



# December 2025 Mastery-based Learning Collaborative Legislative Report

Submitted to the Office of the Governor and the Legislature in response to  
Senate Bill 5187 (2023 ESSB 5187) & Senate Bill 5189 (2025 SB 5189)

Prepared by by Seema Bahl, Associate Director of the Mastery-based Learning Collaborative  
Approved by the State Board of Education on December 4, 2025

# Table of Contents

- Executive Summary.....2
- Introduction and Background .....6
- MBL Demonstration Project Structure and Activities.....9
- Literature Review and National Research ..... 13
- MBLC Project Findings..... 15
- Discussion and Board Recommendations for Continued CBE Work..... 31
- Board Recommendations on CBE (Senate Bill 5189) ..... 34
- Conclusion ..... 48
- Appendix A: Comparison with the Existing Standard Transcript..... 49
- Appendix B: Yearly CBE Designation Process Cost ..... 51
- Appendix C: SB 5189-Competencies Development Process.....52

## Executive Summary

In 2021, Washington launched the Mastery-based Learning Collaborative (MBLC) Demonstration Sites Project, informed by insights from national experts, peer states, and local community input. This report, prepared by the State Board of Education (SBE or “the Board”) as tasked by the legislature in [Sec. 502\(2\) of 2023 Senate Bill \(ESSB\) 5187](#), highlights findings and recommendations coming out of the multi-year MBLC demonstration sites project and discusses the Board’s work to address key aspects of the recommendations outlined in the 2020 and 2021 Mastery-based Learning Work Group<sup>1</sup> reports. Finally, the report addresses required elements of recent legislation ([2025 Senate Bill \[SB\] 5189](#)), tasked to the Board, which supports the implementation of [competency-based education](#)<sup>2</sup> (synonymous with mastery-based learning<sup>3</sup>), including recommendations on the adoption of a competency-based transcript and a process to identify and designate schools implementing competency-based education (CBE) and identify associated costs.

In the CBE or mastery-based learning (MBL) model, students advance as they master content at their own pace, measured through meaningful, positive assessments tied to state learning standards. Students take active ownership of their learning in a culturally responsive, equitable educational environment and receive differentiated support based on their interests and needs, with clear, transferable learning outcomes and rigorous, shared expectations.

Throughout the project, MBLC schools reported annually on their progress, shared best practices, and documented impacts related to post-COVID-19 learning recovery. Over four years, the project supported two cohorts, comprising close to fifty (50) schools through funding, professional development, coaching, and participation in a statewide learning network. Findings in this report are drawn from comprehensive self-reported student, teacher, and administrative data compiled by national experts in several annual evaluation reports<sup>4</sup> and year-end school reports from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools from 2021 through 2025.

## Findings

Overall, the MBLC findings demonstrate that deep, meaningful implementation of culturally responsive and sustaining MBL is possible when supported by clear goals, sustained leadership, a strong network, adequate funding, clear policy levers, and strong professional learning structures. Across both cohorts, schools reported increased student engagement,

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/mastery-based-learning/mbi-workgroup>

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed explanation of CBE, see [https://aurora-institute.org/cw\\_post/illustrating-the-competency-based-education-definition/](https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/illustrating-the-competency-based-education-definition/).

<sup>3</sup> See the state’s definition of mastery-based learning, synonymous with competency-based education, defined through 2025 SB 5189: <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/mastery-based-learning>.

<sup>4</sup> See [https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/MBLC-C1-Y4-Report-October-2025\\_Final.pdf](https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/MBLC-C1-Y4-Report-October-2025_Final.pdf) and [https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/MBLC-C2-Y2-Report-October-2025\\_Final.pdf](https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/MBLC-C2-Y2-Report-October-2025_Final.pdf).

improved teacher-student relationships, and greater student ownership of learning. Importantly, better teacher-student relations and improved student cognitive engagement were found in the 2025 Cohort 1 evaluation report, and this finding held true for students of color. Schools also reported strengthened family and community engagement, enhanced equity-focused practices, and the creation of more inclusive and responsive school cultures.

At the same time, the evaluation identified key barriers that limited the pace and consistency of implementation. Challenges included limited educator capacity and time for collaboration, competing school and district priorities, staff turnover, hesitation around equity-focused practices due to the national sociopolitical landscape, and uncertainty regarding long-term funding and policy alignment. Despite these challenges, state policy developments, most notably the passage of Senate Bill 5189, signaled growing statewide commitment to CBE and laid the groundwork for long-term sustainability of the CBE model through updated definitions, the recommendation of a CBE transcript format, the design of a CBE identification process, and potential state competency development.

## **Recommendations**

The MBLC's comprehensive evaluation provides clear evidence of both impact and opportunity. The findings affirm that sustained investment and enabling state structures are necessary to ensure continued growth and equity-centered implementation. To build on this momentum, the Board recommends the following:

1. Longer-term recommendation: Provide comprehensive state support for ongoing school transformation and long-term network sustainability. This would involve establishing the following: 1) an ongoing four-year CBE grant and support program that would provide consistent funding to CBE schools, 2) policy supports pertaining to CBE funding, competencies, and transcripts, 3) regional professional learning hubs, 4) continued network coordination provided by SBE, and 5) leadership development through the Impact Fellows and Living Lab programs. This long-term approach would position Washington as a national leader in competency-based, culturally responsive education transformation.
2. Near-term recommendation: If budgetary limitations preclude immediate expansion, SBE recommends continuing the current demonstration site project to maintain statewide coordination and support for MBLC schools and focus on the additional learning needed to set the stage for long-term sustainability.

Ultimately, the Board's vision for competency-based education in Washington is to ensure that any interested Washington school can successfully and seamlessly transition to culturally responsive MBL through supportive, flexible, and equity-centered structures and policies. In this way, many more schools will adopt this model—allowing students to access engaging, relevant, and deep learning experiences. Deep and widespread implementation of CBE

represents not only an investment in schools, but a lasting commitment to Washington's students, families, and communities.

## **Competency-based Education Implementation Recommendations:**

### **On a process to identify and designate schools implementing CBE and identify associated costs**

Per the charge in [RCW 28A.255.030](#), the Board's recommended CBE school designation process creates an equitable, transparent process for recognizing Washington schools and districts that are implementing CBE, aligned to the state's seven-part CBE definition. The designation process centers a public, standards-based framework for candidate evaluation with four domains (Educational Strategy; Conditions for Implementation; Continuous Improvement; and CBE Implementation). The framework asks applicants to demonstrate commitment to CBE, equity, stakeholder engagement, comprehensive planning, inclusive design, and measurable improvement.

Implementation of the framework relies on the CBE reviewer's use of a public-facing rubric in the evaluation process with developmental scales (from "not yet" to "modeling") and observable "look-fors." In addition, the application process encourages candidate self-study on CBE readiness and then requires a portfolio submission. This submission will undergo an independent expert review in order to designate the school as a CBE implementer. CBE expert reviewers will go through a process of reviewer certification and calibration, and CBE school designations will be time-limited (full designation would last 4 years before required status renewal, and provisional designation would last for 2 years). Clear evidence of CBE implementation, annual reporting on performance measures, and a transparent scoring system are recommended to make designation credible. A preliminary cost model anticipates an up-front system build of \$100,000, reviewer pool development (approximately \$78,000), ongoing annual maintenance and calibration, per-application costs, and periodic re-certification. Details of this model are in the body of this report.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Adopt the four-domain CBE framework and CBE designation rubric and run multi-site pilots of the designation rubric before any high-stakes use to refine language, gather data, and confirm viability;
2. Use a diverse stakeholder panel to set minimum acceptable evaluation scores so CBE designation standards are rigorous yet equitable;
3. Require a candidate portfolio (including a narrative and up to three artifacts per standard) evaluated by two certified reviewers with optional targeted site visits to verify implementation;
4. Use provisional (2-year) CBE designation status for borderline cases and full (4-year) designation status for programs that meet thresholds;

5. Invest in recruiting, training, and certifying a reviewer pool representative of Washington's demographics and contexts and budget for ongoing calibration/audits;
6. Publish the CBE designation framework, standards, rubric, scoring rules, and examples of appropriate evidence so that the process is public and transparent, barriers are reduced, and trust is built;
7. Fund the recommended cost model (including choices about whether to retain site visits to balance credibility against potential savings) and require annual performance reporting and renewal cycles to ensure designations drive continuous, equity-centered improvement.

### **Summary of recommendations for a competency-based transcript format**

Per the charge in [RCW 28A.230.125](#), SBE recommends using the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC) as Washington's competency-based transcript format: the MTC Learner Record when paired with the traditional transcript, and the MTC Mastery Transcript as a full alternative. A CBE transcript should include five core elements: (1) term-by-term course list, (2) competencies earned/in progress, (3) linked evidence samples, (4) an individualized school profile (courses offered and how mastery is defined), and (5) a Reference Range showing a typical course/competency load so higher education and other schools can reliably interpret a student's learning journey.

CBE records should retain most mandatory high-school transcript content (per [WAC 392-415-070](#)). Because the MTC Mastery Transcript does not include a GPA, schools using it should be exempt from the GPA requirement in [WAC 392-415-050](#) but must provide a crosswalk translating competency attainment to traditional credits/subjects and must calculate a GPA when needed for [Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program](#) (WAGAP) eligibility or merit scholarships. MTC records are digital and can integrate with a future statewide digital transcript. The state should do the following: 1) partner with MTC, 2) fund membership costs (to expand access and obtain discounts), 3) allow schools to choose MTC transcript or the MTC Learner Record along with a standard transcript, 4) provide training/support for implementation, and 4) periodically review transcript options.

### **Recommendations:**

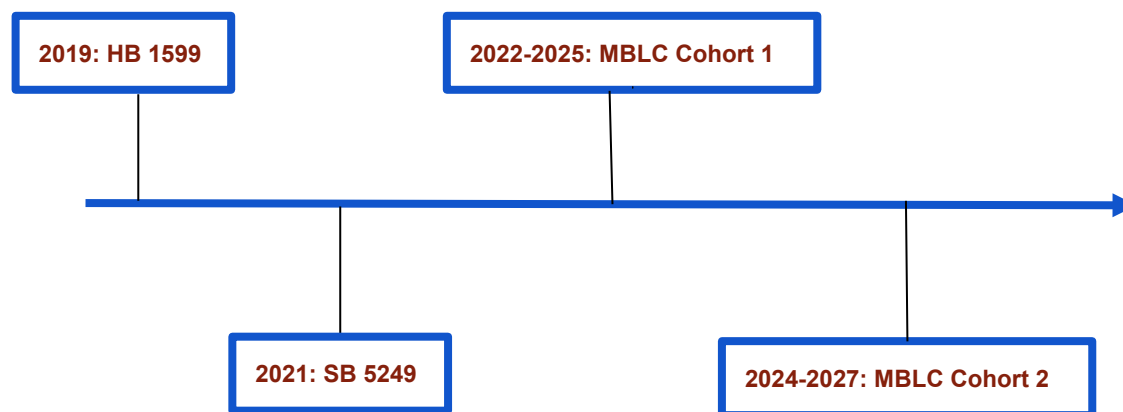
- Adopt MTC Learner Record as the recommended supplement and MTC Mastery Transcript as the recommended alternative.
- Require a pre-implementation crosswalk translating competencies to traditional credits/subjects.
- Exempt schools using the MTC Mastery Transcript from WAC 392-415-050 GPA reporting, provided they can produce a calculated GPA when required (for WAGAP and scholarships).
- Permit an optional standards-based reporting scale (1–4) alongside the standard transcript when using the Learner Record.

- Fund state-level MTC membership (including existing members) to lower barriers and secure discounts.
- Provide targeted training, technical support, and an implementation timeline for schools.
- Review competency-based transcript tools on a regular cycle and consult K–12 and higher-education stakeholders before changing the recommended format.

In addition to tasking the Board with developing the recommendations above, SB 5189 also directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in consultation with SBE, with developing a process for creating competencies aligned to state learning standards and identifying associated costs. This process for the development of competencies is provided in Appendix C of this report.

## Introduction and Background

### Timeline for MBL in Washington



### Establishment of the Mastery-based Learning Work Group

In 2019, the Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 1599, establishing the Mastery-Based Learning (MBL) Work Group to identify barriers and opportunities to expand student access to MBL. From this effort, the Work Group submitted two reports to the Legislature (2019 interim and [2020 final](#) report), including a recommendation to extend the Work Group to develop a statewide Profile of a Graduate, a vision for the transferable, cross-disciplinary skills that each and every student should acquire during their K–12 experience.

Other key recommendations put forth in the 2020 report included the following:

- *Barriers to Mastery-Based Learning (MBL):*  
Review the state policy barriers to MBL, particularly the need to align accountability,

assessment, and funding systems to support MBL, and the lack of an effective statewide communication strategy to increase public understanding of the benefits of MBL<sup>5</sup>

- *Mastery-Based Pathways to a High School Diploma:*  
Develop a state policy framework for the MBL diploma, which should offer alternative ways<sup>6</sup> to demonstrate learning while still meeting the same standards as students using a traditional credit and seat-time-based diploma.<sup>7</sup> In addition, engaging higher education in this work is critical to ensure students pursuing MBL pathways are not disadvantaged in college admissions.<sup>8</sup>

## Development of the Profile of a Graduate

Through SSB 5249 (2021), the Legislature extended the MBL Work Group to formally develop the Profile of a Graduate. The resulting [2021 report](#) outlined the skills and dispositions that would define Washington State's Profile of a Graduate and offered additional recommendations to support statewide MBL implementation. Key additional recommendations from the 2021 report include the following:

- A standardized state format for a mastery transcript be developed, balancing the concern of higher education partners in evaluating mastery transcripts with "the desire of MBL schools to move toward more equitable grading practices."
- The development of tools and supports for the implementation of the state's Profile of a Graduate, including sample rubrics and other tools that schools can customize to their local contexts.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> "The why, simply put, is because '...preparing all students for success in the modern world requires moving away from the traditional model of education to one that ensures equity and promotes deep student engagement and learning.'"

<https://sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/2020%20MBL%20Work%20Group%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> "The MBL diploma is distinct in that it aligns with students' unique interests, delivered through [personalized learning experiences](#) like project-based or work-based learning, interdisciplinary courses, and experiential learning."

<https://sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/2020%20MBL%20Work%20Group%20Report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See the [House Education Committee Work Session](#) (3/13/25) on the Mastery-based Learning Collaborative for further discussion of the elements of competency-based education and the rigorous adherence to Washington State learning standards required under this model.

