced by students

from their homes or other remote locations, with teachers accessible as needed by e-mail, messaging, or phone. Some courses include teacher support by blending some amount of classroom learning and teacher-student interaction with online curriculum.¹⁷ Some schools may require students taking online recovery courses to complete all work at the school site.¹⁸ Schools that allow students to access their credit recovery courses remotely may also require them to take course tests in school settings monitored by teachers or facilitators.¹⁹

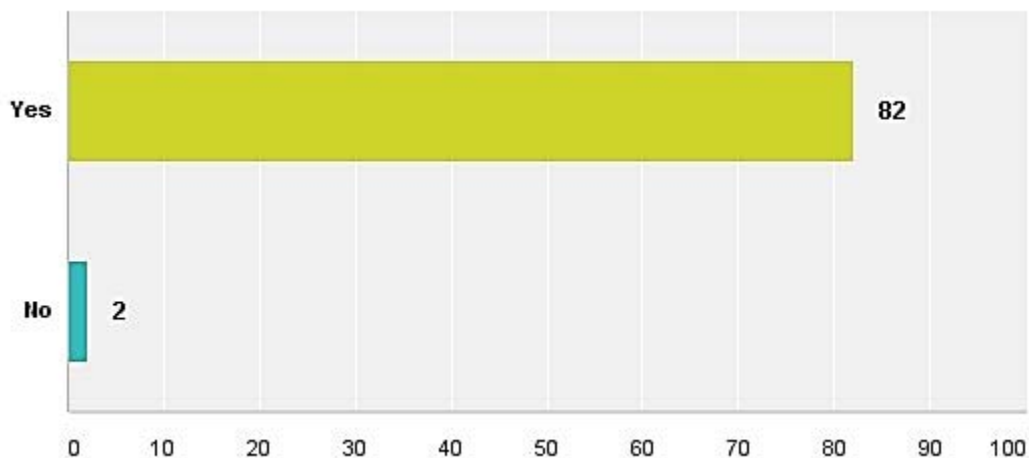
Survey Results: Tennessee School District Implementation of Credit Recovery

OREA partnered with the SBOE to survey Tennessee school districts that serve the high school grades about their credit recovery practices. (See [Appendix C](#) for a letter of response from SBOE.) The online survey was sent to 119 districts on May 18, 2015, with a requested deadline for completion of June 5, 2015. Late survey responses were allowed. A total of 84 districts responded for a survey response rate of 71 percent. A summary of survey responses is provided below. Districts did not respond to every survey question; notes provided with each exhibit indicate the total number of respondents to the corresponding survey question.

How many Tennessee districts offer credit recovery options for their students?

The OREA survey found that, of the 84 responding districts, all but two provide credit recovery as an option for students. (See [Exhibit 1](#).) Nearly all districts that provide credit recovery provide the option at all high schools.²⁰

Exhibit 1: Does the district provide a credit recovery option for students?



Note: 84 respondents out of 119 districts surveyed (82, yes; 2, no).
Source: OREA Survey, Question 2.

The state's current policy concerning credit recovery is unclear. As of August 2015, Tennessee has no official state law, regulation, or policy addressing how districts should implement credit recovery. SBOE has two policies that refer to credit recovery only briefly: the Distance Education policy, which encourages districts to use distance learning for various programs, including credit recovery, and the Uniform Grading policy, which allows districts, for the purposes of the HOPE scholarship eligibility grade point average calculation, to replace students' failing grades with those obtained through credit recovery or similar programs.²¹

Another document is more policy-like in nature, but has not been adopted by the SBOE: a set of credit recovery guidelines developed in 2005 by the Tennessee Department of Education. The guidelines were included in a 2014 frequently-asked questions (FAQ) document published by the SBOE²² about the High School Transition Policy (now replaced by the High School Policy 2.103).

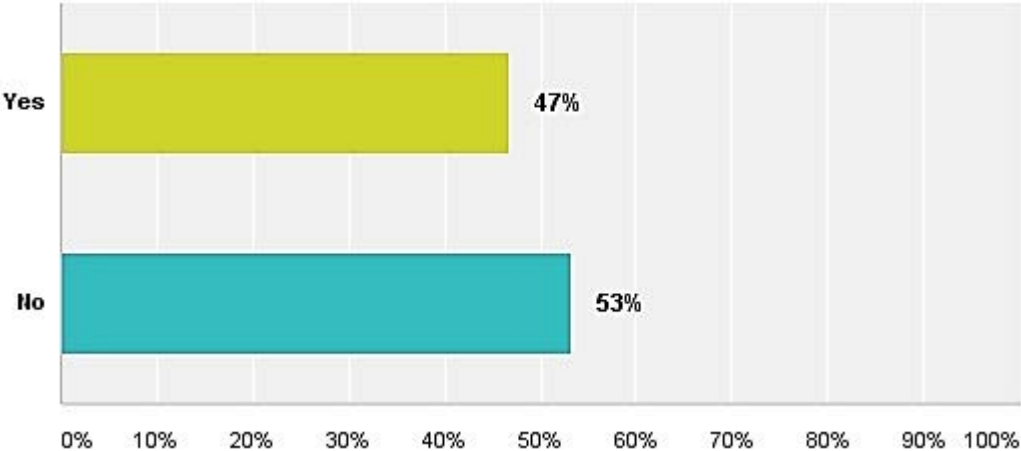
In an effort to provide more clarity around the administration of credit recovery courses, the SBOE is actively working to consider what additional policies or guidance may be needed concerning credit recovery.

