



Mastery-based Learning

in Washington State

2020 REPORT

By the Mastery-based Learning Work Group

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Authorizing legislation: [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1599, Chapter 252, Laws of 2019](#)

Introduction Letter from Mandy Manning, 2018 National Teacher of the Year

To Washington educators, parents, families, and communities,

Before the 2020 pandemic, we knew systemic racism and inequity existed in our country and in our state. We understood that the old school model does not provide equitable opportunities for all students. COVID-19 has illuminated these injustices in a new light. Now, we must take the time to make real change that can be felt by *each and every* student from *every* background. We have the opportunity to improve the way our state's students, families and educators are served in K-12 education. We need a system that provides opportunities for every student through engagement in our vibrant, diverse communities for the rest of their lives.

The concept of mastery-based learning is not new. But in some Washington schools, we can see a modern form of this kind of education tackling barriers to student success, closing the opportunity gap, and engaging students in learning that is relevant to them based on their passions, experiences and cultures.

Mastery-based learning allows students and teachers to build relationships. Educators are given a chance to truly know their students. Education works best when we recognize that each student has their own strengths and personal identity. When teachers are treated as professionals who are trusted to assess their students' work and needs without the old model (which relies heavily on standardized testing), magic can happen.

Imagine a class in which students who are passionate about the environment can present to their peers about the impact of global warming on Washington's salmon population. Imagine them working with the Nisqually tribe on conservation projects—and getting credit towards their high school diploma. Consider a course where students work with community professionals to construct tiny homes for displaced peoples resulting in fewer homeless people in our state. These are examples of the kind of learning that is possible in mastery-based education. Students flourish in environments where learning means they are empowered to take ownership over their education; and educators thrive when they can apply meaningful ways to gauge their students' progress.

The Washington Legislature created the [Mastery-based Learning Work Group](#) to carefully consider how education like this will be effective and meaningful for our young people. With consideration for all students' needs, and with deep acknowledgement for culturally responsive family and student engagement, the group's recommendations should be understood and supported by each diverse Washington community and by the Legislature. It is time to consider how mastery-based education can make real change for our students, our schools and our future.

Sincerely,
Mandy Manning
2018 National and Washington State Teacher of the Year

Table of Contents

Introduction Letter from Mandy Manning, 2018 National Teacher of the Year	1
Executive Summary.....	4
Mastery-Based Learning Work Group Report.....	6
Introduction to the Mastery-based Learning (MBL) Work Group’s Final Report.....	6
Why do we need Mastery-Based Learning In Washington?	6
Vision of the Work Group	10
Work Group Recommendations.....	10
1. Barriers to Mastery-Based Learning (MBL).....	11
Recommendation 1A: Engage Families.....	12
Recommendation 1B: Review the State Accountability System for Alignment with MBL	13
Recommendation 1C. Engage Education Partners in the Next Phase of the Work.....	14
2. Improvements in the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) as an Essential Tool for MBL	16
Bright Spot: Fife School District’s High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) Process	16
Recommendation 2A. Support Students Through Additional School Counselors	17
Recommendation 2B. Provide Professional Development for Educators to Support MBL and HSBP	18
Recommendation 2C. Make the HSBP more Meaningful and Useful for Students.....	19
3. Development of Mastery-based Pathways to the Earning of a High School Diploma.....	20
Recommendation 3A. Develop a Profile of a Graduate.....	22
Recommendation 3B. Develop Supports for Mastery-based Learning Implementation	23
Recommendation 3C. Engage Higher Education	25
Recommendation 3D. Create a State Policy Framework for a MBL Pathway to a Diploma.....	26
4. Results of the competency-based pathways previously approved by SBE as a learning resource ...	28
What can be Learned from the Schools Using the Waiver?.....	28
What can be Learned from Other Washington Schools Doing Some Form of MBL?.....	30
5. Expansion of Mastery-based Credits to meet Graduation Requirements	34
State Board of Education Developed New Rule on Mastery Crediting	34
Culturally Responsive Examples of Mastery Crediting	36
Conclusion.....	37
Appendix 1: Definition of Terms	39
Achievement Gap vs. Opportunity Gap.....	39
Credit.....	39

Credit Equivalencies	40
Competency-based Education or Competency-based Learning	40
Interdisciplinary vs. Multidisciplinary vs. Transdisciplinary	40
Learning Standards.....	41
Mastery-based Learning.....	41
Pathways—A note on the Varying Usage of the term as it Appears in This Report:	42
Performance Assessment.....	42
Personalized Learning	43
Project-based Learning.....	43
Proficiency-based Learning.....	43
Standards-based Education	44
Standardized Assessment.....	44
Appendix 2: Funding Challenges with MBL and the Innovative Learning Pilot Program.....	44
Appendix 3: Mastery-based Diploma Frameworks from Across the Country.....	45
Arizona’s Grand Canyon High School Diploma	45
Great Schools Partnership (GSP) Framework for Proficiency-Based Learning (GSP region)	45
New York City Mastery Collaborative: Support Structure and Framework for Success	46
South Carolina: Competencies for the Profile of a Graduate	46
New Hampshire: Statewide Competencies and Competency Crediting.....	47
Mastery/Competency Education Pilots: Utah, Idaho, and Montana.....	47
Big Picture Learning Model.....	48
Appendix 4: Annual Reports from Schools with the Waiver of Credit-based Graduation Requirements 48	
Methow Valley School District: Independent Learning Center (ILC).....	49
Issaquah School District: Gibson Ek High School.....	50
Federal Way Public Schools: Open Doors and Career Academy at Truman Campus.....	51
Lake Chelan School District: Chelan School of Innovation	52
Quincy School District: Quincy Innovation Academy	53
Peninsula School District: Henderson Bay High School.....	53
Highline Public Schools: Highline Big Picture High School.....	54
Collaborative Responses from the Big Picture Schools	54

Executive Summary

The Mastery-based Learning (MBL) Work Group has examined opportunities to increase student access to relevant and robust mastery-based academic pathways aligned to personal career goals and postsecondary education, and reviewed the role of the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) in supporting mastery-based learning.

School looks very different today than it did when the MBL Work Group began our journey—due to COVID-19 and the reckoning our country is undergoing as we grapple with our historical and present-day structural racism. The Work Group members believe that Washington has both an opportunity and an imperative to respond to this dual pandemic of COVID-19 and the structural racism that our school system has never effectively addressed.

Our collective “why” calls for a transformation of our education system to close both the opportunity gap and resulting achievement gap. When we recognize that a student’s learning happens differently for each subject and that learning does not just happen in a classroom, then the focus shifts to meeting the needs of each individual student. Through a MBL approach, the education system values the knowledge and skills students already have and engages students through their diverse cultures and communities; students are also supported through authentic relationships with educators to experience rigorous and personally relevant coursework.

Our recommendations align to the charges to the Work Group from E2SHB 1599 Sec. 301:

1. Barriers to MBL: Various state policy barriers have been identified, including the need to ensure the accountability and funding systems support alignment with MBL. However, the biggest barrier is that while most would recognize the practices embedded in MBL as “good teaching” families and other stakeholders are not familiar with the term—and a state communication effort is needed around the “why” for MBL. Districts must also engage families from the beginning, or risk dooming the effort from the start.
2. Improvements to the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) as an essential tool for MBL: Counselors must have the time in their schedule to provide direct support to students around the HSBP. Additionally, every educator must receive professional development on the HSBP so they can also support students’ HSBP. In a MBL approach, the HSBP becomes even more important—because in a personalized learning environment that is responsive to individual student interests, needs, and cultural backgrounds—the student’s short and long-term goals are what should guide their learning experiences.
3. Development of mastery-based pathways to the earning of a high school diploma:
 - a. The MBL Work Group should be extended, in order to develop a state Profile of a Graduate describing the cross-disciplinary skills a student should have acquired by the time they graduate high school. The Work Group will submit a final report by December 2021, describing the Profile of a Graduate and any related recommendations for supporting implementation of mastery-based learning.
 - b. The transition to MBL model requires a sustained effort over time to ensure state and local policies support implementation and schools and districts have access to resources to support their learning as they transform their systems. To that

- end, the SBE should be tasked with providing statewide coordination through capacity-building support and technical assistance, including communications and advocacy around the shared goals of MBL. A regional support structure is also critical—with partner organizations focused on providing professional development and collaboration time to discuss schools’ shared learning.
- c. As this work moves forward, a more explicit role for higher education to engage in this work may be helpful to ensure students who take advantage of these programs are not placed at a disadvantage in the admission process.
 - d. The state policy framework for a MBL diploma is not creating a separate diploma. Rather students who embark on the MBL route to earning their diploma would have different opportunities for demonstrating what they know and can do—but would still meet the same learning standards as students in the credit-based framework. A MBL diploma would have different characteristics than a credit-based route to a diploma. The defining feature of a MBL diploma is that it is designed around the individual student’s interests through their engagement in personally relevant, contextualized learning experiences, such as project- or work-based learning, interdisciplinary coursework, and extra-curricular activities.
4. The results of the competency-based pathways previously approved by the SBE under RCW 28A.230.090 as a learning resource: the schools operating under the waiver of credit-based graduation requirements, as well as other schools implementing some form of MBL, have an advisory structure to promote deep relationships and a sense of belonging between a small group of students and an advisor. Additionally, all schools discussed in the report shared the importance of a regional support structure to facilitate educator collaboration within a school and among colleagues at other MBL schools.
 5. Expansion of mastery-based credits (MBC) to meet graduation requirements: Due to the coronavirus and ongoing disruptions of our educational system, the Work Group felt it was important to accelerate expansion of MBC policies. To that end, the Washington State School Directors' Association released [model policies in additional subject areas](#) and SBE adopted a new section of [rule](#) to detail the process for granting students MBC.

There are schools in Washington that are already doing some of this work—and hearing the student stories along this journey, some of which are woven throughout this report, has been the motivation to engage deeply in the work to create a state policy framework for MBL. Mastery-based learning is not magic—but its components, when done well, have the potential to change our students lives forever. Imagine a classroom you’ve been in, either as a student or visitor, where all the students were engaged and excited about what they were learning. Now imagine every Washington student could experience that feeling, in every class. When students experience the joy of learning—it changes the world. This is our greatest hope—that each and every student, no matter their skin color, family income level, home language, or ability, could experience the purest joy of being valued for who they are and encouraged to discover their interests along their own unique learning journey. To every student who has ever felt invisible – we dedicate this work to you. We will not stop fighting until school becomes a safe place to explore, be accepted and appreciated, and to practice thinking critically—the place where you discover yourself and learn all you need to reach your dreams.

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING WORK GROUP REPORT

Introduction to the Mastery-based Learning (MBL) Work Group's Final Report

Per the charge to the Work Group from [E2SHB 1599 Section 301](#), this report discusses the barriers to mastery-based learning (MBL) in Washington State and provides recommendations around how to increase capacity for MBL, including the development of a MBL pathway to a high school diploma.

The Work Group believes that the principal work of the group, mastery-based learning, is effectively defined in legislation (per E2SHB 1599 Sec. 301):

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

The legislative definition has the added benefit of being widely accepted by policymakers and practitioners in the field of MBL, as it was created in 2011 at the National Summit for K-12 Competency-Based Education hosted by the Aurora Institute (formerly iNACOL) and the Council of Chief State School Officers.¹

WHY DO WE NEED MASTERY-BASED LEARNING IN WASHINGTON?

Schools are experiencing unprecedented disruption, forcing educators to think differently about how they engage with their students and forcing changes to longstanding systems that have been established to deliver education. This presents an opportunity to not only discover ways to address education during the coronavirus pandemic, but also to address the much longer standing pandemic of racism that has plagued our society and our school system.

Every part of our system is asked to respond to COVID-19 and resulting learning loss² experienced disproportionately by students who have not been well served by our education system because of the historical and present-day institutional racism perpetrated by society and

¹ Sturgis, C., Patrick, S., & Pittenger, P. (2011). *It's not a matter of time: Highlights from the 2011 Competency-Based Learning Summit*. Retrieved from http://www.aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/iNACOL_Its_Not_A_Matter_of_Time_full_report.pdf

² See for instance research from NWEA: <https://www.nwea.org/2020/05/researchers-estimate-students-coming-back-after-covid-19-closures-may-have-greater-variances-in-academic-skills/>

reflected in our schools. MBL can serve as a salve to the dual pandemic of the coronavirus and systemic racism, because it recognizes that learning takes place in many places through many experiences, and not just in a classroom. MBL builds on the knowledge students bring rather than focusing on deficits or learning loss.³ With intentionality, MBL must actively decolonize our education system⁴ by ensuring the curriculum reflects multiple cultures and not just the dominant narrative as well as facilitating students' connections to place and community. Decolonization should also involve careful examination of the power dynamics between adults and students, as one way to ensure students can take ownership over their own learning experience.

Every child is gifted—the primary role of the education system is to support each and every student as they discover who they are and what makes them flourish. Gifted programs are incompatible with, and unnecessary in a well implemented MBL system. Work Group members drew inspiration from the Indigenous approach to education:

Indian education dates back to a time when all children were identified as gifted and talented. Each child had a skill and ability that would contribute to the health and vitality of the community. Everyone in the community was expected and trained to be a teacher to identify and cultivate these skills and abilities. The elders were entrusted to oversee this sacred act of knowledge being shared. That is our vision for Indian education today.⁵

The Work Group believes that mastery-based learning (MBL) is a way to transform our education system—with this approach, teaching methods are designed to equitably engage each and every student in ways that best support the individual student's learning journey. Additionally, because "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,"⁶ MBL prepares all students for the workforce of the future by allowing them to experience ownership over their own learning process. The key to MBL is the focus on the individual student; MBL engages students through educational experiences tailored to their personal assets and interests while providing the opportunity for them to develop interpersonal skills necessary to participate in a global society.

The Work Group believes strongly in the importance of the state learning standards—but believes a state framework for MBL would benefit students individually and collectively, by

³ Rigby, J., Forman, S., Foster, L., Kazemi, E., & Clancey, S. (2020, July 31). *Promising District Leadership Practices for Transformative Change in the Context of COVID-19* (Issue brief). Retrieved <https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/Promising-Leadership-Practices-Brief.pdf>, page 6

⁴ *Decolonization in an Educational Context* [PDF]. (n.d.). Victoria BC: Centre for Youth & Society: University of Victoria. <https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/youthsociety/assets/docs/briefs/decolonizing-education-research-brief.pdf>

⁵ *From Where the Sun Rises: Addressing the Educational Achievement of Native Americans in Washington State* (Rep.). (2008, December 30). Retrieved <https://education.wsu.edu/documents/2017/02/fromwherethesunrises.pdf>

⁶ Levine, E., & Patrick, S. (2019, November). What Is Competency-Based Education? An Updated Definition. Retrieved August 21, 2020, from <https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/what-is-competency-based-education-an-updated-definition-web.pdf>

providing richer and deeper learning experiences. Authentic assessments tied directly to the state's learning standards are a key part of MBL. According to Grant Wiggins (1998), "an assignment is authentic if it:

- is realistic.
- requires judgment and innovation.
- asks the student to "do" the subject.
- replicates or simulates the contexts in which adults are "tested" in the workplace or in civic or personal life.
- assesses the student's ability to efficiently and effectively use a repertoire of knowledge and skills to negotiate a complex task.
- allows appropriate opportunities to rehearse, practice, consult resources, and get feedback on and refine performances and products."⁷

Therefore, demonstration of mastery would not be limited to standardized assessments. Demonstration of mastery of the standards could also be through locally developed assessments, such as portfolios, hands-on demonstration of knowledge and skills, and presentations. A recent study of schools participating in the New York Performance Standards Consortium "reinforces the findings of other research suggesting that learning experiences structured around performance-based assessments support student advancement and can help narrow race, class, and linguistic gaps in secondary and higher education achievement."⁸ Likewise, the Learning Policy Institute has recently released a report overviewing the implementation process of performance assessments in a number of California school districts participating in the California Performance Assessment Collaborative.⁹ The development of such authentic assessments could help facilitate the development of culturally responsive projects within curricula.