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/committeeschedules/Home/Documents/32981?/House/31641/03-13-2025/04-01-2025/Schedule///Bill/>

<sup>8</sup> Note that in a May 2022 letter, the Council of Presidents expressed support for "mastery-based learning approaches to instruction and graduation that establish universally high learning expectations for students."

<https://councilofpresidents.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Mastery-Transcript-Statement.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> The state has yet to create rubrics and tools to support Profile of a Graduate implementation, but important work in this space is advancing at a national level (see <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2024/10/15/next-generation-durable-skills-assessment/>).

## Initial State Investment in the MBLC Demonstration Project

To support the MBLC initiative, the 2021–23 operating budget (Sec. 502 of ESSB 5092) dedicated \$5 million towards MBL implementation “for the purpose of addressing learning recovery and other educational issues related to COVID-19” in selected schools and districts. This funding (\$1.5 million in Fiscal Year 2022 and \$3.5 million in Fiscal Year 2023) enabled the state, through the MBLC project, to administer district and school-level grants to member schools, provide state-supported MBL professional development to educators participating in the MBLC, and create a support structure for the state to provide technical assistance and facilitate community networking opportunities to member schools. Proviso language required grantee schools to “report on impacts and participate in a collaborative to share best practices.”

## Expanded Legislative Support in 2023–25

Recognizing early momentum, the Legislature provided \$6.6 million in the 2023–25 operating budget ([Sec. 502\(2\) of ESSB 5187](#)) to continue and expand the demonstration project (\$1.8 million in Fiscal Year 2024 and \$4.8 million in Fiscal Year 2025) for grants to schools,<sup>10</sup> professional development, and state implementation and policy support as well as developing a state MBL resource suite and funding a comprehensive project evaluation. As before, grantee schools were to report on impacts and participate in the MBLC to share best practices. The Board was additionally tasked with submitting to the education committees of the legislature and Governor this report outlining findings and recommendations.

In addition to the Fiscal Year 2024 funding mentioned above, \$4.3 million in federal ESSER<sup>11</sup> funding (FY24) enabled a second year of professional learning for the initial cohort and the launch of a second demonstration cohort.<sup>12</sup> Both cohorts of schools served diverse communities in terms of geography, urban versus rural location, size, demographics, and educational outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Including school districts, charter schools, or state tribal education compact schools established under 33 chapter 28A.715 RCW.

<sup>11</sup> Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds: See <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/formula-grants/response-formula-grants/covid-19-emergency-relief-grants/elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund>.

<sup>12</sup> This second cohort represented schools at all levels of K-12 with a variety of school types, including traditional public schools (comprehensive schools, small Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs, Open Doors programs) as well as two charter public schools.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1UqRmlt96sv1E1eTaH3sqYfMvb5nPTVJb&usp=sharing>

## Competency-based Education Work in the 2025-27 biennium

For the 2025-27 biennium, the Legislature signaled its support for the work above through two actions. First, [Senate Bill \(SB\) 5189](#)<sup>14</sup> was passed, which updated the definition of mastery-based learning per HB 1599 to the new, 7-point definition of CBE (again, synonymous with MBL, see footnote 3 above) and charged OSPI and the Board with specific tasks related to the following: 1) recommending a CBE transcript format, 2) recommending a process for CBE school designation, 3) adopting funding rules for CBE, and 4) recommending a process for competency development. Second, the state provided \$2 million total (\$1 million per year) for SBE to continue to support grants to schools, provide state leadership for the project, and continue contracts with professional learning providers and the project evaluation for the MBLC.<sup>15</sup> Although this was a significant decrease in funding for the project, the Board recognizes that the inclusion of this funding in the state's operating budget in this precarious economic climate signals its clear recognition of the power of this innovative educational shift.

This report will discuss the state's work to date and expectations moving forward on the two items above. Specifically, as mentioned in the previous section, it will 1) review and analyze the state's progress over the past four years in advancing culturally responsive and sustaining<sup>16</sup> MBL implementation, drawing on findings from the MBLC Demonstration Site project evaluation and MBLC school reports,<sup>17</sup> and 2) recommend a CBE transcript format and a process to identify and designate schools and districts that are implementing CBE and identify costs associated with this process, as mandated by the Legislature in SB 5189.

## MBL Demonstration Project Structure and Activities

### Project Structure

Led by SBE, with executive sponsorship from OSPI and the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), the MBLC has been a statewide effort, engaging partners from state agencies, higher education and community-based stakeholders, educational service district staff, and participating districts and schools. The project is guided by an informal advisory group (the

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://lawfilesex.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5189.SL.pdf?q=20250903141046>

<sup>15</sup> Per [Sec. 502\(2\) of ESSB 5167](#), the \$1 million state appropriation of the general fund per year will be "provided solely to the state board of education for implementation of mastery-based learning in school district demonstration sites. The state board of education shall require grant recipients to report on impacts and participate in a collaborative to share best practices. The funds must be used for grants to school districts, charter schools, or state-tribal education compact schools established under chapter 28A.715 RCW; professional development of educators; development of a resource suite for school districts statewide; evaluation of the demonstration project; and implementation and policy support provided by the state board of education and other partners."

<sup>16</sup> Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education, the key practice promoted in the MBLC project along with MBL, is defined on SBE's MBLC webpage: <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/mastery-based-learning/mastery-based-learning-collaborative>.

<sup>17</sup> MBLC Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools were required to submit reports at the end of every year of the grant project.

“Collaborative Consulting Group”), and over the course of the project, SBE contracted with two professional learning provider organizations, Great Schools Partnership (GSP) and New Learning Collaborative (NLC), national leaders in the professional learning space of MBL.

Additionally, SBE has contracted with an external evaluator, [FullScale Learning](#), (formerly known as Aurora Institute) the premier CBE research and policy organization in the country, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the project (more details about the evaluation, findings, and recommendations are provided in the sections below).

Guided by the legislation outlined above, key project objectives include:

- Establishing a statewide infrastructure that provides policy guidance and communications support to facilitate MBL implementation.
- Showcasing effective practices for implementing culturally responsive and sustaining MBL.
- Providing professional learning opportunities for teachers, principals, counselors, and other in-service educators to advance culturally responsive MBL.
- Documenting the critical steps necessary for states, districts, and schools to successfully transition to a culturally responsive MBL model.
- Developing and sharing tools and resources to support educators in adopting an MBL approach.

The first cohort of MBLC member schools (Cohort 1) comprised 23 schools across 13 districts and included elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as one full district. Cohort 1 member schools were selected by SBE through an application process in Fall 2021. Funding for the 2021-2022 year supported project design, development of the grant application, selection of grantees and contractors, and planning-year grants to the selected districts. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, funding provided grants to support Cohort 1 schools’ first full year of intensive professional learning. The 2023-24 fiscal year supported Cohort 1’s second year of professional learning and deepening of implementation practices, and the final year for Cohort 1 (2024-25) was a ramp-down year, focused on supporting schools to transition to a full sustainability model. These Cohort 1 schools (currently 22 schools) are now part of the MBLC alumni network and receive ongoing supports from SBE and access to the professional learning events hosted by both SBE and the professional learning providers. In addition, SBE has selected three Cohort 1 alumni schools to serve as Living Lab schools, discussed below.

Cohort 2, made up of 24 schools in 17 districts, was selected through a more targeted and intensive competitive selection process by SBE in Fall 2023 and began work in Spring 2024, after which program activities followed a similar trajectory to the Cohort 1 plan described above. Currently, the MBLC project continues to support 47 schools in two cohorts (28 districts statewide), and through this work, over 18,000 students have been part of this powerful process of educational transformation.

## Project Supports and Activities

As mentioned above, the primary supports and activities provided to schools by the MBLC were state-provided professional learning and powerful community networking opportunities, grant funding for schools, and implementation tools and a resource bank. Each support is described below.

### Professional Learning and Networking Opportunities

All schools in both cohorts received two main forms of coaching:

- 1) Individualized coaching for each school provided by the state-contracted professional learning provider tailored to the school's specific context and goals. Schools were assigned a dedicated coach and received ongoing virtual coaching throughout the year, as well as in-person full-day coaching sessions and half-day virtual coaching sessions as needed. This personalized support helped guide school efforts and ensured that implementation strategies were relevant and effective.
- 2) State-provided cohort-wide professional learning and networking opportunities aimed at building capacity for culturally responsive MBL. These opportunities included quarterly full community in-person gatherings, monthly training webinars, site visits to other MBLC schools, leadership communities of practice, and other collaborative formats designed to deepen understanding and support progress. An archive of these professional learning events is kept on an [MBLC Community Resource Website](#).<sup>18</sup>

While all schools had access to the same core supports, each school made its own decisions about how to approach implementation based on its own unique profile, including size, school type, location, and student needs. With guidance from their coaches, schools determined which areas of work to prioritize and where to focus their efforts. Finally, the MBLC has led various additional programs to enhance project sustainability and offerings to the school community:

- **Youth Advisor Sessions:** Student leaders from among the network schools convened virtually several times a year to share ideas for advancing the MBL work from a student perspective. Students brought those ideas back to their schools and to the quarterly gatherings to offer suggestions to the MBLC community about how to center student voice and choice.
- **Impact Fellows:** The MBLC Impact Fellows Program supports educators who want to lead MBL in their schools while building skills to be MBL trainers and change leaders throughout the system. In Fiscal Year 2025, Fellows received a \$2,000 stipend, coaching from project's professional learning providers, and support from a network of peer Fellows. They designed and implemented equity-focused MBL projects in their schools, attended coaching sessions, and shared lessons learned with the broader MBLC network at the MBLC 2025 Spring Gathering. Upon completion of the training in June 2025, Fellows were added to a list of recommended MBL professional learning

---

<sup>18</sup> <https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/events/event-archive?authuser=0>

providers, expanding their impact and opening opportunities to guide other schools in future years.

- **Living Lab Schools:** Starting in the 2025-26 school year, the MBLC introduced three Cohort One Living Lab schools to serve as exemplars of culturally responsive MBL practice. Modeled after New York City's Competency Collaborative,<sup>19</sup> Living Lab schools will showcase MBL in action. Selected through a competitive SBE application process, Living Lab schools are awarded \$10,000 annually for two years, and have committed to attending all MBLC professional learning to share their learning with other schools, coaching with the project's professional learning providers, hosting at least one intervisitation,<sup>20</sup> and contributing tools and resources to the MBLC community. Living Lab schools are not required to be advanced implementers, but they should be ready to share their journey and invite others to learn alongside them.

## Grant Funding

Schools have received grant funding for the years that they were in the project. For Cohort 1 schools starting project work during the 2021-22 school year, \$40,000 was awarded to most schools as a planning year grant in Fiscal Year 2022, after which there were two years of professional development and implementation funding awarded (\$125,000 for the academic year 2022-2023, and \$110,000 for the 2023-24 academic year). The final year of funding, academic year 2024-25, was a "ramp-down" year in which Cohort 1 schools received varied levels of funding based on their prior participation in the project (as determined by SBE in consultation with the professional learning providers). All Cohort 1 schools were expected to move towards a sustainability model during this year, with a final report that was submitted to SBE at the end of the school year (2025).

Cohort 2 schools began project work in the academic year 2023-24. These schools received \$30,000 as a planning grant, after which they received \$100,000 for the academic year 2024-25 to continue their work on intensive professional learning and culturally responsive MBL implementation. With the reduced funding that was allocated to the project this biennium, Cohort 2 schools will receive \$14,000 in grant funding this year (FY 2025-26) and \$14,000 next year (FY 2026-27).

With grant funding, MBLC schools have made strategic choices about how to allocate resources in ways that best support their culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation goals. These decisions, guided by both the knowledgeable professional learning providers and SBE, have reflected each school's commitment to advancing MBL in a way that is both locally responsive and sustainable. The use of grant funding will be further explored in the Findings section below.

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.competencycollaborative.org/living-lab-1>

<sup>20</sup> Hosting a formal school visit for other MBLC schools in order to share best practices, discuss ideas, and arrange classroom walkthroughs.

## Tools and Resources

In the 2023-25 biennial budget request submitted by SBE to support scaling the transition to MBL beyond the grant project, the continued expansion of a suite of resources that would be available to all schools and districts throughout the state was proposed. This [Resource Suite](#)<sup>21</sup> launched at the start of the MBLC project in 2022, and has since grown to include a variety of materials, guides, [videos](#),<sup>22</sup> and supports to schools seeking to advance culturally responsive and sustaining education and MBL in the state. In particular, schools and districts seeking guidance on how to implement the [key steps](#)<sup>23</sup> required to make the shift from traditional instruction to culturally responsive and sustaining MBL instruction can access a variety of resources. These resources include specific templates on planning curricular project-based units, crafting subject-specific scoring criteria, and designing culturally responsive and mastery-based [assessments](#), as well as guidance on project-based learning, developing competencies, and a useful MBL Implementation [Handbook](#) example. In addition, there is a [School-based Resource Exchange](#) that features tools and resources developed by the MBLC schools to facilitate culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation, as well as [sample assessments](#) developed by the MBLC schools.

To amplify the great work of the MBLC schools in the project, the MBLC website includes a [blog page](#) that features in-depth profiles of several Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 MBLC schools, including the successes and challenges encountered in making the required shifts to the new system of culturally responsive and sustaining MBL. In addition, the MBLC newsletter, was distributed to the “Friends of the MBLC” email list of over 7000 recipients every other month in order to keep the community apprised of the latest developments, news, and events related to culturally responsive and sustaining MBL in Washington State and beyond.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the blog page and the newsletter, SBE houses several handouts on its website that can support publicity, messaging, and communication about this work. This has been very useful to schools in the MBLC project, as they have often had to explain to their families and communities what the shift to culturally responsive MBL entails and how and why the schools are engaging in this deeply transformative work. This, in turn, has motivated many schools in the MBLC to develop their own communications materials, often with the support of SBE, to continue the process of educating the public about the importance of this work.