Results from the OREA credit recovery survey indicate that about 53 percent of responding districts have not developed a written policy about credit recovery; about 47 percent of districts have developed a policy. (See Exhibit 2.) Some districts that have written policies, but not all, indicate they have generally followed the guidelines in the SBOE FAQs document. Some of the guidelines are:

- To be eligible for credit recovery, students must have earned a failing grade of not less than 50 percent in a course.^B
- Credit recovery facilitators must be endorsed and certified, and must receive training concerning online instruction management and related technology.
- Students must complete a course skill-specific diagnostic to determine the skill-specific goals they must master to earn credit.
- Credit recovery curriculum must align with Tennessee curriculum standards approved by the SBOE.
- School districts must establish a grading formula that includes the original failing grade in the calculation of the final credit recovery grade.

See Appendix B for an excerpt of the 2014 SBOE FAQ document.

Exhibit 2: Does the district have a written district policy about credit recovery?



Note: 79 respondents out of 119 districts surveyed (37, yes; 42, no).
Source: OREA Survey, Question 3.

^B According to the Uniform Grading Policy originally adopted by the State Board of Education in 2005 and revised in 2015, the percentage range of 0-69 constitutes a grade of F.

What makes students eligible for credit recovery? How do districts identify students who need credit recovery?

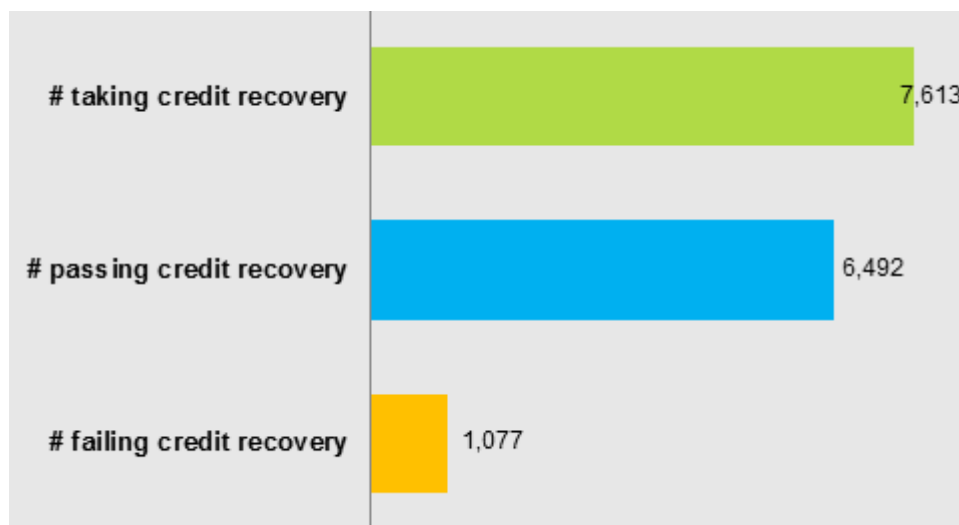
Survey responses from Tennessee districts indicate that students are eligible for credit recovery after failing one or more high school courses that are required for graduation. Districts generally require that students make a minimum grade in the original course (usually between 50 and 60 percent) and some also factor in student attendance (i.e., those with poor attendance may not be eligible for credit recovery).²³ Districts may also require students to complete a credit recovery application and meet with the guidance counselor, sometimes including parents, to ensure that all parties understand the expectations under the credit recovery program.²⁴

Most responding districts (91 percent of respondents to this question) indicate they have a system in place to track student academic progress and identify students in need of credit recovery. Schools use various approaches to identifying students, including regularly scheduled reviews of student transcripts, teacher referrals, and routine monitoring of data in the student management information system. Personnel assigned to these duties include guidance or at-risk counselors, graduation coaches, and classroom teachers, among others.²⁵

How many students were enrolled in credit recovery during the 2014-15 school year? How many students passed and failed credit recovery courses during that period?

Of the 84 districts that responded to the OREA survey, 64 supplied basic statistics about their programs, including the number of students taking credit recovery courses and the number passing and failing in school year 2014-15. Some of the numbers are estimates from districts, which were still finishing up the school year at the time they completed the survey. Estimates per district range widely, generally based on district size: the smallest number of students reported in credit recovery was three and the highest was 1,004. The total number of students in credit recovery statewide was estimated at 7,613. Because 18 responding districts that provide credit recovery did not supply data, the actual total number of students in credit recovery is certainly higher. (See [Exhibit 3](#).)

Exhibit 3: Estimated number of students taking, passing, and failing credit recovery in 64 school districts, school year 2014-15



Note: 64 respondents of 119 districts surveyed.
Source: OREA Survey, Question 24.

Districts reported that most students in credit recovery passed (6,492 of 7,613 students, or about 85 percent); an estimated 1,077 students failed (about 14 percent).

