

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 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.



Photo: students from Maritime HS
(Highline Public Schools).

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. During this time, the work group explored barriers to MBL and provided [recommendations](#) to state leaders.



The work group was extended by [Senate Bill 5249](#), which produced a second set of recommendations and a [Washington State Profile of a Graduate](#) on December 10, 2021. The Profile of a Graduate was created by the work group with input from students, parents, educators, and community members statewide. The profile was designed to help the public understand what transferable skills and knowledge would be necessary for a student to successfully transition to life after high school.

- **Next steps - Profile review and Alignment Project:** SBE was charged by the Legislature with reviewing the Profile and developing recommendations on how best to align graduation requirements to the Profile by December 31, 2022.

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 for school boards.

SBE Rules on Mastery-based Crediting (MBC)

The full procedure is available in [WAC 180-51-051](#). MBC is an approach used in schools to award credit to individual students based on their prior knowledge or other demonstration of mastery of learning standards. Alternatively, MBL is a much bigger shift in approach from the traditional model. Current MBC rules for school districts say that districts:

- Have the authority to award credit based on mastery.
- Must review data regularly to identify the student groups receiving MB credit and address inequities.
- 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.

Is there grant funding?

The [Mastery-based Learning Collaborative \(MBLC\)](#) is a new grant project that is providing schools with funding and professional learning to successfully transition to culturally responsive MBL.

How have other states implemented MBL?



In Idaho, a founding cohort of 32 schools are leading the implementation of mastery education in their own communities.



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



South Carolina developed multidisciplinary competencies to align with their state Profile of a Graduate.