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Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative Evaluation Report – Cohort 1, Year 3

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Acknowledgments

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This report was prepared by the Aurora Institute under contract with the Washington State Board of Education.

Images: Student mural at GATES High School in Tacoma, Washington. Student wall tiles at West Valley Middle School in Yakima, Washington. Student masks at CHOICE Academy in Burien, Washington.

About the Aurora Institute

The Aurora Institute's mission is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all. Aurora is shaping the future of teaching and learning through its work in policy advocacy, research, field-building, and convening. With a national and global view of education innovation, Aurora works on systems change in K-12 education, promotes best practices, examines policy barriers, and makes recommendations for change to yield improved outcomes for students. Aurora envisions a world in which all people are empowered to attain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to achieve success, contribute to their communities, and advance society.

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Executive Summary

The Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative (MBLC) is a demonstration project taking place in 47 schools in 28 districts in Washington State. The schools receive funding and participate in professional learning and the statewide network of MBLC schools to support implementation of mastery-based learning (MBL) and culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE). The initiative's overarching goal is "to inform future policy by helping decision makers better understand what quality mastery-based learning looks like, how long it takes to implement, and what resources are necessary."

The Washington State Board of Education (SBE) staff are leading the MBLC with executive sponsorship from SBE, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB). The Aurora Institute is evaluating the initiative to identify effective policies, practices, and system changes that can support MBL implementation throughout Washington's K-12 education system.

The MBLC comprises 23 schools from an initial cohort that began in December 2021 and a second cohort of 24 schools that began in January 2024. This report presents evaluation activities and findings for Cohort 1 at the end of Year 3 of the initiative. All content in the report refers to Cohort 1 unless Cohort 2 is specified. The Cohort 2 evaluation is in a separate report. Year 1 of the MBLC's activities (which was six months long) focused on planning, Year 2 focused on professional learning, and Year 3 focused on deepening implementation. This executive summary provides an overview of the evaluation's findings and recommendations.

Findings

The MBLC has provided substantial evidence of success in promoting deeper MBL and CRSE preparedness, implementation, and positive impacts on early outcomes such as school climate, cultural responsiveness, student engagement, and student ownership of their learning. Most educators and school leaders said that their schools have shifted toward deeper implementation, and they support their school's plans to continue that process over the next several years. More than four out of five shifts in educator and school practices were in the direction intended by the initiative, which strongly suggests that the MBLC is contributing to schools moving toward deeper mastery-based learning and culturally responsive-sustaining education.

The initiative has also created and supported conditions in schools and the state to facilitate CRS MBL[1] implementation. It has sustained the MBLC's statewide network of schools, offered two-and-a-half years of extensive professional learning and coaching opportunities, provided funding and guidance for schools to engage in many activities to deepen their implementation, and secured a fourth year of funding at a reduced level for all schools. Almost all school leaders said that they would recommend participating in

[1] The initiative originally used the acronyms MBL and CRSE, which were used to frame the evaluation design. Later they added the acronym CRS MBL, for culturally responsive-sustaining mastery-based learning. This report uses the two versions interchangeably.

the MBLC to other school leaders who are exploring transformation to a more student-centered and equitable learning approach.

Students shared their perspectives on four key MBL and CRSE strategies: selecting learning opportunities based on their interests, learning at different paces, celebrating diverse cultures and traditions, and fostering a more welcoming and affirming school environment. These approaches made students feel more engaged and invested in their learning. Most students wanted schools to expand their use of these strategies, which they said they had experienced at low to moderate levels.

Much remains to be done to realize the MBLC's vision. Many educators are implementing CRS MBL strategies regularly, but about half are just beginning the transition. Depth of implementation also varies widely across schools, and a substantial minority of educators do not feel well prepared to implement CRS MBL or believe that doing so will improve student outcomes.

Throughout the initiative's first two-and-a-half years, SBE staff and the MBLC schools have come to a growing understanding that the journey to deep implementation will require consistent effort and resources well beyond the current grant period. This is consistent with the time frame observed nationally for schools to reach deep levels of MBL and CRSE implementation.

Washington has made substantial progress toward realizing each of the MBLC's objectives. The state's decisions to fund Cohort 1 for an additional year and to launch Cohort 2 signal that they see the MBLC's early outcomes as favorable enough to continue the pilot. They recognize that CRS MBL transformation is a long-term, iterative process. The lessons learned, the infrastructure built, and the processes refined during the first three years have improved the conditions for Cohort 1 schools to continue their transformation and for schools in Cohort 2 and future cohorts to make faster and deeper progress.

MBLC Network – School leaders said that the existence of a statewide network has helped them make a case locally for the value of transformation toward MBL and CRSE. Network events affirmed, informed, and inspired school staff, enabled connections with and visits to other innovating schools, and provided guidance that accelerated transformation efforts. A fundamental MBLC benefit is that the grant pays for professional learning and collaboration time for school staff.

Cohort 1 had school selection, work planning, and infrastructure challenges that SBE staff and the professional learning providers have addressed in ways that they believe will increase buy-in and accelerate progress of the schools in Cohort 2 and future cohorts. These challenges do not detract from the substantial progress made by Cohort 1 schools, and describing the refinements across successive cohorts supports the state's goal of documenting what conditions and resources are needed to implement quality CRS MBL successfully. For Year 4, SBE staff are focusing on strategies for schools, districts, and the state to support and sustain the work of Cohort 1 schools when their MBLC funding ends.

Professional Learning – During Year 3, the network's professional learning providers facilitated 27 virtual and live events, provided individual coaching and supports for each school, and added many resources to the MBLC website. Coaching was conducted primarily with members of each school's MBL team, a small group of staff who are leading transformation efforts and sharing their learning with colleagues who are not on the MBL school team.