Mastery learning is deep and enduring learning that can be applied across context and time to have a meaningful impact. Students gain the enduring knowledge, lifelong skills, and critical dispositions to succeed on a path of their choosing.

-Julia Bamba
Gibson Ek High School
Principal



MBL approaches provide an outstanding opportunity to develop culturally relevant, or sustaining, instructional practices that embed recognition of students' cultures in the learning

⁷ Wiggins, G. (1998). *Educative Assessment. Designing Assessments To Inform and Improve Student Performance*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104. (The definition listed comes from Wiggins, as articulated in: *Authentic Assessment*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 28, 2020, from <https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/assessing-student-learning/authentic-assessment/index.html>)

⁸ Fine, M., & Pryiomka, K. (2020). *Assessing College Readiness Through Authentic Student Work: How the City University of New York and the New York Performance Standards Consortium Are Collaborating toward Equity*. *Learning Policy Institute*. Retrieved from https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/RCA_CUNY_Assessing_College_Readiness_REPORT.pdf

⁹ Maier, A., Adams, J., Burns, D., Kaul, M., Saunders, M., & Thompson, C. (2020, October). *Using Performance Assessments to Support Student Learning: How District Initiatives Can Make a Difference* (Rep.). Retrieved https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/CPAC_Performance_Assessments_Student_Learning_2_REPORT.pdf

process: “the term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence.”¹⁰

Mastery-based learning is not the latest education trend—components of MBL are part of all good instruction and can be observed every day in effective classrooms. MBL has particular importance now, as a system of good instruction, through its potential to eliminate the achievement gap¹¹ by providing access to equitable educational opportunities and thereby closing the opportunity gap. Per [EOGOAC’s 2020 Annual Report](#): “The term ‘opportunity gap’ refers to the systemic inequity in the education system that structurally disadvantages certain demographics of students. When educational opportunity gaps exist, achievement gaps form.”

Washington State cannot perpetuate a failed system any longer—these gaps require intentional action. One of the most promising approaches to addressing these gaps is mastery-based learning. MBL contextualizes the expectations educators have for their students and that students have for themselves; it is a paradigm shift for most educators to think of the learning process as being led by the student based on their individual interests.

Our collective “why” calls for a transformation from a conventional system to an MBL approach because this enables:

- A focus on meeting the needs of each individual student.
- Students to enjoy relevancy, engagement, and choice in their learning.
- Contextualized learning environments that recognize learning does not just happen in a classroom, but is happening all the time.
- Actively embracing inclusivity—compassion and belonging for students.
- Freedom for both students and educators to develop and try different ways of doing things and embracing the innovation and learning that comes from both successes and mistakes.
- Valuing knowledge and skills that students already have.
- Each student’s learning progresses at their own pace.

Comprehensive high schools are built for one type of student and that’s it. Almost all of the students left out of comprehensive high school can be served by a project-based learning, mastery model.

-Washington Student



¹⁰ Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational researcher*, 41(3), 95.

¹¹ The use of the term “achievement gap” is intentional and aligns with the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) leadership over the past decade on the connotations of these terms. [Appendix 1](#) includes a longer explanation of the distinction between these terms.

- Transformation of our education system to close the opportunity gap and resulting achievement gap, and recognize that each student’s learning happens differently for each subject.

VISION OF THE WORK GROUP

The Work Group members engaged in a thorough discussion about their vision for the mastery-based learning in Washington. Our vision of a mastery-based learning system is one that:

- Celebrates equity and every student feels a sense of belonging in their school community.
- Empowers students to advance upon demonstrated mastery of content, rather than seat time or age.
- Enables students to direct their own learning and serves each student based on their personalized needs.
- Honors the assets students bring and engages students through their diverse cultures and communities.
- Helps students’ innate creativity shine through in their learning.
- Welcomes learning experiences that take place in environments outside the classroom.
- Facilitates students’ voices and transition to higher education and careers.
- Supports both students and educators as lifelong learners; provides the freedom to fail and celebrates the resulting learning.
- Demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness in our changing world.

I learned early on that not everyone is an extrovert like I am. And I wanted to figure out how to be able to work with other students more.

Discovery lets me work in groups and have a growth mindset. I got to choose where I wanted to go along with teacher support. It gave me freedom, the yin and yang balance between freedom and just doing worksheets. I found my home here.

-Washington Student



Work Group Recommendations

The Mastery-based Learning (MBL) Work Group was asked to “examine opportunities to increase student access to relevant and robust mastery-based academic pathways aligned to personal career goals and postsecondary education,” and to make recommendations in the following areas:

1. To inform the governor, the legislature, and the public about barriers to mastery-based learning in Washington State.
2. Improvements in the High School and Beyond Plan as an essential tool for mastery-based learning.
3. Development of mastery-based pathways to the earning of a high school diploma.
4. Consider the results of the competency-based pathways previously approved by the State Board of Education under RCW 28A.230.090.
5. Expansion of mastery-based credits to meet graduation requirements.

Because of the dual pandemics experienced in our state, nation, and the world, our schools cannot and should not go back to business as usual. The coronavirus has further exposed the inequities of our system, and with the multiple recent incidents of racism and violence against people of color—the need for a shift to a mastery-based learning system has been accelerated and is even more urgent than when the legislation passed to create this Work Group. Now is the time to wholeheartedly focus our collective efforts on addressing the systemic opportunity gap that has been fostered by the current structure of our education system for far too long.

If a mastery-based learning (MBL) education system simply recreates the status quo—all of the efforts of this Work Group will have been for naught. Rather, a MBL system must be evaluated and sustained primarily based on its progress in reducing both the opportunity and achievement gap.

Since 2009, the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) and its members have been leading the charge in taking a holistic approach to closing the opportunity gap in Washington. Because of the shared dedication to creating a system that closes the opportunity gap, the MBL Work Group strongly supports the recommendations made in the EOGOAC [2020 Annual Report](#). Specific EOGOAC recommendations of particular relevance to this work are called out where appropriate in the following recommendations.

The following MBL Work Group recommendations are categorized into five sections, based on the applicable component of the five statutory charges (as listed above).

1. BARRIERS TO MASTERY-BASED LEARNING (MBL)

One of the biggest barriers identified is that, although we recognize many of the practices in MBL in what we might observe through “good teaching,” mastery-based learning is not a concept that is well understood, neither within the education community, nor by the public. Various initiatives around the state already support the goals and fit within the

A lot of our communities come from countries where MBL is already done. Our parents understand MBL. What we, as an educational system, never explain to parents is the American concept of partnership between families and school. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) concept of collaborative education is not something our parents come to the system with. For many of our parents, the job of an educator is to educate; the job of a parent is to parent. The concept of being a partner with the school building/parent-teacher conferences etcetera is a foreign concept to many of our families. MBL is already taking place in other countries and our parents want to know why it is taking so long in U.S. Pre-COVID, our families either had their kids totally bored in school or totally ignored in school. We need to get away from seat time requirements where a student learns for nine months and then all students are expected to be in the same place academically at the end of the school year.

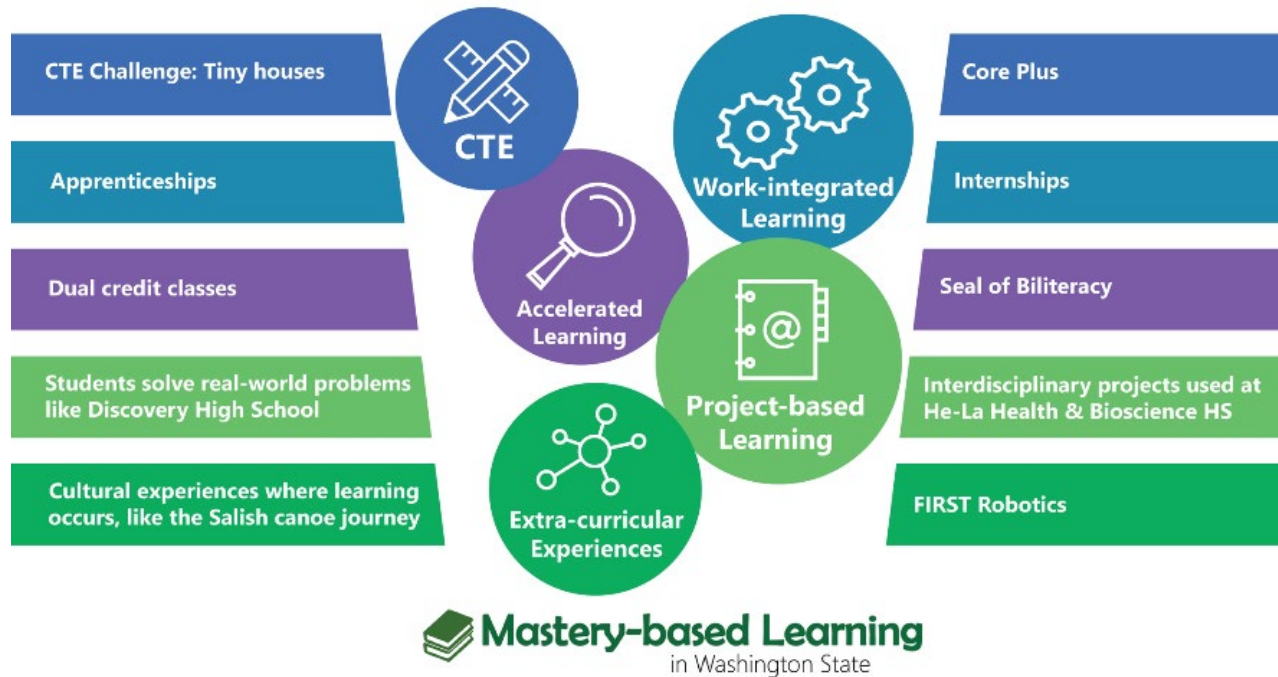
This is an industrial view of education that isn't equitable. I think if we were able to engage our families and say this is what we're doing with MBL . . . if they knew MBL is the end goal of where we're going, they would be so excited. Families want to be involved in anything that makes the system better for their kids, and I believe MBL could do that.

-Sharonne Navas, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Equity in Education Coalition



framework of MBL, including work-integrated learning, project-based learning, and extra-curricular experiences.

For mastery-based learning to be accepted by families and students, school districts will need help in explaining the “why” behind mastery-based learning. 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.”¹²


As a first step in the effort toward helping the public understand mastery-based learning and publicizing the Work Group’s vision for MBL in our state, a [one-page summary document](#) was developed. The document is intended to be a resource that can be used to help school district staff and other education stakeholders, families, students, and policy makers understand mastery-based learning at a high level. Examples of MBL have also been incorporated throughout this report to help the Legislature and the public visualize what MBL could look like in a classroom. Additionally, SBE will support a communications effort around the goals of MBL during implementation (see more in [Rec. 3B](#)).

RECOMMENDATION 1A: ENGAGE FAMILIES

Moving toward a mastery-based learning (MBL) approach will be a multi-year process for any school—however this year Washington faces a unique opportunity due to the educational

¹² Levine, E., & Patrick, S. (2019, November). What Is Competency-Based Education? An Updated Definition. Retrieved August 21, 2020, from <https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/what-is-competency-based-education-an-updated-definition-web.pdf>

disruption the world is experiencing because of COVID-19. Any shift in education, whether it be instructional practices, assessment and grading practices, school day schedules, a shift in school culture, etc., will fail if students and their families are not meaningfully engaged from the beginning. Mastery-based learning will include a change in all those things and more—and therefore, it is imperative that any school that begins a journey toward MBL simultaneously brings students’ families along with them, through authentic family engagement efforts. Without proactive and early family engagement, well-intentioned policies may in fact lead to greater inequity and larger opportunity gaps.



Without proactive and early family engagement, well-intentioned policies may in fact lead to greater inequity and larger opportunity gaps.

During the Work Group’s meetings, anecdotes were also shared about several examples of schools in the U.S. who have tried to shift toward MBL, yet their efforts failed because they did not engage families during the process. When the Work Group heard from three schools already engaged in MBL in our state at their [November 2019 meeting](#), each school shared about opportunities they provide for families to be a part of their child’s learning process through attending student learning exhibitions or by having family members come in and present to the class on topics in which they can share expertise.

The Work Group also believes its recommendations around the importance of family engagement align well with the EOGOAC’s recommendations around the importance of family engagement efforts that are culturally responsive, and that authentically engage families, particularly families of color, throughout their child’s education experience.¹³

RECOMMENDATION 1B: REVIEW THE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM FOR ALIGNMENT WITH MBL

Common state policy barriers to a mastery-based learning education system, as identified by KnowledgeWorks and with some applicability to the Washington State context include:

- accountability (when the state’s measures of success don’t align with a mastery-based learning approach),
- assessment (if tests don’t support the learning process),
- educator workforce (if educators aren’t available with the skill set to teach in an MBL system), and
- funding models (when per-pupil funding is based on seat-time).¹⁴

¹³<https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/workgroups/eogoac/pubdocs/2020%20EOGOAC%20Report.pdf>, pages 23-24

¹⁴ Jenkins, S., Olson, A., Pace, L., & Sullivan, T. (2019). *State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning*. KnowledgeWorks. Retrieved from <https://knowledgeworks.org/get-empowered/policy-resources/state-policy-framework-personalized-learning/>

The Work Group recommends that the state’s accountability system be reviewed for alignment with MBL goals. Additionally, if Washington moves toward a MBL system, there may also be a need for a corresponding change in our teacher assignment policy.

Although creating a specific recommendation around funding is beyond the scope of this Work Group, because Washington’s traditional funding model is largely still tied to a student’s seat time, unless funding is addressed, this is likely to be a disincentive to expanding mastery-based learning. Since the creation of the MBL Work Group, additional legislation passed creating an Innovative Learning Pilot Program to address funding challenges faced by early adopter schools currently operating under a SBE waiver from the credit-based graduation requirements (see [Appendix 2](#) for additional details about the enrollment reporting guidelines and the Innovative Learning Pilot).

RECOMMENDATION 1C. ENGAGE EDUCATION PARTNERS REGARDING BARRIERS TO MBL IN THE NEXT PHASE OF THE WORK

Insights from individual conversations members have had with stakeholders regarding barriers to MBL throughout their time serving on the Work Group have informed the Work Group’s recommendations throughout this report. Additionally, to ensure the Work Group heard from districts that currently implement some form of mastery-based learning opportunities as well as those who do not, a survey was developed and sent to all Washington school district superintendents. The survey was open from August 12-September 8, 2020. Unfortunately, only six school districts participated in the survey. Though the Work Group hoped to hear from more school districts through the survey, the low participation rate is understandable given the amount of logistics school district leadership had to juggle during this time period, in planning first for a return to school buildings, and then shifting direction for a remote start to school during the midst of coronavirus.

Because of the low response rate on the survey, no reliable conclusions could be reached. However, Work Group members believe it is critical to engage the education field regarding the systemic barriers to mastery-based learning. If the MBL Work Group is extended (see [Rec. 3C](#)), future work would include partnering with the associations representing the various levels of our education system to ensure we heard from their members via a survey as well as through gathering data by MBL Work Group member attendance at the respective organizations’ meetings. Particular organizations the MBL Work Group will partner

More direction from the state in terms of a policy framework for mastery would be helpful in moving our buildings toward implementation. We would need guidance about how to implement a MBL diploma. For us right now, feeling like we are at a place to measure mastery in all content areas is a barrier. If we are going to move toward a mastery-based system, we must truly show respect for our educator professionals and trust them to use their expertise to assess students—our classroom educators’ role is so important. Regarding the specific resources we would need to offer a MBL diploma—a combination of professional development, release time for educator collaboration, and funding all comes to mind.