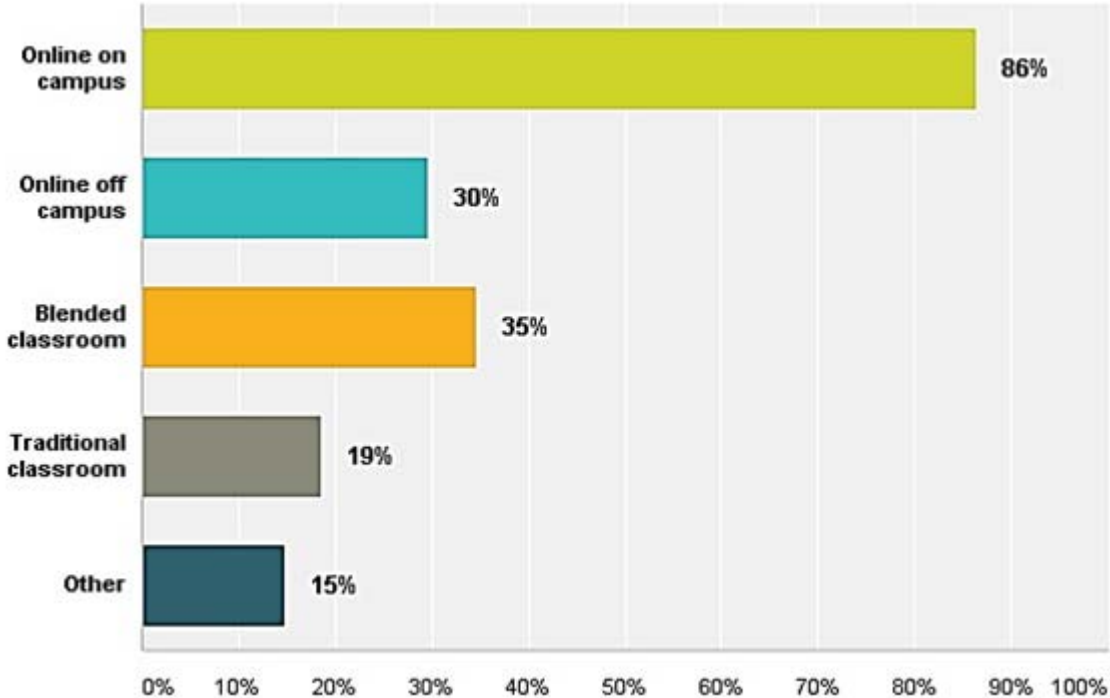
Districts also estimated that students failed an average of two courses prior to taking credit recovery and that the average number of credit recovery courses that a student takes during high school is also two.²⁶

How and when is credit recovery offered in Tennessee schools?

In keeping with the national trend, most Tennessee districts provide credit recovery courses online, but may also provide different credit recovery options for students. Survey respondents were not limited to one selection when asked how credit recovery is offered in their districts. A large number of districts (86 percent of respondents) indicated that they provide credit recovery online but at the school campus; 30 percent of respondents provide credit recovery online but off the school campus. A smaller number (19 percent of respondents) provide credit recovery in a traditional classroom setting. Some districts (35 percent of respondents) combine (or blend) the online approach with a traditional classroom setting. (See Exhibit 4.)

A large number of survey respondents indicated that they offer credit recovery during the school day (76 percent of respondents); an equal number (76 percent) also indicate they offer credit recovery before and/or after school. A smaller but sizeable number (26 percent) offer credit recovery flexibly at students' convenience. These districts likely offer students the ability to remotely access online credit recovery courses, either in online, off campus courses or part-time in blended classes. Several districts (36

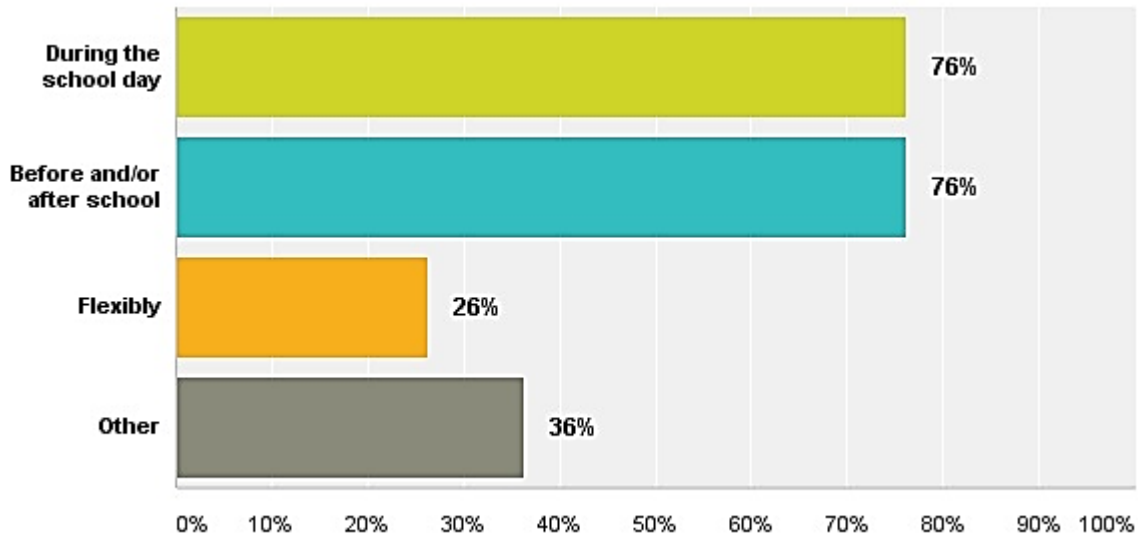
Exhibit 4: How is credit recovery offered? (Responses are not mutually exclusive.)



Note: 81 total respondents out of 119 districts surveyed: Online on campus, 70; Online off campus, 24; Blended classroom, 28; Traditional classroom, 15; and Other, 12. A choice of "Other" indicates respondents provided additional information. Respondents were not limited to one choice.
Source: OREA Survey, Question 21.

percent of respondents) selected the “other” option, and many of these indicated that they offer credit recovery during their summer school sessions. (See Exhibit 5.)