## Literature Review and National Research

The state’s efforts and substantial investment in transitioning schools across Washington to the MBL model is based on clear and meaningful national evidence that culturally responsive MBL implementation can reduce opportunity gaps and improve student engagement and outcomes over time. For example, in a recent North Dakota study, an analysis showed an

---

<sup>21</sup> <https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/resources/mblc-resources?authuser=0>

<sup>22</sup> <https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/events/event-archive?authuser=0>

<sup>23</sup> <https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/resources/implementation-steps?authuser=0>

<sup>24</sup> Friends of the MBLC information and past newsletters are housed on SBE’s MBLC webpage: <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/mastery-based-learning/mastery-based-learning-collaborative>.

increase in post-secondary enrollment rates for students from participating personalized, competency-based learning (PCBL, synonymous with CBE and MBL) districts compared to non-PCBL districts, as well as a quick recovery from the pandemic compared to nonparticipating districts.<sup>25</sup> Another compelling study compared mastery-based testing to traditional testing in Calculus II and found that “mastery-based testing led to students feeling the assessments better reflected their content knowledge as well as higher end-of-semester course grades with fewer hours spent studying outside of class.”<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, a recent study of Arizona public schools found modest positive increases in English Language Arts and Math test scores among high school students attending PCBL schools versus those that were not in the studied group.<sup>27</sup> There are several other encouraging national and international examples of positive outcomes linked to the adoption of practices that are key components of MBL, such as personalized learning and project-based learning, in schools and districts.<sup>28,29</sup>

Culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE), a core element of the MBLC initiative, recognizes diverse identities and expressions (e.g., race, social class, gender identity, language, nationality, religion, disability) as assets for teaching and learning.<sup>30</sup> Research has clearly shown the benefits of CRSE and equitable classroom practices. For example, a 2019 study found that targeted classroom interventions promoting “identity safety,” belonging, inclusion, and growth cut discipline citations among Black and Latino boys by 57–70% in middle school and up to 65% through high school in a longitudinal study, helping close long-term racial gaps in discipline based on negative teacher-student interactions.<sup>31</sup> Additional studies affirm the value of culturally responsive teaching as a promoter of student belonging and engagement.<sup>32</sup>

National research confirms that MBL transformation is a long-term process. Early implementation (3–5 years) typically produces emerging outcomes such as shifts in

---

<sup>25</sup> Ahigian, R. & LacirenoPaquet, N. (with Lolashvil, G.) (2024). The North Dakota Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Initiative: Progress and Outcomes After 5 Years. *WestEd*.

<sup>26</sup> Harsy, A. and Hoofnagle, A. (2020) Comparing Mastery-based Testing with Traditional Testing in Calculus II. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Teaching and Learning*. Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2004&context=ij-sotl>.

<sup>27</sup> Gegenheimer, K., Kim, D. and Duffy, M. (2024). Personalized, Competency-Based Learning in Arizona: A Preliminary Report on Implementation and Student Outcomes. *Research for Action*. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchforaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/RFA-implementation-and-outcomes-report-on-PCBL-in-AZ-April-2024.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/chronic-absenteeism-personalized-learning-south-carolina/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10411581/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.competencycollaborative.org/crse>

<sup>31</sup> Goyer et al. (2019). Targeted Identity-Safety Interventions Cause Lasting Reductions in Discipline Citations Among Negatively Stereotyped Boys *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 117(2), 229–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000152>

<sup>32</sup> For example: see the following: Darling-Hammond, L., Martinez, M., Edgerton, A. K., Melnick, H., & Schachner, A. (2020). Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond. [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Restart\\_Reinvent\\_Schools\\_COVID\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Restart_Reinvent_Schools_COVID_REPORT.pdf)

engagement and school climate,<sup>33</sup> while fuller integration of culturally responsive MBL often takes much longer, depending on school size and context,<sup>34</sup> and can produce longer-term impacts on academic performance and improved policy supports to ensure the viability and sustainability of MBL. Examples such as Lindsay Unified<sup>35</sup> and New York City's Competency Collaborative<sup>37</sup> show that scaling a culturally responsive MBL system requires multi-year, even multi-decade, investments, aligned policy supports, robust professional development pathways, and deliberate sustainability planning. These national models demonstrate the long horizon needed for system-wide change.

In Washington, culturally responsive MBL implementation is already showing promising early results, as will be discussed in the next sections of this report. However, in order to benefit fully from the positive impact of this powerful instructional model, a further state investment of time, effort, and resources will be necessary. If the state would like to realize its full vision of equitable and engaging education for each and every student in Washington, the MBLC will require further funding, continued staffing, and additional support for capacity-building among our schools, as this will continue to provide the structure and tools needed for our growing network of innovators. The Board's findings, recommendations, and guidelines for the future of MBL in the state are explained below.

## MBLC Project Findings

As mentioned above, legislative proviso language for state MBLC funding states that SBE must require grant recipients to "report on impacts and participate in a collaborative to share best practices" as well as address post-Covid 19 learning recovery. As such, SBE created a process for schools to establish multi-year goals and reflect and report yearly on progress towards those goals. To aid schools in this work, SBE provided detailed templates for schools to complete their initial Work Plan, where they would establish their school-level goals and desired outcomes over the course of the project in key areas of culturally responsive and sustaining MBL. In addition, grantee schools were required to complete Continuation Documents and grant budgets with reports on progress and updated goals for every year in which schools received grant funding from the state.

---

<sup>33</sup> Evans, CM., Landl, E., Thompson, J. (2020). Making sense of K-12 competency-based education: A systematic literature review of implementation and outcomes research from 2000 to 2019. *Journal of Competency-Based Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbe>

<sup>34</sup> Wolfe, Ph.D., R. E., & Fernando, R. (2024, June 18). *From Theory to Practice Cross-State Themes in Student-Centered Systems Change*. <https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/education-research-cross-state-student-centered-systems-change/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.lindsay.k12.ca.us/en-US>

<sup>36</sup> [https://aurora-institute.org/cw\\_post/the-latest-milestones-and-lessons-from-lindsay-unified/](https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/the-latest-milestones-and-lessons-from-lindsay-unified/)

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.competencycollaborative.org/>

The findings highlighted in the following paragraphs are synthesized from the project evaluation reports<sup>38</sup> and the year-end 2025 reports on impacts provided to SBE by Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools.<sup>39</sup> These findings and impacts are organized according to the project inputs, or supports, provided to schools throughout the project and the resulting lessons learned after four full years of project implementation. These inputs are the following: MBLC Network Impact, Professional Development Impact, and State Support Impact. After reporting on these input-associated successes and lessons learned, the overall shifts toward culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation that were identified in the evaluation reports will be discussed. It is important to note that MBLC evaluation reports were provided to the state at the end of the second (2023), third (2024), and fourth years (2025) of the project for Cohort 1, and the first (2024) and second (2025) years of the project for Cohort 2. This report will reference all reports except for Cohort 2's 2024 report, which reflected their planning year only (Cohort 2's 2025 report reflected their second year in the project).

## **Findings on MBLC Network and Collaboration Impact**

### **Successes**

According to the Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 evaluation reports referenced above, the MBLC network<sup>40</sup> provided measurable value to individual member schools in advancing local and regional transformation efforts to a culturally responsive MBL educational model. The reliable structure and support provided by SBE and the MBLC network were essential for schools as they deepened implementation during all years of the grant project. In particular, schools expressed that the ability to communicate to their educators, families, and the community that this significant instructional transformation was supported by the state was critical to garnering the buy-in needed to devote time and resources to this process. Aside from the practical and logistical support provided by SBE, further state policy support and legislative advances were very useful to schools. In particular, the state's adoption of SB 5189, to be discussed in a later section, was widely celebrated by MBLC schools.

Schools in both cohorts consistently reported that connecting with other member schools in the MBLC undergoing similar transformation processes and grappling with common problems of practice benefitted them in profound ways. The many events hosted by the MBLC (discussed below), along with other networking opportunities, allowed ample opportunity for schools to collaborate and share successes and challenges faced during the

---

<sup>38</sup> Evaluation methods used to develop findings consisted of school self-reporting, including data from teacher, administrator, and student surveys, focus groups, and interviews, as well as SBE and coach interviews. For a detailed description of the MBLC evaluation methodology, refer to the FullScale (formerly Aurora Institute) Cohort 1, Years 2, 3, and 4 evaluation reports: <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/mastery-based-learning/mastery-based-learning-collaborative>.

<sup>39</sup> Cohort 1 schools submitted Final Reports and C2 schools submitted Continuation Documents. As mentioned, templates were provided by SBE.

<sup>40</sup> The network included Cohort 1 and 2 grantee schools, SBE, professional learning providers, the evaluation team, the expert state MBLC advisory group, and statewide partners.

course of the project. In addition, since the MBLC schools from across the state represented various sizes, school types, grade bands, geographic profiles, and student demographics, it was very important for schools to connect with peer institutions with similar profiles that were experiencing relatable issues as they engaged in the significant work of instructional system transformation.

One Cohort 1 school highlighted the MBLC network impact in their 2025 Final Report:

(The) Fall and Spring MBLC Community Gatherings have provided rich opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and shared learning. These gatherings have fostered a sense of community among educators across the state, allowing us to exchange ideas, learn from diverse perspectives, and stay grounded in our shared commitment to equity. The collective wisdom and encouragement from these events have been vital in sustaining our enthusiasm and focus.

Funding, a key network support provided by the state through significant grants to both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools, was seen as crucial to advancing culturally responsive MBL implementation goals. Grant funding enabled schools to:

- Compensate educators for collaboration and professional learning outside of contracted hours,
- Offer additional culturally responsive and sustaining MBL training through external contracts with MBLC coaches,
- Send MBLC team members to national MBL trainings and conferences, as well as visits to regional and national exemplar MBL schools and networks
- Employ and onboard in-house instructional coaches to provide ongoing and sustainable support to educators and leaders during the process of implementation,
- Purchase curriculum, software, and materials that were specifically designed for classrooms and learning experiences adhering to a culturally responsive and sustaining MBL model.

Articulating the value of funding an in-house coach in their Final Report, One Cohort 1 school reported:

This third year of grant funding, our funds were used for an in-house MBL instructional coach, focused on proficiency scales, communicating MBL shifts with families, staff professional development, a new reporting system set-up and staff support, as well as supporting other coaches and administrators around MBL. These funds were instrumental in continuing the implementation of mastery-based learning, utilizing the expertise and skills of a staff member who has been a part of the MBLC from the beginning of the grant.

## **Lessons Learned**

One of the early evaluation findings from the Cohort 1, Year 2 report highlighted the challenges and guidance needed from schools in “specifying tangible goals for school

progress and establishing clear points of accountability.”<sup>41</sup> Although schools were required during the planning phase of the project to complete a detailed Work Plan including identifying goals pertaining to educational equity, submitting multi-year budget drafts and narratives, and identifying anticipated outcomes in four key project domains (culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation, Covid-19 recovery, school-wide professional learning, and student engagement), the process for reaching these goals was not clear enough at the outset, according to evaluation findings at this early point in the project. However, these gaps were subsequently addressed in the next Cohort of the project through the development of a detailed self-evaluation tool<sup>42</sup> in Year 3 (2024) that coaches used to guide schools in identifying specific goals and could then work during individual coaching sessions on completing the steps needed to make progress towards those goals.

In addition, the professional learning providers developed an “[Implementation Steps](#)” graphic<sup>43</sup> and [detailed guide](#)<sup>44</sup> that clearly outlined the sequential steps needed to move from beginning to full implementation of school-wide culturally responsive and sustaining MBL. SBE staff worked closely with coaches throughout all years of the project to obtain frequent, documented updates on school progress, and in 2024-25, the coaches provided SBE with quarterly reports on school progress, milestones, and tangible data on movement towards implementation goals, ultimately guiding schools to add concrete language into their Continuation Documents and Final Reports as accountability measures. Another key step towards concrete accountability measures of MBL implementation will develop more clearly as the Board, directed by SB 5189 (discussed below), begins to design and recommend a process to designate schools and districts implementing CBE and their level of implementation.

Understanding the challenges faced by Cohort 1 as they finished their first full year of implementation, including the need for educators to understand the commitments required by the project and the level of engagement necessary to participate fully in this deep and complex transformation process, SBE shifted its approach to Cohort 2 selection. As interest in the project grew statewide and nationally, there were many more Washington MBLC school applications received for Cohort 2 than were received during the Cohort 1 selection process. In fact, there were twice as many Cohort 2 applicants as there were grants, prompting SBE to update its Cohort 2 screening process to include virtual interviews with potential applicants to ensure that interested schools clearly understood what was expected of them in terms of commitment to culturally responsive practices and equity, the number of required professional learning hours and events held each year, and the expectation that schools would be responsive to both SBE and the project contractors, including the professional

---

<sup>41</sup> See the MBLC Cohort 1, Year 2 Evaluation Report for further discussion: <https://sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/MBLC%20Evaluation%20Year%202%20Report%20FINAL%209.7.23.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WAMBLCSelfAssessment>

<sup>43</sup> <https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/resources/implementation-steps?authuser=0>

<sup>44</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/14NN-xq62GerXETJ2EUMD4cFgw1yrdLqUYT3vHXwSrA4/edit?tab=t.0>

learning providers and evaluators. As a result of this new approach, the selected schools in Cohort 2 were much more prepared to engage in this deep and sometimes challenging work.

By 2025, it was clear that two of the greatest aids to MBL implementation progress for both cohorts were stable school leadership and a collaborative and cohesive school culture. Year 4 Cohort 1 findings also highlighted that smaller schools and schools with strong initial equity practices at the start of the project were often better positioned to personalize learning and coordinate change. Both 2025 reports also found that schools starting their journey with MBL-facing practices such as the use of standards-based grading, Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), were poised to advance more readily than those with traditional grading and instructional practices.

Additional key factors identified in the 2025 evaluation reports that led to the most effective and seamless path towards school-wide culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation included the following:

- strong instructional leadership, with leaders who prioritized the work, followed through on expectations, and promoted educational equity,
- a clear vision for schoolwide MBL implementation,
- aligned resources and priorities (e.g., standards-based grading, restorative justice), and
- supportive internal professional learning structures.

For Cohort 2 schools, additional enablers that emerged in Year 2 were MBL-aligned student schedules and practices such as advisory periods, project-based learning activities, and student-led conferences. Finally, Cohort 2 schools noted that the ability to attend site visits and make connections with schools in more advanced stages of implementation proved especially valuable when they had difficulty visualizing a strong model of culturally responsive MBL implementation—in other words, what this shift would look like in practice.

A Cohort 2 2025 school Continuation Document expressed the immense value in seeing practices at a model school:

The [exemplar] school was just that, a lead school of learners who express and explain their learning in great detail with slide decks, illustrations, and a verbal presentation. Their student-led conferences around what goals they had set for themselves and their progress toward the goals (to include setbacks and what they learned from them) was impressive. It gave us pause to really prioritize the need for students to self-assess and use that formative assessment along the way of their learning towards mastery.

