



MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

A TOOLKIT FOR MOSCOW SCHOOL DISTRICT FAMILIES

- Learn the story behind Mastery-Based Learning
- Understand what Mastery-Based Learning looks like in action
- Address some common myths and misconceptions
- Find out where to learn more

The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking. ~Albert Einstein

When you're finished changing, you're finished. ~ Benjamin Franklin

DEAR PARENT:

You might have heard about Mastery-Based Learning in the news or from a friend. You may be wondering, what is Mastery-Based Learning, and what impact will it have on my child?

This kit is designed to help answer questions you may have and provide a foundation for further discussion with your child's teacher(s), or Moscow School District Administrators.

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DEFINITION:
MASTERY-BASED LEARNING GIVES EVERY STUDENT THE OPPORTUNITY TO GROW AND SUCCEED, TO DEVELOP PERSISTENCE AND DETERMINATION. IT GIVES TEACHERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE AND LETS STUDENTS LEARN AT THEIR OPTIMAL PACE.

MUST-KNOW FACTS ABOUT MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

We hope that you'll read everything in this kit, but until you have time, here are the most important things to know:

- THIS ISN'T AN EDUCATION FAD OR EXPERIMENT.**
This is an educational update happening across Idaho and other states. It's based on the reality that no student is "average." Every student has different strengths and needs, and that will never change.
- MASTERY-BASED LEARNING CAN LOOK DIFFERENT FROM CLASSROOM TO CLASSROOM.** Each school and classroom can apply Mastery-Based Learning in a way that takes into account their unique situation, resources, and student needs. Moscow School District is making this meet our community's needs, interests, and values.
- MASTERY-BASED LEARNING INSISTS THAT EVERY STUDENT CAN LEARN.**
Mastery-Based Learning is rooted in the idea that each student is more than average and may have their own unique learning needs. Every student deserves the opportunity to be challenged and to succeed.

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS

- Offers flexibility
- Promotes transparency
- Instills a desire to learn
- Develops real-world skills
- Ensures success
- Personalizes learning

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING IN MOSCOW SCHOOL DISTRICT #281

In May 2015, the Moscow School District was the first in the state to complete the task of seeking district-wide accreditation. During this process, evidence was gathered demonstrating distinct activities that relate to the identified traits of highly effective school districts. The evidence that was typically gathered by our building and district leadership teams consisted of policies and procedures, actions taken, and outcomes received. In addition, surveys were given to students, teachers, and parents to gather their thoughts and opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of our school district.

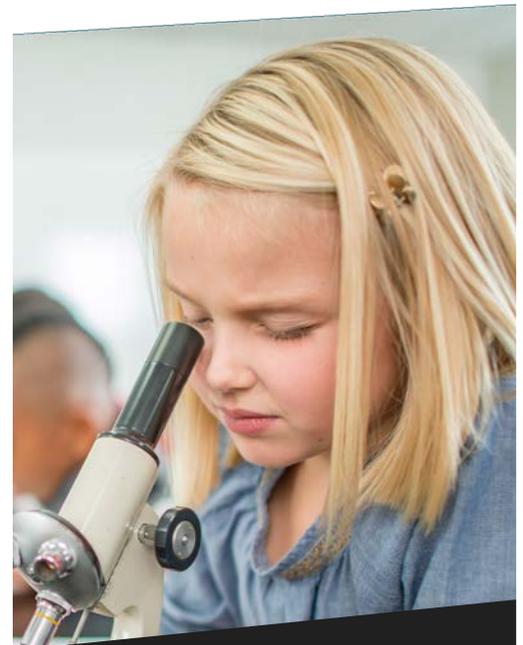
After the evidence was gathered and discussed by building leadership teams and a district leadership team, we were visited by an out-side accreditation team that reviewed all the evidence, including the survey results, and interviewed a sampling of parents, students, and teachers.

This process helped us identify areas that we needed to strengthen. The following are the goals identified through the accreditation process.

- Develop a K-12 assessment system that is aligned vertically and horizontally.
- All Moscow School District students will increase reading proficiency.
- All Moscow School District students will increase math proficiency.
- Communicate effectively to all Moscow School District stakeholders.