Insights from a Conversation with a Washington school district Superintendent



with, or will continue to partner with, include, but are not limited to, the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA), Washington Education Association (WEA), Washington School Counselor Association (WSCA), Washington State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC).

2. IMPROVEMENTS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND PLAN (HSBP) AS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR MBL

The purpose of the HSBP is to guide the student's high school experience and inform course taking that is aligned with the student's goals for education or training and career after high school (RCW 28A.230.090).

As stated in the Work Group's [Interim Report](#), frequent discussion has occurred regarding the varying levels of implementation of the HSBP throughout the state, and even within districts. While some schools have created practices to utilize the HSBP in a meaningful way, other schools have not been as successful. As Washington moves toward a mastery-based education system, the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) has a critical role to play.

BRIGHT SPOT: FIFE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND PLAN (HSBP) PROCESS

Fife School District has had their HSBP process in place for over 15 years, though the process has evolved and expanded over time. The district has a Career and College Specialist position as part of Fife High School's Counseling Center who is responsible for the district's HSBP process, which occurs through the Xello platform.

Beginning in 6th grade, students take the career interest inventory assessment every year to inform their High School and Beyond Plan. Currently, in seventh grade all students take a course called "Connections" where college and career readiness lessons are integrated into the curriculum, preparing them for their High School and Beyond Plan requirements that begin in eighth grade.

In junior high and high school, students take an advisory course, called a "family group." Twice a month, family advisors receive a lesson plan from the Career and College Specialist that connects the daily lesson to career guidance themes. In grades 9-12, students get a .25 credit each year for their advisory course, and it is where all HSBP activities, along with SEL and financial literacy activities, take place. High school students stay in the same family group all three years. All the activities in high school are building toward the district's required Senior Project, based on the student's HSBP. Throughout their time in high school, students will have done research in advisory on career paths, the education and training needed for their chosen path, and how to pay for that education or training. During each student's presentation, they talk about their career exploration and interests, how they will pay for any required education or training they need for their career path, and show evidence of what they have done (both academically and outside of school activities) that has prepared

I found the High School and Beyond Plan process that included career and college research very helpful! It narrowed down if I wanted to stay in state or go out of state, what I wanted to look for in a college (diversity, enrollment, and class size) and what I saw in each college that could better my career! I didn't know what I wanted to do at first so taking quizzes and determining my likes and dislikes helped see what I didn't want to do so I could focus more and narrow down on what I did want to do. All in all, I did find it really helpful!

-Casonndrah Polo,
Class of 2020



them for their one year after high school plan. The district has surveyed seniors regarding the required Senior Project, and 66 percent of the graduating seniors said their HSBP and resulting presentation was helpful to them/contributed to their success post-high school.

Fife has also recently developed a new Career and College Ready [website](#). The website breaks down the HSBP process by grade level, so students and families know what activities to expect in each grade.

RECOMMENDATION 2A. SUPPORT STUDENTS THROUGH ADDITIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Most people would agree that school counselors play an important role in schools, but it should be noted that having more counselors actually correlates to greater student success: “overall, the body of research and recommendations on counselors indicates that lower student-to-counselor ratios are beneficial for student outcomes.”¹⁵

Although the prototypical school model funds high school counselors at a ratio in line with the American School Counselors Association (ASCA)’s recommended student to counselor ratio of 250 students to 1 counselor, the prototypical model funds the elementary and middle school levels at a ratio much higher (meaning there are more students per counselor) than the ASCA’s recommendation. In addition, most high schools operate with a higher ratio due to competing demands on resources. Per statute, the High School and Beyond Plan process must begin in middle school—and yet with such high student to counselor ratios in middle school, this is not always done in a truly meaningful way. By the end of 8th grade, a student should have taken a career interest and skills inventory that will help inform high school course-taking and help the student initially identify education and career goals. With a lower student-counselor ratio, individual students should be able to have time to meet with their middle school counselor and discuss their learning goals for high school. The Work Group recommends the Legislature fund certificated counselors at the middle school level in line with the ASCA ratio, to support beginning the HSBP process in a more robust way that sets students up for success as they begin their high school career.¹⁶

The Work Group recommends the Legislature fund certificated counselors at the middle school level in line with the ASCA ratio, to support beginning the HSBP process in a more robust way that sets students up for success as they begin their high school career.

Additionally, although the high schools are funded consistent with the ASCA recommendation, because other support positions are not funded at

¹⁵ <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2019-12-Staffing-Enrichment-Workgroup.pdf>, p. 52 (Note: The Staffing Enrichment Workgroup report details a variety of specific research findings that supports this general conclusion)

¹⁶ The EOGOAC’s [2020 Annual Report](#) also includes a similar recommendation that the Legislature adopt the Association of School Counselors (ASCA) student to counselor ratio of 250 students: 1 counselor through funding the allocations in the prototypical schools funding model.



recommended rates, often districts have much higher ratios in practice. As stated in the Staffing Enrichment Workgroup’s report: “Reductions to caseload and class size increases the ability of educators to individualize instruction or supports, provide timely feedback to students and families, and keep students actively engaged in learning...caseload and class size impact the ability of staff to more fully serve students and eliminate opportunity gaps.”¹⁷

School counselors of color have a particularly important role in supporting students of color. To support the development of a diverse counselor workforce, the MBL Work Group strongly supports working with the Washington School Counselors Association and higher education institutions that offer school counselor certifications, as well as working with districts to attract and retain school counselors of color. Likewise, cultural competency professional development is needed for White counselors working with students of color and students from diverse cultures.

An additional challenge for high school counselors is that they are assigned other duties that prevent them from spending the time necessary to provide the level of support needed to meet the Legislature’s intention for the High School and Beyond Plan generally, or to support individual student’s learning goals articulated in their HSBP. The MBL Work Group recommends that districts be required to allow counselors to spend a certain percentage of their time (e.g. 80%, as proposed in previously unsuccessful legislation: [HB 2699/SB 6480](#)) in direct support of students’ learning goals (which would include High School and Beyond Plan activities).

RECOMMENDATION 2B. PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS TO SUPPORT MBL AND HSBP

The HSBP should not just focus on the student’s goals for after high school but should help students take ownership over their learning during high school while exploring their values, strengths, passions, and long-term goals. When teachers understand each student’s individual learning goals as articulated in their HSBP, they can tailor their instruction to become more relevant and responsive to their students’ interests. For this to take place, professional development is needed for teaching staff and other educators¹⁸ on both mastery-based learning as well as the HSBP. Training cannot be limited to only classroom teachers—all educators must be provided training to support a MBL system—teachers, counselors, administrators, school

The HSBP should not just focus on the student’s goals for after high school but should help students take ownership over their learning during high school while exploring their values, strengths, passions, and long-term goals. For this to take place, professional development is needed for teaching staff and the entire education community.



¹⁷ <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2019-12-Staffing-Enrichment-Workgroup.pdf> p. 32, 33

¹⁸ In this report, the term “educator” is inclusive of all roles within the education system: classroom teachers, paraeducators, instructional coaches, counselors, school and district administrators, and other education support personnel.

board members, and other education support personnel (ESP). To ensure a cohesive education system, MBL training should not be limited to only educators already in the field, but should include preparation programs for teachers, counselors, and administrators as well.

Once educators are trained to meaningfully engage with students about their High School and Beyond Plan, then it becomes feasible to engage the entire education community—students, parents, and the community—around the HSBP so that the entire community can help individual students with their plan. To support deeper engagement and promote family involvement in the process, schools must engage with families regarding the High School and Beyond Plan at the same time students are working on their plan.

The HSBP is not meant to limit students' options for their future—and should not be a tool used to track students. Rather, it should be used to help students ensure they are learning the skills necessary to reach their post-high school goals. In a MBL diploma framework, the HSBP becomes even more important—because in a personalized learning environment that is responsive to individual student interests, needs, and cultural backgrounds—the individual student's short and long term goals are what should guide their learning experiences. In short, the HSBP is the map to get a student from where they are academically to where they want to be, both academically and in life.

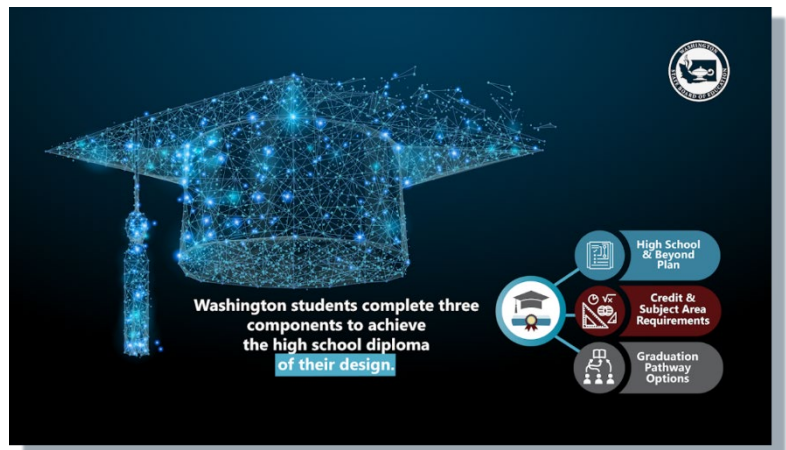
When the HSBP is used to guide student learning and early career exploration, based on the individual student's interests, it would also be appropriate to extend the HSBP process into upper elementary school. Although most elementary students will not know what path they will ultimately decide to pursue after high school, elementary students are inherently interested in what they might want to be when they grow up. The Work Group recommends encouraging children to explore careers and discuss their goals, allowing students to practice articulating how their individual interests relates to their education.

RECOMMENDATION 2C. MAKE THE HSBP MORE MEANINGFUL AND USEFUL FOR STUDENTS

The Work Group recommends recognizing the value of the HSBP through awarding credit (in the traditional credit framework) or meeting a content area requirement (in the MBL diploma framework). One possible way to support this recommendation would be through the development of a state model HSBP curriculum to align with relevant state learning standards, but that could be adapted to fit local needs. Districts across the state use multiple platforms for their HSBP process. Beginning in the 2020-21 school year, districts are required to offer an online platform to support the HSBP. While districts should be free to use whichever platform works best for their unique process, the Work Group recommends that the key components of the HSBP be identified that must exist on all platforms, to ensure high-quality implementation throughout the state. At a minimum, districts should offer one of the platforms from the list approved by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), as those platforms meet the requirements for functionality articulated in E2SHB 1599 Section 504 (Laws of 2019) for an online HSBP platform.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF MASTERY-BASED PATHWAYS TO THE EARNING OF A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

In Washington, our high school diploma represents completion of three broad sets of requirements that together are intended to represent that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner (RCW 28A.230.090): the subject area (credit) requirements, the High School and Beyond Plan, and the graduation pathway options.



The Work Group reviewed mastery-based diploma framework models from other states across the country. A summary of some of the models reviewed is available in [Appendix 3](#). The Work Group’s recommendations around a state level policy framework for a MBL diploma are based on what was learned about how mastery education is being approached in these other states, and how those components could be adapted to fit Washington’s unique context.

I chose Discovery after touring it—there was a difference in school structure and a difference in approach. I didn’t struggle academically, but I struggled keeping a purpose to my work. This school has really helped me feel a purpose.

-Washington Student



Washington has made an intentional policy choice to only have one high school diploma for all of its students, though the diploma requirements are flexible enough to be customized based on the individual student’s interests and goals. The Work Group does not want the mastery-based route to the earning of a high school diploma to be viewed as a separate, or less rigorous, diploma.¹⁹ In fact, the Work Group would argue that mastery-based learning may be more “rigorous” because it supports deeper

learning and a more explicit demonstration of the learning standards than “traditional” seat-time and assessment models. In MBL, students are supported through authentic relationships with educators to experience rigorous and personally relevant coursework.²⁰ Whether students earn a diploma through meeting the current credit graduation requirements framework or

¹⁹ See [Appendix 1](#) for more detail regarding the varying uses of the term “pathway” in this report

²⁰ McNulty, R. J., & Quaglia, R. J. (2007). Rigor, relevance and relationships. *School Administrator*, 64(8), 18. http://bb.plsweb.com/RRROL/m1/Rigor_Relevance_and_Relationships.pdf

through the MBL framework, the student will meet the same learning standards. In essence, the vision would be a system where students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do. Some schools may continue to use credits as the metric to signify that a

Whether students earn a diploma through meeting the current credit graduation requirements framework or through the MBL framework, the student will meet the same learning standards.

In essence, the vision would be a system where students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do.



student has met the standards while schools using the mastery-based learning framework would use other measures to show that a student has mastered the standards.

A key advantage of the mastery-based learning framework is that it is more conducive to a number of effective teaching and learning strategies including interdisciplinary coursework and experience, project-based and experiential learning, and work-based learning. All of these are environments where students would be learning and applying their knowledge in ways that connect to the learning standards in multiple subject areas and disciplines. The Work Group

heard a number of examples of the power of these types of experiences at the student panel held at their [November 2019 meeting](#). Several student quotes regarding their experience at MBL schools have been included in sidebars throughout the report.

It is often difficult for students to find relevance in single discipline courses because life is interdisciplinary, and research supports that interdisciplinary courses can enable deeper learning. In the MBL diploma pathway, students would demonstrate mastery of the learning standards in multiple subject areas, typically through a interdisciplinary approach that may include classroom experiences, project- or work-based learning, or other authentic and personally relevant learning opportunities. Therefore, the Work Group believes students, and particularly students of color, will be better served in a MBL diploma framework that encourages the interdisciplinary approach to mastery of state learning standards.

When educators teach in a culturally responsive manner, all students benefit: “as a result of continuing demographic change toward a majority multilingual

Student Project Spotlight:

Chelan School of Innovation One student set up a cook stove and counter top, and cooked a gourmet breakfast for panelists while simultaneously presenting the culmination of his Learning Plan during his Exhibition. He chose this creative format because he wished to pursue a career in Culinary Arts. Another example of a creative Exhibition was when a student entered the room wearing a backpack and clad in wilderness survival attire. He proceeded to unpack his pack and explain each component of his gear, along with his rationale for choosing each item. He was inspired by Dick Proenneke’s book and film “Alone in the Wilderness.” The examples of student creativity are endless.



society of color, fostering linguistic and cultural flexibility has an instrumental purpose for both students of color and White students: multilingualism and multiculturalism are increasingly linked to access and power in U.S. and global contexts.”²¹ An example of culturally responsive, mastery-based learning is the learning that happens when Salish students participate in a canoe journey. Students learn math and science skills as they design the canoe (culturally relevant and aligns with learning standards), history and storytelling (English Language Arts) during the journey, as well as teaching teamwork and other “21st century skills,” and teaching nutrition based on what you can retrieve from the sea. This interdisciplinary approach contextualizes the

In the MBL diploma pathway, students would demonstrate mastery of the learning standards in multiple subject areas, typically through a interdisciplinary approach that may include classroom experiences, project- or work-based learning, or other authentic and personally relevant learning opportunities.



learning students do outside of the school building while also honoring the importance of students’ culture: “many Indigenous students have responsibilities to their communities and territories (including human and non-human ancestors and future generations), so their learning and lives are often embedded in these responsibilities.”²²

This change to interdisciplinary, contextualized learning should breakdown rather than reinforce the silos in our education system (e.g. the silos of science educators from math educators). Likewise, our larger education system is siloed—and mastery-based learning aligns well with the goals of the [Work-Integrated Learning Advisory Committee](#). The MBL

Work Group believes the recommendations that come out of the Work-Integrated Learning Advisory Committee will further the purpose of recognizing the mastery of learning standards students achieve outside of the school building.