Many schools took full advantage of the professional learning opportunities and said that the coaching and events were essential for deepening their CRS MBL work. Coaching had the highest participation rate, averaging two hours per month including virtual meetings and four on-site meetings. Participation in virtual and in-person events was substantial and well-received by attendees. However, levels of participation declined from Year 2 to Year 3, and many schools again fell short of the state's attendance expectations. In response, the professional learning providers have restructured the Year 4 events to take place on a single day each month to accommodate schools' preferences and schedules. The patterns of participation in professional learning events in Years 2 and 3 continue to raise the question of what level of engagement, if any, the initiative should require of grantees.

State Policy and Supports – Several state policies and supports facilitate CRS MBL implementation, including mastery-based crediting, equivalency crediting, Alternative Learning Experience rules, waivers from credit-based graduation requirements, and the Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CCDEI) Standards for Educators. Some of these policies require further development to address misalignments with the education system that reduce their utilization.

Several positive state-level developments occurred in Year 3. Washington passed legislation enabling a new performance-based graduation option and provided resources to support the creation of tools for its implementation. Updates to the state's teacher evaluation system added elements that align with CRS MBL instruction and assessment practices. A bill to advance CRS MBL (2024 SB 6264) passed the Senate but didn't make it out of the House during the brief legislative session. Finally, OSPI began a review of the state's learning standards that may move the state closer to having an approved set of higher-level competencies and success criteria.

Additional supportive reforms discussed in the Year 2 and Year 3 evaluation reports, most of which were also included in SB 6264, would be revising the state's grading systems and standardized transcript format to fully support mastery-based grading, revising funding approaches that disincentivize schools from facilitating off-campus learning opportunities, and amending existing statutes to incorporate the field's updated definition of mastery-based learning to reflect the importance of equity, student agency, and other important MBL elements.

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education – There is substantial support for implementing CRSE among staff at MBLC schools. Educators and school leaders reported engaging in a wide range of activities to improve pedagogy, cultural responsiveness, and school structures and climate in relation to CRSE. In most schools, this work appeared to be in its early stages. Deep work is still needed to build familiarity with CRSE principles and practices, use school data to address inequities, explore strategies to award academic credit for cultural learning that takes place outside the school, and provide needed curriculum, resources, supports, schedules, and planning time.

Many interviewees felt that they and their school are not taking enough action to ensure equitable outcomes and do not have enough staff capacity to address students' needs. Several want to offer more culturally responsive education but lack resources or time to develop relevant knowledge. Some educators and school leaders have experienced pushback or bigotry from staff and community members who object to certain CRSE perspectives or strategies. This has impeded transformation efforts and has prompted some school and state leaders to diversify their messengers and approaches.

Educator and School-Level Attitudes, Policies, and Practices – The findings describe the levels and features of many current practices and document changes over time in three MBL and CRSE dimensions:

1. **Knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs,** such as familiarity with MBL and CRSE principles, level of support for deeper implementation over time, and beliefs about potential impacts on equitable outcomes, postsecondary readiness, and school culture.
2. **School-level policies and practices**, such as structures for educator collaboration and support, school schedules, curriculum and materials, competency frameworks, assessment, grading, and crediting.
3. **Educator practices** related to responsive pacing, differentiation, student agency, assessment, grading, habits of success, and anytime/anywhere learning.

Many aspects of MBL and CRSE are already happening in MBLC schools, and the findings suggest numerous opportunities to deepen implementation in Year 4 and beyond. The largest positive shifts were in schoolwide practices, such as using data to address inequitable outcomes or providing release time for educators to observe each other's practice. There were also many positive but typically smaller shifts in individual educators' practices, such as providing opportunities for enrichment or meeting individually with each student to discuss their work and progress.

Managing Change – All MBLC schools are managing complex change processes. Several were addressed earlier in relation to state policy, the MBLC network, professional learning, and culturally responsive-sustaining education. Many additional enablers, challenges, and needs for effective school transformation include developing a shared vision, developing a phased and focused implementation plan, launching effectively, devising flexible support and scheduling strategies, making use of early adopters, supporting experimentation, monitoring and managing implementation, determining consistency expectations, managing district demands, insisting on change, celebrating change, and developing evidence of success. Each MBLC school uses these strategies to different extents, depending on local circumstances.

Recommendations

Strategies to improve CRS MBL in current and future MBLC cohorts and Washington's K-12 education system appear throughout the report. The broadest and highest-leverage strategies are gathered here as a series of recommendations for state policies and supports, the MBLC network, professional learning, school-level policies, and educator practices.

State Policies and Supports

- Continue supporting the Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative. The initiative has made substantial progress toward its objectives, learned and improved in response to challenges, and shown that transformation is a long-term process that requires innovation and refinement across multiple cohorts of schools.
- Develop a state-approved set of mastery-based competencies, learning progressions, and success criteria aligned to state standards that mastery-based schools or districts could opt into as an alternative to the existing system.

- Update state reporting systems to fully support and accurately reflect the meaning of standards-based grades.
- Update state legislation to incorporate the field's 2019 definition of mastery-based learning, rather than current use of the 2011 definition.
- Support re-introducing legislation similar to 2024 Senate Bill 6264 and contribute lessons learned from the MBLC and a review of other states' policies that support CRS MBL.
- Continue investigating and implementing changes to state policies and structures that would further encourage the adoption of CRS MBL.

