



Proficiency-Based Systems

Overview and Submission Process

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Part I: Overview

South Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) [Regulation 43-234 \(II\)\(C\)](#) allows districts to award credit for courses through a proficiency-based system that has been approved by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE).

The purpose of this guidance is to assist districts in applying for authorization to develop such a system to award credit. Proficiency-based systems focus on providing educational experiences within a school or a broader community, are not bound by existing instructional hour requirements, and are based on mastery of content. A student is awarded credit once the proficiency-based system credit type requirements are met.

Using this Application

Districts wishing to offer existing or new courses where credit is given through proficiency-based means should complete the [online application](#) and design the system to deliver those courses using the following situational guidance.

Existing Courses: Districts seeking to offer existing courses through proficiency-based means only need to use the proficiency-based evaluation form. For example, if a district already offers an English 3 course in its catalog and wishes to provide an opportunity to earn credit through proficiency-based means, it can use this application.

New Courses: Districts seeking to award credit for new courses not currently included in their course catalog must first have those courses approved through the innovative course application or the Career and Technical Education Innovative Course Application process, as prescribed in SBE [Regulation 43-234 \(II\) \(H\)](#).

For more information on or to submit an innovative course application, please email innovativecourseapp@ed.sc.gov.

Types of Credit

School districts may use this guidance to create proficiency-based systems designed to award the following types of credit (see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) in Part III of this document for examples).

1. **Initial Credit:** Refers to an educational experience in which a student seeks to obtain credit for the first time. In this case, a student would enroll or participate in an educational experience and attempt to gain sufficient knowledge to demonstrate proficiency to earn the desired credit.
2. **Credit through Prior Knowledge:** Refers to a proficiency-based process by which a student demonstrates sufficient understanding of a subject to receive credit. In this

case, a student’s demonstration of subject knowledge is not tied to a specific educational experience, and credit is awarded based on mastery.

3. **Credit Recovery:** Refers to an educational experience that permits a student to receive credit to make up for a previously unsuccessful attempt to obtain credit. In this case, a student had previously enrolled in an educational experience, which may have been either traditional or proficiency-based, but did not meet the requirements to receive credit.

Awarding Credit

A district or school may award credit for courses the SCDE has approved in a proficiency-based system.

1. **Initial Credit:** A district or school may award a numerical grade for one-fourth, one-half, or one unit. Districts are accountable for ensuring that the academic standards for the course are addressed. The grade will be factored into the GPA.
2. **Credit through Prior Knowledge:** A district or school may award a grade of “P” if the student demonstrates sufficient mastery of a subject included in the approved proficiency-based system application. This is often a method of credit used for students seeking acceleration or placement in a course with prerequisites. If a district or school plans to use assessment of Credit through Prior Knowledge to offer grades that would count toward a student’s Grade Point Average, the South Carolina Department of Education must review the district’s methods for determining mastery as a part of the proficiency-based system application process.
3. **Credit Recovery:** A district or school must follow the Uniform Grading Policy when transcribing the final grade in a credit recovery course, ensuring the original failing grade remains on the transcript and awarding a passing grade of “P” or a failing grade of “NP.”

Relevant Resources

These are resources that districts may wish to consult when creating their application:

- South Carolina Education Flexibility Guide: This guide can help you think about how to create your approach to personalized learning, leveraging existing policies that promote flexibility and innovation.
- PBS World Language Guidance: This guide provides a launching point on how to offer World Language Credit Through Prior Knowledge.
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Part II: Plan Submission

The submission process provides a structure for a school district to submit a plan to develop a proficiency-based system to award credit under [Regulation 43-234\(11\)\(C\)](#) to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). Before completing the online application, the SCDE recommends consulting the Overview and FAQ sections of this document. The application should be completed and submitted using this [electronic form](#).

Deadlines, Feedback, and Renewal Process

Proficiency-based systems plans are approved for the duration of the district strategic plan or school renewal plan, each 5-year cycle. A new proficiency-based plan must be submitted in the first year of a new 5-year district strategic or school renewal plan. By April 30 of each year, districts will complete an evaluation of their proficiency-based systems plan using the [form](#) on the SCDE State Accountability website.