RECOMMENDATION 3A. DEVELOP A PROFILE OF A GRADUATE

To help families, communities, and schools embrace the purpose of a high school diploma, the Work Group recommends the development of a state “Profile of a Graduate.” Many states and school districts throughout the country have developed a Profile of a Graduate that includes cross-curricular skills a student should have developed by the time they complete high school: such as being creative, empathetic, self-directed, collaborative, and a global citizen. One such example at a state level is South Carolina, which created interdisciplinary competencies for their Profile of a Graduate.²³

²¹ Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 87.

²² Spang, M., & Bang, M. (2014, November). Implementing Meaningful STEM Education with Indigenous Students & Families. Retrieved August 21, 2020, from <http://stemteachingtools.org/brief/11>

²³ See more about South Carolina in [Appendix 3](#).

Currently in Washington, the diploma is defined as a declaration “that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner” ([RCW 28A.230.090\(1\)](#)). A Profile of a Graduate could help bring to life the state’s guiding premise for K-12 education: “to provide students with the opportunity to become responsible and respectful global citizens, to contribute to their economic well-being and that of their families and communities, to explore and understand different perspectives, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives,” as well as the four specific goals detailing academic skills students should accomplish by the time they graduate ([RCW 28A.150.210](#)).

A Profile of a Graduate is a richer depiction of the 21st century skills all students should acquire by the time they reach high school graduation. It is a promise to students, and to the community, that—regardless of grades achieved or the particular pathway completed—students will develop the self-agency and critical thinking skills across a variety of disciplines that will help them problem-solve and succeed after high school. The Work Group’s desire is that this Profile will guide policy around high school graduation requirements—it would signify the expansion of Washington’s concept of a high school diploma from one based on just academic content to one based on a holistic view of the student. The Profile would be the bridge between the two routes to a diploma (credit-based and mastery-based)—it would convey that every student is meeting the same standards.

A Profile of a Graduate could also create more cohesion in our system by actively seeking to include families and communities in the development of a vision for our education system that

The transition to a Mastery-Based Learning (MBL) model requires a sustained effort over time to ensure state and local policies support implementation and schools and districts have access to resources to support their learning as they transform their systems.



builds upon the goals the Legislature has already set, to create buy-in from all Washingtonians regarding the purpose of our education system. The MBL Work Group commits to seeking out family and community feedback throughout the development of the Profile of a Graduate, with the aim of creating a system that is more responsive to family and community needs.

RECOMMENDATION 3B. DEVELOP SUPPORTS FOR MASTERY-BASED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

The transition to a Mastery-Based Learning (MBL) model requires a sustained effort over time to ensure state and local policies support implementation and schools and districts have access to resources to support their learning as they transform their systems. Developing a clear policy framework and support structure to implement MBL is essential.

STATE AND REGIONAL SUPPORT STRUCTURE

To that end, the State Board of Education (SBE) should be tasked with providing statewide coordination through capacity-building support and technical assistance, including communications and advocacy around the shared goals of MBL. SBE could serve in a general advisory role as a resource to the state during MBL implementation and will also work with districts and schools as they begin implementing MBL.

Additionally, without a proper regional support structure in place, school districts may not feel equipped to begin the transition to a MBL system. This recommendation around a need for a regional support structure is based on: a.) hearing about the conditions needed for success in implementing MBL from the schools who have received the waiver of credit-based graduation requirements (see details in the [next section](#)) and, b.) the New York City Mastery Collaborative model (see more in [Appendix 3.](#)) The Work Group members heard from the Mastery Collaborative at their [April 2020](#) meeting.

One possible strategy for creating a regional support structure could be leaning on the Educational Service Districts (ESDs) or alternatively non-governmental partner organizations. The partner organizations could focus on implementing, sharing, and refining best practices for improving student learning outcomes by acting at the system and organization levels. They could also provide professional development and a space to meet regularly to discuss schools' shared learning.

CONTINUING THE MBL WORK GROUP

As districts begin implementing the state policy framework for a mastery-based diploma, the MBL Work Group recommends that its statutory authority be extended. The Work Group believes that there is value in maintaining continuity of members on the Work Group, who have devoted a significant amount of time and energy over the past year and half in understanding the policy issues around mastery-based learning. The Work Group should be extended with the primary charge of developing the state Profile of a Graduate as discussed in the [previous recommendation](#):

1. Recommend the Washington State Profile of a Graduate by December 10, 2021.

Advice to the state from a local school about how to support MBL capacity

Support for this work could include collaboration with a lead at the state level who also coordinates a work group as well as collaboration for best practices in mastery-based learning. Highlighting schools that are doing this well, could be beneficial as well. How might we think about MBL not as an either/or, as in not as either traditional learning or Mastery Based Learning? Aligning mastery WITH the concept of traditional credits might be a helpful way to think about and offer MBL when shifting a system. This would allow for greater accessibility and respond to the fluidity students may experience with changing schools or learning environments. It also is a way for stakeholders, grounded in a century-old system to better make sense.

As our state studies MBL and how to support and foster high quality MBL, being intentional about ways to do that should include recommended professional learning - not only for the teachers but for those in leadership positions at the district level.

- Henderson Bay High School
Peninsula School District



- a. The MBL Work Group would develop and report on the Washington State Profile of a Graduate to the Legislature and State Board of Education by December 10, 2021.
 - b. Based on the newly developed Profile of a Graduate and the framework for the MBL diploma, the Work Group would recommend that SBE then reexamine the components of the high school diploma by 1.) reevaluating what should be included in the core subject area requirements, and 2.) exploring the relationship between credits and core subject area requirements. The Profile of a Graduate should serve as a guidepost to ensure that the state's subject area and other graduation requirements are seamlessly aligned with and equip students for success in post-secondary pathways. It is imperative that this review of the state graduation requirements engage students, parents and communities, particularly communities of color, and result in the system becoming more culturally responsive.
 - c. The workgroup would also recommend other supports needed for successful implementation which may include recommendations around issues such as transcripts (see [Rec. 3C](#)), educator training (see [Rec. 1C](#)), and professional development (see [Rec. 1C](#) and [2B](#)).
2. To make any policy changes as necessary, based on the recommendations of a practitioner group.
 - a. The Work Group believes a practitioner group should be convened to discuss and develop model frameworks and resources for districts beginning the transformation to mastery-based learning. The practitioner group could help develop shared rubrics, common performance assessments, etc. Additionally, the practitioner group could become the state's teacher leaders in MBL, and could facilitate the sharing of best practices long-term (similar to the [Fellows' Network](#), but on an ongoing basis).

A final report would be provided to the Legislature, based on 1.) any proposed policy changes made to the MBL Work Group by the practitioner group, and 2.) an update on how implementation of MBL in the state is going, by December 10, 2021.

RECOMMENDATION 3C. ENGAGE HIGHER EDUCATION

If higher education institutions are not given adequate information via a student's high school transcript to understand how students are meeting all the subject area requirements and learning standards, this could negatively impact the student.

During Washington's transition to an education system that supports mastery-based learning opportunities, through both mastery-based crediting and pathways to a mastery-based diploma, students should still have access to traditional high school transcripts until higher education institutions better understand MBL. However, Work Group members strongly support the use of

a MBL transcript that more authentically demonstrates student learning, such as the transcript developed by the [Mastery Transcript Consortium](#). One recent study demonstrates that even higher education institutions that receive a large number of applicants can benefit from a holistic review of admissions applications that include evidence of student work is the City University of New York (CUNY)'s pilot with students from the New York Performance Standards Consortium.²⁴ The pilot required students to submit their application in an earlier timeline that would otherwise apply, presumably to allow admissions staff more time to review these more comprehensive applications.

Work Group members have begun meeting with Washington State higher education institutions to share with them the goals for MBL and will continue to do so to build understanding and smooth the transition. As this work moves forward, a more explicit role for higher education to engage in this work may be helpful to ensure students who take advantage of these programs are not placed at a disadvantage in the admission process. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) is willing to engage with and solicit perspectives from higher education leaders to inform issues around a MBL transcript. WSAC is well positioned to do this work given their role in setting admission requirements and ongoing convening of higher education stakeholders. WSAC could provide an update on this work in a timeline aligning with the MBL Work Group's December 2021 report around the Profile of a Graduate and update on MBL implementation (assuming the MBL Work Group is extended). Additionally, in the next phase of work, a representative appointed by Washington Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (WACTE) should be added to the MBL Work Group to ensure the teacher preparation program voice is included as the state moves toward MBL.

A pathway to a MBL diploma would have different characteristics than a credit-based route to a diploma, as a MBL diploma is designed around the individual student's interests through their engagement in personally relevant, contextualized learning experiences, such as project- or work-based learning, interdisciplinary coursework, and extra-curricular experiences.



RECOMMENDATION 3D. CREATE A STATE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR A MBL PATHWAY TO A DIPLOMA

Washington's state policy framework for a MBL diploma is not creating a separate high school diploma. Rather students who embark on the MBL pathway to earning their diploma would have different opportunities for demonstrating what they know and can do—but would still be meeting the same learning standards as students in the credit-based framework. A pathway to a

²⁴ Fine, M., & Pryiomka, K. (2020). Assessing College Readiness Through Authentic Student Work: How the City University of New York and the New York Performance Standards Consortium Are Collaborating toward Equity. *Learning Policy Institute*. Retrieved from https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/RCA_CUNY_Assessing_College_Readiness_REPORT.pdf

MBL diploma would have different characteristics than a credit-based route to a diploma, as a MBL diploma is designed around the individual student's interests through their engagement in personally relevant, contextualized learning experiences, such as project- or work-based learning, interdisciplinary coursework, and extra-curricular experiences.

The intent is to create a state policy framework to support and facilitate these types of learning experiences for students. However, it is beyond the scope of this Work Group to write rules to implement a state policy framework for a MBL diploma. Because of the State Board of Education (SBE) role in providing staff expertise to the Work Group, it is recommended that the SBE be given rulemaking authority to implement any legislation passed regarding mastery-based learning.

Beyond the state policy barriers to implementing a MBL pathway to a diploma addressed in this report, there are also practical implementation concerns that cannot be solved at a state level by policymakers. That is why the Work Group is recommending engaging a group of practitioners ([Rec. 3B](#)) to develop the essential tools (performance assessments, rubrics, etc.) to implement MBL at a building level. The practitioner group could also inform the MBL Work Group about any potential barriers that are not easily anticipated from a state level perspective.

While the MBL Work Group members would be overjoyed to see an entire school district make the shift to a mastery-based learning approach in every school, the expectation is that most school districts would choose to start implementation of MBL in a single school as a first step. Philosophically, the Work Group's intent is that school districts who want to begin implementation of a MBL pathway to a diploma for their students should not need to ask for permission to do so from the state. However, the Work Group has also heard in many contexts and conversations with practitioners in this work how important it is to be able to collaborate across schools and districts with colleagues also engaging in MBL efforts. Several schools currently implementing some form of mastery-based learning shared that their first step toward implementation was speaking with a school that had already begun the journey toward MBL. A state entity could help facilitate this collaboration and ease the burden on individual schools interested in this work.

Therefore, a notification process should be developed by the State Board of Education (SBE) for districts who are beginning the process of implementing a MBL pathway to a diploma. This would enable the SBE to be aware of the various MBL efforts across the state, so that SBE can then provide statewide coordination of these efforts through capacity-building support and facilitation of the sharing of MBL best practices (see additional details in [Rec. 3B](#)).

4. RESULTS OF THE COMPETENCY-BASED PATHWAYS PREVIOUSLY APPROVED BY SBE AS A LEARNING RESOURCE

The State Board of Education has the authority to grant waivers from the credit unit graduation requirements of [WAC 180-51](#). The waiver program was designed to encourage local innovation and to enable districts to more easily provide a performance-based educational experience (rather than an education experience linked to time).

The Work Group's intent is for the mastery-based pathway described above to eliminate the need for the waiver program. Rather than placing the burden on schools to have to completely develop their own MBL approaches and ask for permission from the state (as is currently happening via this waiver program), a state policy framework for a MBL diploma will signal the Legislature's desire to encourage MBL by allowing schools to opt in without the additional administrative hurdle of a waiver process. Therefore, the SBE should repeal WAC 180-18-055 in order to remove the waiver program from law. If the Washington Legislature acts on the recommendations of the MBL Work Group during the 2021 legislative session, then it is recommended that SBE phase out the need for the waiver in a timeline to align with the adoption of rule for the MBL pathway to a diploma notification process. It was with deep appreciation for the schools who have operated under the SBE waiver of credit-based graduation requirements that the Work Group makes this recommendation. These schools have been leading the way in competency-based education²⁵ for the rest of the state and based on the mastery-based pathway described above, Washington is ready to expand MBL for the rest of schools in the state.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE SCHOOLS USING THE WAIVER OF CREDIT-BASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS?

Currently, 15 schools in our state are operating under the [waiver program](#). The schools that have received the waiver of credit-based graduation requirements must report on their progress meeting the goals of the program annually ([WAC 180-18-055](#)).

The following themes were found in the annual update report results from the schools with waiver of credit-based graduation requirements ([Appendix 4](#) includes a longer summary of results). Note, most schools currently operating with the waiver are implementing the Big Picture Learning model.

- 1. An advisory structure that fosters relationships between students and an advisor that they stay with their entire high school career facilitates a sense of belonging.**
 - a. Students stay in their small advisory cohort their entire high school career, and many students reflect that their advisory is a second family.

²⁵ The use of the term "competency-based education" is intentional here, as this is the preferred term of the schools who use the waiver of credit-based graduation requirements.

2. Use the High School and Beyond Plan, along with the Big Picture Learning Plan, as a guide for each individual student's learning journey.

- a. Individual students meet with their advisor frequently to update their Learning Plan, as well as revise the Learning Plan at the end of each learning cycle. Students' families are involved in supporting the development of students' learning plans and also in assessment of student progress toward competencies through their participation as panelists in student exhibitions.
- b. For example, the annual update from Federal Way Public Schools stated the following: "As we are guided to personalize learning based upon scholars' passions and interests, the High School and Beyond Plan supports our co-construction of Personalized Learning Plans including the work of establishing internships. The career interest survey completed by our scholars supports the identification of possible businesses or organizations that scholars can contact for informational interviews and job shadow opportunities pre-internship. Using both the HSBP and the pre-internship activities, scholars are provided with opportunity to discover potential interests to pursue further. Scholars collaborate with their advisors to set learning and post-secondary goals as a component of their Personalized Learning Plan which aligns with their work on the HSBP and engage in discussion as a result to support the college research and application process."

3. Facilitate student ownership over their own learning process.

- a. Students design and implement numerous projects aligned with their interests each year, often co-creating assessment rubrics with input from outside experts. All students present their learning in formal exhibitions multiple times each year. Exhibitions are driven by the individual student learning plans and assessed collaboratively by a panel including the advisor, other staff, peers, family members, and internship and project mentors. Students also maintain portfolios to document their project work as well as progress meeting various competencies.

4. Importance of resources to support educator collaboration, a regional support structure, and professional development:

- a. The annual update from the Methow Valley School District stated the following: "The work we do with mastery-based learning is so unique and in many ways so different from traditional school that it is absolutely critical we have access to a support network. Initially, when we started to transition to MBL, we leaned on our Big Picture Learning regional coach for support. Over the past few years, a regional network of educators has grown and developed practices around supporting one another's work and growth. Access to this network is critical to our work. Being a part of a network provides us with thought partners who can push our thinking, support our practices, share resources, and reinforce our attempts to continually revisit how we implement mastery-based learning. Serving the students we work with in a holistic manner requires not only teachers, administrators, and support staff but it also requires adequate time for professional development and collaboration. As a staff, in order to best serve individuals and families, we require time to collaborate, share, reflect, and

problem solve. The work can be exhausting and personally taxing when attempted without the support of a highly functioning team. Allowing for time for staff to work as one as well as collaborate with regional partners on a regular basis is crucial to our success, and therefore crucial to the success of our students. We're in a unique position in the Methow Valley because of significant financial support in the form of local support grants that have made much of our unique programming possible. Because of the small size and rural setting of our school, we would not be able to offer the program we do without the support of local support grants. These grants were available to support significant professional development that we needed to transition to mastery-based learning. This funding also supported the development of a mentorship coordinator/school based social worker position which has facilitated the development of our internship program. We've accessed additional funding to launch a new automotive technology program at our school created because of high demand and a lack of adequate access for internships in that field. We recognize the foundational importance of this funding. A similarly sized school in a similarly situated geographic area may not be able to transition as successfully without a different funding mechanism available through state funding."