MBLC Network

- Support Cohort 1 schools and their districts to prepare for sustainability after MBLC funding ends. For future cohorts, use lessons learned from Cohort 1 to provide this support from the outset of their work.
- Consider requiring schools to use grant funds to support staff who will become internal CRS MBL experts and coaches. Explore strategies to incentivize this work, such as job-embedded fellowships and pathways to earn graduate-level credentials.
- Continue revising the work-planning and reporting processes to support schools in creating more tangible goals, milestones, and well-protected staff planning time.
- Reassess what requirements, if any, should be placed on participation in network professional learning activities and if alternative pathways and accountability are needed.
- Revisit the practice of providing equal funding to schools regardless of size. Evaluate whether larger schools need increased funding and coaching to achieve timely progress.
- Create more strategies to recognize and celebrate successes, amplify best practices within the MBLC network, and share inspiring resources from the broader CRS MBL field.
- Develop processes to identify a school's level of CRS MBL implementation in relation to common criteria and the school's own goals for change.
- Increase efforts to establish statewide infrastructure that supports school and district communication with diverse stakeholders about CRS MBL implementation.

Professional Learning

- Prioritize supporting schools' efforts to maximize the investment of well-protected and collaborative staff planning time focused on advancing MBL and CRSE.
- Facilitate more opportunities for every MBLC school to visit high-implementing, mastery-based schools in Washington and nationally.
- Increase the amount of in-person coaching. As in-state CRS MBL expertise grows, including expertise within schools and districts, the cost of coaching should decrease.
- Encourage Cohort 1 schools to use the new self-assessment tool to shape their work planning for Year 4 and beyond.

- Ensure that school staff know and understand the full breadth of strategies that CRSE encompasses.
- Explore additional strategies and messengers to understand and engage school staff and community members who oppose aspects of MBL and CRSE.

School-Level Policies and Educator Practices

The findings on school-level policies and educator practices suggest many high-impact areas and successful strategies for focusing MBL and CRSE change efforts in Year 4 and beyond. An overarching need is to provide sufficient time and support to deepen implementation. Each school should assess their needs and set ambitious but achievable goals to improve the quantity and quality of their practices and policies over time in collaboration with their MBLC coach and other experts and informed by a growing body of self-assessment inventories and support resources.

Introduction

The Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative (MBLC) is a demonstration project taking place in 47 schools in Washington State. The schools receive funding and participate in professional learning and the statewide network of MBLC schools to support implementation of mastery-based learning (MBL) and culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE). The initiative's overarching goal is "to inform future policy by helping decision makers better understand what quality mastery-based learning looks like, how long it takes to implement, and what resources are necessary."

The Washington State Board of Education (SBE) staff are leading the MBLC with executive sponsorship from SBE, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB). The objectives of the initiative include:

- Establishing a statewide infrastructure to provide needed professional development, policy, and communications support to enable school districts and schools to implement MBL.
- Demonstrating that schools can successfully implement MBL with student learning and assessment that are authentic, engaging, and culturally connected and sustaining.
- Documenting the key steps that states, districts, and schools must take to transition to MBL successfully.
- Positively impacting student engagement and progress toward learning goals.

The state defined mastery-based learning in 2019 legislation (E2SHB 1599) as follows:

- Students advance upon demonstrated mastery of content;
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower 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 that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.[2]

The MBLC initiative also emphasizes CRSE, due to the recommendations of Washington's Mastery-Based Learning Work Group, which was enlisted by the state legislature to provide recommendations for the development of mastery-based pathways to earning a high school diploma. In the Work Group's 2020 report, they explain the need for CRSE in relation to "students who have not been well served by our education system because of the historical and present-day institutional racism perpetrated by society and reflected in our schools" (p. 6) and that MBL provides "an outstanding opportunity to develop

[2] Adapted from Sturgis, C., Patrick, S., & Pittenger, L. (2011). It's not a matter of time: Highlights from the 2011 Competency-Based Learning Summit. iNACOL. https://www.aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/iNACOL_Its_Not_A_Matter_of_Time_full_report.pdf

culturally relevant, or sustaining, instructional practices that embed recognition of students' cultures in the learning process" (p. 8).[3]

The initiative defines CRSE in reference to the New York State Department of Education's framework, which lays out a vision of an education system in which all students (1) experience academic success, (2) develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and (3) develop a critical lens through which they challenge inequitable systems of access, power, and privilege.[4] Initially, the initiative named MBL and CRSE separately, and the evaluation was designed around that framing. Subsequently, the initiative has also used the acronym "CRS MBL," or culturally responsive-sustaining mastery-based learning, to emphasize their interconnection.

The Aurora Institute is evaluating the initiative for SBE. The evaluation is intended to contribute to the identification of effective policies, practices, and system changes that can support MBL and CRSE implementation throughout Washington's K-12 education system. The evaluation questions are:

1. What do evaluation participants report as the MBLC's benefits for schools?
2. What school conditions helped or impeded MBL implementation?
3. Was participation in the MBLC associated with changes in educator practice?
4. What was the quality of implementation of MBL at the selected schools?
5. To what extent did evaluation participants report that implementation of MBL had a positive impact on learning conditions?
6. What implementation practices or conditions contributed to the reported impacts or lack of impact?

The MBLC comprises 23 schools from an initial cohort that began in December 2021 and a second cohort of 24 schools that began in January 2024. This report presents evaluation activities and findings for the first three years of Cohort 1. Additional information is presented in a previous evaluation report.[5] In late 2023, SBE staff and Aurora expanded the evaluation to include a fourth year for Cohort 1 and the first four years of Cohort 2. The relationship among the MBLC cohorts and dates is shown in Table 1. The rest of this report refers to Cohort 1 schools and activities unless Cohort 2 is specified.

Year 1 focused on planning. SBE staff provided initial supports to individual schools, began developing the statewide network, and structured a process for each school to develop customized plans to move deeper into the work and identify indicators of progress over time. Year 2 focused on professional learning, but some schools also began implementing or deepening MBL and CRSE practices. In Year 3, professional learning activities continued and schools focused on deeper implementation.

