



Exhibit C - Competency-based Education 2027-29

Biennial Operating Budget Request

2027-29 Biennium Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

DP code/title: Advancing Competency-based Education

Budget period: 2027-29

Budget level: Maintenance

AGENCY RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Competency-based education (CBE) is a key strategy to address persistent opportunity gaps and support equitable opportunities in Washington's K-12 education system. To ensure that we maintain our progress to date on this critical work, this request seeks continued support for the development of local expert CBE schools and educator trainers, a continued evaluation, and a robust statewide resource suite. CBE supports deeper learning, and the Board will identify policies, practices, support structures, and accountability mechanisms necessary to continue our current work of successfully transitioning schools to CBE and allowing them to maintain this model of instruction.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2028	2029	2027-29	2030	2031	2029-31
Staffing						
FTEs	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001 – 1	1000	1000	2000	1000	1000	2000
Total Expenditures	0	0	0	0	0	0
Object of Expenditure						
Object A	115	115	230	115	115	230
Object B	32	32	64	32	32	64
Object C	318	319	637	301	287	588
Object E	84	83	167	101	115	216
Object G	9	9	18	9	9	18
Object J	0	0	0	0	0	0
Object N	442	442	884	442	442	884
Total Objects	1000	1000	2000	1000	1000	2000
Revenue						
Fund 001-1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Revenue	0	0	0	0	0	0

DECISION PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?

More than one in four 10th and 12th graders believe their schoolwork is seldom or never meaningful, and more than one in three believe what they learn in school is only slightly important or not important for later in life, according to the 2025 Healthy Youth Survey. Students, families, educators, and other stakeholders have consistently asked for more meaningful learning, real-world skill development, and individualized preparation for life after high school. The schools participating in the Mastery-based Learning Collaborative demonstration project are addressing these issues head-on and beginning to show meaningful results, as described in the following sections.

At a time when labor market research continues to highlight increasing demand for postsecondary credentials, our direct-to-college enrollment has fallen by 10% over the past decade (OSPI Report Card) and Washington's direct-to-college rate ranks among the nation's lowest, according to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. This is despite progress we've made as a state, increasing graduation rates by 4% between 2016 and 2025 (OSPI Report Card). Competency-based education provides greater opportunities for students to develop skills through a variety of applied learning models that result in higher levels of engagement and deeper learning.

National research confirms that CBE implementation strategies can reduce opportunity gaps and improve student engagement and outcomes over time (see examples below), but this transformation is a long-term process. Early implementation (3–5 years) typically produces emerging outcomes such as shifts in student engagement and school climate, while fuller integration of culturally responsive CBE often takes much longer (at least 8 to 10 years or more), depending on school size and context. Sustained implementation support can produce longer-term impacts on academic performance, as well as providing data that can lead to improved policy conditions supporting CBE. Examples such as Lindsay Unified School District and New York City's Competency Collaborative show that scaling a culturally responsive CBE system requires multi-year, even multi-decade, investments, aligned policy supports, robust professional development pathways, and deliberate sustainability planning. These national models demonstrate the long horizon needed for system-wide change.

In Washington, the transition to a CBE model will require 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. This request provides the resources needed to continue the state's seven-year investment (2021 through 2027). It will continue to provide educators with critical professional learning opportunities, tools, and supports necessary to implement CBE successfully. In addition, continuing the demonstration project will provide a broader base of data to inform policy decisions and to develop structures for sustainability. Ultimately, this investment is needed to support schools in transforming the

education system to be more relevant and engaging for all students, and ultimately to close opportunity gaps.

Addressing opportunity gaps and advancing educational equity

Washington's leadership has set ambitious goals for our education system and established indicators of the education system's health in 2013 to monitor movement toward those goals. Preliminary data from SBE's upcoming 2026 Statewide Indicators of Educational System Health Report shows that we have made progress on some of the indicators, but not yet enough to meet the state's goals. For example, even though the 83% four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2025 is five percentage points higher than 10 years prior, we are not on track to meet the state's goal of 90% for the Class of 2029. Furthermore, notable gaps exist for underserved students. American Indian/Alaska Native students, multilingual learners, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and nonbinary (Gender X) students graduated at rates at least 25 percentage points lower than the highest performing student group.

Additionally, the OSPI Report Card shows double the gap in the percentage of students who are on track for college level coursework when they enter postsecondary education (based on 2024-25 school year ELA and math assessments): students in foster care, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners are performing at least 50 percentage points below the highest performing student group. This data suggests that too many students in Washington are not receiving the needed supports to be able to demonstrate proficiency in important academic subjects. At this rate, it may take many years to eliminate these opportunity gaps and ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills needed to set them up for post-graduation success.

We also recognize that Washington's education system continues to face challenges in improving student experiences of equity, inclusion, and belonging that shape their educational journeys. In response, we have embraced the need to create learning environments that are engaging, culturally responsive, and meaningful for all students, with a particular focus on those who have been historically underserved and furthest from educational justice.

Culturally responsive competency-based education

Washington must continue supporting proven strategies that make school relevant and engaging for all students and close opportunity and achievement gaps. The state has invested considerably in transitioning to CBE in conjunction with the implementation of culturally responsive practices, and we are just now beginning to see the results of these investments. Continuing support for this work is essential to capitalize on these investments and support the large number of educators and students who are benefiting from CBE implementation (see next section for a summary of the initial investments).