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM OTHER WASHINGTON SCHOOLS DOING SOME FORM OF MBL?

Several schools in our state already embody some of the characteristics of the MBL Work Group's vision for mastery-based learning in our state. Delta High School in Pasco and Avanti High School in Olympia are both small choice schools that students opt into based on interest in a different educational experience than is provided at the student's local comprehensive high school. Because of each school's intentional development of a relationship-based community-centered culture, and likely also as a result of their small student population, they have been able to implement robust advisory programs for their students. Although the characteristics of the advisory programs vary between the two schools, shared practices include that the advisories meet regularly to offer academic and social/emotional support for students, as well as offer a safe place to bond with other students and build community.

The following summary of the two schools' approach to a [personalized learning](#) environment (including several key aspects of mastery-based learning) was written as a result of conversations with the schools (reviewed by each school for accuracy).

DELTA HIGH SCHOOL (PASCO)

[Delta High School](#) is a small, STEM-focused (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) school that serves students from across the Tri-Cities. Delta uses standards-referenced grading because as a Delta educator shared "when you do a project in the workplace, it is not one and done. You get feedback from your colleagues, you revise, it is an iterative process." Students receive multiple attempts at each standard, and every standard must be assessed at least three times. Each subject-area department structures the standards-referenced grading procedures a little differently based on the content are. For instance, in English Language Arts the expectation is

the student's grade will be lower on the first attempts because they are just starting to learn that standard; therefore, the student's final grade for a standard is the top score of their three attempts. In the math department, the student's final score is an average of the student's last two attempts at the standard. However in every academic course in each term there is at least one project, based on [Buck Institute's Gold Standard for Project-based Learning](#). Students at Delta are able to exercise voice and choice in designing their project each term. Further information about Delta's standards-referenced grading system can be found in the [Student Handbook](#).

Delta High School employs both a Community Engagement Manager and a .75 FTE Work-based Learning Coordinator who provide the dedicated staff time necessary to support the school's robust career preparation curriculum all students receive and facilitate the [internship](#) program. Delta provides a continuum of career connected learning (CCL) opportunities for students as they move from grade 9-12 in the school's STEM-focused program. Delta works to align students' High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) with a personalized pathway required for high school graduation. Students get a variety of CCL experiences including interaction with career guest speakers, industry tours, job shadows, resume reviews, mock interviews, internship fairs, and more. Delta also hosts a variety of on and off-site events throughout the year, based on student interest identified in their HSBP and market trends.

"Each year we offer multiple career exploration events for all grades. Typically, 9th & 10th grade attend career exploration events in October and March such as Health Science Day, Nuke Tech Day, and STEMCon. At these events, I bring in industry professionals to lead hands-on workshops which give students a glimpse into real-world STEM careers in action. Juniors and seniors attend college and trade tours across the state based on personal interests and pathways," said Community Engagement Manager for Delta High School, Heather Hoppe.

Examples of CCL experiences at Delta can mean students who are interested in the medical field might take a college tour at University of Washington to learn about their pre-med program, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences in Yakima, or the nursing program at our local community college. Students also experience industry tours based on their personal interests; in 2019 students interested in justice and law toured the Benton County Justice Center which included a tour of the Court System, Sheriff's Office, and Coroner Facility. Students in their junior year will participate in two, 2-hour long job shadow experiences again based on their interests. For

It's such a valuable experience to get a first-hand chance to see careers in action while you're still in high school however what might be even more of an asset is to be able to experience these careers and industries before you are fully committing, both with your time and financially, through college or the workforce, and prior to high school graduation. After four years at Delta High School, students will have a completed a HSBP plan, a set path for after graduation, and they will have been given the opportunity to participate in numerous career connected learning experiences first-hand.

– Heather Hoppe, Delta High School Community Engagement Manager



several years now, students with computer science or engineering interests have partnered with employees at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory/Battelle for their job shadows.

All these CCL experiences are helping students to prepare for their 12th grade year and beyond as well as the possibility of participating in an internship for high school credit during their senior year. While an internship is not a requirement for all seniors, there is a school-wide goal that 80% of all seniors participate in an internship for at least one trimester of their senior year.

Delta believes in the importance of developing students' professional networks and social capital while they are in a low-risk environment (when they are not paying for college courses

etc.) Unlike most schools that have internship programs, Delta does not have any eligibility requirements around GPA threshold for students to participate in the program. One Delta alumnus changed his post-high school plans as a result of participating in an internship where he had a chance to explore his career interests. Before beginning the internship, he had a 1.8 GPA and hated the traditional classroom experience but thrived in hands-on learning activities. His internship was at Energy Northwest, where he worked in their maintenance department. Because of the internship, he realized he needed more education and training to attain his career goals, so he enrolled in the local community college. He is now working in the automotive repair industry.

This is one example of many where Delta has seen their students engage in more meaningful, relevant learning as a result of their participation in work-based learning opportunities. Through these opportunities, students apply their knowledge from academic courses in a hands-on way while developing transferable skills that will serve them throughout the rest of their careers.





AVANTI HIGH SCHOOL (OLYMPIA)

[Avanti High School](#)'s individualized learning plan approach allows students to learn at their own pace. Classes consist of mixed age and grade levels and students are not held to finishing course content within a defined term. Students who demonstrate mastery before the academic term is complete, may receive credit and begin a new course. Likewise, if a student has not demonstrated mastery of the content on a specific course by the end of the academic term, they have the option of extending that learning plan until they reach

mastery, indicated by a letter grade of B or above, as well as self-evaluations and learning reflections completed by the student. Students do not receive Cs, Ds, or Fs at Avanti. Rather, they continue to learn content until they reach mastery, which translates into academic credit.

In response to the coronavirus school building closures in Spring 2020, the staff at Avanti met regularly throughout the summer to design a new structure of learning that centers around teachers team-teaching in a cohort model. This restructuring was spurred by Avanti's desire to adapt to fit the changing needs of students and teachers under the current challenges all of education is facing right now, but Avanti staff anticipate that the pilot will strengthen the educational experience at Avanti well into the future.

Avanti teachers Quasar Surprise (Science), Scott Hendrix (Social Studies), and Cecily Schmidt (Art) are planning to offer students a unique learning experience that integrates all three subjects into a learning cohort. Students that choose to participate in this innovative pilot will explore their interest areas by doing deep dives into complex real-world issues from an interdisciplinary lens. Students will engage in a learning module aligned with the standards for each subject and will also promote important 21st century skills such as critical thinking, making connections, effective communication, deep reflection, and creativity while earning credits in Art or English (.5), Social Studies (.5), and Science (.5) respectively.

I think the most important piece for me is that it takes a lot of work to set it up at first, but I find the pay off to be totally worth it. The work is really in front-loading the structure of the class, but once the students start to take more ownership of their learning, a lot of the work of a teacher in a more traditional classroom gets transferred to the students. When students monitor their own learning, the teacher's role becomes more of a coach or facilitator, and a lot of the busy work of grading and record keeping becomes more manageable and more meaningful to both students and teachers.

-Cecily Schmidt,
NBCT-Visual Art
Avanti High School



5. EXPANSION OF MASTERY-BASED CREDITS TO MEET GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Mastery-based (or competency-based) crediting is an option for students to earn high school credit for demonstration of learning on assessments that are clearly aligned to learning standards. The assessments may be state or national standardized tests or may be district-specified assessments. Such assessments do not need to be standardized tests and may include other forms of assessment such as a portfolio of student work or a hands-on demonstration of skills and knowledge.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION DEVELOPED NEW RULE ON MASTERY CREDITING

Due to the coronavirus and related school building closures and ongoing disruptions of our educational system, the Work Group felt it was important to accelerate expansion of mastery-based crediting policies where possible. To that end, the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) released [model policies in six additional subject areas](#) in April 2020. Additionally, the Work Group encouraged SBE to move forward with rulemaking to encourage mastery-based crediting policies that could be helpful to school districts immediately.

Accordingly, SBE adopted a new section of rule ([WAC 180-51-051](#)) in September 2020 to detail the process for granting students mastery-based (MB) credit. Through this new rule, the Board intends to support districts in offering MB crediting opportunities more widely. Based on the rule, districts still need to adopt a written policy to award MB credit. These new rules articulate several things that a district's policy for awarding MB credit should include:

- Which courses are eligible for MB credit.
- Any other methods beyond what is in the new rule regarding how students can demonstrate mastery of the state learning standards and earn credit.
- A provision that outlines how the district will ensure cultural responsiveness and equity in awarding of MB credit. The district is required to review disaggregated student data to see which subgroups of students are receiving MB credit. If the district finds disproportionality among student groups, the district must take appropriate action to ensure equitable access to MB credit opportunities.

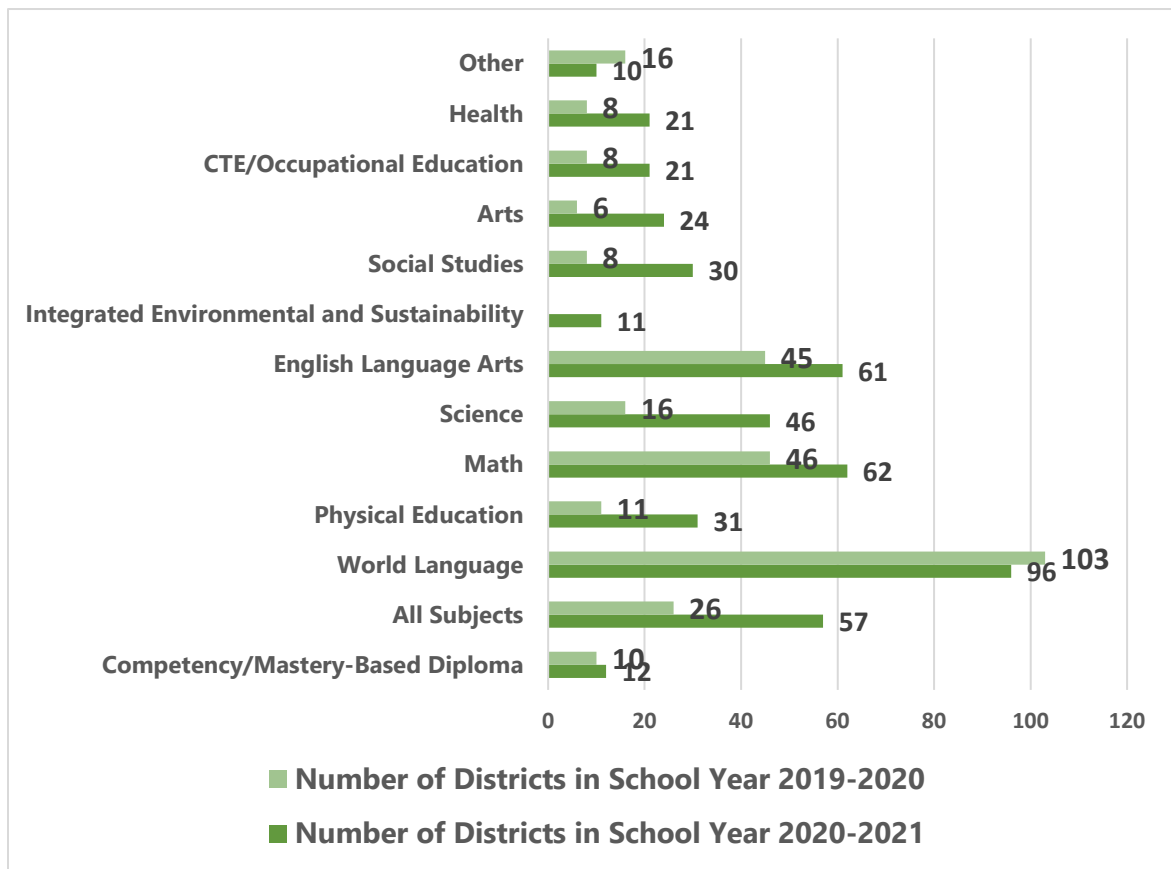
The rules also outline broad categories for student demonstration of proficiency that districts could consider making available to their students. However, the rules do not prevent districts from creating additional categories or methods for allowing students to demonstrate proficiency. The rules specifically enumerate:

- State summative assessments in English Language Arts, math, and science.
- Several different possible local assessment methods that districts could consider making available: such as a student-designed portfolio, written report, student presentation, hands-on demonstration of knowledge and skills, or a combination of assessment methods as created by the district.

- Ideally, to provide students ownership over their own learning, students would be allowed to choose (from their district created alternatives) how they want to demonstrate their proficiency.
- Equivalency course of study for learning experiences outside of school that align to state learning standards.
- If a student successfully completes the next higher-level course in a sequence that includes a natural progression of the state learning standards from the previous course, then a district could award MB credit for the course in which the student had previously been unsuccessful.

Now that the rules have been adopted, WSSDA plans to update their model policies around mastery credit accordingly, to ease the process for districts in implementing these rules (chart below).

It appears that efforts to increase the availability of mastery-based crediting (MBC) opportunities are having the desired effect. Preliminary data from SBE’s annual basic education reporting process indicates an increase in both the number of districts offering MBC and the number of subjects in which districts offer mastery-based crediting opportunities.



Analysis of Mastery-Based Learning data showing significant growth in districts across the state year-over-year. This is based on preliminary data from Basic Education Compliance and Reporting as of November 24, 2020.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EXAMPLES OF MASTERY CREDITING

Research shows that “students learn best when they can connect their cultural contexts and experiences to what they are learning in school.”²⁶ In Washington State, there are already a few schools who are engaged in an effort to award mastery-based credits for the learning that happens through a student’s cultural experiences. For instance, the EOGOAC 2020 Annual Report offers an example of culturally responsive, mastery-based crediting opportunities available in a Washington state-tribal education compact school: “The Lummi Nation School has focused on offering culturally responsive, mastery-based course offerings, including a focus on the tribe’s traditional relationship with the ocean, weaving this knowledge into the marine sciences, environmental ocean monitoring and boat building.”²⁷

Enumclaw School District is another example of a school district that has engaged in intentional efforts to recognize the value of Indigenous/Native cultural, community-based learning experiences. “Responding to a need for culturally responsive and place-based educational frameworks,” Enumclaw is piloting an approach to assess mastery of state learning standards through collaboration with community and traditional practitioners.²⁸

The district wanted to better serve their students from systemically marginalized communities through a holistic approach that appreciates and honors the assets and knowledge students already have obtained outside of the school building. Sui-Lan Ho’okano, Enumclaw’s District Cultural Support Program Manager, partnered with community partners to develop a [sample model](#) for how to provide up to 12²⁹ credits through Indigenous pedagogical courses: for instance providing an English Language Arts credit through an Oratory Narrative and Written Applicable Skills course or a Mathematics credit through an Indigenous mapping course.

According to Sui-Lan, Indigenous pedagogies connect learning to a specific place, with knowledge situated in relationship to a particular location, experiences, and people. For Indigenous students this means being provided opportunities to learn alongside their environment. These learning spaces may be sacred to specific communities, not to be housed in an educational institution like a school building: therefore, the responsibility for a student’s learning is held by community elders and cultural practitioners. Districts providing students with opportunities to learn with community elders and practitioners provide a culturally responsive education partnership and offer a rich context for learning, and aim to support all students and communities who have been historically marginalized.