[3] Muller, A. (2020). Mastery-based learning in Washington state: 2020 report. Mastery-Based Learning Work Group. https://www.sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/2020%20MBL%20Work%20Group%20Report.pdf

[4] New York State Education Department. (2018). Culturally responsive-sustaining education framework. https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf

[5] Levine, E. (2023). Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative Evaluation Report, Year 2. Aurora Institute. https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/MBLC-Evaluation-Year-2-Report-FINAL-9.7.23.pdf

Table 1: Timeframe of MBLC Cohorts 1 and 2

Cohort 1 Year	Cohort 2 Year	Dates
Year 1		Dec 2021 – Jun 2022
Year 2		Jul 2022 – Jun 2023
Year 3	Year 1	Jul 2023 – Jun 2024[1]
Year 4	Year 2	Jul 2024 – Jun 2025
	Year 3	Jul 2025 – Jun 2026
	Year 4	Jul 2026 – Jun 2027

[1] Cohort 2 started in January 2024.

At the outset of the initiative, the MBLC schools represented a wide range of MBL practice, from beginners to well-established MBL schools. Each school's next planning, professional learning, and implementation steps were therefore tailored to their local needs and goals in relation to MBL and CRSE. Each school has a team of 3-6 teachers and one or more school leaders who lead the school's MBLC work. Some schools also request input and support from student advisors.

Washington's biennial budget for SBE for fiscal years 2022 and 2023 included $5 million to implement mastery-based learning in school district demonstration sites to address learning recovery and other educational issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional MBLC funding was appropriated by OSPI and the state legislature for fiscal years 2024 and 2025. Funding for fiscal years 2026 and 2027 will depend on the state's next two-year budget. These funds pay for MBLC school grants, professional learning, project evaluation, and administration.

Methods and Participants

Data collection activities in Year 3 consisted of surveys of educators and school leaders, focus groups with students, observations of professional learning activities, and interviews of educators, school leaders, professional learning providers, and staff of the Washington State Board of Education.

Educator and School Leader Surveys – The surveys were developed by the Aurora Institute and modified based on feedback from SBE staff and the PL providers.[6] They assess key aspects of CRS MBL schools, including knowledge, beliefs, educator practices, and school-level policies and practices. The surveys were designed to require no more than 15 minutes for educators and 20 minutes for school leaders to complete. SBE staff emailed school leaders three months before the survey administration,

[6] The surveys are available at https://aurora-institute.org/resource/mastery-based-learning-collaborative-evaluation-report-cohort-1-year-3

advising them to schedule dedicated time during a paid staff meeting to complete the surveys, aiming to increase participation and reduce the burden on participants. SBE staff also reminded school leaders that they had agreed, in the grant's Statement of Assurances, to participate in the evaluation's surveys and interviews.

The surveys were conducted for three weeks in March 2023 and March 2024 and administered via an online platform. SBE staff and Aurora sent several email reminders to non-respondents and school leaders. Many items were repeated on the Year 2 and Year 3 surveys to assess change over time. When the Year 2 survey was administered, the initiative was still at an early stage of development, and few schools had begun substantial implementation or professional learning beyond their MBLC school teams.

Due to competing priorities, one school exited the MBLC while the Year 3 surveys were being administered, resulting in a much lower survey response rate than every other school. Analysis revealed that the staff who had already responded were not representative of their school. As a result, the school's Year 2 and Year 3 survey responses were excluded from this report's analyses, and there are minor differences between some initiative-level findings that are presented in both years' reports.

Educator, School Leader, and Student Interviews and Focus Groups – Aurora interviewed each MBLC school once, including virtual interviews in Year 1 and in-person school visits in Years 2 and 3. The schedule was designed for each year's interviewees to vary along dimensions including grade-levels served, geography, student race/ethnicity, and family income. The semi-structured interview protocols were drafted by Aurora and modified based on feedback from SBE staff.

The interview findings in this report are drawn primarily from visits to eight schools in March 2024. Each visit included a 45-minute focus group with four to eight students and three 45-minute interviews with one to two school leaders, an educator on the MBLC school team, and an educator not on the MBLC school team. The interviewer was a white male. At each student focus group, a woman of color from Aurora or the SBE staff was also present. Schools were asked to recruit students for the focus groups who represented diverse identities and perspectives that "may include students of color, students with disabilities, students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and students who are multilingual, migrant, in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or LGBTQIA+."

The schools that participated in Year 3 interviews were CHOICE High School and Innovation Heights Academy in Burien, Edgemont Junior High School in Puyallup, Enumclaw High School in Enumclaw, La Conner Middle and High School in La Conner, Lind-Ritzville High School in Ritzville, Lind-Ritzville Middle School in Lind, Vanguard Academy in Moses Lake, and West Valley Mid-Level Campus in Yakima.

Observation of Professional Learning Activities – MBLC network activities observed live and virtually include a webinar, two professional learning communities, and the in-person fall gathering. The observations focused on the network's potential benefits for schools and factors that may influence changes in educator practices and school structures and culture.

Professional Learning Partner and SBE Staff Interviews – The semi-structured interview protocols were drafted by Aurora and modified with input from SBE staff and the PL providers. Both interviews were about 90 minutes long and were conducted via Zoom in April 2023. The SBE staff interviews were conducted with Seema Bahl, Senior Policy Analyst; Alissa Muller, Director of the Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative; and Randy Spaulding, Executive Director. The PL partner interview was

conducted with leaders from the two organizations providing professional learning to the MBLC, Joy Nolan, Director of the New Learning Collaborative, and Kate Gardoqui, Senior Associate of the Great Schools Partnership. Qualitative analysis of all interviews focused on a set of themes drawn from the evaluation questions.

