

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5189

As of February 17, 2025

Title: An act relating to supporting the implementation of competency-based education.

Brief Description: Supporting the implementation of competency-based education.

Sponsors: Senators Wellman, Dhingra, Harris, Nobles, Wilson, C., Kauffman, Hasegawa and Saldaña.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/15/25, 2/04/25 [DP-WM, DNP, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 2/17/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to adopt rules to authorize funding for students enrolled in competency-based education (CBE) programs and to create competencies aligned with state learning standards.
- Requires the State Board of Education (SBE) develop and recommend a process to identify and designate schools and school districts that are implementing CBE, and identify costs associated with this process.
- Directs the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association to review barriers related to students participating in CBE in its rule adoption process.
- Requires SBE, in consultation with other agencies, to develop or identify and recommend a format for a CBE high school transcript as part of, or as an alternative to the standardized high school transcript.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Harris, Ranking Member; Cortes, Hansen and Krishnadasan.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator McCune.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Dozier.

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Trevor Press (786-7446)

Background: Legislation Related to Competency-Based Education. In 2019, the Legislature directed the State Board of Education (SBE) to convene and staff a mastery-based learning work group to inform the Governor, Legislature, and public about barriers to mastery-based learning. Mastery-based learning is also commonly known as competency-based education (CBE).

For the purpose of the work group, mastery-based learning was defined as a program model in which:

- students advance upon demonstrated mastery of content;
- competencies include explicit, measurable, and transferable learning objectives empowering students;
- assessments are meaningful, and a positive learning experience for students;
- students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs; and
- learning outcomes emphasize competencies including application and creation of knowledge, and the development of important skills and dispositions.

The work group was directed to examine opportunities for increasing student access to relevant and robust mastery-based academic pathways aligned to personal career goals and postsecondary education. At the direction of the Legislature, the work group published recommendations for the profile of a graduate in 2022.

In 2021, the operating budget appropriated \$1.5 million in the 2022 fiscal year and \$3.5 million in the 2023 fiscal year to SBE for the implementation of mastery-based learning in school district demonstration sites. SBE was directed to require grant recipients to report on impacts and participate in a collaborative to share best practices.

Washington Interscholastic Activities Association. In Washington State, school boards may

delegate control, supervision, and regulation of extracurricular activities to the Washington Interscholastic Athletics Association (WIAA), or any other voluntary nonprofit entity. Under state law, the WIAA, or any other voluntary nonprofit entity, may adopt rules and policies governing student participation, as well as penalties for rules violations subject to statutory requirements.

Standardized Transcripts. The standardized high school transcript used by school districts was developed at the direction of the Legislature by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in consultation with the public four-year institutions of higher education, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Summary of Bill: Definitions. Mastery-based learning has the same meaning as CBE.

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

CBE means education including the following elements:

- 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;
- the assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students yielding timely, relevant, and actionable evidence;
- students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs;
- students' progress is based on evidence of mastery, not seat time;
- students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing;
- strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems; and
- rigorous, common expectations for learning, including knowledge, skills, and dispositions, are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

Funding for Competency-Based Education Programs. By September 1, 2025, OSPI is directed to adopt rules to authorize full-time enrollment funding for students enrolled in CBE programs identified by SBE in accordance with certain criteria. These rules must permit students to report full-time equivalent students in CBE programs for general apportionment funding.

Aligning Competencies. Utilizing guidance from the mastery-based learning collaborative, OSPI and SBE are directed to recommend a process for OSPI to create competencies aligned with the state learning standards, and identify costs associated with this process.

Competency-Based Education Designation. SBE must design and recommend a process to identify and designate schools and school districts implementing CBE according to the definition in this bill, and identify the costs associated with this process. These recommendations are due in December 2025.

Direction to Washington Interscholastic Athletics Association. WIAA is directed to consider barriers to students participating in CBE as a component of its rule adoption process.

Transcripts. Before the 2026-27 school year, OSPI must update the standardized high school transcript.

SBE is directed to work with a range of stakeholders to develop a format for a CBE high school transcript and recommend this format to OSPI before the 2026-27 school year. The stakeholder group must include four-year institutions, SBE, OSPI, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: This is the natural way that humans learn, and even the Carnegie Foundation has moved away from the Carnegie Hour.