Exhibit 5: When is credit recovery offered? (Responses were not mutually exclusive.)



Note: 80 respondents out of 119 districts surveyed: During the school day, 61; Before and/or after school, 61; Flexibly, 21; and Other, 29. Respondents selecting “Other” provided additional information. Respondents were not limited to one choice. Source: OREA Survey, Question 23.

What vendors do districts contract with for online credit recovery?

Many districts (74 percent) indicated that they contract with a vendor to provide online credit recovery. Some districts also use more than one product. The most frequently cited vendors were Plato/Edmentum, Odysseyware, A +, and Compass Odyssey. Other vendors in use were Grade Results, Edgenuity, Pearson-GradPoint, FuelEd, Apex, IXL, and NovaNet.²⁷

Do students in online credit recovery programs take complete courses or do the courses focus on areas of an individual student’s academic deficiencies?

Survey respondents were not limited to one response for this question; districts may provide credit recovery using a variety of approaches. A large number of districts (64 percent of respondents) indicate that the online credit recovery courses they provide focus on areas of student deficiencies rather than requiring students to re-take entire courses. Some districts (42 percent of respondents) require some students to take complete courses, however, depending on the results from mastery diagnostic tests that determine what skills and knowledge students have and have not already learned. Some districts (28 percent of respondents) require all students to re-take complete courses.²⁸

Districts with credit recovery courses that focus on student deficiencies indicate that they determine those areas of weakness either through an online diagnostic test (42 percent of respondents), through student course work in the failed class (54 percent), or through the results of an end-of-course test where applicable (18 percent). Respondents were not limited to one response for this question and may use some or all of these techniques to determine student needs in credit recovery.²⁹

Does the district limit the number of credit recovery courses a student can take at one time (i.e., during the semester, quarter, or school year)?

A majority of districts (56 percent of respondents) indicated that they do not limit the number of credit recovery courses a student can take at one time; about 44 percent of respondents do limit the number of courses. Most districts with limits allow no more than two credit recovery courses per semester and some limit courses to one per semester, with a few others allowing three.³⁰

How are credit recovery courses staffed and supervised?

Districts use various means of staffing and supervising their credit recovery programs. Several districts highlight the involvement of certified teachers providing direct student assistance with course content as needed. A selection of survey responses to this question is provided below.³¹

“We have content specific teachers that help with those students. For example, an English teacher would supervise a student recovering for English.”

“Certified teachers that are hired/assigned and trained to support and coach personalized learning in a lab environment that involved students at various levels of academic achievement.”

“Generally, students work in the computer lab during their free time. This is manned by an assistant. When students need additional support, core staff will come to the lab or students visit the teacher.”

“Certified teachers are employed to supervise credit recovery courses.”

“Through software with certified and non-certified staff as support.”

“Online Learning Lab during the school day with a lab supervisor. Students can work independently but must have final course post-tests proctored at school.”

“Our Credit Recovery consists of an online program. Each of the high schools has a lab or other designated space in which students work. These labs are generally supervised by classified personnel who can help students with technology issues and tracking. However, certified personnel are available to assist students both before and after school with content.”

“One teacher supervises the program. It is an online program. She works closely with teachers who have students in credit recovery.”

“All school sites have licensed teachers specifically assigned to credit recovery labs.”

“We have one credit recovery coordinator responsible for scheduling. We have Math, English, and Science teachers available during each session to assist students.”

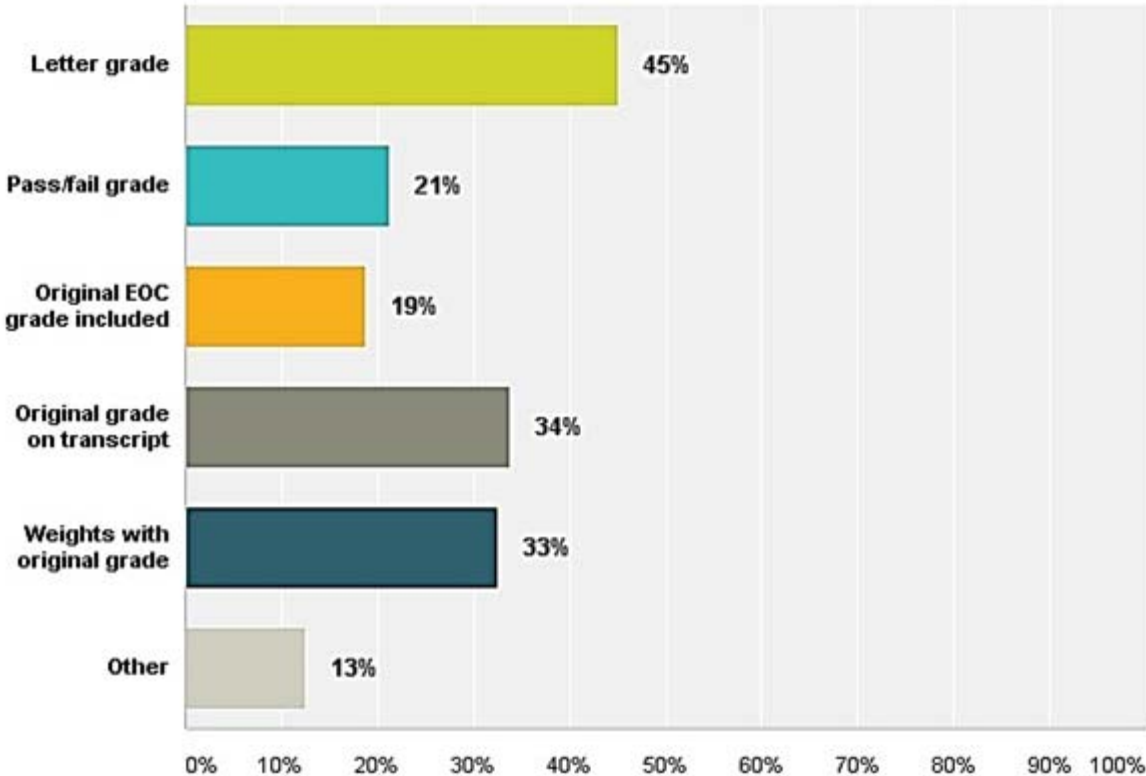
How are students in credit recovery graded?