With the culturally responsive CBE approach, teaching methods are designed to equitably engage each and every student in ways that best support their learning journey. The key to CBE is the focus on the individual student, providing them with an educational experience tailored to

their personal interests, while ensuring students master important concepts before moving on in their learning. CBE transforms education by shifting from a traditional “time-based” model to one where students advance based on their ability to demonstrate mastery of content. This approach:

- Empowers students to decide how they will create, apply, and demonstrate their knowledge in a way that supports their unique needs, interests, and goals.
- Leads with culturally responsive practices that support equitable and meaningful learning experiences for all students.
- Prepares students for workforce and post-secondary success by focusing on authentic, performance-based assessments and offering timely, differentiated support.
- Allows individual students to move through some subjects more quickly while spending more time on their growth area subjects.

The state’s efforts and multi-year investment in transitioning schools across Washington to the CBE model is based on clear and meaningful national evidence that culturally responsive CBE implementation can reduce opportunity gaps and improve student engagement and outcomes over time. For example, in a recent [North Dakota study](#), an analysis showed an increase in post-secondary enrollment rates for students from participating personalized, competency-based learning (PCBL, synonymous with CBE and MBL) districts compared to non-PCBL districts, as well as a quick recovery from the pandemic compared to nonparticipating districts. Another [compelling study](#) compared mastery-based testing to traditional testing in Calculus II and found that “mastery-based testing led to students feeling the assessments better reflected their content knowledge as well as higher end-of-semester course grades with fewer hours spent studying outside of class.” In a similar vein, a [recent study of Arizona public schools](#) found modest positive increases in English Language Arts and Math test scores among high school students attending PCBL schools versus those that were not in the studied group. There are several other encouraging national and international examples of positive outcomes linked to the adoption of practices that are key components of CBE, such as personalized learning and project-based learning, in schools and districts.

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

Schools and districts across the state and nation have been forced to rethink how education is delivered, and the need to move to a culturally responsive CBE framework is clear. Continuing to develop a clear policy framework and accountability structure to implement CBE is essential, and

maintaining the supports offered by the current demonstration project is key to sustaining this shift at scale across implementing schools.

Our multi-year external project evaluation has already shown that CBE implementation is beneficial for students. Our MBLC grantee schools have reported increased student engagement, stronger teacher-student relationships, greater student ownership of learning, improved clarity around learning goals, and stronger feelings of belonging and cultural representation. Many schools expanded personalized learning opportunities, adopted schoolwide competencies, increased use of performance-based assessments, and provided more meaningful feedback to students. While implementation remains uneven and continued support is needed, findings indicate that students in schools with deeper implementation experienced higher levels of student engagement (including students of color), stronger relationships, and more equitable learning opportunities.

The MBLC project has also produced measurable academic and school climate improvements (see Equity Impacts section below for details). Participating schools reported gains in student attendance, academic growth, course pass rates, student voice, school safety, and perceptions of equity. Findings demonstrate that deep, meaningful implementation of culturally responsive and sustaining CBE is possible when supported by clear goals, sustained leadership, strong networks, adequate funding, aligned policy, and high-quality professional learning.

State investment in transitioning to CBE

The state has invested over the last several years in transforming the K-12 education system through culturally responsive CBE: by supporting a work group, developing the state's Profile of a Graduate, and funding a demonstration project. Grant funding ends in Fiscal Year 2027, and additional investment is needed to sustain current CBE implementation progress made by schools as we continue to provide critical resources and supports for statewide use based upon what we are learning from demonstration sites. Washington State's investment includes:

- *Work Group:* In 2019, the Legislature (E2SHB 1599) established the MBL Work Group to identify barriers and opportunities for increasing student access to CBE. The work group provided recommendations to the Legislature in two reports: 2019 interim report and 2020 report. One of the recommendations was to extend the work group to develop a state Profile of a Graduate describing the set of transferrable, multidisciplinary skills each and every student should develop during their K-12 experience.
- *Profile of a Graduate:* In 2021, the Legislature (SSB 5249) extended the MBL Work Group to develop the Profile of a Graduate. This work culminated in a 2021 report to the Legislature on the Profile and other recommendations for advancing CBE.

Initial Launch of Demonstration Project: The Legislature provided funding in the 2021-23 operating budget (Sec. 502 of ESSB 5092) for implementation of CBE in school district demonstration sites. The initial funding of \$5M for the biennium (\$1.5M in FY22 and \$3.5M in FY23) was for "grants to school districts, professional development of school district

staff, and implementation support provided by the state board of education." The first cohort of MBLC member schools (Cohort 1) comprised 23 schools across 13 districts and included elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as one full district. Cohort 1 member schools were selected by SBE through an application process in Fall 2021. Funding for the 2021-2022 year supported project design, development of the grant application, selection of grantees and contractors, and planning-year grants to the selected districts. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, funding provided grants to support Cohort 1 schools' first full year of intensive professional learning.

Recognizing early momentum, the Legislature appropriated \$6.9 million in the 2023–25 operating budget (Sec. 502(2) of ESSB 5187) to continue and expand the demonstration project. This funding was supplemented by \$2.5 million awarded by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), making a total of \$9.4 million available during this period. As a result, enough funding was available to enable a second year of professional learning for the initial cohort and to launch a second demonstration cohort. Both cohorts of schools served diverse communities in terms of geography, urban versus rural location, size, demographics, and educational outcomes.

The 2023-24 fiscal year supported Cohort 1's second year of professional learning and deepening of implementation practices, and the final year for Cohort 1 (2024-25) was a ramp-down year, focused on supporting schools to transition to a full sustainability model. These Cohort 1 schools are now part of the MBLC alumni network and receive ongoing technical and policy support from SBE and can access the professional learning events hosted by both SBE and the professional learning providers. In addition, SBE has selected three Cohort 1 alumni schools to serve as Living Lab schools (more details provided in the Assumptions and Calculations section below). Cohort 2, made up of 24 schools in 17 districts, was selected through a more targeted and intensive competitive selection process by SBE in Fall 2023 (more than twice the number of schools applied than we had funding to support) and began work in Spring 2024, with program activities following a similar trajectory to the Cohort 1 plan described above. Currently, the MBLC project continues to support over 40 schools in two cohorts (28 districts statewide), and through this work, over 18,000 students have been part of this powerful process of educational transformation.