Participants – The interviews with 28 educators and school leaders included principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers across many subject areas. All school leaders and half the educators were members of their MBLC school teams. Four to eight students participated in each of the eight focus groups. Half were middle school students and half were high school students. Information shared informally by students and school leaders confirmed that the students were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, family income and country of origin, disability status, gender identity, and religion.

The Year 2 educator survey had 368 responses and a 78% response rate. The response rate for individual schools ranged from 42% to 100%, with a median of 88%. The Year 3 educator survey had 447 responses and an 85% response rate. The response rate for individual schools ranged from 80% to 100%, with a median of 100%. Eleven percent of educators taught grades K to 5, 47% taught grades 6 to 8, and 53% taught grades 9 to 12. Most taught in core academic subject areas, and some taught in many other specialties.

The Year 2 school leader survey had 47 responses and a 72% response rate. The Year 3 school leader survey had 60 responses and an 85% response rate. School leaders from all 23 schools submitted survey responses in both years. Respondents' school roles were administrator (69%), school counselor (26%), or MBLC school team leader (5%).

Findings

The following sections address changes in learning conditions at MBLC schools, the quality of CRS MBL implementation, and conditions that supported or impeded implementation and outcomes:

1. The MBLC network
2. Professional learning
3. State policy and supports
4. Core MBLC benefits and outcomes
5. Staff knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs
6. Culturally responsive-sustaining education
7. School-level policies and practices
8. Educator practices
9. Managing change

Comparisons of the Year 2 and Year 3 survey responses, as well as reflections from educators, school leaders, students, SBE staff, and the professional learning providers, identify and explain changes that have taken place during the initiative.

When interpreting the survey findings, it's important to keep in mind that achieving the highest response level on each item – such as students always being able to choose how they will demonstrate their learning – is not necessarily the school's or the MBLC's goal. The surveys identify the levels of various beliefs, practices, and policies, as well as their changes over time, but it's up to each school to determine the level of each dimension that they aspire to reach, ideally with input from the MBLC.

MBLC Network

SBE staff continued to oversee the MBLC network in Year 3, coordinating the work of participating state agencies, schools, and vendors. They visited all Cohort 1 schools, met with school teams to discuss their work plans and progress, and structured a process for schools to reflect on Year 3 and plan for Year 4.

Cohort 1 currently consists of 19 grantees and 23 schools. (Three districts received a single grant that covered two schools in their district, and one district received three grants and is using them to support all four schools in the district.) Four schools have left the initiative. Two were in a district that had major staff turnover as the MBLC was beginning and decided that they lacked the capacity to participate. One school left when they realized that the reforms they planned to support with their MBLC funds did not align with the requirements of the initiative. The last school left at the end of Year 3 to focus on other school priorities. To replace the three schools that left early in the initiative, SBE staff awarded MBLC grants to three new schools early in Year 2.

The MBLC's primary activities are coaching provided to each school individually, professional learning events for the whole network, and providing funding to schools. Most schools received $40K in Year 1, $125K in Year 2, and $110K in Year 3 for expenses such as staff stipends, materials, substitute teachers, consultants, and travel that supported their MBLC work. During Year 3, the state appropriated funds to extend the financial and professional learning support at a reduced level for a fourth year. Year 4 funding will average $42K per school but will vary from $15K to $78K depending on the scope and quality of each school's continuation proposal, including their plans to develop resources that could benefit other MBLC schools and to sustain and deepen their CRS MBL transformation after the initiative's funding ends.

A fundamental MBLC benefit noted by several interviewees is that the grant pays for professional learning and collaboration time for school staff. "We're very appreciative of the grant monies," a school leader said. "If we didn't have it, I think we'd be years behind where we are now." Another school leader explained, "It always boils down to time, whenever you try to change a culture or move away from something that you're used to. You need to have the time to do that, and the grant and being part of this cohort have done a great job of allowing us to find that time."

School leaders also said that the existence of a statewide network of schools that are working toward deeper implementation of MBL and CRSE has helped them make a case locally for the relevance, value, and even inevitability of this transformation.

Multiple educators and school leaders said that the MBLC network events affirmed, informed, and inspired them and their colleagues. “The community connection and networking have been the most valuable things for us,” a school leader said. “Being paired at professional learning events with amazing teachers and principals from other schools who are doing innovative work. For our redesign process, being able to see tangibly what other people are doing and what’s possible.” A school leader explained,

> Being part of the MBLC gives us partners in the innovative work we’re trying to do around project-based learning, assessment, grading procedures, and how we want to work with students who are becoming adults. It lets us do some thinking with others in the network around issues we feel are important that don’t necessarily align with the priorities in the traditional schools [in our district].

Staff of the State Board of Education have frequent calls with MBLC school leaders, attend all network events, and join the PL providers during school visits. SBE staff help school leaders navigate state-level policies relevant to CRS MBL, such as waivers from credit-based graduation requirements. Sometimes they also provide district-level supports. An SBE staff member said, “Schools have asked us to … help their districts better understand this work and what’s reasonable to expect an MBLC school to do. Maybe they need a little permission to not follow the district pacing guide or things like that.” The state’s presence, even in the background, can support school leaders’ conversations with their districts.

Connections across schools have deepened during the two-and-a-half years of the initiative. Some of the collaboration is now being driven by the schools themselves rather than just by SBE staff and the PL providers. A school leader said, “We have visited with other schools in the consortium, not only in the official gatherings, but we’ve gone and visited them, they’ve come to visit us, we’ve done Zoom meetings, and we’ve worked with new people in the second cohort. So being part of the network allows that ability to listen and hear and share with other schools.”