In working towards these goals, we found that Mastery-Based Learning would help us achieve our goals. The Moscow School District is establishing a Mastery-Based Learning system to meet the individual learning needs of all students. A district-wide Mastery-Based Learning system will:

- Provide a system that supports individualized instruction.
- Provide uniformity in learning requirements within grade level and subject area.
- Empower teachers to make instructional decisions based upon their students' learning needs.
- Provide clarity of expectations throughout the K-12 learning spectrum.
- Provide clarity in assessing a student's knowledge, understanding, and ability.
- Provide a system that allows for better communication among all stakeholders.



MASTERY-BASED LEARNING IS DEFINED AS A SYSTEM WHERE

*"STUDENT PROGRESS IS
BASED UPON A STUDENT'S
DEMONSTRATION OF MASTERY
OF COMPETENCIES AND
CONTENT, NOT SEAT TIME, OR
THE AGE, OR GRADE LEVEL
OF THE STUDENT."*

HOW DOES IT WORK?

In a **Mastery-Based Learning classroom**, the classroom may look different at times, depending on the needs of the students. In addition to whole group instruction and activities, one group of students could be exploring math tutorials on tablets, with each student's instructional video specifically tailored to his or her skill level. Another group may be working on a group project, learning not only the material itself but also collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills. A final group may be working on individual projects, with the teacher there to support them as needed.

Students receive frequent feedback about their progress on learning targets, reflect on how they best learn, and celebrate growth in real time. Each teacher will determine how best to use Mastery-Based Learning for their unique student population.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR MY CHILD?

Mastery-Based Learning meets students where they are and lets them learn in ways that are best for them. It allows for more personalized, differentiated learning, and provides support to struggling students before they advance, preventing future failure. It also provides the structure to challenge high achieving students so they can go deeper into the content.

With Mastery-Based Learning, you can rest assured that students will benefit from a personalized learning experience, receive assistance when needed, advance—and graduate—with the skills necessary for future college and career success.



ALEX

2ND GRADE ~ EXCELS IN READING

WHEN ALEX EXCELS, MASTERY-BASED LEARNING:

- OFFERS DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
- LETS HIM MOVE AT AN OPTIMAL PACE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM, OR AT TIMES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM
- OFFERS TEACHER GUIDANCE



SARAH

9TH GRADE ~ STRUGGLES WITH SCIENCE

WHEN SARAH STRUGGLES, MASTERY-BASED LEARNING:

- OFFERS DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
- LETS HER MOVE AT AN OPTIMAL PACE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM, OR AT TIMES OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM
- OFFERS TEACHER GUIDANCE

GET THE FACTS ABOUT IDAHO MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

ISN'T

Mastery-Based Learning isn't a move to technology, and it doesn't mean giving every student a tablet or computer.

Mastery-Based Learning isn't just a new way of grading.

Mastery-Based Learning isn't the latest education fad or experiment.

Mastery-Based Learning isn't going to happen overnight.

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

IS

Mastery-Based Learning is a way of teaching that recognizes each student's unique strengths and needs.

At times we will use technology and devices in the classroom. These can be useful tools for teachers and students, but they are just that—tools.

These technologies aren't a required part of Mastery-Based Learning. Also, using these technologies doesn't mean a school is using Mastery Education.

Mastery-Based Learning is focused on measuring a student's mastery of skills and concepts. Because of this, many Idaho Mastery-Based Learning classrooms will measure students' mastery based on some form of performance assessment.

Tests are not the only form of assessment—teachers can assess students through assignments, projects, performances, and in other ways.

Teachers give assessments to students when they are confident that the students will be fully successful.

A low score on an assessment is a sign that the student isn't ready to move forward. It's a chance to go back, practice more, and try again.

Mastery-Based Learning is an educational update that changes the way we prepare students for careers, college, and life.

Moscow School District's educational update to Mastery-Based Learning started in 2015. This is a fundamental change asking all stakeholders to rethink how students learn. Changes this big take time and effort, but we owe our students nothing less.

GET THE FACTS ABOUT IDAHO MASTERY-BASE LEARNING

IDAHO MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

ISN'T

Mastery-Based Learning isn't just for struggling students, or just for students who need to be more challenged.

Mastery-Based Learning isn't a way of making students teach themselves.