Despite the power of the MBLC network supports, there were notable barriers to implementation throughout the project. In larger comprehensive Cohort 1 schools, competing school and district initiatives and large class sizes often made it difficult to focus on MBL implementation objectives. In addition, broader political volatility in the national landscape surrounding equity, especially during 2024-2025, contributed to educator hesitancy and a slowdown of previous momentum in instituting culturally responsive MBL

practices. Finally, the significant budget cuts experienced by school districts in the MBLC, especially during the fourth year of the project (2024-2025 school year), added stress and uncertainty about the future of MBL work and an inclination to preserve time, energy, and resources for educational initiatives and work processes that would more clearly be supported and sustained in the state's public education system over the long term.

A Cohort 1 school that was particularly impacted by the financial uncertainty expressed these challenges in their Final Report:

The (district) cut 20 million dollars from the budget in the previous year which meant loss of half the teaching, counseling and administrative staff serving our students. The funding was used to provide teachers with time to adapt to a new gradebook program and communicate learning accomplishment to both students and parents. Courses were redesigned and implemented in a different way than in previous years due to changes in personnel and supply budgets.

## **Findings on Professional Development Impact**

### **Successes**

Over the four years of the project, the MBLC delivered over 80<sup>45</sup> professional learning events to MBLC schools, in addition to individual coaching support. As mentioned earlier, these events included quarterly gatherings for the entire MBLC community (often including state MBLC advisory group members and district leaders) held in person in various locations across the state, MBLC school-hosted events sharing effective emerging MBL practices and inviting guests to walk through classrooms to observe implementation in action, virtual professional development offered by the state expert providers (often featuring national exemplar MBL schools), and more targeted virtual convening opportunities for MBLC educators of color, MBLC administrative leaders, and Impact Fellows (described above). These high-quality professional development offerings were regarded as vital learning opportunities for MBLC schools that were beginning their transformation journey. The state also contracted with an in-state culturally responsive and sustaining education expert who provided valuable training on Indigenous place-based practices as well as higher education faculty who created opportunities and resources for stakeholders interested in bringing MBL practices to teacher preparation programs.

Individual coaching sessions provided by the state's professional learning provider, offered virtually once per month and in person (on campus) several times a year, consistently had the highest participation rates and were considered essential by schools working towards implementation goals. For both cohorts, professional learning events and individual coaching were frequently cited as valuable and complementary supports for advancing culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation. The expert coaching was seen as key in envisioning and breaking down complex reforms into actionable steps and connecting

---

<sup>45</sup> Archive: <https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/events/event-archive?authuser=0>

schools to national models and resources. Additionally, as mentioned above, many schools found the individual coaching sessions so useful that they allocated additional MBLC grant funding towards the purchase of external contracts with their MBLC coaches for additional professional development to build staff knowledge and confidence. Other findings related to professional development, particularly for Cohort 2, included the following:

- Schools emphasized the importance of their scheduled time for collaboration and professional development within the school day, supported by MBLC coaching, release time, and other structures.
- Staff collaboration and consistency<sup>46</sup> across grading and instructional practices improved as a result of professional learning and individual coaching. Coaching facilitated cross-departmental and vertical (across grade levels) collaboration in order to align core competencies and instructional goals.
- In some cases, Cohort 2 schools began hiring with an eye toward candidates wanting to implement culturally responsive MBL.

One Cohort 2 school emphasized the value of individual coaching in their Year 2 report:

The most valuable MBLC professional learning for us this year has been our work with our coach...She has been a force for us school-wide as well as individually with the principal as well as each teacher. Without [our coach], we would not be where we are today.

## **Lessons Learned**

For Cohort 1 Schools, the Year 3 evaluation report noted that participation in statewide professional learning events declined from Year 2 to Year 3, raising concerns about the mandatory participation requirements, both the minimum number of events required for MBLC schools and the minimum number of MBLC-involved staff members requested at each event.<sup>47</sup> To address feedback from schools that the number of events and time commitments required in the project were straining teacher capacity, Year 4 professional learning delivery was restructured into clear and predictable monthly after-school events (taking place on the same time and date each month) to better align with schools' operational realities. In addition, schools were clear about their preference for live, in-person coaching and professional development. To address this need, in-person coaching support increased during the 2024-25 school year.

---

<sup>46</sup> Consistency in grading and instruction often makes assessments of students' knowledge and skills more reliable and equitable. For further discussion of equitable grading, see Joe Feldman's work.

<sup>47</sup> As part of the grant approval and disbursement process, schools were required to sign a Statement of Assurances, outlining the professional development participation requirements for all MBLC member schools.

Even though the time commitment and professional development requirements of the MBLC were revised and reduced based on educator feedback, Cohort 2, Year 2 evaluation findings continued to reveal that teachers felt they had insufficient time and capacity for collaboration, common planning, and deep implementation of the new practices learned from the MBLC professional development. Many also reported that transitioning to culturally responsive MBL seemed overwhelming, and despite seeing the MBLC's value, they had concerns about its viability. In particular, the overall state budget climate in 2025 led to a lack of long-term funding clarity regarding MBL implementation, which raised concerns about the sustainability of this innovative instructional model. Schools were hesitant to invest deeply without assurances that financial support would continue.

Similar to these Cohort 2 challenges, one deeply committed Cohort 1 MBLC comprehensive school briefly highlighted the following professional development concerns:

The MBLC professional learning offerings have demonstrated strong alignment with school-wide goals focused on equity, student agency, and standards-based instruction. This alignment has fostered increased staff buy-in and participation. However, several implementation challenges have emerged, including competing professional priorities, scheduling conflicts with personal responsibilities, and the logistical complications of managing substitute teachers for in-person training sessions.

Another major barrier to effective implementation of the professional learning offered through the MBLC for both cohorts was staff resistance to change. For Cohort 2, some teachers expressed reluctance to changing grading policies and instituting flexible deadlines, and for Cohort 1, there was some resistance to implementing certain culturally responsive and sustaining practices in the classroom. While Cohort 2 survey data showed generally strong teacher buy-in, persistent reports of "mindset resistance", which may have come from a smaller group of "unwilling" teachers, impeded broader adoption despite the intensive coaching received by each school. In addition, though the professional learning sessions provided useful conceptual support, some teachers reported that the lack of adequate exposure to successful culturally responsive MBL models and practical tools made it difficult to picture what implementation could look like, and schools often struggled to find peer examples that matched their context.

Finally, despite indicators of progress through professional development, SBE was disheartened to see that several Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 MBLC schools experienced significant staff and leadership turnover during the project period, which led to the loss of network relationships and knowledge acquisition pertaining to culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation, which in turn, disrupted the progress of some schools towards their goals.

## Findings on State Policy and State Supports Impact, Including SB 5189

### Successes

For both cohorts, state policy support, provided through existing policy levers and the Board’s leadership in advancing more recent MBL-friendly legislation ([2023 HB 1308](#)), was named as vital in sustaining momentum around implementation. In particular, existing policies such as the mastery-based crediting policy,<sup>48</sup> the waiver of credit-based graduation requirements,<sup>49</sup> and the adoption of the performance-based pathway via HB 1308<sup>50</sup> facilitated the implementation of MBL from the beginning of the project.

In addition, existing state policies and initiatives under the authority of partner agencies such as Alternative Learning Experience<sup>51</sup> (ALE) rules, the Innovative Learning Pilot Program,<sup>52</sup> and the Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Growth Program<sup>53</sup> (TPEP), led by OSPI, as well as PESB’s Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Standards<sup>54</sup> (CCDEI), were noted by schools as providing meaningful support as they moved forward with this work over the course of the project.

### Senate Bill 5189

Prior MBL definition per <a href="#">HB 1599</a> <sup>55</sup>	Updated CBE definition per <a href="#">SB 5189</a>
Students advance upon demonstrated mastery of content.	Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time.
Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.	Rigorous, common expectations for learning, including knowledge, skills, and dispositions, are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.
Assessments are meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.	Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and

<sup>48</sup> See SBE’s Mastery-based Crediting handbook for a detailed guide: <https://sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/1.23.23.Mastery-based%20Crediting%20Handbook%202.0%20Final.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> See SBE’s website for details on this policy: <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/basic-education/waivers>.

<sup>50</sup> For details, see <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/graduation-requirements/graduation-pathway-options/performance-based-pathway>.

<sup>51</sup> <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/learning-alternatives/alternative-learning-experience>.

<sup>52</sup> <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-10/02-23-innovative-learning-pilot-program.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/educator-support/teacherprincipal-evaluation-program>.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.pesb.wa.gov/innovation-policy/ccdei/>.

<sup>55</sup> <https://lawfilesexternal.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1599-S2.SL.pdf?q=20251114154154>.

	actionable evidence.
Students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.	Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.	Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and how they will demonstrate their learning.
	Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.
	Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.

One of the most important developments in the MBL landscape in Washington has been the passing of [SB 5189](#), codified into Washington State law in Chapter [28A.255](#) RCW. As mentioned above, the bill updates the previous state definition of MBL (from HB 1599) by defining CBE using the seven-point definition (coined by Aurora Institute) that includes an equity component (see RCW [28A.255.010](#)). In addition, the bill directs the Board to both 1) design and recommend a process for identifying and designating schools and districts that are implementing CBE (RCW [28A.255.030](#)) and 2) recommend a format for a CBE transcript that may serve as part of, or an alternative to, the standardized transcript. The Board’s recommendations associated with these tasks are discussed at the end of this report.

Finally, the bill tasks OSPI, by September 1, 2025, with 1) adopting rules authorizing full-time enrollment funding for students in qualifying CBE programs ([WAC 392-121-189](#)), 2) updating the standardized high school transcript before the 2026-27 school year (RCW [28A.255.020](#)), and 3) developing and recommending a process for creating competencies aligned with the state learning standards and identifying costs associated with this process, in consultation with SBE (RCW [28A.255.030](#)). Importantly, OSPI’s competency development process must “incorporate relevant materials and guidance developed through the mastery-based learning collaborative” and “submit the recommendations and associated costs developed in accordance with this subsection to the state board of education by December 1, 2025.” Note that OSPI’s competency development and recommendation process is attached to this report as an appendix.

## Lessons Learned

Although the policy developments described above were significant achievements, signaling widespread support and acknowledgement of the value of culturally responsive MBL, MBLC schools stated that perceived systemic misalignments in policy and practice limited full use of these levers. As referenced above, key areas for further policy work identified by schools include the following:

- Advance policy and practice to update grading, CEDARS reporting,<sup>56</sup> and learning management systems to better align with mastery-based learning structures.
- Improve transcript formats and more flexible funding approaches, (allowing, for example, enhanced CTE funding for schools using the ALE model), which would better support innovative learning.

The Board notes that MBL-friendly transcript formats and funding approaches may be addressed through the state’s work on SB 5189 implementation.

In the Year 4 report, many Cohort 1 leaders and teachers acknowledged that general “readiness” to pursue culturally responsive and sustaining education practices fell behind that of MBL, in some ways due to the recent national sociopolitical landscape changes, even though Washington State policy frameworks such as PESB’s CCDEI standards strongly support culturally responsive MBL implementation. Both cohorts reported at many stages of the project that community pushback around equity initiatives somewhat limited culturally responsive and sustaining education implementation despite strong state messaging.

Finally, the 2025 evaluation reports showed that some MBLC schools hesitated to create MBL-friendly rubrics and performance assessments because they weren’t sure how potential changes to state learning standards in various content areas might affect their work. The Board hopes that [RCW 28A.255.030](#), requiring OSPI to develop and recommend a process for creating competencies aligned to state learning standards, informed by learnings from the MBLC, will help ease schools’ concerns about whether their efforts will match future state expectations.

## Findings on Covid Recovery

In response to legislative proviso requirements and ESSER funding stipulations, the MBLC tracked Covid recovery as a core outcome from the start of the project. Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools were required to complete multi-year work plans at the beginning of their initial planning year outlining project goals, action steps, and anticipated outcomes, including goals for post-Covid learning recovery. Schools then documented yearly progress on Covid recovery in continuation documents and final reports (for Cohort 1), reflecting on their

---

<sup>56</sup> For a description of the CEDARS state reporting system, see <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/data-reporting/reporting/cedars>.

success in meeting these initial goals. The original work plan prompt emphasized that “funding must be used for implementation of mastery-based learning in school district demonstration sites for the purpose of addressing learning recovery and other educational issues related to COVID-19. Please share a substantive and realistic goal for your coronavirus recovery efforts.” This was later updated to align with ESSER’s 2023–24 federal guidance, which prioritized activities addressing students’ academic, social, and emotional needs and the disproportionate impact of Covid on underserved student groups, asking schools to explain how participation would support recovery for these particular students and what evidence would demonstrate this success.

All MBLC schools consistently reported their efforts to address Covid learning loss through the implementation of personalized, culturally responsive MBL practices. Many noted persistent impacts of the pandemic on student engagement and morale, though progress was seen among many groups of students, including historically marginalized students. In general, Covid recovery goals were not distinct from general anticipated outcomes of the project, as emphasis has always placed on high-impact, equitable, student centered practices that lift up all students, with particular emphasis placed on reducing opportunity gaps for those students least well served by our K-12 public education system. In fact, the 2025 Cohort 2 report noted that “Many Cohort 2 respondents also discussed particular groups of students for whom CRS MBL practices were particularly beneficial – especially students with disabilities, disengaged or over-age learners, and English Language Learners.”

One highly engaged comprehensive Cohort 1 school commented on these efforts:

Our school has made meaningful progress toward Outcome 2: Coronavirus Recovery, as outlined in our MBLC work plan. Our primary goal has been to identify and move away from pre-COVID classroom routines that no longer serve students, while advancing mastery-based learning and Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CRSE) practices that foster belonging, engagement, and academic achievement. One of the most impactful shifts has been the transition from a single student equity team to the formation of multiple student focus groups. This change has broadened our understanding of student needs and perspectives, allowing us to implement more targeted and responsive interventions. These groups have become a vital feedback loop, helping us shape practices that are inclusive and student-centered. We have also prioritized data-informed decision-making, particularly through the ongoing analysis of Panorama Survey results. These surveys have provided valuable insights into students’ sense of belonging and the overall school climate.

## **Findings on Family and Community Engagement**

The 2025 evaluation reports and school year-end reports pointed to the strong community and family connections that were made by MBLC schools, expanding beyond the school walls. With the support of the MBLC grant, schools were better able to consistently engage families, community partners, teachers, and leaders in their culturally responsive MBL work. In

particular, the MBLC included several Big Picture Learning<sup>57</sup> schools, known for their deep commitment to family and community engagement through year-end student exhibitions.

