



Policy Proposal for Competency/Mastery Based Crediting

Policy Considerations

At the June work session, the Board will discuss the possibility of changing rules to better support competency/mastery crediting.

The Board has expressed an interest in modifying SBE rule around competency/mastery credit in order to support districts in offering these credit opportunities more widely, according to the needs of their students and their schools—as an innovative way of providing instruction and awarding credit. Members have also expressed support for competency/mastery crediting policies because they would ensure that students have the opportunity to earn credit where they are able to demonstrate mastery of content. Additionally, the use of competency/mastery-based crediting is a way schools may award credit that may be critical for students whose schools have closed in response to the novel coronavirus.

Although all the components of the rule proposal detailed in this memo are things districts can already do if they have adopted an authorizing policy for providing competency credit, the new rule would articulate districts' authority in an explicit way.

If the Board chooses to move forward with this proposal, staff will prepare draft rule for competency crediting to be considered by the Board at the July meeting.

Background

In existing SBE [rule](#) regarding definition of a credit, there is provision for awarding a credit based on a student's satisfactory demonstration of competency, as defined by written district policy, of the state's learning standards.

The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) Model Policy No. 2409: Credit for Competency/Proficiency has been available for districts to adopt for over a decade. It was designed for competency/proficiency credit in world languages; however, a district could expand the policy to multiple subjects.

Information from the State Board of Education's annual Basic Education Compliance Survey (reported in the [Mastery-based Learning Work Group Interim Report](#)) indicates that the number of districts using competency-based crediting has increased over the past few years, perhaps in response to new graduation requirements. The subjects most commonly credited through competency-based policies are world languages, math, and English. Math and English credit are most often awarded through the use of high school state assessment (Smarter Balanced Assessment) scores in math and English. While there is growing interest in competency/mastery-based education, many districts are reluctant to award competency credit, offering it rarely, and only to a few students.

To assist districts in awarding credit in other subjects that have state learning standards

associated with them, WSSDA recently released [new model policies for competency/mastery credit](#) in English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Art, and Health and Fitness.

Definition and Usage of Terms

The WSSDA model policies use the terms competency/proficiency interchangeably.

This memo will generally use the term mastery, to align with the state's definition in legislation ([E2SHB 1599](#), Sec. 301), unless referring to places where another term is used (e.g. in WAC, where the term "competency" is used instead).

Additionally, while mastery-based learning applies to specific learning and teaching strategies, mastery-based crediting is a specific crediting opportunity. Mastery-based crediting is an option for students to earn high school credit for demonstration of learning on assessments that are clearly aligned to learning standards. The assessments may be state or national standardized tests or may be district-specified assessments. Such assessments are not necessarily standardized tests and may include assessments such as a portfolio of student work or a hands-on demonstration of skills and knowledge.

New Rule Concept Proposal

Guiding Question: Are there components of the new rule proposal that you have concerns about, e.g. what a district's written policy should include or any of the methods for student demonstration of proficiency?

Process for Awarding Competency/Mastery Credit

A district's written policy for awarding mastery credit should specify which subjects/courses are eligible for mastery-based credit.

Per WAC 180-51-050, districts would still need to adopt a written policy before awarding competency/mastery credit. The policy should include details regarding:

- which subjects/courses are eligible for mastery-based credit
- other methods allowable for a student to demonstrate proficiency/qualify for mastery credit (beyond what would be established in the new rule). Most likely, this would be specifying what the district has created for locally developed assessment options

Demonstration of Proficiency to Qualify for Competency/Mastery Credit

Student demonstration of mastery/proficiency of the state's learning standards is not limited to standardized assessment results. Other ways of demonstrating proficiency by students could include through local assessments, portfolios, recorded presentations, and any other methods allowable within in the district's written policy.

Washington State has a [mastery-based learning work group](#), that has been tasked by the Legislature to provide recommendations by December 2020 around the expansion of mastery-based credits and development of mastery-based pathways to the earning of a high school diploma. In their [interim report](#), the work group notes: "within MBL, there is a role for authentic assessments that are tied directly to the learning standards. Demonstration of mastery would not be limited to standardized assessments. Demonstration of mastery of the standards could be through portfolios, demonstrations, and presentations."

The following methods are recommended to be placed in rule as allowable ways for students to demonstrate proficiency of the state learning standards:

State Assessment

Some districts already have a policy for providing competency/mastery credit for students who have met standard on the state assessment but have not been successful in their English Language Arts or mathematics course. For instance, if a student meets standard on the high school Smarter Balanced mathematics assessment, but had failed or received an Incomplete on their Algebra 1 or Integrated Math 1 course, the student could be awarded mastery credit based on their SBA score (districts that have this policy typically award between .5 to a full credit for meeting the standard in math).

The Board could also consider collaborating with OSPI to recommend a suggested cut score in order to have a student qualify for the mastery credit. If there is not a state recommended cut score, there would almost certainly be an equity concern with students getting the same cut score and receiving credit in some districts, but not others.

Local Assessment

Districts can also choose to utilize local assessments to allow students to demonstrate mastery of the course's learning standards through a variety of approaches. A district should include all allowable ways of demonstrating proficiency to receive a course credit in its written policy for awarding mastery credit.

Ideally, to create additional opportunities for student voice and engagement in their education, students would be allowed to choose their assessment method, from a variety of district-approved options. These could include a:

- Locally created written or oral test
- Written report by the student
- Portfolio of student work
- Student presentation/oral defense of their learning in the course
- Hands-on demonstration of skills and knowledge (this might work particularly well for CTE courses)

Districts should consider using standards-based grading for any local assessment approach to awarding credit.

Successful Completion of Next Higher-Level Course

Districts can also choose to include a provision in their policy for awarding a student mastery credit for courses they were previously unsuccessful in after they have successfully completed the next higher-level course. One example might be a student who passes English IV but had failed or received an incomplete on English III. After the student completes English IV, they could then be awarded mastery credit for their English III course.

Districts should use the state learning standards as their guide when making decisions regarding what courses should qualify for retroactive mastery credit, based on successful completion of the next higher-level course. If the next higher-level course includes a continuation/building upon the state learning standards from the previous course, then mastery credit for the previous course is both appropriate and encouraged.

Additional Resources

Additional background information and resources on competency/mastery crediting can be found in:

- [SBE Guidance on Competency/Mastery Crediting](#): The rule proposal outlined in this memo builds upon guidance released in April 2020 to help schools implement the new WSSDA specific-subject model policies on competency crediting, released during the COVID-19 school closures.
- [SBE's Competency-Based Crediting Handbook](#): Released July 2016, summarizes state laws that could influence competency-based crediting
- [Washington State's Standardized High School Transcript's FAQ](#): How to transcribe credits earned through competency/mastery-based learning