Mastery-Based Learning isn't a top-down mandate, or a one-size-fits-all system.

IDAHO MASTERY-BASED LEARNING

IS

Mastery-Based Learning is meant to serve each and every individual student.

Sometimes the education system is designed to serve the average student. But in reality, no student is "average." Instead, each student has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

Mastery-Based Learning lets students spend more time and effort on concepts that they are struggling to master.

Students can move quickly through material that they do grasp so that they continue to be challenged with more in-depth learning.

Mastery-Based Learning is a flexible system that allows teachers to step in quickly when a student starts to struggle.

Mastery-Based Learning asks students to take ownership of their education. It invites input from students to help decide how they will learn.

A teacher in a Mastery-Based Learning classroom should use many different teaching methods, including self-led, group, and one-on-one.

Parents in a Mastery-Based Learning school know what their students are currently learning and can watch their growth over time.

Mastery-Based Learning is being planned and led by teachers with decades of experience in the classroom. Educators from your school are able to work with other MSD #281 teachers to deepen their knowledge about Mastery Education and figure out how it will work at your student's school.

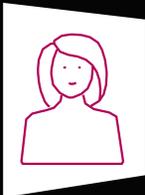
WHAT DOES A STUDENT-CENTERED EXPERIENCE LOOK LIKE?



Learners participate in a range of different learning techniques (teacher-facilitated, small group, individual, conferencing) and flexible groupings with other students based on their specific goals or needs.



Learners are regularly engaged in crafting, leading, and sharing the results of their inquiry, and can talk about their experiences: how they make connections and build background knowledge, how they go deep on a topic, the process of synthesizing information and reflecting; and finally, the creation of work products or performances to demonstrate Mastery.



Learners have ongoing opportunities to build strong relationships with adults, including parents and educators, who will continue to be formally engaged in their learning.



Learners access their learning data in real time and can take a leading role in discussing, reflecting, and evaluating their work relative to their goals.



Learners have a range of meaningful choices within units of study. Those choices are designed to make the curriculum relevant to the individual student, foster the student's self-regulatory abilities, and support interest-based learning and career exploration.



Students have regular and varied opportunities to learn key cognitive (thinking) and metacognitive (awareness of thinking) skills and strategies. Students have sufficient time to practice and apply new skills and strategies in both group and independent settings.

Questions & Answers

Hopefully, this packet answered many of your questions about Mastery-Based Learning. However, here are a few additional questions that have been asked and the responses provided.

What is Mastery-Based Learning?

Mastery-Based Learning is a student-centered educational system that promotes relevant learning while allowing flexibility in both time and teaching methods, where progression in education is determined by mastering content and skills needed for college, careers and life.

Briefly, what's the main difference between Mastery-Based Learning and the traditional education?

Traditional:

Time (Constant) + Instruction (Constant) = Learning (Variable)

Mastery-Based Learning:

Time (Variable) + Instruction (Variable) = Learning (Constant)

How is Standards-Based Grading different from traditional grading?

With the traditional grading system, many elements are combined to determine your student's grade - test scores, quizzes, completed homework, classroom participation, coming to school on time, extra credit - then, the average of the semester's work equates into a percentage that correlates with a specific letter grade.

Standards-Based Grading, a subcomponent within the Mastery-Based Learning model, separates those elements. And while we believe all should be addressed, now students and parents will be able to see specifically if the student needs help with an academic concept or if he or she can't remember to turn in homework.

Rather than averaging all scores to produce a single grade, Standards-Based Grading details the student's learning development over time.

Questions & Answers

Continued

How is Standards-Based Grading different from traditional grading? (Continued)

The Benefits of Standards-Based Grading

For Students:

- Learning targets are clearly defined and aligned with state standards
- Students are offered multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate proficiency
- Students monitor their own progress toward the achievement of specific targets
- Specific feedback on progress helps build self-esteem, pride, and motivation for students

For Parents:

- Report card grades are less mysterious and have more meaning
- Parents are aware of exactly what their child knows, is able to do, and next steps for progress
- Parents know in what areas their child needs more support
- Parents are empowered to increase their child's confidence and help their student set goals

For Teachers:

- Teachers know exactly where students stand in their progress toward learning targets and what support needs to be provided
- Teachers of the same courses throughout the district have aligned expectations and standards
- Assessment results help teachers determine when students need extra help and when they need more challenging work

Questions & Answers

Continued

How does a proficiency level score differ from a traditional letter grade?

