

What is Mastery-Based Learning (MBL)?

The state defined mastery-based learning (MBL) in E2SHB 1599 Sec. 301:

- Students advance upon demonstrated mastery of content;
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students;
- Assessments are meaningful and a positive learning experience for students;
- Students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs; and
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

MBL Work Group

E2SHB 1599 also established a [work group](#) to explore the barriers to MBL and provide recommendations around how to increase capacity for MBL, including the development of a MBL pathway to a high school diploma. The work group's final recommendations are due to the Legislature on December 1, 2020.

Some of the topics and ideas the work group has begun to coalesce around include:

- **Learning Standards.** Whether students earn a high school diploma through the meeting the 24-credit graduation requirements or through the MBL framework, the student will meet the same learning standards.
- **Profile of a Graduate.** The work group plans to recommend that Washington State create a Profile of a Graduate, as a way of helping stakeholders understand the multidisciplinary skills students should acquire by the time they graduate high school.
- **High School and Beyond Plan.** To use the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) as an essential tool for MBL, there is a need to engage the entire education community—students, parents, former students, and the community, as well as educators—about the HSBP so that the entire community can help individual students with their plan.

Why do we need MBL?

- A focus on meeting the needs of each individual student.
- Students enjoy relevancy, engagement, and choice in their learning.
- Actively embraces inclusivity—compassion and belonging for students.
- Freedom for both students and educators to develop and try different ways of doing things, and embraces the innovation and learning that comes from both successes and failures.
- Values knowledge and skills that students already have.
- Each student's learning progresses at their own pace.
- A way to get rid of labels and create a system that closes the opportunity gap, and recognizes that each student's learning happens differently for each subject.



What state laws and guidance currently exist around MBL?

- State Board of Education (SBE) [Guidance](#) and [Handbook](#) on mastery-based crediting.
- Current law permits a multidisciplinary approach, with one course meeting more than one subject area graduation requirement (WAC 180-51-068).
- [The Washington State School Directors' Association \(WSSDA\)](#) has model policies that school boards can adopt that permit mastery-based credit.

SBE Proposed Rules on Mastery-Based (MB) Crediting

A summary of the proposed rules, WAC 180-51-051: Procedure for granting students mastery-based credit (View the full proposed rules on [SBE's website](#), pg. 8-13).

- The rules clarify existing district authority in providing mastery-based (MB) credit.
- Districts must periodically review their data regarding which student subgroups are receiving MB credit. If disproportionality is found, districts should take appropriate actions to ensure equitable access.
- The rules recommend districts provide several ways students can demonstrate mastery of the learning standards: state assessments, locally developed assessments, equivalency course of study, and success in a higher level course.



A Note on Term Usage

The field of mastery-based learning (MBL) has many terms that are confusing—for instance, many states use the term “competency-based education” to mean what Washington State has chosen to call MBL. Some terms are used interchangeably, even when the meaning of the terms are not, or should not, be interchangeable, e.g. personalized learning and project-based learning are strategies often used in MBL, but are not interchangeable terms.

MBL Examples in Other States



Idaho

Idaho supported the implementation of MBL through school incubator teams: a founding cohort of 32 schools are leading the implementation of [mastery education](#) in their own communities.



South Carolina

South Carolina developed [multidisciplinary competencies](#) to align with their state Profile of a Graduate, to further their efforts toward competency-based education.



Arizona

Arizona has a [performance-based diploma](#) students can earn once they demonstrate mastery through end-of-course exams in all core subject areas.