Plans will either be approved or returned to the district with feedback. If a plan is returned with feedback, districts are encouraged to resubmit the document after incorporating suggested revisions.

Once SCDE approves a plan, the district may use it to develop its proficiency-based system and accompanying courses. If the district has submitted one or more innovative course applications for a course not currently approved by SCDE, the district must ensure that each new course is approved before offering the course for credit. Should the district wish to develop courses outside the scope of its original proficiency-based system plan, such as offering a new type of credit, it should submit an updated plan that includes the development of proposed courses within the proficiency-based system. The final proficiency-based system developed through the plan should be included in the district's next strategic plan update and shared publicly with students, parents, and stakeholders.

Please review our Frequently Asked Questions document or email proficiency@ed.sc.gov if you have additional questions.

Submission Questions

You will be asked to respond to the following questions, using the form on the SCDE website.

Section 1: Basic Information

Date Submitted:

District Name:

DSSR Cycle Year:

Primary Contact Name:

Contact Position:

Contact Phone Number:

Contact Email Address:

Section 2: Plan Information

Please note that the plan should provide readers with a detailed understanding of the district's process to develop its proficiency-based system. This application requires districts to submit a plan outlining how they will establish and develop a proficiency-based system. The district does not necessarily need to describe precisely what courses, systems, or structures will emerge from this process, though it may choose to do so. At a minimum, all plans must address the following elements to be considered for SCDE approval:

- **Goals:** State the goal(s) in the District Strategic Plan that precipitated the decision to use proficiency-based instruction. How will this decision benefit the students? (GPA, SC Profile Graduate, Workforce goals)
- **Evidence:** What evidence will you use to demonstrate you met those goals?
- **Schools:** Which secondary schools within the district are involved?
- **Types of Credit:** Indicate the type(s) of proficiency-based credit from the guidance document for which the district is seeking approval:
 - Initial Credit
 - Credit through Prior Knowledge
 - Credit Recovery
- **Student Selection:** Which subgroups will be targeted for the proficiency-based system?
 - Advanced coursework
 - Homebound students
 - Scheduling conflicts

- Transfer students
 - Alternative school placement
 - Virtual school
 - Evening programs
 - Adult education
 - Other
- **Selection:** What are the criteria for student selection? How many students do you project your district will serve in the type of credit the district seeks approval for?
 - **Appeal Process:** Describe the district’s appeal process.
 - **Tracking:** How does your district track students’ academic performance in courses and identify those failing before the end of the first 4 weeks?
 - Content recovery within the traditional classroom
 - MTSS
 - Other interventions:
 - **Method(s) of Instruction:** What instruction method (s) will be used for initial credit and/or credit recovery within the proficiency-based system?
 - **Determining Proficiency:** How will the district determine proficiency in SC State standards to award credit for courses offered in the proficiency-based system?
 - **Individual Student Learning:** What accommodations are being made for students with IEPs in this new structure?
 - **Communication:** Explain the district’s procedure for communicating with the parents and students, and the need for a proficiency-based course.
 - **Attendance:** Describe how the district will ensure compulsory attendance laws are met for students enrolled in proficiency-based courses. If the proficiency-based system is used to award credit on a case-by-case basis to students “who have excessive absences that the local school board has approved,” (R 43-274), provide the related board policy. (Skip this question if you are only applying for CTPK)
 - **Assurances (Last Step!):** All assurances must be reviewed and checked.

Part III: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the actual regulation that allows for a proficiency-based system?

The state board [Regulation 43-234\(II\)\(C\)](#) states that:

A school may award credit for courses approved by the SCDE in a proficiency-based system. A proficiency-based course may also be offered for one-fourth, one-half, or one unit if the system specifies these units. Each school district that seeks to implement a proficiency-based system must submit a plan to the SCDE that provides procedures for establishing and developing a proficiency-based system, including the method for determining proficiency. The SCDE must approve the district-submitted plan before the district can implement the proficiency-based system. Districts are responsible for ensuring that students meet academic standards and have their individual learning needs addressed.