Districts have different methods for grading students in credit recovery. Respondents were not limited to one choice on this question. Most districts (45 percent of respondents) give students a letter grade and some (21 percent) give students a pass/fail grade in credit recovery courses. (See [Exhibit 6](#).) In 34 percent of responding districts, the original course grade is included on the student’s transcript. In 32 percent of responding districts, the credit recovery grade is weighted to include the original grade. Weights used for this purpose vary among districts – for example, one district calculates a final credit recovery course grade using a 40 percent original grade / 60 percent credit recovery grade and another uses a 25 percent / 75 percent weight. Some weight the two equally.³²

Some districts' written comments indicate that students receive a grade of 70 if they pass credit recovery even if they score a higher grade. This is also indicated in some districts' written policies.³³ Some districts (18 percent of respondents) include or consider the end-of-course exam score in the credit recovery grade for courses that require these tests.³⁴

For courses that have end-of-course exams, most districts (80 percent of respondents) do not require students who pass a credit recovery course to retake the exam; 20 percent of responding districts do require students to retake the end-of-course exam.³⁵

Exhibit 6: How are students in credit recovery graded? (Responses were not mutually exclusive.)



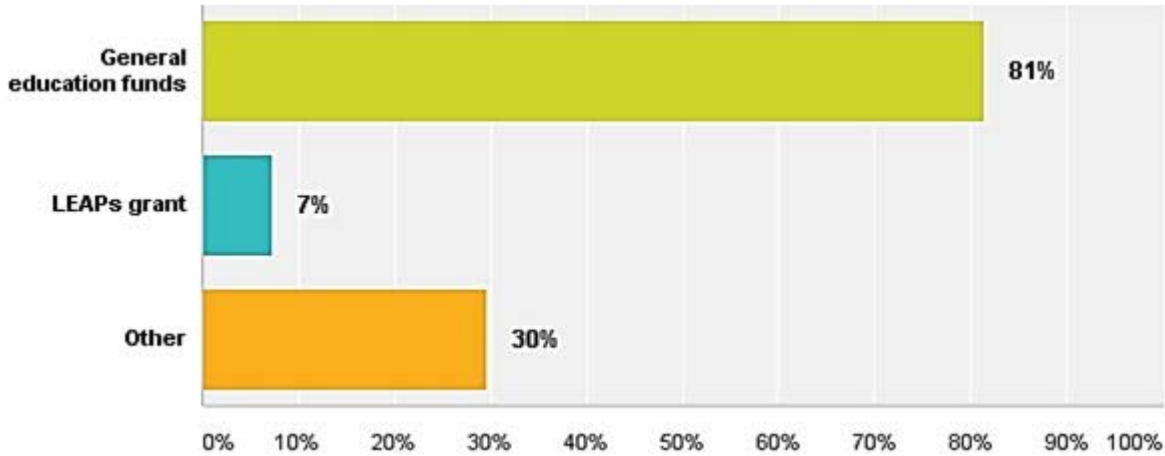
Note: 80 respondents out of 119 districts surveyed: Letter grade, 36; Pass/fail grade, 17; Original EOC grade included, 15; Original grade on transcript, 27; Weights with original grade, 26; and Other, 10. Respondents selecting "Other" provided additional information. Respondents were not limited to one choice. Source: OREA Survey, Question 22.

How do districts fund credit recovery programs? Is there a fee for students/parents?

Most districts (81 percent of responding districts) report using general education funds to operate their credit recovery programs. A few districts (7 percent) indicate they use grant funds from the Tennessee Lottery for Education Afterschool Programs (LEAPs) for their credit recovery programs. About 30 percent of districts wrote in additional comments, and many of these indicated that they use extended contract funds for their credit recovery programs. (See Exhibit 7.)

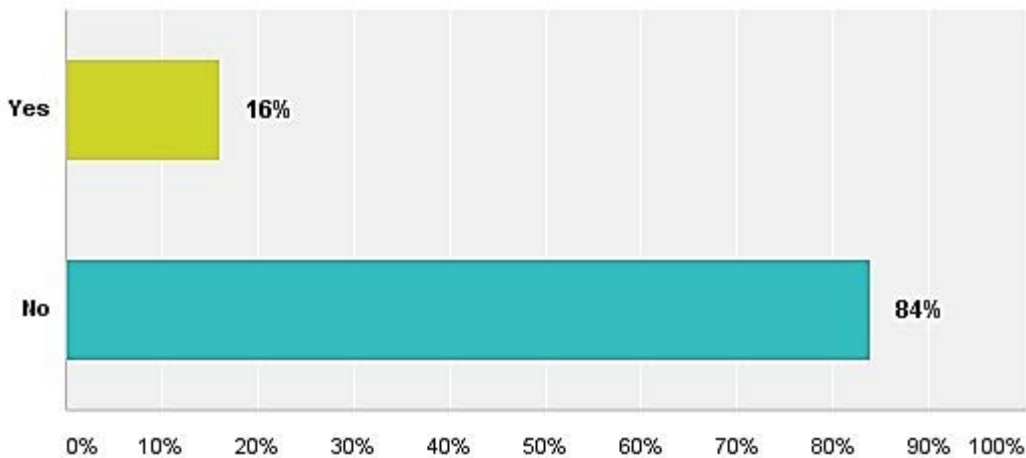
Most districts (84 percent of respondents) do not require students/parents to pay a fee for taking credit recovery courses; 16 percent of responding districts do charge a fee for credit recovery. (See Exhibit 8.) Of those districts charging a fee for credit recovery, most indicate the fee is waived or adjusted for students that qualify for free and reduced price lunch.³⁶

