

What is Mastery-based Learning (MBL)?

MBL is an instructional approach designed to help students learn deeply and effectively. Classrooms using MBL have these in common:

- **Student agency.** Students help direct their own learning. MBL values the knowledge, skills, and interests of every student.
- **Relevance.** Students are empowered to make interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary connections and use their learning in many ways. Learning is relevant and engaging for students and can be applied outside of the classroom.
- **Differentiation.** Students receive help based on their individual interests and needs. Students move forward at their own pace. This is especially important as students recover from learning disruptions caused by COVID-19.
- **Inclusion.** Students experience compassion and belonging. MBL honors the unique contributions of every student and the knowledge they bring from their diverse cultures and communities.
- **Innovative assessment tools.** Students demonstrate mastery of skills or concepts through tests, portfolios, projects, or other demonstrations. Students and educators are encouraged to try new tools. Assessments are aligned to standards and allow students to show what they know as well as provide valuable feedback on the areas in which students need to deepen their learning.



Together, the elements of MBL lead to the transformation of our education system that will close opportunity gaps and support the needs of each and every student.

The MBL Work Group

The Legislature passed [House Bill 1599](#) in 2019. This bill established multiple graduation pathway options and tasked the State Board of Education (SBE) with creating a [work group](#) to learn more about MBL. Over the past two years, we have explored barriers to MBL and provided recommendations to state leaders. Our recommendations were submitted to the Legislature on December 1, 2020 and are available on the [MBL Work Group webpage](#).

The work group was extended by [Senate Bill 5249](#). We will produce a second set of recommendations and a Washington State Profile of a Graduate by December 10, 2021. Next steps include:

- **Profile of a Graduate.** Our work group will create the Profile of a Graduate with input from students, parents, educators, and community members statewide. The profile is designed to help the public understand the multidisciplinary skills K–12 students should acquire by the time they graduate. The work group will offer various opportunities to hear from Washingtonians.
- **Profile review.** SBE will review the profile. We will submit a report to the legislature by December 31, 2022. Our report will include recommendations on how best to align graduation requirements to the profile and support opportunities for mastery-based learning in our state.

State Laws and Guidance

- SBE offers [rules](#), [guidance](#) and a [handbook](#) for mastery-based crediting.
- Current law allows for 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 for mastery-based credit.

SBE Rules on Mastery-Based (MB) Crediting

The full procedure is available in [WAC 180-51-051](#). Current rules for school districts include:

- Districts have the authority to award credit based on mastery.
- Districts must review data regularly to identify the student groups receiving MB credit and address inequities.
- Districts should provide several pathways to demonstrating mastery, such as state or local assessments, equivalent courses of study, or success in a higher-level course.



What's it called again?

The words we use to describe teaching methods and approaches are always changing. Some states use **competency-based education** to describe MBL. It is also often confused with **personalized learning** and **project-based learning**. Both are important components of MBL, but they're not synonyms of MBL.

How have other states implemented MBL?



Idaho

In Idaho, 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.



Arizona

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