One Cohort 1 Big Picture Learning school from the Eastern side of the state expressed the following:

Community and family engagement has been a vital component of our culturally responsive, mastery-based learning work. From the beginning of the project, we have prioritized authentic partnerships with families and the broader community to support student learning and growth. One of the key ways we engaged families was through student exhibitions of learning, which were held each fall. Families were invited to attend and actively participate in these exhibitions, where students presented their academic progress, goals, and reflections. These events provided families with a deeper understanding of their student's individual learning plan and the broader competencies we are working toward. Through these exhibitions and parent-student conferences, families have become more involved in shaping the direction of student learning and are recognized as essential partners in the process.

Parents and community members also contributed to mindfulness and cultural inclusion efforts at several schools through open dialogues (called "community cafes") and classroom activities celebrating diversity. Finally, real-world community partnerships with businesses and student internships further connected students with authentic opportunities in the community in order to demonstrate advanced skills (or competencies), making MBL a powerful anchor in students' educational journeys.

## **Overall Shifts Toward Culturally Responsive MBL**

Over the four years of the project, the comprehensive evaluation reported the following overall shifts toward culturally responsive and sustaining MBL:

### **Student Engagement**

One of the most promising MBLC project findings, described in the Cohort 1, Year 4 evaluation report, was that students in "high-implementation" schools<sup>58</sup> reported greater student cognitive engagement<sup>59</sup> and stronger teacher-student relationships over time. Furthermore, these benefits were seen across racial and ethnic groups, and students of color were found to particularly benefit from deep culturally responsive and sustaining MBL implementation. Similarly, a significant majority of Cohort 2 educators and school leaders noted heightened student engagement by the end of Year 2, attributed to stronger teacher-student relationships, personalized learning, and meaningful, relevant content.

---

<sup>57</sup> For more information about the Big Picture Learning model, see <https://www.bigpicture.org/>.

<sup>58</sup> High, moderate, and low-implementation MBLC schools are so designated in the report through self-reported data from teachers, school leaders, and students. The designation is consistent with the opinions of professional learning providers and SBE regarding school level of culturally responsive MBL implementation.

<sup>59</sup> Refers to students' "intrinsic motivation, investment, and interest in learning."

One Cohort 2 School reported the following at the end of Year 2:

Through our engagement with culturally responsive and sustaining mastery-based learning, we've seen tangible benefits for several student populations:

- Students furthest from educational justice, including those navigating poverty, unstable housing, mental health challenges, or systemic marginalization, have particularly benefited from the individualized, strength-based approach of MBL.
- Multilingual learners and students with IEPs or 504 plans have experienced more equitable access to curriculum and assessment. The shift away from seat-time and percentage-based grading allows these students to demonstrate learning in varied ways and at their own pace.
- Students identifying as BIPOC and LGBTQ+, who have sometimes felt disconnected or underrepresented in traditional classrooms, have seen more culturally responsive content, affirming relationships, and inclusive learning environments as a result of our professional learning through MBLC.

### **Student Clarity and Voice**

By the end of Year 2, many Cohort 2 teachers reported that students demonstrated improved understanding of their learning goals, progress, and purpose, supported by reflective and “metacognitive”<sup>60</sup> practices that helped them articulate their growth. The Cohort 2 2025 evaluation also reported that student input began shaping curriculum, activities, and school structure. Schools noted more student-led projects and initiatives, contributing to a more student-centered culture. However, both cohorts’ 2025 findings highlighted that while teachers offered more chances for student input, many classrooms remained teacher-led (especially in schools with a lower level of implementation), and many teachers and students felt that students did not have sufficient opportunities for input in classroom decisions and learning. These findings are evidence that more work is needed, through continued professional development and state supports, to shift classrooms to spaces where student voice, leadership, and agency are the established norm, rather than emerging practice.

Still, the Final Report of a Cohort 1 school in a small district in Eastern Washington reported the following promising insight:

Students have directly benefited from these changes. They are receiving clearer instruction, better-aligned feedback, and more transparency in grading practices. It’s been encouraging to see students ask thoughtful questions about assessment and advocate for themselves in the learning process. That engagement is a testament to the power of MBL in shifting the student experience from passive to active.

### **Stronger Sense of Belonging and Cultural Representation**

Teachers in both cohorts reported an increase in CRSE practices leading to feelings of cultural representation and belonging, and for Cohort 1 students, this finding was affirmed by

---

<sup>60</sup> Metacognition is an important element of CBE. See [https://aurora-institute.org/cw\\_post/critical-importance-of-metacognition/](https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/critical-importance-of-metacognition/).

students of diverse backgrounds feeling a sense of safety.<sup>61</sup> For Cohort 2 schools especially, culturally responsive education practices, from using inclusive classroom materials to hosting schoolwide cultural events, helped both marginalized and majority student groups feel seen and valued. Though the Cohort 2 2025 report notes that many of these efforts had not yet shifted classrooms toward critical practice,<sup>62</sup> schools emphasized the importance of fostering diversity awareness and appreciation. In Year 3, Cohort 1 schools reported substantial support for culturally responsive and sustaining education principles but also acknowledged early-stage implementation.

Though culturally responsive practices were in place at many of the MBLC schools, the findings above highlight some of the barriers to implementation, including self-perceived insufficient staff capacity to work on changing existing cultural norms, limited culturally responsive curriculum resources and guidance, and community resistance (in some localities). Educators indicated the need for enhanced data utilization strategies to address gaps in student belonging, expanded off-campus culturally responsive mastery-based crediting opportunities and support, and strengthened cultural competency development (especially for the MBLC educators that are majority white, which mirrors the state education system as a whole).

This quote from a Cohort 1 school emphasizes the power of culturally responsive practices within the context of the MBLC project:

I think our greatest movement toward educational equity is demonstrated in our work with the [local] Tribal Community to create, document, and standardize our culturally based competency credits. In our current partnership, we are meeting regularly to plan, discuss, and institutionalize the awarding of credit for rich and varied cultural learning. We are encouraging students to request credits in advance of participating in these experiences as one way of communicating that we see and value their learning outside of school. The work being done to validate our students' learning experiences is robust and will lead to greater educational equity. And, as we develop this model with [the Tribe], we are creating a system that can be applied in other contexts to support students who have learning experiences apart from [the Tribe]. [Tribal]-certificated teachers have been hired by the Tribe to oversee and facilitate summer credit requirements for students who have applied for opportunities through canoe journey, canoe racing, overnight camping excursions, and more.

## Shifts in Schoolwide and Instructional Practices

Across both cohorts, reports point to steady progress in shifting schoolwide practices and classroom instruction toward culturally responsive MBL. By Year 3, Cohort 1 schools had expanded the use of data to address inequities, increased peer classroom observations of MBL practice, provided more enrichment opportunities to students, and prioritized one-on-one student check-ins. By Year 4, more schools had adopted schoolwide competencies,

---

<sup>61</sup> The 2025 Cohort 1 report notes that “we asked all Cohort 1 students to rate their school experiences based on safety, as students’ sense of safety is an indicator of the extent to which a school’s environment is welcoming and affirming.”

<sup>62</sup> See Competency Collaboratives CRSE discussion: <https://www.competencycollaborative.org/crse>, and <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/mastery-based-learning/mastery-based-learning-collaborative>.

though many still needed support to translate these into clear, student-facing progressions that foster student ownership of learning. Similar challenges were observed in Cohort 2's Year 2 findings. Teachers in both cohorts increasingly offered personalized and real-world learning opportunities, yet embedding these shifts into schoolwide instructional culture remained uneven, especially in more traditional settings where misunderstandings of mastery-based policies and logistical barriers persisted.<sup>63</sup> These findings reinforce national research claims that implementing culturally responsive MBL in a deep and lasting way will take much longer than the four-year MBLC project window.

### **Shifts in Assessment, Feedback, and Pacing**

Findings from 2025 for both cohorts highlight growing use of performance-based assessments, particularly in schools further along in MBL implementation<sup>64</sup>, while traditional testing remained common in earlier-stage schools. Formative feedback emerged as a strength in the Cohort 1 2025 report, with more than half of surveyed students reporting regular use of teacher feedback to reflect on progress and goals. However, equitable access to flexible pacing and differentiated supports varied: students in high-implementing schools were more likely to receive extra help or accelerate after mastery, while those in less advanced schools had fewer such opportunities.

Overall, these findings signal that while progress has been made in MBL implementation across both cohorts, further work is needed to ensure consistent, equitable implementation.

### **Positive Impacts Reported by Schools**

SBE concludes its findings by highlighting a few examples of the positive impact of MBLC participation on educators and students in a Cohort 2 Open Doors program:

- Participation in the MBLC has had an impact on both educators and students at our school. Educators have developed a deeper understanding of how to design and validate assessments that are both culturally responsive and grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Students have experienced more success, and in a more timely manner, thus providing a foundation for self-efficacy on which to build.
- As a result, we've seen improved student engagement and more meaningful demonstration of learning across projects. Attendance data has shown more than 90% of students meeting attendance requirements on a regular basis, improvement among students who were previously low attenders, and Indicator of Academic Progress (IAP) data reflects increased number of students showing academic progress early and on time —indicating that our shift toward culturally responsive mastery-based learning (CR-MBL) is fostering more personalized and effective instruction.

---

<sup>63</sup> The Cohort 2, Year 2 report offers examples of these challenges, such as how to appropriately award P.E. credits for outside sports and the lack of out-of-school internship or place-based learning opportunities in rural or under-resourced districts.

<sup>64</sup> 70 percent of Cohort 1 teachers in high implementing schools report consistently using performance-based assessments in the Year 4 report.

Similarly, measurable positive outcomes have been reported by several Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools, as noted in these excerpts from two 2025 Cohort 1 year-end reports:

1. Educators and students have benefitted from participation in the MBLC through the learning and mindset shifts, professional development, and rethinking of educational practice. We have seen improved scores in our English Language Arts iReady and Math diagnostics from Fall to Winter (2024) and maintaining higher levels of proficiency into this Spring (ELA, and TBD for Math, as of this writing). Our increased focus on knowing our standards, and teaching to the standards has clearly benefited our students!
2. Results of implementation of the MBL program:

**Pass Rates:**

- Average Pass Rate 2021-22: 53.7%
- Average Pass Rate 2022-23: 64.7%
- Average Pass Rate 2023-24: 78%
- Average Pass Rate 2024-25: 75%

In the second example, school staff attributed the positive increase in pass rates to several aspects of their new school model and MBL implementation, including the transition from online learning to real-world, project-based learning and the implementation of a coteaching model with general education and special education teachers in the classroom, resulting in students with IEPs now passing at much higher rates. In addition, Panorama survey data at this Cohort 1 school has shown a positive increase in student perception of topics relating to equity, positive behavior and safety, and student voice and leadership.

## **Discussion and Board Recommendations for Continued CBE Work**

### **Discussion**

Findings from the MBLC demonstrate that deep and powerful implementation of CBE is possible across a variety of school contexts with sustained support and enabling systemic conditions. Both cohorts of schools entered this work at different points in their CBE implementation journey and tried different approaches, with the help of the MBLC coaches and state support structure. The evaluation reports for Cohort 1 schools showed that with time, leadership support, and resources, schools could begin to build learning environments that were more engaging and meaningful for students and educators alike. However, persistent barriers that limited both the pace and scale of progress were also identified during the evaluation. These challenges underscore that while belief in CBE may be strong across the MBLC network, favorable conditions and solid support are essential for success. For Cohort 2 in particular, while educators expressed strong affirmation of the value of CBE, they faced certain logistical and mindset challenges that impeded full alignment of CBE practices across content areas and grades, along with financial and human resource uncertainty and some lack of clarity about long-term state support for the work. As the Board considers the impact of the MBLC project in Washington, the focus of this demonstration site project continues to be

on learning what works, what does not, and why, rather than achieving uniform implementation across all participants.

The Board's ultimate vision for CBE in the state is that 1) any interested school can successfully and seamlessly transition to a CBE instructional model, and 2) that many more schools will adopt this model, ultimately allowing students to access these engaging and innovative instructional practices. To achieve this, the state must build on the momentum of the MBLC, address identified barriers, and create durable structures that embed equity and culturally responsive practice at the heart of the work. The findings in this report demonstrate both the promise and the challenge of transformation. Early impacts of the work include improved student engagement and school climate; however, full implementation at scale will require Washington's sustained effort, supportive policies, and ongoing investment.

## **Board Recommendation Supporting Long-term Vision for CBE in Washington State**

To match the scale of Washington's vision and ensure continuity of progress and scalability of CBE in the long term, the Board recommends the following path for comprehensive state support:

### **Comprehensive State Support Through Ongoing School Transformation and Long-term Network Sustainability**

This recommended plan ensures that Washington capitalizes on its initial investment, creates durable structures for CBE, and continues to position the state as a national leader in equity-focused competency-based education.

Under this plan, the state would support an ongoing school transformation and improvement model that would provide grants for schools, professional development, and statewide coordination. This would include intensive support for schools entering the work, ongoing network convenings hosted by SBE, continued professional development offered through regional learning hubs administered by local partners, and continued support for the Living Lab and Impact Fellows program. Funding would also sustain SBE's staffing to provide administrative leadership, deliver presentations about the MBLC to interested stakeholders, monitor national trends and innovation in the CBE space (including understanding the evolving implications of Artificial Intelligence use), and support resource suite development.

Key Elements:

- Policy and Implementation supports including supportive school funding models, statewide competencies, transcripts and student records systems aligned to CBE, and clearly defined implementation benchmarks as described in the 5189 recommendations below.

- An ongoing four-year grant program to support school transformation with administrative staffing and technical assistance provided by SBE, grants to between 10 and 20 new schools per year, and support for the MBLC community through convenings, networking opportunities, site visits, and other events.
- Continuation of sustainability and structural support programs, such as the resource suite, Impact Fellows program and the Living Lab Schools program.
- The transition of professional learning delivery from national providers to regional statewide providers, such as Educational Service Districts or other Washington-based providers.

Rationale:

- Aligns with national research showing that authentic transition to a CBE model requires 7–10 years of sustained investment to learn lessons and address barriers.
- Builds statewide capacity through cohorts, Living Lab schools, and Impact Fellows.
- Promotes equity by ensuring schools of varying contexts can access resources, training, and funding.
- Strengthens Washington’s role in national CBE networks and knowledge-sharing.

In following this recommendation, Washington would build on existing momentum, address systemic barriers, and establish the foundation for long-term transformation. This is not only an investment in schools, but an investment in students, families, and communities, and a commitment to educational equity across the state.