Traditional letter grades generally show how well a student is doing compared to his or her classmates, can reflect averages of work done over the year, and show extra credit completed. Proficiency reporting reflects a student's individual progress toward learning specific knowledge and skills as related to a specific standard or learning target.

Why did we start the transition to a Mastery-Based Learning System?

As we moved toward reaching the goals we had set in the accreditation process, we reached out and brought in renowned education researchers to speak with our staff. We determined the Mastery-Based Learning program would help us reach our goals. Early in our transition to Mastery-Based Learning, we were offered a grant by the Idaho State Department of Education to learn about and transition to a Mastery-Based Learning system. The District Leadership Committee determined that we would accept the grant if we were allowed to have the autonomy to meet our specific needs in Moscow. The Idaho State Department of Education agreed. We accepted the grant and began training our staff to move toward a Mastery-Based Learning system.

Questions & Answers

Continued

What is the difference between a rubric, a proficiency scale, and a grading scale?

Rubric: We use a rubric when we are grading a single piece of work and want to give feedback on multiple skills or multiple standards. For example, we may look at a writing piece and use a rubric to give students feedback on their word choice, spelling and introduction.

Proficiency Scale: We use a proficiency scale when we are monitoring a student's progress on one standard or learning target over several pieces of work. For example, we may look at several writing pieces to determine if the student is proficient at writing introductions or to identify "next steps" to getting them to proficiency. (student progress toward a standard or learning target)

Grading Scale: A Grading scale in education is the process of applying standardized measurements of varying levels of achievement in a course.

How will my student be assessed?

Your student's learning will be assessed using a variety of formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment is completed during a learning process to assist the student and teacher of how the student is progressing in learning the new skill. The summative assessments are completed at the end of the learning process to determine the level of mastery of the skill taught. These tools will include formal assessments such as traditional paper-and-pencil tests, projects, written papers, lab reports, or verbal assessments, but they may also include assessments such as classroom discussions or teacher observations. Essentially, everything that a student does in a standards-based class provides the teacher with evidence of the student's learning.

Questions & Answers

Continued

Why is district changing to Standards-Based Grading?

As part of our commitment to our community, Moscow School District wants to report grades that are accurate, consistent, meaningful, and supportive of learning. The change to standards-based grading is an effort to reach that goal. Here is how Standards-Based Grading addresses each of those four criteria:

Accurate: By basing a student's grade on solely academic factors, the teacher creates a clear picture of what the student has learned without the influence of other factors. These other factors, such as effort and attitude, are still essential, but are not part of the student's academic grade.

Consistent: Each course employing standards-based grading is aligned to standards and uses common assessments at multiple points during the semester.

Meaningful: A meaningful grade is one that clearly communicates what learning has taken place, making it easier to identify areas of strength and to address areas of concern for each student.

Supportive of Learning: Standards-based grading supports learning by focusing on the material that has or has not been learned rather than on accumulating points to reach a certain total.

Questions & Answers

Continued

Why are report cards changing?

Report cards are changing to give parents and students detailed information on progress toward mastery of essential grade level or content standards.

What's changing on the report card?

Instead of letter grades in 4th and 5th grade, parents and students will receive a report showing progress toward mastery of an overall concept or skill. Progress will be reported for all grades and academic subject area concepts or skills based on a 1-4 proficiency scale. Study and social skills are reported using a 1-3 scale.

What should the expectations for my student be?

Remembering that every student learns differently, the goal for students is to reach a level 3-“Meeting State and District Standards” by the end of the school year.

Can a student perform at a level 3 during one marking period and then receive a level 2 or 1 in subsequent marking

The expectations change from one marking period to another as the student moves toward mastering grade level expectations for the end of the year. As such, a student may find that expectations have increased in each marking period. This may result in very different levels of proficiency. A student could receive a 3 in the first marking period, and a level 2 or 1 in the subsequent marking period.

Questions & Answers

Continued

Some areas on my student's report card were not evaluated this marking period and the report card shows an "*" or "not assessed at this time". Why wasn't this standard evaluated?