Competency Based Education (CBE) is a teaching method that focuses on students demonstrating their knowledge and skills and empowers students to take charge of their learning. This is valuable to employers and a game changer for schools who can focus on skills and concepts rather than box checking. Since implementing CBE, schools' graduation rates have improved significantly and students are more engaged in their learning.

Washington has had skills centers for a long time, which is another way of applying hands-on learning. These include Aviation High School, Henrietta Lacks, Maritime High School, all of which are oversubscribed. We've had CBE high schools in Washington for years, such as Gibson Ek and the Big Picture School.

There are two times more applications to the mastery-based learning collaborative than can be funded. This bill is backed by research and honors the recommendation of the state's work group. The equity element of the CBE definition is very important, and this definition aligns well with national work on this topic.

Developing a CBE transcript will provide a more transparent and holistic response to needs expressed by higher education institutions. This will improve the quality of educational records.

It is important to understand the real costs of professional development, staffing, and facilities for these programs. This bill provides resources to train teachers. This bill is necessary because OSPI funding models have not kept up with educational models that have been promulgated by the Legislature. Schools in the mastery-based learning collaborative have benefited from the funding they've received, which recognizes that mastery-based learning frequently includes learning in multiple locations, times, or modalities.

CON: The State Board of Education has not acknowledged the lack of direction in our schools and the appalling disruption in classrooms. CBE has lowered the bar so that students need only complete waivers, pathways, projects, and feel-good assignments. Throwing more money into the system and creating pathways for graduation is not the solution.

WA has an overabundance of choices for schools. We have traditional, charter, private, AP, IP, and CTE. Last year, 27,000 students enrolled in CTE. Self-paced high-density classes may work for some students, but not others.

The dictionary definition of competent is "adequate," there is no focus on making sure children master reading or math. It is difficult to impossible to measure mastery of qualities like being globally conscious. CBE tends to focus on how a student thinks; this is valid, but we need to put some inputs of knowledge into them first. This could be age-appropriate, where you do more CBE in the high school but in the early grades we need to make sure they are learning numbers, factual things, correct answers.

The Aurora Institute's 2024 report shows that half of school leaders were uncertain that families supported MBL and culturally responsive sustaining education and a quarter of school leaders believe that families do not support the focus on culturally responsive sustaining education or equity. This is a sectarian influence on public schools in violation of Article 9, Sec 4. Equity is antithetical to excellence.

OTHER: The definition of CBE is the definition of all good education. We want all education to be student-empowered, equity-focused, and have timely feedback. We need to address the timeline in which OSPI would pass the rules to access funding. Do we use pilot rules addressing only schools with the waiver or funded through mastery-based learning collaborative or wait until the SBE identifies their process and then pass OSPI rules.

There is not a single learning standard around identifying students for being in a seat. CBE in our state is about the collaborative and cohort model or having a waiver with an

application to SBE so we can ensure that learning standards are clearly identified and incorporated in OSPI's rules.

Some schools pursuing CBE including in evaluations have differentiated funding. Some have ALE funding because it is different than the traditional model. This section, should it pass, would result in some schools that will benefit from basic education funding rather than all and some will not. This section is permissive, and provides access to basic education funding.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Senator Lisa Wellman, Prime Sponsor; J. Lee Schultz, Washington State Board of Education; Troy Goracke, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Lauren House, Dishman Hills High School; Emily Souders, La Conner School District; Nasue Nishida, Washington Education Association; Holly Ferguson, Highline Public Schools.

CON: Joy Gjersvold, Conservative Ladies of Washington; Sarah Garriott; Rhonda Looney, None; Sharon Hanek.

OTHER: Becky Wallace, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education):

CON: Jennifer Heine-Withee; Sharon Damoff; Gabe Jacobs.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Please reach out to students in districts to see the transformative impact of this type of learning. Most work occurs without teachers. The current system fails most students. This bill is an essential nod to the future. Schools have had little chance to take stock of how things are working now. This bill allows schools to begin innovative work that recognizes what students know and do.

CON: No more money should be spent on this program until it has been audited for academic honesty and integrity. This bill provides credits in what can be seen as academic fraud. Competency based education will lower the bar on our education. The cost of education in Washington is soaring and success is falling. This type of education is not serving taxpayers.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: John Axtell; Jeff Petty; Gerrit Kischner.

CON: Sarah Garriott; Ryan Jewell.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.