²⁶ 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, page 47

²⁷ 2020 Annual Report of the EOGOAC, page 6

²⁸ Ho’okano, S. (2019). Cultural Credit - Value Proposal. Retrieved October 08, 2020, from <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cBSW3o81QR2VaEB1e8YqvWdVVKLU2k0lhRH5J9IOG3WA/edit>, page 2

²⁹ Although the policy allows for up to 12 credits, the most awarded to-date for a student has been 4.5 credits.

One such story is about an Enumclaw student, Adam Miller, who would spend time each season learning from elders and cultural practitioners while on canoe journeys and in the local environments. Adam would thrive in this environment, because of the understanding of the interrelationships that co-exist between community, responsibility, self and the learning environment. Unfortunately, Adam's experience in the institutional education setting did not nourish his self-esteem, identity, or match his interests. The policy that Enumclaw School District adopted allowed Adam to utilize these cultural teachings and experiences for graduation requirements, aligning the cultural learning to core learning standards. Adam's natural gifts and sense of responsibility were cultivated by community elders and cultural practitioners, as well as the environment. This strengthened Adam's learning spirit and confidence. Adam became "community ready," just as, if not more important than "college and career ready." The policy places the focus on the gifts and learning of the individual student, in order to cultivate strong outcomes, belonging, complete well-being, and community responsibility. Because Enumclaw School District acknowledges these important partnerships with the Local Tribal Community (Muckleshoot), Adam was able to graduate on time, and is the youngest person hired right out of high school by an environmental agency. Adam now works full-time to serve the community through environmental restoration.



Adam's story showcases the vital importance of creating collective community-based learning environments, strengthening relationships across the broader educational system, and focusing on what shared conditions are needed for our students and community to sustain and thrive.

Conclusion

The Mastery-based Learning (MBL) Work Group has examined opportunities to increase student access to relevant and robust mastery-based academic pathways aligned to personal career goals and postsecondary education, and reviewed the role of the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) in supporting mastery-based learning. Mastery-based models in other states as well as from schools within Washington informed the Work Group's recommendations.

The MBL Work Group's recommendations recognize the barriers that exist in state and local policy and provide a framework for mastery-based learning implementation through both a state and regional support structure. As Washington moves toward a mastery-based education system, the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) has a critical role to play. The HSBP is the map

to guide a student from where they are in their learning journey to where they want to be, both academically and in life.

Some progress has been made already toward the Work Group's goals for instance, the SBE adopted a new section of rule outlining the procedure for granting students mastery-based credits to support districts in offering mastery-based crediting opportunities more widely. However, in recognition that the work is not done, the Work Group recommends its authority be extended in order to develop a Washington State Profile of a Graduate and address other implementation issues as they arise.

Washington State faces both an opportunity and a moral imperative to respond to the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and social, economic, and institutional racism that has been ignored for too long in our education system. Mastery-based learning is not the latest education trend. It is a proven strategy that has the potential to eliminate the achievement gap by providing access to equitable educational opportunities and thereby closing the opportunity gap. MBL erases the need for "gifted" or "remedial" courses—it recognizes that each student's learning happens differently for each subject while simultaneously valuing the knowledge and skills students bring with them from their diverse cultures and their learning that has occurred outside of the classroom.

Through MBL, Washington can actively decolonize our education system by ensuring the curriculum reflects multiple cultures and not just the dominant narrative, facilitating students' connections to place and community, and ensuring student ownership over their own learning experience. When each and every student can direct their own path and experience the joy of learning, then and only then will our world become a healthier, more equitable place.

Appendix 1: Definition of Terms

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

This list of definitions has been refined and added to since the group’s Interim Report, as the group progressed in its work.

ACHIEVEMENT GAP VS. OPPORTUNITY GAP

In every annual report the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) has produced, there has been a discussion on the difference between the terms “achievement gap” and “opportunity gap.” Per EOGOAC’s [2016 Annual Report](#):

“The term “opportunity gap” acknowledges there are still structural issues with institutionalized racism, disparate educational opportunities, and different treatment experienced by students of color...The opportunity gap has often been referred to as the “achievement gap.” Opportunity gaps and achievement gaps are not synonymous terms. Achievement gaps are the symptoms of a public school system that consistently provides different and unequal educational opportunities to students of color. Achievement gap language negatively focuses on the students of color and their families for being responsible for disproportionately low student achievement. It does not put the responsibility where it belongs, on the public school system to provide an equitable education to all students. In reality, it is our public school system failing our students not our students failing the system.”

The following table also is courtesy of the EOGOAC 2016 Annual Report:

Achievement Gap	Opportunity Gap
Disproportionately low student achievement is a symptom.	Public school system (e.g., structures, practices, allocation of resources) provides or denies opportunity, creating a gap.
Deficit-based	Asset-based
Puts onus on student and family being a challenge	Focuses the responsibility on the public school system to close the gap

CREDIT

According to [WAC 180-51-050](#), “high school credit” means:

(1) Grades nine through twelve or the equivalent of a four-year high school program, or as otherwise provided in RCW [28A.230.090](#)(4):

(a) Successful completion, as defined by written district policy, of courses taught to the state's learning standards. If there are no state-adopted learning standards for a subject, the local governing board, or its designee, shall determine learning standards for the successful completion of that subject; or

(b) Satisfactory demonstration by a student of proficiency/mastery, as defined by written district policy, of the state's learning standards.

According to this definition, credits are based on learning standards—the learning standards addressed in a course that is part of a four-year high school program. Through MBL, once an educator identifies the learning standards associated with a particular high school course, students do not need to complete that particular classroom-based course to earn that credit. A student who masters those learning standards through any educational experience—work-based learning, completing an individual or team project, learning inside a classroom or outside a classroom—may earn the credit upon demonstration of mastery.

CREDIT EQUIVALENCIES

Students may receive credit for recognition of learning that takes place outside of school. Typically, schools or districts will have a policy and a process for awarding such credit, and will have some form of test or assessment that allows the student to demonstrate the skills and knowledge for which they are being awarded credit.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION OR COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING

Competency-based education is a similar term to mastery-based learning. The choice of using the term mastery-based learning appears a deliberate choice of the Washington Legislature to emphasize that students advance upon *mastery* of content. In a mastery-based learning experience, teachers and students might work together to define what mastery looks like.

Work Group members and others should be aware that in some other states, the terms “competency-based education” or “competency-based learning” are defined essentially identically to how mastery-based learning is defined in Washington’s legislation. When communicating with people from other states or looking at material from other states, it is important to verify the definition of competency-based learning.

INTERDISCIPLINARY VS. MULTIDISCIPLINARY VS. TRANSDISCIPLINARY

For consistency sake, this report uses the term interdisciplinary throughout to minimize confusion that can occur with usage of closely related terms. However, the terms interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary are often used in the education field interchangeably, even

though they do have somewhat different meanings.³⁰ Although the term transdisciplinary is less commonly used, and therefore the term is not incorporated into the report, the connotation of transdisciplinary as defined below is closer to the goals of mastery-based learning.

Multidisciplinary approaches focus primarily on the disciplines. Multidisciplinary integration might remain somewhat distinct because the procedures of the disciplines are dominant. In an **interdisciplinary** approach to integration, teachers organize the curriculum around common learnings across disciplines. They chunk together the common learnings embedded in the disciplines to emphasize interdisciplinary skills and concepts. In the **transdisciplinary** approach to integration, teachers organize curriculum around student questions and concerns. Students develop life skills as they apply interdisciplinary and disciplinary skills in a real-life context.

LEARNING STANDARDS

Learning standards “identify the knowledge and skills all public school students need to know and be able to do.” (RCW [28A.655.070](#)). Washington State Learning Standards are adopted by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, with review and input by the State Board of Education, and are posted on the OSPI website.

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

Mastery-based learning is defined in [E2SHB 1599 Section 301](#) as:

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

Other organizations’ definitions of MBL vary somewhat, but the broad concepts are consistent. For example, Aurora Institute recently updated their definition³¹ to read as follows:

- a) 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.

³⁰ Definitions are courtesy of ASCD: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/103011/chapters/What-Is-Integrated-Curriculum%C2%A2.aspx>. For a table overview of the terms, see Figure 1.4 Comparing and Contrasting the Three Approaches to Integration

³¹ Levine, E., & Patrick, S. (2019). What Is Competency-Based Education? An Updated Definition. *Aurora Institute*. <https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/what-is-competency-based-education-an-updated-definition-web.pdf>

- b) Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence.
- c) Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- d) Students' progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time;
- e) Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.
- f) Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.
- g) Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

PATHWAYS—A NOTE ON THE VARYING USAGE OF THE TERM “PATHWAYS” AS IT APPEARS IN THIS REPORT:

In our state, the term “pathways” is used in a variety of contexts. While not all of the contexts in which the term appears are closely related to this work, a few are defined here that are related to high school graduation requirements:

- Development of mastery-based **pathways** to the earning of a high school diploma: In 2019, [E2SHB 1599 Section 301](#) tasked the Mastery-based Learning Work Group with creating mastery-based pathways to meet state graduation requirements.
- Graduation **Pathway** Option: In 2019, E2SHB 1599 Section 201 established eight possible [graduation pathway options](#). A student must complete at least one in order to be eligible for graduation.
- [Personalized Pathway Requirement](#) (PPR): The three credits that a student must specify in their HSBP that meet graduation requirements and help to prepare for the particular career and education goal chosen by the student. The PPRs are framed as credits in world languages and the arts that can be replaced by electives in any other subject that align with the student's interests and their High School and Beyond Plan.
- [Guided Pathways](#): The Guided Pathways Initiative aims to simplify the number of choices about course selection a community or technical college student must make, inform and support those choices, and direct students into an intentional, comprehensive program of study within one or two terms.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

As defined by the Learning Policy Institute in a recent report, a performance assessment is an approach to educational assessment that requires students to directly demonstrate what they know and are able to do through open-ended tasks such as constructing an answer, producing a project, or performing an activity. This demonstration can include generating a short written

response, writing an analytical essay, conducting a science investigation, creating a curated portfolio of work, or developing an original research paper.³²

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

The concept of personalized learning is foundational to mastery-based learning. Mastery-based learning *must* be personalized learning. But the two terms are not interchangeable. Personalized learning is a broader concept and may describe different types of learning experiences as well as be used to describe programs, educational approaches, and strategies. Personalized learning is intended to address individual student interests, needs, and cultural backgrounds. Personalized learning is the opposite of one-size-fits-all learning. For a more in-depth discussion of the convergence of mastery-based learning with personalized learning, see Table 2 in *Mean What You Say: Defining and Integrating Personalized, Blended and Competency Education*.³³

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Project-based learning is an instructional method or learning experience typically or ideally characterized by students engaging in:

- Personally meaningful projects over an extended period of time.
- Projects that address problems that are authentic and real-world.
- Active, inquiry-based, hands-on learning, often across content areas.

Project-based learning may support mastery-based learning.

PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING

Proficiency-based learning is a term similar to competency-based learning and mastery-based learning, and like these terms indicates that students advance upon demonstration of proficiency in learning objectives. There are shades of meaning in the words: competency, proficiency, and mastery. The words “competency” and “proficiency” indicate a high level of knowledge, skill or ability, but “mastery” suggests a level higher still and also better embodies the notion of an iterative learning process. The choice of using the term mastery-based learning appears a deliberate choice of the Washington Legislature to emphasize that students advance upon *mastery* of content.

³² Maier, A., Adams, J., Burns, D., Kaul, M., Saunders, M., & Thompson, C. (2020, October). *Using Performance Assessments to Support Student Learning: How District Initiatives Can Make a Difference* (Rep.). Retrieved https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/CPAC_Performance_Assessments_Student_Learning_2_REPORT.pdf

³³ Patrick, S., Kennedy, K., & Powell, A. (2013). *Mean What You Say: Defining and Integrating Personalized, Blended and Competency Education*. iNACOL. Retrieved from <https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/mean-what-you-say-1.pdf>, page 23

STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

Standards-based Education is a system of education (including instruction, assessment, grading, reporting and other aspects of a system of education) that is based on students demonstrating the explicit knowledge and skills of the standards as they progress through their education. Mastery-based learning is standards-based education, since the explicit, measurable, and transferable learning objectives that characterize mastery-based learning are based on learning standards.

STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENT

Any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a “standard” or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students.³⁴

Appendix 2: Funding Challenges with MBL and the Innovative Learning Pilot Program

Washington has a couple unique funding strategies for programming outside of the conventional classroom experience. The Alternative Learning Experiences (ALE) model allows funding for teacher-directed instructional time outside of the regular classroom, and Open Doors Youth Reengagement is a competency-based funding model targeted to older students who have disengaged.³⁵ There remains an interest for a mastery-based funding model that provides some of these flexibilities, along with the ability to integrate community and work-integrated learning for students at comprehensive high schools.

In E2SHB 1599 Section 301 (Laws of 2019, Establishing a Mastery-based Learning Work Group), it states “the state board of education, in collaboration with OSPI, shall develop enrollment reporting guidelines to support schools operating with waivers issued under RCW 28A.230.090.” However, in 2020, legislation passed creating the Innovative Learning Pilot Program ([SSB 6521](#)).

Key points of SSB 6521 include:

1. By July 1, 2020, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall create and administer an innovative learning pilot program to authorize full-time enrollment funding for students participating in mastery-based learning programs.

³⁴ Definition courtesy of The Glossary of Education Reform: Standardized Test Definition. (2015, November 12). Retrieved October 15, 2020, from <https://www.edglossary.org/standardized-test/>

³⁵ More information about ALE can be found in [RCW 28A.232](#) and [WAC 392-550](#). More information about Open Doors Youth Reengagement is in [RCW 28A.175.100](#) and [WAC 392-700](#).

- a. To be eligible to participate, school districts must have received a waiver from the credit graduation requirements from the SBE for the 2019-20 school year.
2. By December 1, 2022, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, in collaboration with the state board of education, must report to the legislature regarding the efficiency, cost, and impacts of the funding model or models used under the pilot program.

Additionally, OSPI plans to release attendance guidelines soon for all schools for the 2020-21 school year, that take into account the school building closures due to coronavirus.

Appendix 3: Mastery-based Diploma Frameworks from Across the Country

A brief summary of the elements from other states' high school diploma policies that align to mastery-based learning follows:

ARIZONA'S GRAND CANYON HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

- i. Arizona is the first state to pass [Move On When Ready](#) legislation, signed into law in [2010](#). Students who demonstrate college readiness through aligned instructional systems can earn a performance-based diploma – called the Grand Canyon High School Diploma.
- ii. Student qualification for the performance-based diploma is not linked to time, instead it occurs once students demonstrate mastery through end-of-course exams in all core subject areas. Students who don't demonstrate readiness at first will receive additional targeted support and have the opportunity to re-take the exams.
- iii. Once students earn the Grand Canyon diploma, they can choose to:
 - a. Remain in high school and continue to prepare for admission into universities with advanced courses, dual enrollment, or specialized programs of study (like the STEM Diploma).
 - b. Remain in high school and participate in a full-time career and technical education (CTE) program.
 - c. Graduate from high school with the Grand Canyon High School Diploma and enroll full-time in community college.
- iv. Move On When Ready is working with more than 20 diverse high schools, impacting more than 35,000 students statewide. The students are reflective of Arizona's demographics – more than half are Latino and more than half are low-income. The Center for the Future of Arizona (which was selected by the SBE to administer the program) also works with a growing number of K-8 schools that want to align their work with the participating high schools their students will attend.

GREAT SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP (GSP) FRAMEWORK FOR PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING (MAINE/GSP REGION)

- i. GSP developed an entire framework for implementing MBL with a multitude of resources, sample policies, and planning considerations. The [Framework for Proficiency-Based Learning](#) includes various sections; some of the ones most applicable to a state

policy lens include: State + Local Policies, State + Local Competencies, Assessment + Verification, and Planning for Proficiency: A Guide for Maine School Leaders.