Some standards will be taught each marking period. These standards will be assessed more frequently, and progress will be reported every marking period. In other areas, the skill can progress to something more difficult. Other standards require an entire unit of study that may be unrelated to the current topic. In this case, the skill or concept may have an "*" for a marking period since the skill may not have been assessed at that time. When the standard is taught, the standard is evaluated.

Why doesn't my student have a grade yet?

Because Standards-Based Grading focuses on assessments, your student's overall class grade may not be updated as frequently as it was when every assignment affected the grade. This shift is especially noticeable at the beginning of the semester when it may take a few weeks for the class to complete the first assessment and for your student to be given a grade. However, while the overall grade may not change as frequently the teachers are still recording other assignments, such as homework and in-class assignments, that provide important feedback to you and the teacher about what work is being done. You can see this additional information by clicking on your student's grade for a class. In a standards-based class, grades reflect where a student is at the moment, not where they will be at the end of the semester. Please contact your student's teacher at any time if you have a question about your student's grade.

How will Standards-Based Grading affect my student's GPA and transcript at the secondary level?

Within the secondary grade levels, Standards-Based Grading will report an overall letter grade for each course, so it does not have any impact on your student's grade point average or transcript.

Questions & Answers

Continued

Why should my student do the homework assigned in class if it isn't included in the grade?

Many students feel that in a Standards-Based class they don't have to worry about anything except their final chapter or unit test. This is incorrect. It is important for students to understand that they are being assessed every day by their teachers and that everything they do in class lets their teacher assess their knowledge and helps prepare the students for the assessments. Student work is also analyzed by teachers to determine growth and improvement towards mastery of a specific skill or content. Therefore, a student misses an opportunity to practice a skill when they choose not to do an assignment.

What can my student do to raise their grade in a Mastery-Based Learning class?

The goal in a standards-based class is to ensure that students master the essential standards for the class, so any efforts to raise your student's grade will have the same goal. Your student should meet with the teacher to determine which standards need improvement. The focus is on improving your student's mastery of the material, so extra credit points are not used in Mastery-Based Learning classes.

Questions & Answers

Continued

Why wasn't more information shared with parents at the onset of the transition from the traditional learning system to a Mastery-Based Learning System?

After receiving the grant we realized that staff members needed to learn the concepts within a Mastery-Based Learning system to effectively communicate with parents. Parents typically go directly to their student's teacher for information regarding any changes. The teachers needed more information regarding mastery-based learning so they would be able to provide accurate information.

Since the beginning of the transition we have requested that our teachers and building administrators discuss the Mastery-Based Learning system with parents at the beginning of the year open houses and during parent/teacher conferences.

We are now embarking on a larger communication campaign regarding the benefits of the Mastery-Based Learning even as we are still adjusting some of our implementation strategies.

What and how will communication be provided to stakeholders in the future?

We will be posting updates regarding the progress of the transition, and providing additional answers to common questions as they arise. This information will be posted on a secure website for staff members, and it will be posted on the district's website for community to access.

Questions & Answers

Continued

What do the proficiency levels mean?

4 Exceeding State and District Standards	A “4” means your student consistently exceeds standards as demonstrated by a variety of work that shows an in-depth understanding of grade-level concepts. A “4” is very difficult to obtain.
3* Meeting State and District Standards Expectations	A “3” means that your student has demonstrated mastery in terms of knowledge. Your student has met the expectation independently and requires little to no adult support to demonstrate proficiency. *This is the goal and would have historically been the equivalent of an A.
2 Working towards State and District Standards	A “2” means that your student’s performance indicates developing skills with some application within the grade level range. He/she still requires support and assistance to meet the requirements of the academic standard for their grade level.
1 Not Meeting State or District Standards	A “1” means that your student is not meeting the grade level expectations, needs continued support, and struggles with the concept even with assistance.
* Not assessed at this time.	This standard has not yet been covered or assessed at this time.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS? INTERESTED IN LEARNING EVEN MORE?
CONTACT YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL



Thank You to the Idaho Mastery Education Network (IMEN) for the guidance, resources, and grant funding they provided Moscow School District during our transition to the Mastery-Based Learning model.