In addition to moving forward with the recommendation above, the Board encourages the state to consider supporting the following ongoing activities as the long-term model above matures, with the understanding that further financial and human resource investments would be necessary:

- Embedding robust sustainability planning into current and future CBE work, including providing ongoing technical and policy support for Impact Fellows, Living Lab schools, and district-level capacity-building.
- Expanding the state’s communication strategy to build community trust, address equity-related hesitation, and strengthen family engagement.
- Supporting varied implementation trajectories, recognizing that large comprehensive schools may need to start at the department or classroom level before scaling schoolwide.
- Investing in district CBE implementation guides, resource handbooks, and professional learning models tailored to different contexts.

## **Nearer-term Vision for CBE Work: Continuation of MBLC Demonstration Sites Project**

If the legislature is not able to currently support the Board's recommendation due to the challenging state budget climate, there are nearer-term options that can be considered so that momentum with this work is not lost, and the state can continue to be a leader in learning and modeling best practices in large-scale CBE implementation. This near-term option consists of the following:

- The current demonstration sites project continues with the current cohort of schools.
- SBE continues to administer the project; supporting schools and districts across the state in implementing CBE, coordinating statewide implementation, curating and maintaining a comprehensive resource suite, and providing limited technical assistance to schools.
- The Living Lab Schools and Impact Fellows programs continue to receive the current levels of financial, technical, and coaching support to maintain their leadership roles in the MBLC.

Rationale:

- Focus is on additional learnings needed to set the stage for long-term sustainability.
- Ensures statewide coordination and technical guidance is maintained.
- Maintains current resources for schools at varying stages of implementation. This option maintains some momentum and preserves a statewide knowledge base and policy framework despite current budget constraints.

## **Board Recommendations on Competency-based Education Implementation (Senate Bill 5189)**

### **CBE School Designation Process Recommendations**

As noted above, the Board has been charged in 2025 [SB 5189](#) with designing and recommending a process to 1) identify and designate schools and districts that are implementing CBE, and 2) identify costs associated with this process. This process must consider the extent to which CBE is being implemented as compared to the seven parts of the definition (described earlier in the report).

Through SB 5189, the state may recognize competency-based education schools as those identified by SBE as 1) being members of the MBLC, 2) having a current waiver from credit-based graduation requirements, or 3) meeting the requirements of the CBE designation process developed and recommended by the Board, which will be explained in this section. Note that although one only one requirement for CBE identification must be met, some schools may meet more than one of these requirements.

## Proposed CBE Designation Process for Washington<sup>65</sup>

SBE recommends an equitable, transparent process for identifying schools and districts implementing CBE in Washington, aligned to the state’s seven-part CBE definition. This process identifies clear application requirements, requires self-study and evidence submission, includes external peer and expert reviews, provides avenues for schools to appeal designation decisions and renew designation status, and differentiates full designation from provisional recognition.

A national landscape scan of similar models revealed the following key design features of an effective designation model<sup>66</sup>:

1. Clear criteria and procedures: Applicants need explicit standards, timelines, and step-by-step guidance to build trust, reduce barriers, and promote equity.
2. Rigorous self-study and stakeholder engagement: Applicants must document readiness and progress, as well as involving families, students, educators, and community members.
3. External peer/expert review: Independent reviewers validate evidence, identify gaps, and add credibility.
4. Defined renewal cycles with consequences: Designation should be time-limited with renewal, probation, or loss if standards lapse, making designation a tool for continuous quality rather than a static label.

## Prerequisites and General Requirements

To qualify for CBE designation in Washington, a district or school must show a clear commitment to standards-aligned mastery for every learner with an equity focus, culturally responsive systems and practices, and active leadership/governance support (superintendent or local board). Applicants must submit a portfolio demonstrating (1) that CBE is central to their long-term strategy, (2) a concrete implementation plan (policies, structures, professional learning, resources, and aligned instructional design), (3) a monitoring and evaluation process co-created with students, families, educators, and community partners, and (4) the extent to which the seven-part CBE definition is implemented across all student groups and grade levels.

---

<sup>65</sup> Joe, J. et al. [2025]. *Washington State Competency-based Education Designation Recommendations* [Unpublished Manuscript]. FullScale Learning.

<sup>66</sup> “While multiple states have advanced CBE through waivers, grants, or networks, none has established a designation process that both recognizes high-quality implementation and ties that recognition to funding.” (Joe, J. et al., 2025, p. 6).

## CBE Designation Framework

A clear CBE designation framework based on schools meeting standards within certain domains can ensure that the designation process is transparent, fair, and refined with stakeholder input. The standards outlined below are intended to be a starting point for developing a CBE designation framework<sup>67</sup> and process for districts and schools. The first three domains<sup>68</sup> represent systems and structural conditions that are necessary for CBE designation: 1. Educational Strategy, 2. Conditions for Implementation, 3. Continuous Improvement. The fourth domain is CBE Implementation.

### *Domain 1: Educational Strategy*

---

<b>Standard</b>	<b>What it Looks Like</b>
1.1 Commitment to Mastery-Based Outcomes	CBE is part of the long-term strategy; students are expected to master standards, skills, and competencies.
1.2 Commitment to Equity	Plans address gaps in opportunity and outcomes for historically underserved groups.
1.3 Stakeholder Engagement	Students, families, educators, and community members participate in planning and ongoing decision-making

---

---

<sup>67</sup> "The framework reflects current best practices, research-informed principles, and feedback from early adopters of CBE, while acknowledging that further refinement with stakeholders will be necessary." (Joe, J. et al., 2025, p. 11).

<sup>68</sup> These domains align with the reporting expectations outlined in the MBLC application and progress reports. (Joe, J. et al., 2025, p. 13).

## Domain 2: Conditions for Implementation

---

<b>Standard</b>	<b>What it Looks Like</b>
2.1 Comprehensive Planning	A written CBE implementation plan covers all seven CBE elements and aligns with policies, structures, and instructional design.
2.2 Capacity-Building & Partnerships	Professional learning, coaching, and partnerships support teachers, students, and families; communication structures are clear.
2.3 Inclusive Design for All Learners	Plans ensure meaningful access and benefits for students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and other underserved groups.

## Domain 3: Continuous Improvement

---

<b>Standard</b>	<b>What it Looks Like</b>
3.1 Structured Evaluation Processes	A clear plan outlines how progress will be monitored and how findings will inform adjustments.
3.2 Measurable Goals Aligned to CBE 7-point definition	Metrics (e.g., mastery, pacing, agency, equity) are collected, disaggregated, and reviewed regularly.
3.3 Inclusive Improvement Cycles	Students, families, educators, leaders, and community partners participate in improvement processes.
3.4 Responsiveness to Research & Context	Candidates adapt based on data, research, policy shifts, and student needs.

---

<b>Standard</b>	<b>What it Looks Like</b>
4.1 Student Agency	Students co-design personalized goals and learning plans with teachers, regularly review progress, and choose learning modalities. Educators use data and students' cultural knowledge to provide timely, collaborative supports; students actively shape learning and school decisions.
4.2 Meaningful Assessment	Students regularly reflect and demonstrate growth through varied formative and summative assessments, teachers clearly communicate success criteria, teachers norm expectations across teams, resubmissions and student choice allowed in assessment, grading is based on mastery.
4.3 Personalized, Differentiated Support	Instruction is learner-centered and differentiated; adults know students, use asset-based approaches, collaborate on timely, data-informed supports, adjust pacing and assessments, and monitor progress with continuous improvement and shared mastery criteria.
4.4 Mastery-Based Progression	Students progress when mastery is demonstrated, not through seat time, time and pacing are flexible.
4.5 Personalized Pathways	Collaborative teams ensure cross-curricular alignment and monitor student pace; students self-assess and track progress via

---

<sup>69</sup> These standards and indicators are based on a crosswalk and synthesis of multiple personalized student-centered learning, whole-child frameworks and measures (ASCD nd; Aurora Institute, 2019; Education Policy Initiative Collaborative, 2021; Stack & Vander Els, 2022). (Joe, J. et al., 2025, p 16)

personalized plans, with policies allowing mastery-based advancement and credit for anytime, anywhere learning.

#### 4.6 Essential Competencies

Rigorous, transparent, measurable expectations define proficiency; staff calibrate shared standards. Competencies demand deep cognitive work, cross-disciplinary skills, real-life application, and transferable dispositions for analyzing, creating, and problem-solving.

#### 4.7 Equity

The candidate uses disaggregated, asset-based data to identify gaps, provide targeted supports, and create culturally responsive, inclusive environments, valuing all students' strengths while addressing disparities, bias, and systemic inequities transparently.

A recommended next step in the CBE Designation framework development process could be to propose evidence that would align with the standards described above. The robust evidence provided by MBLC schools in their work plans and continuation documents could serve as a benchmark to assess the quality of evidence and additional specifications that may be integrated into the requirements for acceptable evidence submission.

Examples of evidence that may demonstrate that a school has met a particular standard within one of the four domains specified above include the following:

- School improvement plans
- Policies addressing each of the seven elements of CBE
- Professional learning scope and sequence, agendas
- Participant feedback on professional learning and coaching
- Family and community partner feedback surveys
- Implementation (work) plans
- Professional learning and coaching artifacts
- Student surveys
- Lesson plans

## **CBE Designation Rubric Development**

A clear, public rubric is essential to turn the CBE standards and designation framework described above into observable “look-fors” that support reliable designation decisions and propose improvement for schools seeking CBE designation. The rubric should (1) clarify expectations, (2) guide evidence collection, (3) help local education agencies (LEAs) self-assess and plan, and (4) give families and community members an understandable picture of CBE practice. Public visibility creates coherence across systems, helps LEAs align resources, and reduces misunderstandings that can cause resistance from parents or community members.

Core Rubric Features:

1. Continuum of implementation: Each sub-component of the standard uses a development scale (e.g., Not Yet, Emerging, Developing, Sustaining, Modeling) to emphasize growth rather than pass/fail or compliance.
2. Level descriptors and “look-fors”: Each level of the rubric (Not Yet, Emerging, Developing, etc.) has short, observable descriptors showing what practice looks like in context. Descriptors should include multiple examples that reflect diverse school models (comprehensive high schools, alternative programs, etc.). “Look-fors” should be co-created with students, teachers, and families.
3. Concrete evidence examples: Pair each rubric row with authentic artifacts and evidence types (student work, learning plans, pacing dashboards, policies, observations, surveys, videos) so reviewers and candidates share a clear standard for “sufficient” evidence.

### **Pilot and validation**

Before high-stakes use, conduct pilots across a variety of school types, including CBE-adjacent programs, to test validity and usability. The pilot should ensure the rubric works across school types and grade levels, clearly distinguishes depth of implementation, and that performance levels are meaningful. Feedback from these pilots should then be used to refine rubric language, clarify expectations for acceptable evidence, and improve overall usability.

### **Reviewer qualifications and training**

Reviewers must be CBE experts (human, not AI) and/or practitioners with CBE experience and deep familiarity with Washington contexts. It is important for reviewers to have CBE policy, classroom and/or leadership experience, with direct CBE implementation experience and content-area knowledge. Reviewers should be representative of Washington’s socio-economic and demographic diversity.

Reviewer training ensures consistent, high-quality CBE designation decisions by providing in-depth instruction on standards, rubrics, evidence evaluation, rationale construction, and FERPA<sup>70</sup> guidance. Scenarios, vignettes, and videos can be used to build reviewer expertise. Reviewers are then certified after they score a submission that has been pre-scored by an expert panel in order to compare and validate reviewer scores. This process offers credibility, transparency, and integrity in the designation process.

## **Standard Setting**

To set the minimum requirements for earning a CBE designation in Washington, SBE recommends using the Angoff<sup>71</sup> standard-setting method. This research-based approach relies on experts to decide what the lowest acceptable level of performance is for a program to be considered truly implementing competency-based education. A group of subject matter experts reviews each performance criterion and estimates whether a minimally qualified program would meet it. These judgments are then combined to determine the passing thresholds. For CBE frameworks that use rubrics, experts assess performance levels like “Emerging” or “Developing” to identify the minimum evidence needed across all indicators.

The process starts by bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to define what a “minimally qualified” program looks like. Such a program should show that CBE is strategically integrated, supported by foundational structures, guided by clear plans, tracking early progress, and demonstrating that core CBE elements are developing across the system. Panelists then independently estimate the minimum evidence required for each standard and indicator, with thresholds adjusted based on the developmental stage and context of implementation. This method maintains high standards while promoting equity, setting realistic expectations that encourage participation and support growth, and ensuring the designation process is fair and trustworthy. Ratings from all panelists are combined to determine the final cut scores for the framework.<sup>72</sup>

## **Scoring Design and Reviewer Calibration**

The CBE designation scoring system is designed to make decisions fair, consistent, and reliable by clearly showing how evidence is judged and combined. Reviewers evaluate each indicator on a scale (Not Yet, Emerging, Developing, Sustaining, Modeling) based on the overall evidence, using rubric examples and training to ensure consistency. Standards and indicators are weighted based on their importance, their impact on student learning, and how developed they are, with foundational elements given more weight at first. Scores are combined first within each standard and then across all standards to determine the final designation, using a mix of compensatory strategies (strong performance in some areas can

---

<sup>70</sup> Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

<sup>71</sup> <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED299326>

<sup>72</sup> For an example of this process, see Joe, J et al., 2025, p. 39.

balance weaker areas) and non-compensatory rules (critical standards must meet minimum thresholds), providing both flexibility and accountability.

Reviewer calibration ensures that all reviewers apply the CBE designation framework, rubrics, and standards consistently, addressing potential drift in judgment over time. Periodic monitoring, including consensus scoring with expert panels and audits of random submissions, identifies discrepancies and ensures alignment, with any major issues addressed immediately.

### **Application: Candidate Self Study, Application, and Designation Review Process**

The CBE designation process begins with a candidate's self-study, which is not part of the formal application but helps schools prepare by reflecting on readiness and alignment with Washington's expectations. Candidates complete a pre-screening process to affirm commitment to equity, culturally responsive practices, and leadership support for CBE. They then conduct a self-assessment using the CBE Designation Framework to identify strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement, allowing schools to delay submission if not yet ready and focus on continuous improvement. SBE staff or designated supports can provide feedback during this stage to help candidates understand expectations and build confidence.