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

The MBLC is a statewide effort, including personnel at state agencies, community-based partners, and participating districts and schools. The goal of the grant project is to demonstrate that schools across our large and diverse state can successfully transition to culturally responsive CBE with the right supports and training, and that CBE will improve student outcomes, especially for students from historically marginalized groups and other students who are not well served by the current system. Because of the scale of the effort, the project will also allow Washington to continue to document key policy supports and develop robust accountability measures necessary at the state and local levels for schools to successfully identify as CBE schools.

A key strength of the MBLC is the statewide network of schools, educators, coaches, and partners that provide collaboration, shared learning, and problem-solving opportunities. Schools consistently report that connections with peers facing similar challenges accelerate implementation and help sustain momentum. State grant funding has been equally critical, allowing schools to provide staff training, hire instructional coaches, purchase aligned resources, support collaboration time, and participate in national and regional learning opportunities. Over time, the project has refined its accountability structures, implementation tools, and school selection processes, resulting in stronger goal-setting and improved readiness among participating schools.

What is your proposal?

This proposal capitalizes on the investments and progress made in implementing culturally responsive CBE in Washington. The proposal maintains the current level of support for the MBLC with three parts essential to continued progress: 1) continuation of the demonstration project (including modest school grants, MBLC sustainability leadership grants, professional development, and SBE staff administrative leadership including event hosting, communications support, accountability support, and technical assistance), 2) a modest continuation of our project evaluation to support continuous improvement in our program delivery, ensure that implementation progress is being made by schools, and establish accountability measures and processes, and 3) continued maintenance of a resource suite to support school districts statewide.

This proposal is the best option for maintaining the state's CBE work for several reasons. First, the proposal is efficient by supporting important work that is already underway with the MBLC. Second, it aligns with recommendations from the state's MBL Work Group. If approved, this proposal would immediately impact over 18,000 students across 47 schools in two cohorts (28 districts statewide) through this powerful process of educational transformation. Critically, from a policy perspective it would help us continue to identify key policy changes and supports needed to sustain our existing investments and maintain implementation progress across the state in a way that would impact future generations of Washington's K-12 students.

Professional learning and coaching have emerged as some of the most valuable supports provided through the MBLC. More than 80 professional learning events, combined with

individualized coaching, helped schools translate complex instructional reforms into actionable practices. Schools reported increased staff collaboration, greater consistency in grading and instructional practices, and stronger alignment around schoolwide competencies. In fact, the 2026 external evaluation report confirmed that implementation support was one of the strongest predictors of educator preparedness, and reductions in coaching and professional learning coincided with slower progress in more advanced competency-based practices. Schools consistently emphasized the importance of stable leadership, collaborative school cultures, strong equity commitments, and dedicated professional learning structures in sustaining progress.

Successful whole-school implementation of culturally responsive CBE will take more time and support. The CBE schools currently receiving MBLC support will need additional years of sustained professional learning to transition fully to a CBE instructional framework. CBE schools will benefit from extending the professional learning offerings for several additional years as they transition to a sustained model where CBE is integrated into their ongoing internal professional learning strategy.

Continued grant funding will also be crucial for maintaining progress. Our external evaluation, as well as school year-end reports, reveal the following expenditures as the most impactful to schools in their CBE implementation work:

- Expenditures for professional learning activities and materials, such as staff compensation for meetings or other work done outside of regular work hours, instructional supports related to professional learning, supplies, and travel to MBLC events.
- Statewide networking opportunities provided by SBE through all community in-person gatherings, virtual convenings, and opportunities to visit other schools implementing CBE.
- Expenditures for activities or materials necessary for CBE development and implementation, such as technology solutions to track student mastery, culturally competent curriculum, etc.

As reported in their year-end progress report, one school with a high level of engagement and implementation in their CBE work emphasized:

“One of the biggest strengths of the MBLC has been the opportunity to hear practical examples from schools doing this work in different contexts. The conferences, webinars, Living Lab Schools, and Impact Fellow presentations helped staff see what culturally responsive competency-based education can look like in practice and reminded us that many schools are navigating similar challenges related to grading, transcripts, student engagement, and implementation sustainability.”

Another MBLC elementary school with promising practices noted specific areas where state support would be valuable:

- Continued networking opportunities with other schools implementing culturally responsive CBE,
- Access to webinars, workshops, and updated resources highlighting effective practices.
- Opportunities for school visits and intervisitations to observe successful implementation in diverse settings.
- Professional learning focused on sustaining community partnerships and increasing student voice and agency.
- A statewide community of practice where educators can share ideas, challenges, resources, and successes.