Is there a place where I can find additional examples of how other schools are leveraging South Carolina's flexibilities?

Use this flexibility guide to create your approach to personalized learning, leveraging existing policies that promote flexibility and innovation. Access the playbook to see examples of how districts in South Carolina and around the country are leveraging similar flexibilities.

What strategies should the district use to develop its proficiency-based systems plan?

The district may employ various strategies to develop its proficiency-based systems plan. For example, the district may wish to create a single team or set of teams composed of multiple stakeholders assigned various tasks. North Carolina has developed an implementation guide that may be helpful to schools in designing their own process. Districts are encouraged to align their proficiency-based systems plan with their district strategic plan.

How should the proficiency-based system be integrated into my district's strategic plan?

Districts submitting a proficiency-based system application should do so simultaneously or before submitting their district strategic plan. As part of the district strategic plan process, the proficiency plan should be informed by the needs assessment and reflected in the performance goals, possibly as a strategy or part of the action plan outlined.

What types of courses could be covered in this application?

Courses offered through a proficiency-based system could include the range of existing courses that typically can be counted for course credit based on state regulations and guidance. This could include, but is not limited to: traditional courses, gateway courses, summer program courses, courses that are approved by a district but not offered at a school, adult education courses, locally designed courses, sign language courses, dual credit courses, career and technical education courses, work-based learning courses, cooperative agreements, and some internships. For more details on these course types, please refer to State Board [Regulation 43-234\(II\)\(C\)](#) and SCDE's [work-based learning implementation guidelines](#).

What methods might a district leverage to demonstrate proficiency?

Districts may select from various methods for demonstrating proficiency depending on the type of credit they wish to offer. This could include demonstrated mastery through nationally or internationally recognized assessments, locally designed performance assessments, physical or digital portfolios, oral examinations, independent study, or other means the district may wish to use. The district should also consider the extent to which it may need to develop rubrics, incorporate the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate competencies, revise the school schedule, and determine any additional educator professional development that may be required. Additionally, it should assess how assessment methods and criteria will be communicated.

What amounts of credit may be offered?

The board regulation allows districts to award one unit, one-half unit, or one-fourth unit, so long as the system specifies these units.

The application says that teachers must be appropriately certified to teach proficiency-based courses. What exactly does that mean?

The district should ensure that any teachers who provide instruction or oversight of proficiency-based courses under the system hold the appropriate South Carolina certification for the content area. If proficiency courses utilize lab settings, a teacher certified in the specific content area must communicate regularly with the student and monitor their progress. The lab monitor should proctor assessments and note the students' progress. A correctly certified teacher must also assign final grades for high school proficiency-based credit.

If the course includes an end-of-course (EOC) examination, do students receiving credit through a proficiency-based system need to take the EOC?

Yes, a student who receives credit for a course through a proficiency-based system that requires an EOC must still take that exam before receiving credit. Additionally, a district could determine that passing an EOC could serve as a method for determining proficiency under this application. Schools are encouraged to consider the EOC testing windows when offering courses that require an EOC.

Can proficiency-based credit recovery be a part of a district’s policies and procedures for students with excessive absences?

Regulation 43-274, VII., outlines a district’s responsibility to develop policies and procedures for awarding credit on a case-by-case basis to students “who have excessive absences that the local school board has approved.” Districts with approved proficiency-based systems applications can incorporate proficiency-based credit when that approach is aligned with the local board policy and the student’s needs.

Why isn’t content recovery included in this application?

The application does not include content recovery because districts are not required to submit any information to the state to implement content recovery. To pursue content recovery programs, follow the guidelines/rules in the [Uniform Grading Policy](#).

When should I expect to hear back from SCDE once I have applied?

The SCDE will acknowledge receipt of the application before it is forwarded to the PBS Review Panel. The PBS Review Panel will meet approximately once a week in May and June, and the SCDE may reach out to the district through that process.

For other questions regarding the proficiency-based system application, please email proficiency@ed.sc.gov.