Exhibit 7: How does the district fund its credit recovery program? (Responses were not mutually exclusive.)



Note: 81 respondents out of 119 districts surveyed: General education funds, 66; LEAPs grant, 6; and Other, 24. Respondents selecting "Other" provided additional information. Respondents were not limited to one choice.
Source: OREA Survey, Question 8.

Exhibit 8: Are students/parents required to pay a fee for taking a credit recovery course?



Note: 81 respondents out of 119 districts surveyed: Yes, 13; No, 68.
Source: OREA Survey, Question 9.

Literature Review: Criticisms of credit recovery programs

Critics have raised some concerns about credit recovery programs:³⁷

Lack of basic statistical information. Much basic information is unknown about credit recovery, including the number of students taking credit recovery courses throughout the U.S. and how much of a difference the practice makes in state and district graduation rates. There is also a lack of data about the characteristics of students who take credit recovery, how far behind they are on the path to graduation, how many fail credit recovery courses, and how many successfully transition to postsecondary experiences with and without the need for further remediation.³⁸

Lack of evaluative research about the effectiveness of credit recovery programs. Little research has been undertaken about credit recovery.³⁹ The only federal research grant focusing on credit recovery was awarded in 2011.⁴⁰ The study, conducted in the Chicago Public Schools system by the American Institutes for Research, focused on first-time 9th-graders who failed the second

semester of Algebra 1. The study began in the summer of 2011 and continued through the end of the 2014-15 school year. The study's goal was to compare the effectiveness of an online credit recovery course to a traditional in-class summer school course by randomly assigning students to one of the two.⁴¹ Final results of the study have not been published to date. REL Northwest⁴² is conducting a descriptive study about credit recovery options and implementation in Montana, the results of which are expected to be published in the summer of 2015. Researchers plan to describe Montana's credit recovery options, analyze district data, and ascertain the challenges districts face in providing and implementing credit recovery options.⁴³

Variance in grading practices. Because credit recovery programs are locally designed and implemented, districts within a single state can vary in how they record grades for credit recovery courses on student transcripts. Student work that is similar may result in disparate results throughout a state, raising questions of fairness. In 2010, because of the wide variation of districts' credit recovery practices in North Carolina, the state's Board of Education created a policy to define credit recovery and address uniformity in grading practices.⁴⁴

Potential for fraud. Internal audits found cases of fraudulent practices in some schools' credit recovery programs in New York City Schools and the Columbus (Ohio) City School District, generally tied to districts' focus on raising graduation rates.⁴⁵ The New York Board of Regents and the New York City Department of Education responded by imposing new rules and more extensive state oversight of schools' credit recovery programs.⁴⁶ The audit of the Columbus City School District, which investigated the altering of student grades in credit recovery programs and other contexts, resulted in criminal charges against some district administrators. Auditors continue to monitor the results of board changes to ensure that policies are followed.⁴⁷

Little teacher involvement and greater student autonomy in some online programs. Several anecdotal reports describe credit recovery classes in which students have earned credits in short time spans with little teacher supervision.⁴⁸ The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which reviews student athletes' applications for eligibility on college teams and their transcripts to ensure the high school courses taken meet NCAA standards, made policy revisions in 2010 to address the issue.⁴⁹ The NCAA adopted a new policy concerning nontraditional courses, which includes credit recovery courses, requiring regular interaction between instructors and students throughout a course, a defined time of completion, and placement on the student transcript. Courses must be the same length as traditional classroom courses and students may not pre-test out of portions of a course. The policy revision disqualifies those online credit recovery courses that are designed to be conducted at the student's pace, focus on only student deficiencies, and supply teacher interaction as requested rather than being teacher-based.⁵⁰ In Tennessee, some districts' credit recovery policies provide information about the NCAA requirements.⁵¹

Other states' approaches to credit recovery

Some states make no or only a general reference to high school credit recovery in state laws or education policies, though schools within those states are implementing credit recovery programs. Other states have adopted state laws or policies that prescribe, to varying degrees, how local programs should be administered.⁵² Some states provide a state-level credit recovery program, often through their state virtual schools, that all districts and schools across the state may access for their students. Information provided below for a few states illustrates the various approaches states have taken regarding credit recovery.