Proposal Part 1: Continuation of the demonstration project

Part 1 of our proposal, the continuation of the MBLC grant program, is comprised of those elements that schools, and our evaluators, found most impactful in advancing effective implementation of CBE:

- A modest amount of grant funding for existing CBE schools (up to 40 Cohort 1 and 2 schools) to provide:
 - Release time and stipends for continued teacher collaboration,
 - Funding for substitute teachers so that MBLC educators can observe, learn, and share lessons with other classrooms within their school and at other schools that are implementing CBE,
 - Funding to support schools in evaluation activities, and
 - Modest funding for schools to engage in statewide travel to MBLC intervisitations and in-person MBLC gatherings.
- Ongoing CBE professional learning from an in-state Educational Service District (ESD) or other in-state partner with relevant expertise, including guidance on family and community engagement.
- Funding for the state to host 2 convenings per year to bring the MBLC community together for learning.
- Ongoing funding to maintain the availability of accessible teaching and learning resources for schools.
- Funding for administrative, technical, and accountability support provided by the state.
- Continuation of the virtual third-party evaluation to assess progress and design accountability processes for evaluating implementation quality and emerging outcomes.
- Modest funding for continuation of our sustainability programs to nurture and provide state-level CBE leadership and expertise, and to assist SBE with accountability work (Living Lab and Impact Fellows programs, details can be found in the Assumptions and Calculations section below).

In addition to the grant funding that will help demonstration site schools continue their important implementation work, our request for funding to pay for professional service providers and state staff compensation will serve important functions:

- Technical assistance and administrative leadership provided by SBE staff – SBE staff would continue to carry out the following important duties (this list is not exhaustive):
 - coordinate grant application and selection process (for up to 40 existing CBE schools),
 - manage contracts and work with professional learning providers,
 - assist grantee schools with technical issues, budgets, policy issues, and communications (including newsletter and resource distribution),
 - provide clock hours for professional learning events,
 - facilitate meetings and host convenings,
 - develop and curate resources for the MBLC community through the Resource Suite,
 - deliver presentations to stakeholders,
 - support grants management, reporting, and coordination,
 - conduct state/national level research and networking,
 - carry out ongoing CBE compliance monitoring and accountability processes developed by evaluators (including conducting high-quality site observations and collecting implementation evidence consistently across schools and districts).
- Professional learning provided by in-state service providers such as ESDs – We plan to transition our professional learning providers from out-of-state contractors to in-state service providers (likely an ESD) to continue to develop local capacity to sustain this important work. The professional learning provider will develop and provide trainings, facilitate events, conduct site visits, provide coaching to school teams, and develop resources, among other duties. They will also provide guidance on effective family and community engagement around this work, as this has been requested by the schools.

As mentioned above, the MBLC project continues to support 47 schools in two cohorts (28 districts statewide), and through this work, over 18,000 students have been part of this powerful process of educational transformation. The program also has drawn a great deal of interest from the Washington State education community, with about 7,000 interested parties following the work through our bi-monthly newsletter mailings, some of whom participate in the learning opportunities. Finally, Washington is emerging as a national leader on statewide culturally responsive CBE implementation, drawing considerable attention at large multistate CBE conferences such as the annual FullScale Symposium.

Proposal Part 2: Continuation of our evaluation

As a demonstration project, it is critical that we learn from our participating schools about what it takes to successfully transition to CBE. To this end, evaluation research was built into the project from the outset. We are currently under contract with an organization at the national forefront of CBE research to conduct the external evaluation of the demonstration project.

However, due to budget and timeframe limitations, the scope of this initial evaluation is limited, focusing primarily on matters of implementation.

We propose extending the evaluation to generate evidence to support our existing efforts related to the sustainability and continuous improvement of culturally responsive CBE practices and the impact of CBE on student outcomes. There will be a gradual transition from a learning-oriented evaluation model to an outcomes-oriented model that could eventually inform accountability and funding decisions.

The focus will be on developing, testing, and validating CBE measurement tools, identifying meaningful indicators of CBE implementation quality and student outcomes, and exploring how implementation and outcome data can inform future policy. Findings and resources produced through the evaluation will help Washington State policymakers, stakeholders, and schools better understand the characteristics of high-quality culturally responsive CBE, its impact on students over time, and the supports and policy changes needed to sustain effective implementation. The evaluation will examine the extent to which participating schools are implementing culturally responsive CBE with fidelity, the strengths and challenges of implementation, and the most effective measures for documenting progress and outcomes.

The evaluation includes two complementary areas of work. First, evaluators will develop and validate CBE implementation measures, including a Washington-specific observation protocol, school portfolio process, training and calibration systems for observers, and quality assurance processes to ensure reliable evidence collection. Observation and portfolio data from MBLC schools will be analyzed to identify implementation strengths, challenges, and promising practices, with findings shared through reports, dashboards, and practitioner resources that support continuous improvement and future policy development. Second, the evaluators will conduct longitudinal analyses of student outcomes and experiences, using publicly available data to examine relationships between implementation quality and outcomes such as academic achievement, graduation, and other indicators. Analyses will compare schools with varying levels of implementation, as well as similar non-participating schools and statewide trends, while exploring outcomes across student groups to better understand equity impacts over time.

Proposal Part 3: Resource suite

Finally, to continue our support for schools implementing CBE beyond the grant project, we propose maintaining, updating, and continuously curating our existing suite of resources that would be available to all schools and districts throughout the state interested in CBE implementation. In particular, to better assist districts in this move to CBE teaching and learning systems, a resource focus on developing high-quality and relevant competencies tied to state learning standards (versus focusing on credits) will need to be available and frequently refined and updated to be useful to schools. Of particular importance, the state would make available resources so that districts can more uniformly and equitably assess when students have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to meet graduation requirements, and how to align these competency assessments across subject areas (horizontally) and grade levels (vertically).

Ultimately, SBE is interested in supporting schools and districts in determining how students can demonstrate their knowledge and skills in each required subject area to earn their high school diploma and be declared "ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner" (RCW 28A.230.090).