- a. Multiple policy examples were created (similar to our state’s WSSDA model policies) to help schools transition to a MBL diploma. These included policy examples on graduation requirements, demonstration of learning, grading and reporting, and other topics.
- b. Another component of the larger framework is [A Guide for Maine School Leaders](#), which includes multiple sections, such as [District Policy Considerations](#), [Communication and Community Engagements](#), and other topics.

NEW YORK CITY MASTERY COLLABORATIVE: SCHOOL SUPPORT STRUCTURE AND FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

- i. In order to [support implementation of MBL in their member schools](#), the Mastery Collaborative has organized different membership levels for schools based on where they are in implementation, a learning community across the network of schools to share knowledge and best practices, working groups for various topics, monthly online meetings, and quarterly in-person meetings.
- ii. Their [Framework for Mastery](#) articulates conditions for success through both school-wide and classroom shifts:
 - o School-wide shifts include shared, guiding values (racial and social justice, growth mindset, and progress over time toward mastery.) Member schools use a mastery-based grading policy, where grades measure mastery of standards, not compliance or completion.
 - o Classroom: norms and rubrics create shared understanding, which leads to shared expectations at the outset that are discussed along the way. Learners’ identities, backgrounds, and interests are reflected in the classroom.
 - o Program principles include: Developing all stakeholders’ metacognition about student pathways toward interest-driven postsecondary goals as well as Promoting equity through development of rich, culturally relevant learning environment.

SOUTH CAROLINA: COMPETENCIES FOR THE PROFILE OF A GRADUATE

- i. As part of South Carolina’s competency-based education efforts, they developed the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. This included a focus on world-class knowledge, world-class skills, and life and career characteristics.
- ii. The Profile of a Graduate is a vision of what a student should be able to know and do once they graduate from high school, which includes multi-disciplinary competencies that align with the crosscutting skills South Carolina wants their graduates to have mastered for their post-high career.
- iii. The Competencies represent an effort to make the Profile of a Graduate actionable in every learning space across the state. The document was field tested in the 2019-20 school year.

- iv. The state Office of Personalized Learning offered professional learning opportunities around the South Carolina Competencies.
- v. For each competency, there are seven levels of skill components. (Note: Competency levels do not necessarily correspond with grade levels, but instead align to student readiness levels.)
 - a. Each of the [Competencies](#) has an icon that can be explored more in depth at each level.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: STATEWIDE COMPETENCIES AND COMPETENCY CREDITING

New Hampshire has been working toward a competency-based education system for more than twenty years. Several distinguishing components of their system include:

- i. Changes to New Hampshire's legislative code, [Ed 306.27](#), allowed districts to award credits based on students' mastery: By the 2008-2009 school year, if the local school board adopts a policy that would allow students to graduate from high school as a result of demonstrating mastery of required competencies, the policy shall require students to meet both state and local standards. High schools should have competency assessments available for all courses offered at the school.
- ii. Initially developed as a pilot program in 2012 with four districts, the [Performance Assessment of Competency Education \(PACE\)](#) program has expanded to [11 districts](#). Currently, districts still have to apply to be included in the program.
 - a. In the years that students don't take the statewide assessment, the PACE districts will administer carefully designed common and local "performance assessments" developed by the districts themselves and validated at the state level.
 - b. In each [PACE grade and subject](#), a single common complex performance task called the PACE Common Task is collaboratively developed and administered by all participating schools and districts.
 - c. Determinations of student proficiency in the PACE grades/subjects required under federal law are produced using: (1) teacher judgments at the end of the school year regarding which achievement level best describes each of their students; and (2) end of year competency scores for each student.
- iii. In 2013, Carnegie units were redefined into competencies as an alternative for time-based credits. The state-approved model competencies in mathematics, English Language Arts, science, art, and work-study practices

MASTERY/COMPETENCY EDUCATION PILOTS: UTAH, IDAHO, AND MONTANA

Several states have taken a pilot approach to implementing mastery-based education.

- i. Idaho:
 - a. A founding cohort of 32 schools are leading the implementation of Mastery Education in their own communities.
 - i. The Idaho Mastery Education Network was created to give teachers the tools and training they needed to successfully implement Mastery Education in their classrooms. The Network meets regularly to share experiences and best practices.

- b. A public awareness campaign was funded by legislation. A couple of example materials include:
 - i. [Mastery-based learning one pager](#)
 - ii. [A Toolkit for Idaho Families](#)
 - iii. [Promotional videos](#)
- ii. Utah:
 - a. 2016: Legislation created a pilot program which provided grants and other incentives to local education agencies. The bill authorized the State Board of Education to review and establish competency-based education pilots and assessments to award demonstration of student mastery.
 - b. 2017: Additional funding was allocated for educator professional development and tours of competency-based education schools across the county.
 - c. 2018: The state published a [Competency-based Education Framework](#).
 - d. 2019: A model profile of a graduate was established, known as the [Utah Talent MAP](#) (mastery, autonomy, and purpose).
 - e. 2020: Talent MAP and the state standards were used to design [prototype competencies](#). This draft was developed by over 100 Utah educators and stakeholders in Spring 2020, and the State Board of Education sought public input and recommendations for improvement (the survey closed in July).
 - i. Pilot implementation of the prototypes is expected to begin next year.
- iii. Montana:
 - a. In 2019, [HB 351](#), created financial incentives and flexibility for districts to pilot competency-based education, with an application process in the fall and piloting beginning the following spring.

BIG PICTURE LEARNING MODEL

Big Picture Learning was established in 1995 with a single school and is now a network of 65 schools around the world. The model focuses on putting students at the center of their own learning. Each state that has Big Picture schools has a state regional director. Washington currently has [nine schools](#) who use the Big Picture model. A few highlights from the [10 Distinguishers](#) of the model include:

- i. Students stay with an advisor and a group of fellow classmates for four years, building close personal relationships that last a lifetime.
- ii. Parents are welcome and valued members of the school community and play a proactive role in their children’s learning, collaborating in the planning and assessment of student work.
- iii. Regular advisor professional development is conducted at each school by principals, other school staff, and BPL staff and coaches.

Appendix 4: Annual Reports from Schools with the Waiver of Credit-based Graduation Requirements

This appendix includes highlight excerpts from the annual report responses from the schools operating under the waiver of credit-based graduation requirements. There are 15 schools in

our state currently operating under the waiver program. However, because seven of the schools received the waiver beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, only the eight schools who had been operating under the waiver for more than one school year were sent the annual update survey request.

The Big Picture schools collaborated on their annual update and submitted the same responses to the survey questions based on the core principles of the Big Picture model (see [Collaborative Responses](#) in the next section). However, in addition to the collaborative responses, each school was asked to provide additional information based on their unique local context. The following includes excerpts³⁶ in the school principal's own words, regarding each school's beliefs about the conditions necessary to help expand MBL in our state, based on their experience providing MBL education to their students:

METHOW VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT: INDEPENDENT LEARNING CENTER (ILC)

At ILC, immersing ourselves in authentic learning is an expansive practice that is intentionally individualized, and is constantly evolving with the objective of mirroring authentic "real world" learning. We've learned, over the course of several years, that attempting to mirror "real world" learning in a school setting is quite challenging. One of the ways we're continuously learning to do this is by leaning on our regional support network. The work we do with mastery-based learning is so unique and in many ways so different from traditional school that it is absolutely critical we have access to a support network. Over the past few years, a regional network of educators has grown and developed practices around supporting one another's work and growth. Access to this network is critical to our work. Being a part of a network provides us with thought partners who can push our thinking, support our practices, share resources, and reinforce our attempts to continually revisit how we implement mastery-based learning.

Serving the students we work with in a holistic manner requires not only teachers, administrators, and support staff but it also requires adequate time for professional development and collaboration. As a staff, in order to best serve individuals and families, we require time to collaborate, share, reflect, and problem solve. The work can be exhausting and personally taxing when attempted without the support of a highly functioning team. Allowing for time to staff to work as one as well as collaborate with regional partners on a regular basis is crucial to our success, and therefore crucial to the success of our students.

We're in a unique position in Methow Valley because of significant financial support in the form of local grants that have made much of our unique programming possible. Because of the small size and rural setting of our school, we would not be able to offer the program we do without

³⁶ In an effort to keep this report as informative and concise as possible, the full text of each school's individual response is not included here. However, the full text of each school's individual response is available upon request by emailing the State Board of Education: [Alissa Muller](#), Policy Manager for Career and College Readiness

this support. These grants were available to support significant professional development that we needed to transition to MBL. This funding also supported the development of a mentorship coordinator/school-based social worker position which has facilitated the development of our internship program. We've accessed additional funding to launch a new automotive technology program created because of high demand and a lack of adequate access for internships in that field. A similarly sized school in a similarly situated geographic area may not be able to transition as successfully without a different funding mechanism available through state funding.

ISSAQUAH SCHOOL DISTRICT: GIBSON EK HIGH SCHOOL

Students leverage their interests to pursue meaningful, challenging, interdisciplinary and authentic learning as defined in the Learning Plans they design. As they engage in individual and collaborative projects, both inside and outside the school, they collect evidence of their learning to demonstrate our core competencies—Personal Qualities, Communication, Empirical Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Social Reasoning. Learning happens in advisory, personal exploration, design labs, internships, content-specific courses, and experiences in the world. Students reflect on the process of their learning in their portfolios and share this with family, peers, mentors and staff three times each year at exhibitions. Last year, we designed a custom dashboard to assess and manage student attainment of competencies and other graduation requirements. Additionally, students collect evidence of learning in their Google Drive and display their process of learning through their online Google site portfolio.

Using the competencies to push students to more challenging, meaningful work may look something like suggesting that a student who is interested in learning about the science of global warming (Scientific Knowledge and Theories) use their knowledge to create a model of projected shoreline changes based on current data (Empirical Modeling) and/or examine the correlation between countries' GDPs and the effects of global warming (Empirical Arguments and Geography & Environment).

The technology that Gibson Ek uses to track and report student progress and achievement has been a large part of the success of our school in documenting and communicating those achievements to both internal and external stakeholders. Early iterations of the Gibson Ek narrative transcript clearly placed College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs) top of mind, and as the tools and processes matured into the current GSuite-based Dashboard used for internal tracking and progress reporting and our adoption of the Mastery Transcript Consortium's (MTC) Mastery Transcript, the understanding of the importance of continuing to meet CADRs within our model grew as well. The biggest challenge in communicating our students' preparedness has been the staff time required to educate our higher education partners about our educational model and our use of MTC's Mastery Transcript. While these demands are manageable, they do beg the question of scalability should Gibson Ek someday wish to expand beyond its current maximum enrollment.

Gibson Ek staff acknowledge systemic racism exists and are committed to ending these practices as we examine our own structures, institutions and practices. We are committed to doing all we can to support students who experience racism either overtly or implicitly. Last year, a team of staff and students designed and co-caught lessons focused on micro-aggressions, white privilege, and systemic racism; all advisories engage in restorative practices and often hold restorative circles; we designed a Stand Up Against Hate document to provide students with specific actions and language to use in response to harmful actions; staff have been trained to use trauma informed practices; our model is inclusive of special education students; and we have established practices to support our LGBTQ+ students.

FEDERAL WAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: OPEN DOORS AND CAREER ACADEMY AT TRUMAN CAMPUS

During the 2019-2020 school year, FWPS and Federal Way Open Doors and Career Academy at Truman Campus staff developed a crosswalk between the currently adopted competencies from Big Picture Learning to Washington State Learning Standards and Next Generation Science Standards to ensure alignment to those standards as scholars completed their work to earn competencies. Internships began in earnest at both schools during the 2019-2020 school year, and scholars tracked their competencies earned in their Personalized Learning Plans and their leveling up documentation. Additionally, scholars are assessed in mastery of standards through district assessment and, in non-COVID years, on state assessment as well.

By the very nature of individual project development, we are honoring the assets that each scholar brings and providing opportunity to engage in their learning through the lens of their diverse culture and community. This is an area we are committed to improving, however, as we know the critical importance of our scholars seeing themselves in the learning they engage in. While our surrounding area is very diverse, our internship opportunities do not yet fully reflect the diversity of our community. We are working to diversify our outreach to provide scholars with internship opportunities that more fully reflect the diversity of our student-body. We are also working to increase our family engagement component to further boost the diversity of voice in our program.

As we are guided to personalize learning based upon scholars' passions and interests, the High School and Beyond Plan supports our co-construction of Personalized Learning Plans including the work of establishing internships. The career interest survey completed by our scholars supports the identification of possible businesses or organizations that scholars can contact for informational interviews and job shadow opportunities pre-internship. Using both the HSBP and the pre-internship activities, scholars are provided with opportunity to discover potential interests to pursue further. Scholars collaborate with their advisors to set learning and post-secondary goals as a component of their Personalized Learning Plan which aligns with their work on the HSBP and engage in discussion as a result to support the college research and application process.

We serve high school scholars and young adults as they complete their high school programs, and family engagement may look a little different for our young adults who are living independently while completing their high school course work. As we engage our scholars in their internship activities, we communicate with families regarding opportunities that will enhance scholar learning. We have begun to increase opportunities for families to engage on campus with information nights and celebration nights, and during the 2020-2021 school year, the administrative team will be hosting Zoom Parent events two times a month to share information, answer questions and address concerns, and receive feedback on instruction and scholar learning.

LAKE CHELAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: CHELAN SCHOOL OF INNOVATION

Students at Chelan School of Innovation explore their cultural identity through the Autobiography, an in-depth, 10-chapter writing project. Some students take this project a step further and write "Autoethnographies," which focus more intensely on culture, race and societal implications.

Our school also frequently engages in field trips to work sites, and other places in the community, as well as service projects in coordination with our community partnerships. Because Chelan School of Innovation is a small school, it is easy to arrange field trips or community service projects on short notice. Examples of field experiences include traveling to Twisp, where our students collaborate, share ideas, participate in activities, and learn from their peers at the Independent Learning Center. Examples include Restorative Justice trainings and service projects helping the Forest Service at local campgrounds.

Students advance as they demonstrate mastery in IXL Math and ReadTheory, and in online coursework via Acellus, Apex Learning or eDynamic Learning. Each of these platforms include mastery-based grade settings. Each learning cycle begins with an updated Vision Board, short/long term goals, and an updated Learning Plan. Students at Chelan School of Innovation also complete extensive Post-Secondary plans using the Virtual Job Shadow online platform, which includes interest assessments, skills and aptitudes inventories, career cluster inventories, job searches, career videos, college research/comparison tools, resume builder, etc. Advisors are able to differentiate tasks based on student needs and post developmentally-appropriate assignments to individual students.

Additionally, students gain access to a broader array of careers than our small town has to offer via the Virtual Job Shadow platform. This exposes our students to hundreds of career videos so students are able to visualize themselves in careers beyond the limitations of our small town. Advisors often assign writing, critical thinking and journaling tasks to these career videos. The Post-Secondary Plan tools embedded in Virtual Job Shadow dovetail seamlessly with student learning plans, as they include space for setting short and long-term goals, resume building, college research and comparisons, job searches, and a variety of lessons devoted to the development of soft skills, or non-cognitive capacities.

QUINCY SCHOOL DISTRICT: QUINCY INNOVATION ACADEMY

At Quincy Innovation Academy, students direct all family activities- whether it is a family game night or a dinner or picnic. With students planning these activities we see much more participation. Parents are required to participate in the exhibition of students. If a student does not have an active parent in their life, then we provide them the option of bringing a significant person in their lives. We also provide informational nights throughout the year for families with specific students; new students to the school; juniors and seniors; students with special needs. Our goal this year is to provide families informational nights they may join to learn more on topics such as depression, anxiety, suicide prevention, FASFA, citizenship, drug awareness, and gang awareness.