Cohort 1 had challenges that have been addressed in ways that SBE staff and the PL providers believe will substantially benefit Cohort 2 and other future cohorts. SBE staff needed to conduct the Cohort 1 application and school selection process quickly because of the timing of the MBLC’s initial funding and the need to launch the initiative during the 2022-23 school year. The process to select the PL providers was happening at the same time, so their expertise was not available to inform initial communications with prospective schools. Fewer schools applied than SBE staff had hoped, and every applicant was accepted.

“We had a number of schools that didn’t really know what they were getting into in the first cohort,” an SBE staff member explained. “I think they saw it as a grant that they could spend however they wanted. They didn't really recognize that they were … going to have to be part of a collaborative community.” As a result, some schools left, and “some that stayed weren’t as bought into the process as we were hoping.”

SBE staff improved the process substantially for Cohort 2. They had individual meetings with each interested school before they applied, to be sure they understood the nature of the initiative and the deep focus on both MBL and CRSE. SBE staff “made it very, very clear that CRSE was central – that it was the bedrock of the project,” which they said hadn’t been clear enough in the Cohort 1 application process. The MBLC website’s event archive and extensive support materials that the PL providers had developed

during the project's first two years were also available to support Cohort 2 applicants' understanding of the initiative. Crucially, 40 schools applied for about 20 grants, allowing SBE staff to be selective and build a cohort that they believe has a strong understanding of and commitment to the work.

Another challenge for Cohort 1 has been specifying tangible goals for school progress and establishing clear points of accountability. Schools were required to submit work plans and end-of-year reports, but the work planning template was broad and general. The PL providers said that the process for developing work plans "didn't indicate any suggested strategies or recommended best practices, because it was the first year of the project and we were just starting."

Based on feedback from SBE staff and the PL providers, a recommendation in the Year 2 evaluation report was to "Revise the work planning process to require more tangible goals and to help schools locate their progress in relation to specific implementation milestones. Provide menus of suggested goals that align with well-known phases of MBL and CRSE transformation, such as those in the MBLC's Implementation Steps document and graphic … Encourage more systematic thinking about what steps will be taken to achieve them, how much time is needed, whether the steps were in fact taken, and whether intended outcomes were achieved."

During Year 3, the PL providers, with input from SBE staff and other experts, developed school self-assessment and work planning processes that incorporate many of those elements.[7,8] These new resources were not used with Cohort 1 schools, who were nearing completion of Year 3 when the self-assessment became available. However, the Cohort 2 schools were asked to have as many staff members as possible complete the self-assessment. Then each school worked with their coach to build a work plan informed by the priorities identified in the self-assessment. "I feel hopeful that this process is going to make [work planning] much more concrete and actionable," an SBE staff member said.

The PL providers explained that "the self-assessment was intended to clearly describe … what practices we would look for in a school that was doing a good job of CRS MBL in the first couple of years … not everything that we would hope to see from a school that had been doing it for 10 years." They also said that what they learned from leading professional learning during the MBLC's first two years had been essential to creating the self-assessment.

The challenges that Cohort 1 faced are not shared to detract from the substantial progress that Cohort 1 schools have made, as described in this report. One purpose of the evaluation is to support the state's goal to document what conditions and resources are necessary to implement quality MBL and CRSE successfully, and understanding challenges and refinements made across successive cohorts is an essential part of that documentation.

SBE staff, school leaders, educators, and the PL providers agree that full CRS MBL transformation requires longer than the three-and-a-half-year MBLC funding period. This is consistent with the time frame observed nationally for schools to reach deep levels of MBL and CRSE implementation. SBE staff

[7] Great Schools Partnership, Inc., and New Learning Collaborative, LLC. (2024). CRS MBL school self-assessment for MBLC 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xBOBSoDGkI6WQcNpsbVrLMMswFk6_e-76-H1kJn8iZI/edit

[8] Great Schools Partnership, Inc., and New Learning Collaborative, LLC. (2024). MBLC work plan template, Cohort II, Spring 2024. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1myh86H61i-oqcS4kP19ccvpgbYPJQNbMZ-6VlFIUIN0/edit

asked schools in their Year 4 continuation documents to address strategies for sustaining the work beyond the grant period. Their responses were not available for this report, but SBE staff encouraged schools to build "in-house capacity" to reduce their reliance on external supports. "This is an oversimplification," an SBE staff member said, "but generally speaking, schools that have spent their grant money on an in-house instructional coach, or on teachers developing [CRS MBL] resources, have been more effective than schools spending a ton of money on outside contractors."

The MBLC has focused on supporting individual schools, but SBE staff members believe that sustaining and deepening the changes will require conversations with district leaders about how districts can support the work and how the state can collaborate with districts to encourage ongoing CRS MBL innovation. The SBE staff held their first meeting on these topics with a subset of district leaders in June 2024, and they are preparing to meet with all district leaders during the 2024-25 school year.

SBE staff members also recognize that leading the MBLC pilot was consistent with their agency's mission and authority to build a more meaningful K-12 educational experience in the state, but as the work grows from demonstration sites and policy development to scaling statewide, they anticipate a potential need to expand their capacity by partnering with another organization. They are also discussing mechanisms for building and accessing in-state capacity for this work, such as educators and school leaders who have developed expertise through their MBLC experiences and will deepen that expertise in the years ahead.

Professional Learning

This section provides an overview of the MBLC's implementation strategy, network events, coaching, and online resources, followed by findings on participation in MBLC and external professional learning.