Establishing and maintaining resources related to graduation competencies or proficiency targets for the state's learning standards for high school graduation aligns well with SBE's existing authority to establish graduation requirements (RCW 28A.230.090) and set the graduation standard on the statewide high school assessments (RCW 28A.655.061 and RCW 28A.305.130). In addition, the suite would include resources such as performance-based assessments, model rubrics with scoring criteria, model policies (developed in collaboration with WSSDA), guidance for mastery transcripts, asynchronous professional development, training materials, considerations for implementing CBE in different settings (e.g., institutional education), and communication resources.

The resource suite will be managed by SBE staff who will lead the development, curation, and maintenance of resources in collaboration with professional learning providers, demonstration sites schools, and MBLC partners (other agencies, higher education partners, and community-based organizations). In addition, SBE staff will provide technical assistance and serve as informational resources to schools statewide who want to learn about CBE. This would include support activities such as developing communication tools and guidance, presenting informational webinars, sharing innovations and best practices with state and national audiences, and potential policy work in response to demonstration project learnings.

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

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

Equity and culturally responsive education have been the bedrock of the state's CBE work and a primary area of focus for the MBLC demonstration project. We have prioritized outreach to communities furthest from educational justice, and our evaluation efforts have specifically looked at how CBE implementation is impacting students belonging to diverse groups. The evaluation results have been promising (see the Equity Impacts section below for further information about community outreach and project impacts on diverse student populations).

Our external evaluation reported that students of color in our MBLC schools with deeper CBE implementation practices experienced higher levels of student engagement, stronger teacher-student relationships, and stronger feelings of belonging and cultural representation leading to more equitable learning opportunities. In addition, as mentioned above, the MBLC project has also produced measurable academic and school climate improvements, with participating schools reporting gains in student attendance, academic growth, course pass rates, student voice, school safety, and perceptions of equity.

Culturally responsive CBE is an equity strategy that has shown emerging evidence of closing opportunity gaps, as will be described below in the Equity Impacts section. SBE was intentional in including schools in our project that serve youth who are not well served by traditional settings. Our MBLC schools include several Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs serving many students of color, two Open Doors programs, a charter school in South Seattle with a large majority of Black students, and several schools with significant Native American student populations. These schools have emphasized the importance of relevant, personalized, culturally responsive instructional models, particularly culturally responsive CBE, for their students.

What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?

As described above (Proposed Solution) and below (Fiscal Details and Assumptions), this proposal provides funding for:

1. Continuation of the demonstration project, which provides professional learning to schools. This includes modest grants to schools, sustainability grants for exemplar schools and educator leaders that can continue to train and coach in-state schools on effective CBE practices, a contract with an in-state professional learning provider, event and travel costs, and staffing.
2. Continuation of a reduced, fully virtual external evaluation, including support for the project evaluation to transition from a learning model to an accountability and measurement model.
3. Resource suite, including the maintenance of resources, along with support functions provided by SBE staff.

These investments will achieve the desired outcomes by ensuring schools and districts continue to have access to well-vetted resources as they work towards CBE implementation. This will also ensure that the state fully benefits from the demonstration project that has been underway for several years to support schools' use of this promising instructional model.

What alternatives did you explore and why was this option chosen?

The Board has conducted extensive outreach and has learned from other states about implementing CBE systems. The key takeaway is that this work is iterative and takes sustained effort to ensure the policy and support structures are in place to support implementation. This work is a high priority for the Board, and with the drastic cuts to this grant program, it is crucial that we maintain the minimum level of ongoing maintenance funding to ensure that the state's existing investment is not lost. Currently, schools are attempting to continue implementation with very few resources, and professional development support has been cut with notable impact on schools. In addition, there is currently only one staff person that is able to dedicate significant time to this project, and without maintenance funding to support that position, the Board will be unable to continue to support the MBLC schools.

The agency is exploring options for private funding to supplement and accelerate the work, but

state support remains essential. The independent evaluator for the MBLC project is pursuing external funding to strengthen the evaluation's findings and to continue studying the impact of CBE implementation on diverse populations in Washington State. If successfully secured, the external funding will total \$414,703 for work to be completed through FY 2029.

Washington has a number of policies in place already to support implementation, including a state definition of a credit that is not linked to seat time. This allows schools to prioritize consistent learning outcomes for every student over fixed schedules, unlike the traditional model where "seat time" is the constant and learning varies, leading to gaps that are apparent in our system today. However, real and perceived barriers to implementing CBE remain. In addition, the Board has explored policy supports within existing authority, such as the Board adopting rules in September 2020 to aid districts implementing competency-based crediting policies. While these measures are valuable, especially as districts seek authentic ways to recognize students' learning, they are insufficient on their own to transform schools and close the persistent gaps in our education system.

Washington is quickly emerging as a leader in this work. However, without funding, the state risks losing momentum, and demonstration sites may struggle to sustain their shift to culturally responsive CBE.

What resources does the agency already have that are dedicated to this purpose?

As noted above, the current funding supports grants to schools, contracted professional development, leadership grants, an external evaluation, SBE staff support, and an MBLC Resource suite. The mastery-based learning proviso funding for the current biennium is \$1M per fiscal year, representing a 79% decrease from the previous biennium. Within existing resources, we could only provide minimal policy support and resources for MBLC schools and districts. Without the additional resources requested in this proposal, we would not have funding to continue contracts for professional learning, conduct evaluation activities, or host statewide community events for participating schools. Additionally, SBE would be unable to effectively vet new resources for the statewide resource suite or attend most state and national conferences where we are invited to present on the important work of the MBLC and its related policy implications. Furthermore, SBE would have limited capacity to support the numerous requests from non-MBLC schools for individualized policy and practice recommendations tailored to their local context as they move toward CBE.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

Expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of a current program or service

This proposal represents a continuation at current funding levels. However, to ensure we are providing complete information, we present historical financial information below, based on

information in Enterprise Reports and SBE's fiscal year 2027 approved budget.

Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative Expenditure History

Fiscal Year 2024 State Expenditures

\$188,148 Object A Salaries
\$57,823 Object B Benefits
\$0 Object C Contracts
\$30,253 Object E Goods and Services
\$49 Object G Travel
\$0 Object J Equipment
\$0 Object N Grants
\$276,273 Total Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2024 Federal ESSER Expenditures – Appropriated by the State Legislature

\$0 Object A Salaries
\$0 Object B Benefits
\$1,134,446 Object C Contracts
\$21,324 Object E Goods and Services
\$0 Object G Travel
\$0 Object J Equipment
\$619,908 Object N Grants
\$1,775,678 Total Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2024 Federal ESSER Expenditures – Not Appropriated by the State Legislature

\$34,078 Object A Salaries
\$11,337 Object B Benefits
\$82,500 Object C Contracts
\$20,063 Object E Goods and Services
\$19,856 Object G Travel
\$0 Object J Equipment
\$2,101,710 Object N Grants
\$2,269,544 Total Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2025 State Expenditures

\$276,501 Object A Salaries
\$84,977 Object B Benefits
\$1,217,338 Object C Contracts
\$54,182 Object E Goods and Services
\$28,707 Object G Travel
\$2,110 Object J Equipment
\$3,070,000 Object N Grants
\$4,733,815 Total Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2026 State Expenditures
\$121,133 Object A Salaries
\$31,243 Object B Benefits
\$421,778 Object C Contracts
\$45,587 Object E Goods and Services
\$23,603 Object G Travel
\$0 Object J Equipment
\$343,000 Object N Grants
\$986,345 Total Expenditures

Fiscal Year 2027 Projected State Expenditures
\$112,400 Object A Salaries
\$31,000 Object B Benefits
\$444,500 Object C Contracts
\$99,500 Object E Goods and Services
\$8,600 Object G Travel
\$0 Object J Equipment
\$304,000 Object N Grants
\$1,000,000 Total Expenditures

This budget request is a continuation of the current MBLC initiative, which launched a second four-year cohort of schools in FY24 with the funding described above. Funding this budget request will offer maintenance grants to all interested Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools (up to 40 school grants total), as well as provide MBLC leadership grants to support peer teaching and learning through our “train the trainer” Impact Fellows program and Living Lab exemplar schools program. Funding will also provide in-state professional development, state administrative and technical support, and a limited virtual evaluation of the MBLC as we transition to local maintenance of progress.

Detailed Assumptions and Calculations

Estimated annual ongoing costs include:

- Salary, benefits, and sufficient goods, services, and travel to support the 1.0 FTE permanent employee for program administration (including grants and contract management, technical assistance for schools, meeting hosting and facilitation, resource suite maintenance, outreach to local and national stakeholders, and developing accountability/compliance functions for CBE implementation).
- Contracts with partner organizations able to provide professional learning, evaluation, MBLC networking and communications platforms, and community engagement.
- Goods and services and travel sufficient to cover meetings, convenings, accessibility services, website maintenance charges, phone and grant management subscriptions, and other program-related activities and administrative services.
- Pass-through grants to participating schools in support of professional learning as follows:

- The fiscal years 2027 through 2031 estimate includes \$400,000 each year to fund MBLC member school maintenance grants of \$10,000 per year for up to 40 schools (including all Cohort 2 schools and Cohort 1 schools submitting a letter of interest in maintenance funding for CBE implementation). These grants may fund travel to MBLC site visits/community convenings, release time for team collaboration, materials, supplemental professional development, and stipends for work with SBE on accountability/compliance measures.
- The estimate also includes \$30,000 per year for up to 3 Living Lab schools (\$10,000 per school), who will provide peer observation opportunities, presentations on exemplary practices, resources, and various forms of program-related support to other schools.
- The estimate also includes \$12,000 per year for up to 6 Impact Fellows (\$2000 per fellow, with a yearly application process) to serve as teacher leaders using a “train the trainers” model.

If fewer than 40 schools are interested in maintenance grants, funding may be repurposed to recruit additional schools, enhance support for cohort 2 schools during their last year, or enhance support for the Living Lab Schools or Impact Fellows programs.

Workforce Assumptions

This request supports the following positions:

1. Fiscal years 2028 onward:
 - 1.0 FTE associate director (\$115,000 salary and \$32,000 benefits)

Historical funding

Available funding for this current program or service in the 2027-29 biennium. For ML decision packages, include all funding through CFL. For PL decision packages, include all funding through ML.

Fiscal Year 2028

- FTE = 0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0
- Near General Fund = \$0
- Other Funds = \$0

Fiscal Year 2029

- FTE = 0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0
- Near General Fund = \$0

- Other Funds = \$0

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Strategic Framework

The proposal is particularly responsive in supporting an effective K-12 system by providing a more engaging learning experience resulting in more student learning and a reduction in disparities evident in our current system. The emphasis on authentic learning not only equips students with skills needed for a range of postsecondary opportunities but also enhances their ability to transition successfully into further education or the workforce. Furthermore, Career Connect Washington has identified CBE as a supportive strategy to advance the goals of career exploration, preparation, and career launch, making this proposal essential to the state's broader educational and economic objectives.

The Board highlighted culturally responsive CBE as a pivotal initiative to advance its strategic plan priorities, fostering an equitable and inclusive K-12 education system. This proposal ensures every student is empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in a changing world. It also supports a seamless transition through the P-12 system, preparing students to graduate from Washington State high schools ready for civic engagement, careers, postsecondary education, and lifelong learning.