The individualized learning plan that students write provides them a road map to their learning. We do not have a bell schedule, students use their road map learning plan for the day which might include offsite learning. QIA has the advantage of being in a very diverse community—we offer vast wildland that can be explored, extinct vegetation and wildlife; farming that ranges from data bases to dryland farming to irrigation development. We also have an economic diversity from poverty to wealth. All of the learning plan development encourages giving back to their community and developing projects within our community. Getting outside of the classroom walls is encouraged daily.

In Quincy, we enjoy exceptional support at the district level from both leadership and district departments. With the remote learning we are currently in—it has led to more conversations about a shift to some of the QIA Big Picture practices system-wide for more student directed, student centered learning.

PENINSULA SCHOOL DISTRICT: HENDERSON BAY HIGH SCHOOL

We will be working in the upcoming year to pair competencies with courses so that students who may be fluid between comprehensive schools and our settings can manage the change effectively. This will also be helpful for counselors and administrators to understand the learning that has occurred with our students.

One of the barriers historically in place for MBL has been funding. Having to choose full funding over ALE to do this has likely been a barrier for schools to embrace MBL. We are delighted to be part of the pilot program for full funding this year so that this barrier can be eliminated.

As our state studies MBL and how to support and foster high quality MBL, being intentional about ways to do that should include recommended professional learning - not only for the teachers but for those in leadership positions at the district level. For educators seeking to serve students in equitable and accessible ways, MBL will only be effective with true understanding and not assumptions of what it is. Learning how to lead a mastery-based learning culture is critical to its success as well. It will help guide coaching, scheduling, teacher, student, and family support, as well as communication. Our state now encourages districts to offer "Equivalency credit." In other words, in Career and Technical Education, courses that meets standards in other

academic disciplines, allows students to fulfill one or more graduation requirements. However, the model does not allow students to earn the actual credit associated with the requirement. For example, a student who takes a semester of computer science may fill a CTE and a Math requirement, but is only allowed to earn .5 credits toward graduation. If students meet standards in both, why wouldn't we allow them credit in both? This helps in freeing up a student's schedule, but does not honor the beliefs listed above on MBL.

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS: HIGHLINE BIG PICTURE HIGH SCHOOL

Jeff Petty, principal at Highline Big Picture High School, wrote the following responses for Highline and then shared them with other Big Picture schools in their regional network. In his own words: "Most of these schools were developed around Highline's interpretation of the Big Picture design, with some local variations that may not be substantive enough to show up in response to the annual update questions. Also part of the reason for my sharing our update is that most of the questions seemed to speak to the core principles of our design, and we collaborate frequently (weekly) as a network about how effectively we are implementing these."

COLLABORATIVE RESPONSES FROM THE BIG PICTURE SCHOOLS

The information submitted by all schools on the annual update is as follows:

1. State Learning Standards

a. Please describe how your school's competencies align to the state's high school learning standards.

Our competencies were originally developed and adapted from five "learning goals" developed by Big Picture Learning at its flagship school, the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Rhode Island. In 2008 we cross-referenced these five learning goals with Oregon's PASS standards (Proficiency Based Admissions Standards), developed in collaboration with Oregon colleges, to develop competencies aligned at that time with Washington state standards in various academic disciplines. Since that time our competencies have been periodically revised to reflect Common Core State Standards and new learning about the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and "non-cognitive" competencies aligned with success and persistence in post-secondary education and other aspects of life after high school.

b. How do your students meet state learning standards/how do you know your students are meeting the state learning standards?

Our students meet standards primarily through projects developed jointly with students, teachers ("advisors"), and external mentors and documented in individual student learning plans. Student project work is anchored in students' interests and often involves participation in internships in professional work settings and guidance from mentors in those settings. High school students participate in such internships through all four years of high school, often for

two days each week. Students also meet standards through individual and group direct instruction supervised by our teaching staff.

We know our students are meeting standards through periodic formal presentations of learning called exhibitions. These are driven by the individual student learning plans and assessed collaboratively by a panel including the advisor, other staff, peers, family members, and internship and project mentors. Students also maintain portfolios to document their project work as well as progress meeting various competencies. We also know our students are meeting standards through their performance on various state assessments and ultimately through their effective engagement in post high school planning and preparation. The truest measure of the effectiveness of our program is how well our students are faring in the years following high school, e.g. persistence in post-secondary education and success in careers of their choosing.

2. If you use a portfolio to document student learning or assess student learning, please describe any best practices that you believe other schools interested in implementing mastery-based learning might benefit from reviewing.

We would offer the following as suggested best practices:

- Anchor learning in student interests and leverage strengths to address growth areas. The individual learning plan, developed by students and advisors and with family input, can be an effective tool in this work.
- Structure schools so that adults are supported to know a limited number of students very well over a multi-year period. An advisory that meets for extended time each week and continues over multiple years can be an effective structure for this.
- Assess competency growth collaboratively in regular presentations of learning to panels of peers, staff, families, and mentors, and empower advisors as the primary stewards of the student's learning cycle. (This is in contrast to the prevailing structure of multiple subject area teachers working individually to assess limited portions of a student's growth, with no one responsible for ongoing reflection with the student about their growth as a learner and their progress toward the future they are working toward.)
- Incorporate "real world standards" through practices such as internships and engaging outside experts to advise or mentor students' project work and to co-construct assessment criteria.
- Recognize and design around the fact that learning happens in many different ways and in many settings outside the school. The aforementioned advisory structure can be an effective way to facilitate and capture student learning that occurs beyond the classroom and cuts across multiple disciplines.

3. Please describe how your school's model meets the MBL Work Group's vision for MBL?

(Note: The bolded phrases collectively make up the MBL Work Group's vision, as articulated in the [MBL Work Group's Interim Report](#))

Equity is celebrated and every student feels a sense of belonging in their school community

At Big Picture we describe our approach as "one student at a time." We consistently work to build curriculum and pedagogy around each individual student and their interests, strengths, needs, and aspirations. When functioning well, this approach celebrates equity in that each student's experience of school is designed largely around their identity and interests. A hallmark of this approach is the individual learning plan each student develops at the beginning of their time at Big Picture, a document that is routinely updated and revised after each learning cycle, of which there are three or four each year. We also work to foster belonging through our advisory structure, where students spend most of their school time in small groups that continue for multiple years under the supervision of an advisor. Students often describe their advisory and sometimes the school in general as like a second family. Some of our equity growth areas include increasing staff diversity to reflect the diversity of our students, involving parents more actively in the week to week operation of the school, and adapting our outreach and recruitment to find and enroll the students furthest from opportunity.

Empowers students to advance upon demonstrated mastery of content, rather than seat time or age

We do not use credits or grades and instead work to have students "level up" based on effectively demonstrating growth in the competencies and through accomplishing learning goals outlined in their learning plans. We do not have a bell schedule or discrete classes, and considerable student learning occurs off site in settings like internships.

Enables students to direct their own learning and serves each student based on their personalized needs

As noted above, many of our school's structures and processes are designed intentionally to convey to students the importance of their own agency in their learning and also to foster development of that agency through developing a learning plan, designing and implementing projects to address issues they care about, developing a social network of professionals who share their interests, and frequently reflecting on their learning and sharing it with others.

Honors the assets students bring and engages students through their diverse cultures and communities

Learning plan development begins with supporting students to reflect on who they are, including the assets they bring in the form of interests, curiosities, and strengths. The "Who Am I?" project, often undertaken in 9th grade, invites students to explore their personal and cultural identities. We are working to refine our recruitment and outreach practices as well as our parent engagement to involve more families from diverse cultures in co-leadership of the school.

Students' innate creativity shines through in their learning

When functioning well, our approach encourages students' innate creativity to develop their own learning goals within each learning cycle, to identify and pursue their unique interests, to define and carry out projects that have personal meaning to them and that contribute to real causes outside the school, and also to exhibit creativity in how they demonstrate their learning through exhibitions and the products they produce through their varied projects.

Welcomes learning experiences that take place in environments outside the classroom

Big Picture students are expected to pursue learning through internships for up to two days each week for the duration of their high school career, starting in ninth grade. This situates up to 40% of student learning in settings outside the school and under the guidance of mentors in work settings. Our approach to learning plans and assessment also allows for students to account for learning that occurs in any setting, not just school. Students are encouraged to develop holistic learning plans that address not just academic growth but also growth in essential skills such as executive functioning and social and emotional learning (SEL).

Facilitates students' voices and transition to higher education and careers

While all students are accountable to demonstrate growth in the competencies, the specific project work undertaken to pursue that growth varies student to student. Development of the learning plan often begins with questions about personal aspirations, including beyond high school. What are you interested in? What do you see yourself doing after high school? The internship component of our program places students in real work settings with adults who share their interests. This often leads to extensive informal post high school planning as internship mentors interact with students about their own career journeys and frequently engage students in conversations about their own plans for transition to higher education and careers. Equity is largely about access to social networks, and our internship program is designed to help students develop, over the course of their time in high school, both strong professional networks as well as network-building skills. Informational interviews, job shadows, and internships also give students insights to various workplace cultures and help students realize what they don't wish to pursue in their post high school planning.

Supports both students and educators as lifelong learners; provides the freedom to fail and celebrates the resulting learning

Adults at our school develop individual learning plans that follow the same format as our student learning plans. In this way we are trying to replicate what life and work is like for adults: we engage in work we care about in order to solve problems or further causes of interest to us (or our workplaces), and we tend to define that work in terms of projects. Such work is full of ambiguity, and often projects change mid-course in response to emergent needs or events, or projects need to be scrapped or redefined to better serve intended outcomes. Such "failures" are routine and essential to learning. This is what we are helping students to learn. Exhibitions are about describing what you did in a given learning cycle but more importantly what you learned. Part of the advisor's role is to help students reflect not only on their own learning but

also on how they experience various adult learning cultures including the school and the many other adult workplaces they encounter through their internships.

Demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness in our changing world

Creativity and the capacity to navigate ambiguous and rapidly changing contexts are critical skills to responding to "our changing world." Our approach holds that the best way to do this is to immerse students in authentic work settings (e.g. internships) with adults engaged in real work outside the school, and to use school-based time to help students with the academic and social and emotional skills to be effective contributors in those real contexts. At its core, our program is intended to help students develop agency for their learning and to become highly effective learners.

4. What intentional strategies does your school take to provide a culturally relevant curriculum and address the educational opportunity gap?

When done well, "one student at a time" is inclusive of a student's identity, including their cultural identity. No two students share the same learning plan, curriculum, or array of projects. Students also choose from an array of seminar offerings multiple times each week, and many of these, e.g. the Native Student Alliance, have a cultural component. This year we also are introducing an array of governance committees in which students, staff, and parents/families will engage in leading various aspects of the school. Some of these, such as a newly proposed anti-racism committee, have significant cultural and identity components.

5. Individual student ownership over their own learning

a. Please provide examples of how students take ownership over their learning.

While advisors and other staff may introduce various expectations for "leveling up" from one grade level to the next, learning cannot proceed without student engagement in co-constructing the learning plan. Roughly bi-weekly 1:1 meetings between students and advisors keep the learning plan current and emphasize ongoing student ownership of learning as well as help develop the executive functioning skills of managing project work independently. Students also design and implement numerous projects aligned with their interests, often co-creating assessment rubrics with input from outside experts.

b. Please describe how your school uses the High School and Beyond Plan to guide student learning.

In a sense, the post high school plan is the curriculum. Student learning plans are developed around students' interests, including what they think they might want to pursue after high school including higher education and work. Given that many students have either no idea what they want to do after high school and most have limited exposure to what many jobs and careers are actually like, the internship program is designed not just to pursue interests but to discover them. Rather than being placed in pre-identified internships, students explore options

through informational interviews and job shadows, eventually securing an internship aligned with current interests. Students also learn about the personal stories and journeys of professionals they interview and shadow, which helps students understand that most adults have had circuitous or non-linear career paths. This helps reduce their anxiety about knowing "what they want to do when they grow up" and models that life is about continual reflection, learning, and agency in pursuing meaningful work. Work-based internships also inform students' thinking and planning about college and other post-secondary educational options, as they are frequently in informal learning settings with adults who share their interests and who ask them about their plans for education beyond high school. College visits also are incorporated into all grade levels, and our growing alumni network is increasingly involved in advising current students about post-secondary education. College research and applications are a significant component of the advisory curriculum in junior and senior years.

6. What does family engagement mean to your school? Please also describe how your school conducts family engagement efforts.

Family engagement means each family is known well and engaged in partnership in their child's education. Advisors' responsibilities include frequent collaboration with families in the development of the student's learning plan, and families are expected to participate in student exhibitions. This is supported by advisors having multi-year relationships with students, and the relationships with families deepen with multiple interactions each year over four years. Because we support our students to explore their interests and pursue project work they care deeply about, and because families participate in exhibitions, families often describe feeling reconnected to their students as they participate in and witness the inherent vulnerability of sharing about work we're passionate about. Younger siblings also frequently attend exhibitions, which we believe strengthens family connections related to the importance of school and developing agency for learning. Beyond their participation with their own student's learning cycle, we are increasing efforts this year to include parents in other aspects of overall school governance and to leverage school resources to serve broader family and community needs.

7. College Academic Distribution Requirement (CADRs)

a. What successes and challenges has the district encountered in meeting and documenting the College Academic Distribution Requirement (CADRs) credits?

When developing the original waiver proposal in 2008, we partnered with admissions staff from four-year colleges around the state to advise us on how to communicate CADR expectations in our alternative transcripts. In previous years our admissions work involved significant relationship-building and collaboration with college admissions staff. In more recent years as our alumni have been accepted to and successful in most of the state's public four-year colleges, the need to convince colleges of the merits of our approach has been less of a barrier.

b. What successes and challenges has your school experienced in higher education institutions recognizing those CADRs?

We have not found recognition of the CADR to be a limiting factor in college admissions. A growing national trend questioning grades and credits and traditional high school structures has seemed to help this work. One school in our network (Gibson Ek) has partnered with the Mastery Transcript Consortium, which partners with schools to develop credible alternative means of describing student learning. We (Federal Way, Highline, and Quincy) are exploring joining that partnership this school year.

8. Please read the definition of MBL in the introduction from E2SHB 1599. What barriers or challenges do you face in providing MBL opportunities to your students that fit this definition? What could be changed in state policy to alleviate or reduce these barriers?

a. At the school level?

Our read of the definition as written is that our program aligns strongly and that school level barriers to implementation are minimal, thanks in large part to our SBE waiver from tracking traditional credits.

b. At the district level?

In Highline we enjoy exceptional support at the district level from both leadership and district departments. Internal district communication is supportive and responsive, such that when barriers or problems arise they are addressed quickly and collaboratively. We are working this year to engage more fully and constructively in conversations about how our district might shift more of its practices system-wide to be more student-directed, student-centered, and equitable.

c. What would help expand MBL throughout the state?

It is our belief that for schools and districts to shift toward mastery-based learning as defined by the state in this document, significant incentives must be developed to shift away from the current credit-based system of instruction, with most teachers responsible for delivering a narrow range of content to a number of students too large to allow authentic personalization, and toward a system that tasks teachers with stewarding the learning of a smaller cohort of students over a more extended time period. There are many ways to approach this structurally, for example through advisory structures that meet for ample time each week and continue for multiple years, but this is not likely to happen as long as the state graduation requirement entails accumulating so many credits in so many pre-defined subject areas requiring students to be grouped with teachers with those credentials.

9. (Optional) If you have any other thoughts or successes you want to share about your school with the state's MBL Work Group, please do so here:

We believe our students and graduates and their stories of their own learning journeys are far and away the most compelling advocates for systemic change, including policy changes related to graduation requirements. We would welcome the opportunity for our students, graduates, and staff to meet with the MBL Work Group or partner in any other way to support this work.