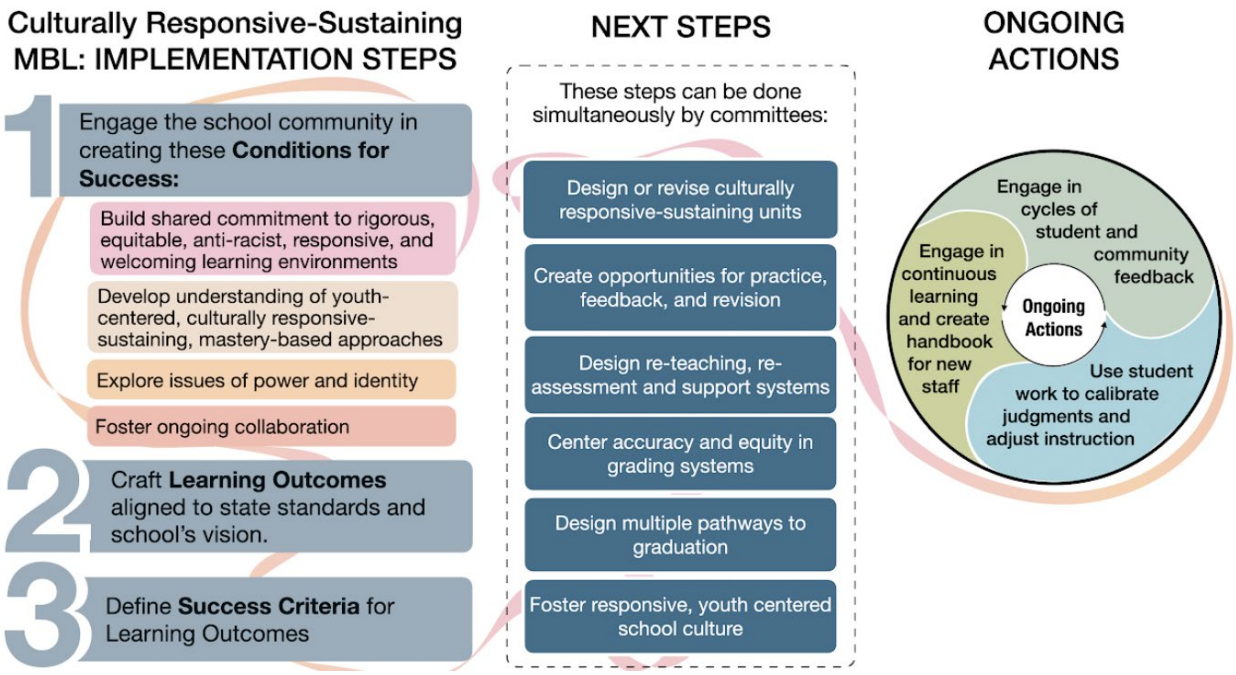
MBLC Implementation Strategy – The theory of action guiding the PL providers' work with MBLC schools is summarized in a graphic[9] (Figure 1) and companion document[10] that serve as guides to the "first, essential steps toward school transformation." The PL providers developed an earlier version of this graphic in Year 2 and the version below in Year 3. They focused their work with schools on the first column – creating conditions for success and crafting learning outcomes and success criteria. After schools have those conditions in place, they are better positioned to work on the Next Steps in the second column, although most schools are working on aspects of both columns at the same time. These efforts are accompanied by the Ongoing Actions in Column 3, with cycles of feedback, continuous learning, calibration, and adjusting learning and assessment.

The PL providers explained that they "tried to frame the Conditions for Success as both foundational and also as the most advanced work. You don't ever 'get there' with the Conditions for Success. They are aspirational, and they're really deep things."

[9] Created by Great Schools Partnership, Inc., and New Learning Collaborative, LLC for the Washington State Board of Education and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial ShareAlike 4.0 International License, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/legalcode.en

[10] https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/resources/implementation-steps

Figure 1: MBLC Implementation Graphic



Professional Learning Events – The MBLC provided the following 27 events during Year 3.

- **Community Gatherings** for school MBL teams included full-day, in-person events in August 2023 (two days), October 2023, and May 2024, and a two-hour virtual event in January 2024. Students from several schools participated in and presented at the spring gathering.
- **Webinars** were offered for an hour after school six times throughout the school year and were archived for online viewing. They are informational, capacity-building sessions that end with a question and answer period. The webinar titles were: Catalyzing Sustainable School Change, It's Just Good Teaching: CRS MBL in Action, Using CRS MBL to Support Inclusive Instruction for Every Student, Using Data to Select an Equity Focus, Crafting & Utilizing Schoolwide Outcomes, and The Power of Co-Teaching.
- **Professional Learning Communities** were offered on three topics: CRSE Foundations, Grading for Accuracy and Equity, and Project-based Unit/Assessment Design for MBL. The first meeting took place during the fall community gathering, and the next four 90-minute meetings took place virtually after school. Each school was asked to have at least three participants who would attend all five meetings of whichever PLC they began with. They could all attend the same PLC or split up among two or three topics. The intention was to "talk shop and reflect, share resources and inspirations, talk through questions, and strategize about the complexities of our work – in community with school colleagues" and members of other MBLC school teams.
- **Leaders' Community of Practice** events were quarterly 90-minute virtual meetings during the school day for school leaders who are directing their school's MBLC work to share successes and resources, request and provide feedback about challenges, and share examples of student work.

- **Youth Advisor/Adult Ally Sessions** were five 90-minute virtual sessions offered during school hours for middle and high school students to learn about MBLC goals, clarify their own roles as student advisors within their schools, receive leadership and advocacy training, and build community with other students. Youth attendees needed to be accompanied by one adult ally from their school. Attendance was optional but encouraged.
- **School Visits** – The PL providers arranged and facilitated in-person visits to two MBLC schools as well as a 3-day trip to visit several schools in the Competency Collaborative in New York City. These visits each had room for about 20 participants across both MBLC cohorts. Attendance was optional but encouraged.