For state budgeting purposes, the State Board of Education is treated as a single activity within the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. The requested funding amounts are \$1,000,000 for FY 2026, \$1,000,000 for FY 2027, \$1,000,000 for FY 2028, and \$1,000,000 for FY 2029 all from fund 001-1.

Performance Outcomes

Project objectives include:

- Establish a statewide infrastructure to provide needed professional development, policy, and communications support to enable schools to implement CBE.
- Demonstrate that schools can successfully implement CBE with student learning and assessment that are more authentic, engaging, and culturally connected and sustaining.
- Document the key steps that states, districts, and schools must take to transition to CBE successfully.
- Positively impact student engagement and progress toward learning goals.
- Funding for the evaluation of the demonstration project ensures that we measure performance outcomes and learn from the participating schools about what it takes to successfully transition to CBE.

Examples of some of the performance outcomes to be measured by the evaluation include changes in:

- educator attitudes toward CBE
- educator practice (e.g., meaningful assessment, responsive pacing)
- student learning activities
- school structures and climate
- student engagement
- student progress toward learning goals
- early student outcomes across groups (e.g., academic achievement, graduation rates)

For additional details, see the evaluation section under "What is your Proposal" above.

EQUITY IMPACTS

Community Outreach and Engagement

SBE continues to engage with partners including charter schools, tribal partners, and Open Doors programs. These partners, serving diverse student populations, have expressed interest in transitioning to CBE. In response to input from our partners, we worked with the legislature to broaden the proviso language to allow their participation in the grant project for Cohort 2. This cohort includes three charter schools and two schools serving a high percentage of Indigenous students (Tulalip Heritage and Nespelem High School). In particular, institutional education partners developed recommendations for a sector-wide transition to CBE in their report to the Legislature (under 2021 HB 1295). We anticipate that some of these schools will stay connected to the work as we move into the sustainability phase of CBE implementation.

Educators have shared feedback that better community outreach is needed at the local level. Specifically, grantee schools need support in authentically partnering with local community groups, particularly those furthest from educational justice. In response to this feedback, SBE has integrated a family and community outreach component into the current proposal (to be provided by our in-state professional learning providers) to provide additional resources that support such local outreach efforts throughout the full transition to CBE. Finally, the Board's outreach regarding this budget request was conducted in tandem with broader community engagement conducted by SBE's FutureReady initiative to comprehensively update graduation requirements. An important focus of FutureReady is promoting and integrating the primary strategies of CBE, including interdisciplinary learning, student choice, flexible and innovative learning outside of the classroom, and competency-based crediting.

The MBLC project has done powerful community engagement work with the local tribal communities connected to the MBLC grantee schools. This effort was carried out in partnership with an Indigenous CRSE expert and a dedicated Washington educator who has been committed to CBE work in the state for many years. This educator provided professional development through the MBLC project for individual grantee schools on effective CRSE practices, as well as a full-day training for MBLC schools. Additionally, this leader has promoted culturally relevant, engaging, and dynamic personalized learning experiences for students from

historically marginalized backgrounds outside of the classroom. For example, Native American students were able to earn credit while honoring their cultural background through a canoe journey.

One of our MBLC schools that received schoolwide training from this expert as part of the project reported this: "In our current partnership [with their local tribe], we are meeting regularly to plan, discuss, and institutionalize the awarding of credit for rich and varied cultural learning. We are encouraging students to request credits in advance of participating in these experiences as one way of communicating that we see and value their learning outside of school. The work being done to validate our students' learning experiences is robust and will lead to greater educational equity. And, as we develop this model with [the local tribe], we are creating a system that can be applied in other contexts to support students who have learning experiences apart from [the tribe]."

Disproportional Impact Considerations

This project is designed to decrease disproportionate impacts on student populations that have been historically marginalized. CBE, in conjunction with culturally responsive and sustaining education, is an equity strategy with the strong potential to close opportunity gaps, and emerging evidence supports this claim. SBE was intentional in our selection process for Cohort 2 schools to ensure that, to the extent possible, this cohort would be representative of the state's demographics. We aimed to include a variety of school types and achieve widespread geographical representation. Currently, Cohort 2 includes schools that serve youth who are not well served in traditional settings. This includes several Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs serving many students of color, two Open Doors programs, a charter school in South Seattle with a large majority of Black students, and several schools with significant Native American student populations. These schools have emphasized the importance of relevant, personalized, culturally responsive instructional models, particularly culturally responsive CBE, for their students.

We are thrilled to report that since participating in our grant project, several schools in the MBLC have been recognized for closing opportunity and achievement gaps through our [Washington School Improvement Framework's School Recognition Program](#). Only about 16 percent of schools throughout the state received that recognition this year, and some of the MBLC schools earning this award attribute this achievement to their work promoting culturally responsive practices and competency-based education. For example, Tumwater High School, a Cohort 2 school, earned the designation through the following metric: Hispanic/Latino student growth from the 2023-24 school year to the 2024-25 school year was in the top 10% of schools for: Graduation Rate, Dual Credit Completion, 9th-Graders on Track. Bush Middle School, a Cohort 1 School earned its recognition for the following: Black student growth from the 2023-24 school year to the 2024-25 school year was in the top 10% of schools for their ELA Proficiency Rate, Math Proficiency Rate, and Math Student Growth Percentiles. La Conner Middle School, a Cohort 1 School, earned the award for the following: Multiracial student growth from the 2023-

24 school year to the 2024-25 school year was in the top 10% of schools for ELA Proficiency Rate and attendance.