The formal application requires a detailed narrative for each standard and up to three pieces of supporting evidence, with SBE staff providing guidance as needed. Two trained reviewers independently evaluate applications using the framework, assign ratings, document rationale, and submit a consensus recommendation, with optional site visits for deeper insights. Borderline programs may receive a two-year provisional designation to address gaps, after which reapplication is required. Full designation lasts four years, with renewal based on updated evidence of growth and sustained, equity-centered implementation. Designated programs are also expected to report annually on performance measures, tracking student outcomes, instructional shifts, and system-level coherence to ensure ongoing quality and responsiveness to contextual challenges.

### **Cost Model<sup>73</sup>**

The total estimated cost of this process includes the following items:

- Up-front costs to collaboratively build the system, develop all necessary materials, and develop the certified reviewer pool;
- Annual costs to support ongoing training and calibration among certified reviewers;
- Annual costs to maintain the system;
- Ongoing certification costs per school/district applicant (including \$3,600 for written application review and approximately \$2,125 for site visits); and

---

<sup>73</sup> Cost model language was taken directly from FullScale's unpublished report (Joe, J et al., 2025, p. 45-48).

- Additional periodic costs to re-certify each school/district (every 4 years), including provisional designees (every 2 years)

Additional Cost Options: As mentioned in the list above, the cost model includes the estimated costs for both written application and site visits; however, cost savings could be achieved if site visits were not conducted.

There are also possible variations in cost based on the number of certified reviewers and applicants. For the purpose of this cost model, we have assumed the following volume:

- 8 reviewer applicants, of whom 6 are successfully certified
- 20 certification candidates (schools) per year, of whom 7 receive CBE designation and 10 receive provisional designation

In addition to the variations in cost based on the number of certified reviewers and school/district applicants, another possible place for variability is whether Washington manages the process internally or hires an external technical assistance (TA) provider, as well as whether Washington decides to use an external technology solution to facilitate submission and scoring of evidence.

The costs below were calculated using the assumption that the work would be led and managed by SBE staff. The vast majority of the cost categories would remain the same if the process was run by a TA provider. However, the costs themselves would likely be higher due to increased costs charged by a contractor/consultant.

Estimated costs of each process component (See Appendix B for a yearly cost breakdown showing estimated fixed and yearly costs from Years 1 through 4):

	General description	Frequency	Fixed costs	Variable costs (Cost per unit)	Variable costs (# units)	Total estimate
1	Developing the process <sup>74</sup>	One-time up-front	\$100,000	\$0.00		\$100,000
2	Certified reviewer pool development (training + certification) <sup>75</sup>	One-time up-front + ongoing as-needed	\$53,500	\$3,100	8	\$78,300
3	Certified reviewer pool ongoing maintenance (calibration)	Annual (ongoing, starting in Year 2)	\$2,200	\$675	6	\$6,250
4	Piloting new process <sup>76</sup>	One-time up-front	\$14,100	\$0.00	0	\$14,100
5	Review of candidate applications (written) <sup>77</sup>	Annual (ongoing, starting in Year 2)	\$0.00	\$3,600	20	\$72,000
6	Review of candidate applications (site visits)	Annual (ongoing, starting in Year 2)	\$0.00	\$2,125	20	\$42,500
7	Review of provisional designees	Every two years, starting in Year 4	\$0.00	\$1,600	10	\$16,000
8	Ongoing support costs (comms, tech platforms, etc.)	Annual (ongoing, starting Year 1)	\$35,000	\$0.00		\$35,000

<sup>74</sup> Row 1 includes the development of the certification process itself, which includes meetings, development of CBE Designation Framework guide (likely at least 70 pages of written rubrics, examples of evidence and look-fors, etc.), facilitation of review sessions with stakeholders, and facilitation of standard-setting conversations with subject matter experts (SMEs). The estimated cost includes a \$1500 stipend to 20 stakeholders (e.g. teachers, school leaders, SMEs) as well as staff or consultant time over 6 months to build out materials, as well as \$20k for meetings and other costs.

<sup>75</sup> The # units for rows 2 and 3 refer to the number of certified recommended reviewers based on the assumed number of applicants (20). The difference between the two is based on the estimate that 75% of the reviewer candidates who attend training will successfully be certified and active in the reviewer pool.

<sup>76</sup> The # units for rows 4-8 refer to the number of school/district applicants. The true number is difficult to predict and may fall above or below this estimate. This estimate currently assumes that 20 applicants would apply per year (rows 4-5). Of those 20 applicants, 7 of them (35%) would be certified (row 8), 10 (50%) would receive provisional designation (row 7), and the remaining 3 (15%) would not receive designation. These percentages are loosely based on the findings in the MBLC C1 Y4 report, which had approximately a third of the schools showing "high" levels of implementation (correlated with full designation), approximately a third showing "medium" levels of implementation (correlated with provisional designation), and approximately a third showing "low" levels of implementation (correlated with no designation—though a few of these schools may reach the bar set for provisional designation). These assumptions should be tested and adjusted based on Washington stakeholder engagement.

<sup>77</sup> All per-person compensation was calculated using a base rate of \$50 per hour; this applied to both staff time estimates and certified reviewer compensation estimates. For simplicity, this cost model does not currently include any adjustments to that rate over time to account for changes in cost-of-living.

## Recommendations for a CBE Transcript Format

With the passage of [SB 5189](#) in 2025, SBE was charged to “develop or identify and recommend to the office of the superintendent of public instruction a format for a competency-based education high school transcript that can be used by all public school districts as part of, or as an alternative to, the standardized high school transcript.” Per RCW [28A.230.125](#), SBE has collaborated with the partners identified in statute to develop a recommendation for a format for a competency-based education (CBE) high school transcript that can be used by all public school districts as part of, or an alternative to, the standardized high school transcript. In collaboration with partners, SBE has also developed recommendations for required elements to be included in the CBE transcript to support receivers of the transcript in interpreting the skills obtained through a student's learning experience.

### Background and Process

This work builds on the work SBE engaged in during 2020-2021 through the state [Mastery-based Learning Work Group](#) and engagement with higher education partners during that time (see pages 35-39 of the [2021 MBL Work Group Report](#) for additional information).

The SBE met with the partners 3 times in summer and fall of 2025 to develop the recommendations. The SBE shared information regarding national examples of CBE transcripts and related work during the first partner meeting in summer 2025 (see [slides 12 and 15](#) in particular for more information on related work nationally).

SBE met with partners (the four-year institutions as defined in RCW [28B.76.020](#), the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, as well as the Independent Colleges of Washington) to develop the recommendations to provide to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Legislature.

It is clear from stakeholders that consistency in how competencies are communicated is critically important; however, it is also important to provide some flexibility in how schools implement these records.

### Recommended CBE Transcript

Currently the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC) is the only [competency-based transcript](#) that is widely accepted at postsecondary institutions [across the country](#) and in Washington. For this reason, SBE recommends adoption of the MTC Learner Record for schools who want to include a competency-based learning record as part of (a supplement to) the traditional transcript. For schools seeking an alternative to a traditional transcript, the SBE recommends use of the MTC Mastery Transcript.

## Recommended CBE Transcript Format

There are five key elements essential for a competency transcript. Each of these elements is included in either the MTC Learner Record (when coupled with a traditional transcript) or the MTC Mastery Transcript. These elements are critical to understanding an individual student's learning journey (both for higher education admissions as well as if a student transferred into other educational settings):

1. A list of courses taken by the student by term (this information is similar to a course list on a traditional transcript)
2. Competencies earned and in progress—this displays the student's cross disciplinary skills they have demonstrated (based on a school's locally determined competencies), like being a critical thinker, culturally competent, etc.
3. Evidence—work samples from different stages of a learner's journey, tied to one of the competencies they have earned
4. An individualized school profile explaining the courses offered at the school (as well as the breakdown of available foundational courses and advanced courses) and grading information (how they define mastery/what percentage of standards a student needs to meet). This will be key for ensuring the CBE transcript is usable for higher education institutions for admissions purposes.
5. The MTC allows for use of a Reference Range that should be enabled to give an idea of what a "typical" student completes (regarding number of foundational courses and advanced courses in each competency area) for comparison of students for college admissions purposes.

## Recommended CBE Transcript Required Elements

- The competency-based transcript should include most of the contents of the mandatory high school transcript outlined in [WAC 392-415-070](#) (see Appendix A for further explanation), including (1), (2)(a)(i-vi), (2)((b-c), and (3-4).
- If schools use the MTC transcript, a GPA will not be included. CBE schools should be exempted from [WAC 392-415-050](#) in this scenario.
  - Schools using a CBE transcript would be required to be able to translate student learning into traditional credit and subject-area terms, or at a minimum, provide clear recommendations for equivalencies when students transfer to a more traditional school. Because CBE schools are most familiar with their own program structures, they are expected to develop a crosswalk outlining how this translation will occur prior to implementing a CBE transcript, to ensure consistency, transparency, and smooth student transitions between systems.
- CBE schools using the learning record and standard transcript together would find it helpful to have an alternative grade reporting scale they could elect to use (from what is currently articulated in WAC 392-415-050) within the state's traditional standardized transcript. Allowing for a standards-based grading scale where 1=Not yet meeting standard, 2=Approaching meeting standard, 3=Meeting standard, and 4= Exceeding

standard would more clearly represent the student's level of proficiency in the learning standards than the more traditional 4.0 GPA scale where 4=A, 3.7=A-, 3.3=B+, etc.

- The MTC competency records are digital records by nature. The standardized transcript may be a digital record at some schools but a paper record at others. As the state develops a standardized digital transcript it is possible to integrate MTC with such a system.

## **Other Considerations**

The [Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program](#) (WAGAP) is a partnership between most of the public universities in the state and participating high schools. To be eligible for guaranteed admissions, students must earn a 3.0 GPA and complete the CADRs.

Students without a GPA would not be eligible for WAGAP. However, as long as competency-based schools calculate a GPA for the purposes of WAGAP eligibility, they would be eligible with the competency transcript plus their qualifying GPA.

Likewise, competency-based schools must calculate a GPA for students who need a GPA to be eligible for merit scholarships.

For students in schools with combinations of instructional models, the MTC learning record may be a better fit (than the MTC transcript) because of the different grading scales used in different settings. An example is a student who is taking courses at the skill center or Running Start courses in addition to their competency-based education setting.

## **Additional recommendations to support statewide implementation:**

The national recognition of the MTC competency-based records by 700+ higher education institutions factors heavily in the recommendation for the use of MTC as the format for Washington's competency-based transcript.

SBE recommends that the state partner with the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC). While SBE is aware of other organizations that are currently in the process of developing competency-based transcripts or similar learning records, none are currently available with the national recognition and acceptance of the MTC's tool.

Already 8 public schools and 4 private schools in Washington are members of MTC. Adding additional schools or districts wishing to utilize the MTC competency learning records would require funding to cover membership costs, as well as covering membership costs for existing schools. If the costs are covered through an agreement at the state level, MTC would be able to provide discounts to reduce the overall cost.

Schools should have the option of using the MTC transcript or using the MTC Learning Record + the traditional standardized transcript, depending on their level of implementation

of competency-based education and what they find to be the most appropriate tool to communicate student learning. As schools transition to using a competency-based transcript, they will need additional support and training to effectively implement the new transcript. Periodically, the SBE should review available competency-based transcript options to determine whether to continue with MTC or recommend another tool. If SBE determines that a new option has become available that should be considered, SBE will consult with the same stakeholders convened for this process to see if other K-12 partners and higher education partners agree that the state should move to a different tool. Just as there are updates to the standardized transcript guidance made on a specific cycle by OSPI now (usually annually), there should be a similar process for the competency-based transcript so that higher education institutions can adapt to any changes made for the competency-based transcript as well.

## Conclusion

National research makes clear that transitioning to authentic CBE requires many years of sustained investment, far beyond the current four-year funding window for the MBLC. Washington has already gained national recognition for its early leadership in statewide scaling of CBE and has seen clear benefits of this innovative model for students and educators. Having invested significantly in building the foundation for schools interested in the transition to CBE through planning and goal setting, professional learning with expert coaching, and beginning implementation steps, the state has seen strong interest from many additional Washington schools eager to join future cohorts. With the passage of SB 5189 and the launch of a CBE transcript process and the design of a CBE school designation process, the state has both the momentum and the responsibility to finish what it has started. To stop now would risk hindering the progress already made—continued support will ensure that Washington not only protects its investment but also becomes a national or even world-class model for scaling CBE equitably and sustainably across all communities.

## Appendix A: Comparison with the Existing Standard Transcript

The recommended format aligns with and diverges from the existing standard transcript in the following ways. (Note: the MTC learning record is not included in the table since it is sent as an addendum to the standard transcript.)

### Comparison of Standard and Competency-Based High School Transcripts

Category	Standard Transcript (WAC 392-415-070)	Competency-Based Transcript
Student Identification	Legal name, birth date, parent/guardian names, school district ID	Same as standard transcript
School Information	School name, address, phone, district name	Same as standard transcript
Academic History	All high school level courses attempted, grades, credits, GPA, withdrawals	Courses aligned to competencies; no GPA if using MTC; mastery-based grading scale optional
Grade Reporting	Traditional letter grades and GPA (WAC 392-415-050)	Standards-based scale (1–4) optional; GPA excluded if using MTC transcript
Credit Reporting	Credits attempted and earned; repeated courses noted	Must translate learning into traditional credit/subject terms or provide equivalency recommendations
Course Designations	AP (A), IB (I), Running Start (R), College in HS (C), Tech Prep (T), Honors (H), Core (B)	May not apply directly; foundational vs. advanced courses noted in school profile. Same limitations on course designations as the Standard Transcript.
Graduation Requirements	Notations for High School & Beyond Plan, Culminating Project, Certificates of Achievement, Seal of Biliteracy	May include similar notations if applicable.
Transcript Metadata	Report date, graduation date, OSPI form version, page number	Same as standard transcript
Authorized Signature	Signature of school official (electronic allowed with policy)	Same as standard transcript

Additional Documentation	No additional info allowed on transcript; may be stapled separately	Includes individualized school profile and Reference Range for college admissions context
Equivalency/Crosswalk	Not required	Required: schools must develop a crosswalk to translate CBE records to traditional terms
Use of GPA	Required (WAC 392-415-050)	Exempted if using MTC transcript. <u>Must be able to provide a translated GPA for students.</u>
Grading Scale	Traditional 4.0 scale	Optional standards-based scale (1–4) for proficiency levels. <u>Must be able to translate into a traditional scale for students.</u>
School Profile	Not included	Explains the courses offered at the school (as well as the breakdown of available foundational courses and advanced courses) and grading information (how they define mastery/what percentage of standards a student needs to meet).
Transferrable skills	Not included	A student’s attainment of durable skills/competencies is included on the competency transcript, along with evidence of how those skills were gained.
Evidence of Student Work	Not included	Evidence of a student’s work, tied to one of the competencies they have earned.