Alabama's State Board of Education in 2008 approved graduation implementation guidelines, which include requirements for district credit recovery programs. Districts choosing to offer credit recovery must develop program rules, regulations, and processes, and follow minimum guidelines established by the State Board.⁵³ The State Board also eliminated the state's seat-time policy to allow for "credit recovery and credit advancement based on students demonstrating mastery, not on their completing a set number of hours in class."⁵⁴

Connecticut passed a law in 2010 requiring districts with dropout rates of 8 percent or higher to establish online credit recovery programs.⁵⁵

Florida's approach to credit recovery, provided through the Florida Virtual School or through a district virtual school, is called "grade forgiveness" in state law. A student who receives a grade of D or F in a course may repeat the course and replace the original grade (i.e., have the grade forgiven) if the student receives a grade of C or higher on a subsequent attempt. If a grade is successfully replaced, the original failing grade is not included in a student's GPA calculation.⁵⁶ Students enrolled in courses that are repeated for credit recovery purposes are exempt from the seat-time requirements for earning credit. Credit is awarded based on demonstrated mastery of student performance standards.⁵⁷

Georgia's Department of Education Credit Recovery Program is free to any public high school student. Online courses are offered on a flexible schedule and are not facilitated by a teacher, although all post tests and final exams must be proctored by the credit recovery site coordinator at the student's school.⁵⁸

Iowa's Kirkwood Community College High School Distance Learning program works with all school districts in the state to offer online and correspondence credit recovery courses.⁵⁹

Montana provides credit recovery through its statewide Montana Digital Academy (MDTA) hosted by the University of Montana's College of Education and Human Sciences. The MDTA program was modified in 2013-14 to limit the number of credit recovery courses students could take at one time because previous experience found that students were often not successful when taking multiple courses.⁶⁰

After finding some inappropriate uses of credit recovery, the **New York** Board of Regents modified state diploma requirements to clarify requirements for earning initial course credit and credit recovery through digital coursework. Online courses must now include “regular and substantive interaction” with the teacher in all cases. **New York City**, the district that was the subject of the Regents audit, adopted additional restrictions to its credit recovery program following the audit: students can earn no more than three credits through credit recovery, students who attended the original failed class for less than two-thirds of the class time are not eligible for credit recovery, and schools must use district-approved programs for online credit recovery.⁶¹

North Carolina State Board Policy defines credit recovery as a block of instruction that is less than the entirety of the student course of study for that course. The policy states that credit recovery is not based on seat time but rather on “the skills and knowledge that a student needs to recover credits.” Districts must use a grade of pass or fail for each credit recovery course, which are not to affect the student’s GPA. Local school boards may not limit the number of credit recovery courses students take prior to graduation. The end of course test associated with credit recovery must be administered within 30 days after completion of the credit recovery course.⁶²

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Department of Education, [States Report New High School Graduation Rates Using More Accurate, Common Measure](#), Nov. 26, 2012, <http://www.ed.gov/> (accessed May 13, 2015).
- ² Andrew Trotter, "Online Options for 'Credit Recovery' Widen," *Education Week*, May 21, 2008, subscription required, <http://www.edweek.org/> (accessed May 13, 2015).
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- ²⁷ OREA Survey, Question 20, 81 total respondents: Yes, 60; No, 21.

- ²⁸ OREA Survey, Question 13, 81 total respondents: All students take complete courses, 23; Some students take complete courses, 34; Courses focus on areas of deficiencies, 52; Other, 10.
- ²⁹ OREA Survey, Question 14, 79 total respondents; Online pre-test, 33; Student course work in failed course, 43; Results of EOC (where applicable), 14; Does not apply, 21; Other, 3.
- ³⁰ OREA Survey, Question 15, 80 total respondents: Yes, 35; No, 45.
- ³¹ OREA Survey, Question 18, 79 total respondents.
- ³² OREA Survey, Question 22, 80 total respondents.
- ³³ Nine districts indicated in their written response to Question 22 that they allow a maximum grade of 70 in credit recovery.
- ³⁴ OREA Survey Question 22, 80 total respondents.
- ³⁵ OREA Survey, Question 17, 81 respondents: yes, 16; no, 65.
- ³⁶ OREA Survey, Question 10, 79 respondents; Yes, 12; No, 4; Does not apply, 63.
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Appendix A: Survey questions

1. Does your district provide a credit recovery option for students?
2. Does the district have a written district policy about credit recovery?
3. If the district has a credit recovery policy, how was the policy developed?
4. Provide the total number of: high schools in your district and high schools in your district that offer a credit recovery option?
5. What criteria must a student meet to be eligible to take a credit recovery course?
6. What grade levels are served through credit recovery? Select all that apply.
 - a. Grades 9, 10, 11, 12
 - b. Preference given to students in grade 12
 - c. Other (please specify)
7. How does the district fund its credit recovery program? Select all that apply.
 - a. General education funds
 - b. LEAPs grant
 - c. Other (please specify.)
8. Are students/parents required to pay a fee for taking a credit recovery course?
9. If the district requires a credit recovery fee, is the fee waived or adjusted for free and reduced price lunch students?
10. Is parental consent required for credit recovery?
11. Does your district have a system in place to track student academic progress and identify students in need of credit recovery? If yes, please briefly describe.
12. Do students in online credit recovery programs take complete courses or do the courses focus on areas of an individual student's academic deficiencies? Select all that apply.
 - a. All students take complete courses