Our South Seattle charter MBLC school, Ranier Valley Leadership Academy (RVLA), with strong culturally responsive and anti-racist CBE practices described the school's improved outcomes as a result of MBLC participation: "Through (a middle school ELA teacher's) use of mastery-based grading practices, clear learning targets, standards-aligned rubrics, and strong scholar relationships, her scholars demonstrated some of the strongest growth outcomes in the school. By the end of the year, the percentage of middle school ELA scholars achieving High Growth on MAP assessments had nearly doubled, reaching approximately 29% of scholars. This growth is particularly meaningful given that many RVLA scholars enter our school several grade levels behind due to systemic inequities in access to early educational opportunities."

Target Communities and Populations

As mentioned above, the MBLC project continues to support 47 schools in two cohorts (28 districts statewide), and through this work, over 18,000 students continue to be part of this powerful process of educational transformation. The program also has drawn a great deal of interest from the Washington State education community, with about 7,000 interested parties following the work through our bi-monthly newsletter mailings, some of whom participate in the learning opportunities.

Culturally responsive CBE serves all students, and as mentioned above, may particularly benefit those students traditionally not well served by our current education system, including Black, Indigenous, and students of color, students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and low-income students. With the culturally responsive CBE approach, teaching methods are designed to equitably engage each student in ways that best support that individual student's learning journey. Culturally responsive CBE has the potential to close opportunity gaps by centering those students furthest from educational justice. For further discussion on culturally responsive CBE, please refer to the "Package Description" section above.

SBE was intentional in including schools in our project that serve youth who are not well served by traditional settings. Our MBLC schools include several Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs serving many students of color, two Open Doors programs, a charter school in South Seattle with a large majority of Black students, and several schools with significant Native American student populations. These schools have emphasized the importance of relevant, personalized, culturally responsive instructional models, particularly culturally responsive CBE, for their students.

Community Inputs and Incorporations

The needs articulated by the MBLC schools informed the contents of this proposal from the outset. Likewise, The MBL Collaborative Consulting Group provided input throughout the proposal development process to inform this decision package (see stakeholder impacts section for more details).

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

HEAL Act Agencies Supplemental Questions

N/A

Puget Sound Recovery

N/A

State Workforce Impacts

N/A

Intergovernmental

N/A

Stakeholder impacts

The State Board of Education engaged with several stakeholders in developing this proposal. In addition to collecting input from legislative champions, SBE received an enthusiastic endorsement from a large ESD interested in potentially assuming some of the professional development duties we are proposing.

Stakeholders expressed broad support for this proposal with particular interest in the learnings and resources coming out of the demonstration project. The Board did not hear any concerns with moving forward in this work. The Chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees, both champions of CBE, have expressed enthusiasm for this proposal for many years, and the passing and implementation of Senate Bill 5189 on competency-based education in 2025 highlights the broad support received from both the legislature and Washington State education stakeholders to develop structures that can support and enable schools across the state to continue CBE implementation work.

One particularly important feedback mechanism for this work is the MBL Collaborative Consulting Group (CCG), an informal advisory group established to support the MBLC demonstration project. The members represent the K-12 system, higher education, industry, and community-based organizations (CBOs), and several of them were part of the state's MBL Work Group. At several recent CCG meetings, members discussed the need for ongoing support for the work, noting that a long-term CBE implementation process requires sustained support from policy makers and the Legislature.

Another important source of feedback is the current educators participating in Cohort 1 and 2 of the demonstration project. Feedback from participants shows that they highly value the professional learning, grant funding, and state support they are receiving through the project. Here are some quotes from MBLC schools:

- Overall, our experience with the MBLC project has been transformative, leading to positive impacts on educators and students alike. As we continue our journey towards culturally responsive-sustaining MBL, we remain committed to ongoing reflection, collaboration, and improvement to ensure that all students receive the education they

deserve. We appreciate the support provided by the MBLC project and look forward to continued collaboration to expand culturally responsive-sustaining MBL across our school and district.

- Our final thoughts and reflections on our most recent year with MBLC are pure gratitude. Pure gratitude for believing in our ability to enact change and providing us with the unmatched support to get there. Seeing all our efforts last year come to fruition this year has been nothing short of remarkable and awe inspiring. We are so grateful for this partnership and we truly hope it will continue next year.
- The primary factor in our success was the support of the collaborative. This was a grant filled with more than just expectations and money – the coaching, the webinars, the convenings, the field trips, the opportunities to network, the direct support from SBE all were instrumental in our success. We had the drive and the willingness to start this work, but it was the grant that made it a viable option.
- Participation in the collaborative has afforded the staff the time, outside of school, to develop and find consensus on a shared vision for our efforts. It has also provided us with rich and meaningful resources that have enhanced our experiences. Our students have benefitted from our collective efforts as their experiences have come from all school events, within advisory, in all academic subjects, and within interdisciplinary courses where there has been an effort to help students make connections. The work of the MBLC is so critical as it encourages and promotes best practices for students not only meeting academic standards, but it requires them to apply their knowledge and understanding as well. In doing so, it demands students to develop much needed 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem solving. All of which are seldom required by traditional approaches to teaching and learning while mastery-based learning emphasis is on applying knowledge and skills within real world scenarios such as living and working within diverse environments that demand inclusivity, tolerance, and respect of difference.
- Our school culture is a function of our MBLC work specifically.
- It's impossible to untangle the impact of the [MBLC] grant from the development of who we are and the identity of [our school].

State Facilities Impacts

N/A

Changes from Current Law

N/A

Legal or Administrative Mandates

N/A

Governor's Salmon Strategy

N/A

IT ADDENDUM

N/A