## Appendix B: Yearly CBE Designation Process Cost

Cost Type	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Building the process	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Certified reviewer pool development (training)	\$78,300	\$0	\$0	\$0
Certified reviewer pool maintenance (calibration)	\$0	\$6,250	\$6,250	\$6,250
Piloting new process	\$14,100	\$0	\$0	\$0
Ongoing support costs (comms, tech platform, etc.)	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000
<b>TOTAL FIXED COSTS</b> <i>Note: This yearly estimate does not include the optional start-up site visit build cost in Year 1 of \$4000.</i>	<b>\$227,400</b>	<b>\$41,250</b>	<b>\$41,250</b>	<b>\$41,250</b>
<b>VARIABLE COSTS</b>				
\$3,600 (Assumption: 20 new written applications)	\$0	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000
\$2,125 (Assumption: 20 site visits for new applications)	\$0	\$42,500	\$42,500	\$42,500
\$1,600 (Provisional designee re-reviews. Assumption: 10 in Year 4)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$16,000
<b>TOTAL VARIABLE COSTS</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$114,500</b>	<b>\$114,500</b>	<b>\$130,500</b>
<b>TOTAL FIXED AND VARIABLE COSTS</b>	<b>\$227,400</b>	<b>\$155,750</b>	<b>\$155,750</b>	<b>\$171,750</b>

## Appendix C

# *SB 5189-Competencies Development Process*

## Background

Senate Bill 5189 directs OSPI, in consultation with the State Board of Education, to develop and recommend a process to create competencies aligned to the state learning standards and identify costs associated with this process.

## Definitions In Statute: [Chapter 28A.255 RCW: COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION](#)

(1) "Competencies" mean the rigorous, shared expectations for learning that encompass knowledge, skills, and abilities across grade levels. Competencies are broader than learning standards and may encompass multiple learning standards. Competencies are transparent, measurable, relevant, and transferable to multiple contexts.

(2)(a) "Competency-based education" means education that includes the following elements:

(i) Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and how they will demonstrate their learning;

(ii) Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence;

(iii) Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs;

(iv) Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time;

(v) Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing;

(vi) Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems; and

(vii) Rigorous, common expectations for learning, including knowledge, skills, and dispositions, are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

(b) "Mastery-based learning" has the same meaning as "competency-based education."

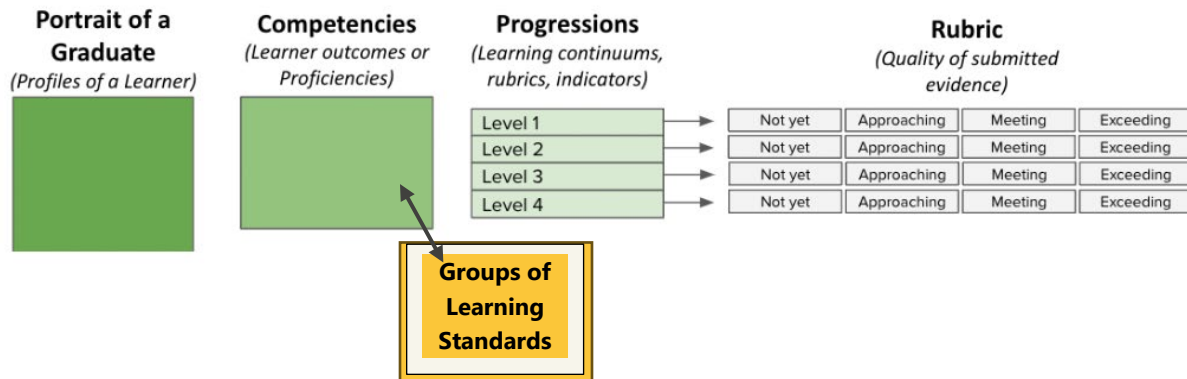
## Competency Development Explanation

This process incorporates relevant materials and guidance developed through the Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative (MBLC) and incorporates the process for creating competencies used by members of the mastery-based learning collaborative.

Competencies are broken down into **proficiency scales** (also called progressions, indicators, rubrics, etc.) that describe multiple levels of proficiency



on each competency. Most proficiency scales articulate a level of competency that is expected of learners prior to earning a credential (such as a diploma). ( [Getting Smart](#) )



The process supports the work of the MBLC by factoring in the work of the MBLC Design Tools for [MBLC Units and Assessments](#), as well as examining project examples from the [School-based Resource Exchange](#) in the MBLC: One example can be found here from North Dakota: [ND Learning Continuum v9 \(003\).pdf](#)

There are eleven content areas to develop competencies for: Arts, Computer Science, Educational Technology, English Language Arts, Financial Education, Health, Physical Education, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and World Languages. Developing competencies for each of these academic content learning standards will require each set of standards to have attributes and attribute descriptions. Attributes are large overarching areas essential for all learners to grow, refine, and master in their K–12 journey. Attribute Descriptions define the graduate level of competency for each attribute; the expectations each learner is striving to reach. Grade banded competencies are developed from the attribute descriptions, are grounded in the WA state learning standards, articulate broad, enduring, and relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Competencies are applied over time, across multiple contexts, disciplines, and are assessed for each learner throughout their educational career.

Attribute				
Attribute Description				
K-2	3-5	6-8	9-12	Lifelong Learning
<b>Competencies:</b> Descriptions of what the attribute looks like at each grade band				
<b>Priority Standards:</b> Aligned with each competency for each grade band				
<b>Proficiency Scales with Learning Progressions:</b> Show the progression of learning for the selected standard with steps clearly laid out and proficiency clearly defined.				

Priority Learning Standards will be identified for each content area as they are reviewed and revised on OSPI'S published timeline. The Priority standards are the most essential academic skills and concepts students need to succeed from one grade level to the next. Priority standards are identified as standards that will prepare students for post-secondary success, have relevance and connection across content areas, and involve consistent skill and knowledge building. The Priority standards can be used by learners to practice and demonstrate proficiency of the competencies. These Priority standards align to the competencies, providing context in relevant learning experiences and authentic choices aligned to interests, needs, and personal goals.

By using the competencies and the Prioritized standards, Proficiency Scales would be created to support instructional practices and guide learning. To support the process of developing Proficiency Scales, the "learning progression" will be identified to lay out the steps the student can demonstrate in their learning of the skills and knowledge of each competency and learning standard. Proficiency Scales would be created to have a consistent measurement tool for educators to support student attainment of the competency or standard.

Proficiency Scales are:

- A tool used to describe and measure progress toward mastering a specific essential learning standard
- Topic/Standard(s) specific
- Learning tools, breaking down standards into levels of progression or pathway for learning
- Progression of what students need to know and be able to do, with foundational steps clearly laid out, and proficiency clearly defined
- Used by the learner to articulate what they should know and be able to do and understand their own progression of learning to demonstrate proficiency on the standard
- Used to provide feedback and scores for *any* applicable task or assessment
- Applied across various opportunities, contexts, and experiences for the learner to demonstrate proficiency

## Roles

Multiple voices need to be incorporated into the creation of the competencies and Proficiency Scales for each set of content learning standards.

- **Educator Voice:** To include the voices of educators in a variety of schools and communities, educators involved in schools from the MBLC and other K-12 educators representing the demographics of the students in WA State and large and small districts, urban and rural. Educators will help support the development and review of the competencies and Proficiency Scales from the identified learning standards.
- **Content Area and Assessment Team Experts from OSPI:** To support the use of priority standards, the breakdown of standards, connection to multiple content areas, and career

and college readiness. Support development of competencies and Proficiency Scales from identified learning standards.

- **State Board of Education:** To support development of competencies and Proficiency Scales.
- **Educator Growth and Development Team:** To support alignment of professional learning, student growth goals, and evaluations.
- **Grad Team/High School and Beyond Plan:** To support alignment of competencies and standards and considerations for graduation requirements.
- **Special Education Team:** To support development of competencies and Proficiency Scales that are inclusive.
- **Multi-lingual Team:** To support development of competencies and Proficiency Scales that are inclusive.
- **Highly Capable Team:** To support development of competencies and Proficiency Scales that are inclusive.
- **Career and Technical Education:** To support competencies, Proficiency Scales and connections to industry standards where appropriate.
- **Learning Options Team:** To support development of competencies and alignment with the learning option environments and programs.
- **Data Team:** To support integration of systems alignment, impact to state report card, updating any validation or program codes for identification and designation of schools/districts, any relative updates to transcripts.
- **Student Work groups:** To develop competencies, provide input on competency development, attributes and attribute descriptions. Using two work groups, current high school students, and students in college or recent graduates involved in AWSL leadership programs.

## Approach/Process

Step 1: One-time, Professional Development for the OSPI internal team on Competencies and Proficiency Scale development. This will be provided through a contract or purchase order with an organization. The professional development will support in person or virtual meetings for OSPI's internal team's understanding of the purpose and components of a competency based system. This includes the connections of learning standards, competencies, graduate profiles, performance based graduation pathway, proficiency scales, scoring guides and how students, educators, and families might interact with the competencies.

Step 2: Ongoing, until all standards have been revised, up to four years (Fiscal years 2027-2030), a yearly contract will be solicited for the work of facilitating the educator and OSPI focus groups in competency development. The contractor will use a developed process and solicit a diverse group of educators representing multiple student demographic indicators, rural, suburban, and urban districts, participant schools in the MBLC, wide representation of content and K-12 grade

levels. 30 educators per content area with 10 being elementary level, 10 middle level, 10 high school level will be utilized, with a total of 120 educators each year (Four content areas).

OSPI staff and selected educators will review the revised learning standards for each content area to develop attributes, attribute descriptions, and competencies. The process will focus on the language of the competencies, format and content of the proficiency scales, adaptability to align with local context, application of the competencies, and a public feedback process. A component of the process will also be to have educators in the focus groups identify the professional learning/technical support needs for all educators to implement the competencies to inform future support. Educator stipends for participation in the work groups, travel, meals, housing, and supplies for meeting space and facilities will also be included in the contract for each year.

## Project Products

Competencies of the learning standards will be created and available for district integration of their own locally developed learner profiles, industry standards and or alignment to frameworks and equivalencies that occur at the local level. The competencies will align with cognitive levels appropriate for the learning standard using a well-recognized taxonomy (Bloom, Hess, DOK).

The competency development process will include co-constructed attributes, attribute descriptions and proficiency scales that provide access to support all learners in obtaining proficiency and support all programs that will use them.

## Projected Timeline

- Professional Learning for OSPI internal staff August 2026 – One time cost
- Educator and OSPI staff work groups for competency development of Math, English Language Arts and Financial education, September 2026-Late Winter 2027.
- Educator and OSPI work groups for competency development of next set of revised learning standards (Projected content areas: Science, World Language, Health, Physical Education) 27-28.
- Educator and OSPI work groups for competency development of the next set of revised learning standards (Projected content areas: Social Studies, Arts, Education Technology, Computer Science) 28-29.
- Potential cost for additional work groups in 29-30 for any additional remaining sets of revised learning standards.

## Detailed assumptions and calculations:

### State Administration and Implementation Support

The costs for state administration and implementation support—including staffing costs, which are further outlined in the Workforce Assumptions section—are as follows:

- FTEs (full-time equivalents): 5.7 FTE costing \$1,099,000 in FY 27 and \$1,034,000 annually thereafter up to four years.
- Contracted professional development and facilitation at \$140,000 in FY 2027 and \$125,000 annually up to four years.
- Educator work groups \$215,000 in each fiscal year up to four years ending with fiscal year 2030 or sooner.

## **Workforce Assumptions**

If funded in 2026 – the work would not begin until Summer of 2026 and after. Anticipating only Mathematics, Financial Education and English Language Arts standards would be ready to go through this process in the fiscal year 2027. This would be an annual ask for each year as new standards are revised, up to four years.

Fiscal Year 2027 (Total = \$1,099,000), Fiscal Years 2028-2030 (Total = \$1,034,000).

Associate Director, spread across multiple content areas, 1.7 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$333,000 in FY27 and \$314,000 annually thereafter.

Assessment Specialist, 0.25 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$44,000 in FY27 and \$41,000 annually thereafter.

Director, spread across multiple content areas, 1.6 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$384,000 in FY27 and \$366,000 annually thereafter.

Program Supervisor, spread across multiple content areas, 0.55 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$98,000 in FY27 and \$92,000 annually thereafter.

Special Programs & Assessment Coordinator 0.5 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$95,000 in FY27 and \$90,000 annually thereafter.

Assistant Superintendent 0.1 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$27,000 in FY27 and \$25,000 annually thereafter.

Administrative Assistant 3, 1.0 FTE

The cost for this FTE is \$118,000 in FY27 and \$106,000 annually thereafter.

## **OSPI Internal Professional Development**

- \$15,000, one time cost in fiscal year 2027 for virtual or onsite professional development.

## **Competency Facilitation Contract**

Contract with an organization to facilitate the development of learning standards competencies

and related products. Facilitation includes leading educator work groups and OSPI internal staff, product draft creation, public input, and finalization of products. Up to four years of facilitation for fiscal years 2027-2030. (Total = \$125,000 per year)

## Educator Work Groups

Educator work groups would be secured each year of the project. Up to 30 educators for each content area, with no more than 120 educators per year. Work group costs include three meetings per year, facility use, printing costs, meals, travel, and per diem. Up to four years of work groups for fiscal years 2027-2030. (Total = \$215,000 per year)

## References

**State Board of Education (n.d.).** *School-based resource exchange.*

<https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/resources/school-based-resource-exchange>

**State Board of Education (n.d.).** *Section one: MBLC unit assessment design tools.*

<https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/resources/assessment-resources/section-one-mblc-unit-assessment-design-tools>

**North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. (2023).** *North Dakota learning continuum (Version 9).*

[https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Academic%20Support/ND%20Learning%20Continuum/ND%20Learning%20Continuum%20v9%20\(003\).pdf](https://www.nd.gov/dpi/sites/www/files/documents/Academic%20Support/ND%20Learning%20Continuum/ND%20Learning%20Continuum%20v9%20(003).pdf)

**Sturgis, C. (2023, March 14).** *Measuring learning growth: Competencies and standards.* Getting Smart.

<https://www.gettingsmart.com/2023/03/14/measuring-learning-growth-competencies-and-standards/>