- b. Some students take complete courses
 - c. Courses focus on areas of student academic deficiencies
 - d. Other (please specify)
13. If the credit recovery courses focus on areas of student deficiencies, how are those areas determined? Select all that apply.
- a. Through an online pretest
 - b. Through student course work in the failed class
 - c. Through the results of an end-of-course test (where applicable)
 - d. Does not apply
 - e. Other (please specify)
14. Does the district limit the number of credit recovery courses students can take at one time (i.e., during the semester or quarter)? If yes, please specify the number of courses and the period of time (semester, etc.).
15. Does the district limit the number of courses for which students can earn credit through credit recovery? If yes, provide the number of courses.
16. For courses that have end-of-course exams, does the district require a student who successfully passes a credit recovery course to retake the EOC exam?
17. How are credit recovery courses staffed and supervised? Briefly explain.
18. How does the district ensure that the instructional content of online materials used for credit recovery align with the state's academic standards? Briefly explain.
19. Does the district contract with a vendor to provide online credit recovery for the district? If yes, please specify the name of the vendor.
20. How is credit recovery offered? Select all that apply.
- a. Online on campus
 - b. Online off campus

- c. Blended classroom
- d. Traditional classroom
- e. Other

21. How are students in credit recovery graded? Select all that apply.

- a. Letter grade
- b. Pass/fail grade
- c. Original EOC grade included
- d. Original grade on transcript
- e. Weights with original grade (If grade is weighted, specify weight used.)
- f. Other

22. When is credit recovery offered? Select all that apply.

- a. During the school day
- b. Before and/or after school
- c. Flexibly
- d. Other (please specify)

23. Please provide the following data for the 2014-15 school year.

- a. Number of students taking credit recovery
- b. Number of students passing credit recovery
- c. Number of students failing credit recovery
- d. On average, the number of courses students failed prior to credit recovery
- e. On average, the number of credit recovery courses a student takes

Appendix B: Excerpt from State Board of Education High School Transition Policy Frequently Asked Questions

High School Transition Policy Frequently Asked Questions

Revised: June 11, 2014

General Questions:

What is meant by credit recovery and how can it be accomplished?

Credit Recovery is traditionally defined as a way to “recover” credit for a course that a student was previously unsuccessful in earning academic credit towards graduation. Credit Recovery programs, in general, have a primary focus of helping students stay in school and graduate on time. LEAs may choose how they address and offer credit recovery within these department guidelines developed in 2005:

Credit Recovery is defined as a coursespecific, skillbased extended learning opportunity for students who have previously been unsuccessful in mastering content or skills required to receive course credit or earn promotion.

LEAs shall develop Credit Recovery program rules, regulations, and processes and shall provide them in writing to students, parents, and guardians. At a minimum, they must address the following standards for admission and removal, instruction, content and curriculum, and grades:

1) Admission and Removal

- a) LEA rules, regulations, or procedures for admission to and removal from Credit Recovery programs may include but not be limited to attendance, discipline, availability of coursework, availability of space, appropriate progress, and grades. At a minimum, they must:
 - i) Require students to complete an application process as determined by the LEA.
 - ii) Require parent or guardian consent for students to apply for Credit Recovery.
 - iii) Require students to have earned a failing grade not less than 50% in the course. LEAs may establish a higher minimum score for admission.

- b) LEAs shall not require students to participate in Credit Recovery programs.

2) Instruction

- a) Credit Recovery Facilitators:
 - i) Shall be endorsed and certified.
 - ii) Shall receive training pertaining to course organization, online instruction management, and related technology.

- b) Students in Credit Recovery programs:
 - i) Shall complete a course skill-specific diagnostic to determine skill-specific goals.
 - ii) Shall meet individual skill-specific goals in a flexible time frame as established by identified student need.
 - iii) Shall master all individualized skill-specific goals as established by the diagnostic process in order to earn credit.

3) Content and Curriculum

- a) Credit Recovery content may be delivered through instructional technology.
- b) Credit Recovery curriculum shall align with Tennessee Curriculum Standards approved by the State Board of Education.

4) Grades

- a) LEAs are responsible for establishing specific uniform procedures for evaluation of student progress and awarding of final grades in Credit Recovery programs.
- b) LEAs shall establish a grading formula that includes the original failing grade in the calculation of the final credit recovery grade.

FOR EXAMPLE:	50
Equal Weighted Original Grade	
Equal Weighted Credit Recovery Grade	90
Final Transcript Grade Calculation	140/2
Final Transcript Grade Posted	70

- c) Grades awarded in Credit Recovery programs shall adhere to the State Board of Education uniform grading scale.
 - d) Grades awarded in Credit Recovery programs shall be posted under the name of the original teacher of record. The original failing grade may be retained on the transcript.
 - e) LEAs shall establish a naming convention to differentiate a Credit Recovery transcript grade from all other transcript grades.
- LEAs shall establish administrative procedures to enter grades to student transcripts and student information systems, and to report grades to students and parents/guardians.

Source: Tennessee State Board of Education, [High School Transition Policy Frequently Asked Questions](http://www.state.tn.us/), Revised: June 11, 2014, pp. 2-4, <http://www.state.tn.us/> (accessed July 28, 2015).

BILL HASLAM
GOVERNOR



DR. SARA L. HEYBURN
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July 28, 2015

Mr. Russell Moore
Offices of Research and Education Accountability
Comptroller of the Treasury
Suite 1700 – James K. Polk Building
505 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37243-1402

Dear Mr. Moore:

The State Board of Education appreciates the partnership of the Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) in exploring this important topic of credit recovery. When used appropriately, credit recovery provides opportunities for students who have previously struggled in courses to attain the credits needed for graduation.

As part of a comprehensive review of our policies, the State Board plans to undertake a close review of the credit recovery guidance and determine whether additional policies or guidance might be needed. The OREA survey results and report will inform this work. We look forward to collaborating with OREA on this issue as well as future topics and research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Heyburn".

Sara Heyburn
Executive Director

SH/pc



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