Educators and school leaders made many favorable comments about the PL events, which helped them understand strong CRS MBL theory and practices and make connections with other MBLC schools. The school visits, including virtual school visits during two webinars in Year 2, were mentioned most often. A student success coach who attended a virtual visit said, "That was incredibly important for me. It helped me contextualize how I can start to do some of that work here … and have direct examples of what it could look like." After the New York City trip, a school leader said,

> The impact of visiting schools that have been doing this for many years was profound. The teacher who went and I are preparing an hour of training for the rest of the staff on some of what we learned around CRSE, grading, assessment, school structures, and communication with parents. It was one of the most impactful uses of time I've had in terms of seeing how standards-based learning, project-based learning, and CRSE happen.

A professional learning provider added, "Seeing it in action is really vital … When you see it, you're like, 'Oh, of course we can do that!' Otherwise, it's like 45 slide decks later and 'I have a to-do list taller than me!' But if you see it all working together, the power of that is really, really important."

Coaching – Each school was assigned a coach from the Great Schools Partnership or the New Learning Collaborative. The coaches (who are the same individuals as the "PL providers" referenced throughout the report) met with each school for an average of two hours per month during Year 3, mostly with school leaders and MBLC school team members. The amount of coaching (from July 2023 through mid-May 2024) varied by school, ranging from 5 to 25 coaching meetings and 9 to 44 hours of meeting time. Meeting lengths varied from half-hour video calls to full-day in-person visits, with about 20% of meetings lasting less than an hour, 60% lasting one to two hours, and 20% lasting three hours or longer.

The coaches, who are all located in northeast states, visited each school at least four times during the school year, typically for a half day. Several schools elected to use some of their grant funds to arrange for extended or additional in-person visits with their MBLC coach or with other outside consultants and vendors to advance their MBL and CRSE implementation.

Within the framework of the implementation graphic (Figure 1), the coaches' work with each school was different, focusing on key elements related to the school's specific context and needs. They "try to tackle big pieces, but not everything," as one coach explained:

> When I talk about this project with schools, I try to acknowledge that it can feel like we're trying to change everything, everywhere, all at once, because the scope of the project cannot be overestimated. We're asking people to think very deeply about culture. We're asking them to think about racial equity and how they address it in their schools. We're asking them to develop deep skill sets in culturally responsive-sustaining education. We're asking them to think about project-based learning, about their systems of reteaching, reassessing, and enabling kids to go back and try things again – which also has big implications for their schedule. We're asking them to rethink their grading systems. We're asking them to rethink their daily teaching practices. And so when you add that all together, it's monumental and overwhelming.

Given this context, they seek to make coaching an opportunity to identify which elements are the highest priority for each school and how the coach can help them. During Year 3, these included helping schools define shared outcomes and scoring criteria in language that students can understand, creating opportunities for students to self-assess and track their own progress, creating a broader variety of assessment strategies that students can select from, developing strategies to elevate student voice in the school, and many others. Many school leaders and educators described how essential coaching was to their progress:

> The work we've done with our coach has been fabulous. It would be very difficult for us to try to do this on our own. The time it takes to make these kinds of system changes is huge. To have somebody like [our coach] come on board to support us … to help us figure out how we get from A to B, it's been really good. We really appreciate it.

> Working with [our coach] has been very positive. His questions and wonderings continue to help me focus on my long-term goals when I get overwhelmed with the minutiae of daily practice.

> Our coach has been an amazing sounding board and resource. When my co-worker and I reached out to her last year, we were both almost in tears. We felt like we were so lost and confused, so we sat down with her for a few Zoom meetings, and she talked us off the ledge. We felt like we were horrible teachers, that we didn't know what we were doing, that we were failing in all aspects. After talking with us, she said, "You're not failing. You're doing fine. This is what we expect." When she showed us things that other schools were doing, it helped us to realize, "Oh yeah, that's what we're doing too. So it's not like we're complete failures." She linked us to key articles and resources and showed us examples of work that other teachers have done. She gave us names of people we could contact that might have some answers that she wasn't able to give us. We felt like we started to get our feet underneath ourselves, and we started moving forward. So the resources have been phenomenal.

The schools, the coaches, and the state have all described in-person coaching as particularly beneficial. One of the coaches said, "If only I could live in Washington and [coach] them in person once a month! The in-person visits are so useful, because if we're not in the school, we're only sort of looking through a hole in the fence, and it's very hard to coach based on what you hear people happen to raise in an hour-long online meeting."

An SBE staff member added, “Schools have been saying since the beginning that they prefer in-person professional development … [It] seems to be more effective than virtual learning for a lot of people … So we have learned that and are incorporating it into our understanding of what success looks like. You have to be in the school.”

Website – The two major supports provided by the MBLC Community website[11] are the Events and Resources pages. During Year 3, the Events page featured upcoming events, registration links, a summary of the year’s events, and links to video recordings, slide decks, and other resources from past events. The Resources page links to extensive MBL and CRSE overview documents, FAQs, practice templates and exemplars, and a glossary of key terms. A section was added during Year 3 that contains the MBLC Implementation Steps document and resources associated with its main components. The website also has a blog with nine posts relevant to MBLC schools.

Participation in Professional Learning – SBE staff members told MBLC schools that in Year 3 they expected at least three team members to attend each quarterly gathering and PLC and at least one team member to attend each webinar and leaders’ community of practice. Attendance at the youth advisor sessions and school visits was optional but encouraged. Schools were also expected to participate in monthly coaching.

The PL activities with the most schools meeting the state’s requested level of participation were coaching (87%), community gatherings (55%), and webinars (55%) (Table 2). The activities with the fewest schools meeting the requested level were PLCs (30%) and Leaders’ Community of Practice (30%). (Those percentages indicate whether schools’ *average* level of attendance across all sessions of an activity met the requested minimum. Table 2 also shows the percentage of schools that met the requested minimum at *every* event in the category. Substantial differences between the two percentages primarily indicate a decrease in attendance over the course of the year.) Webinar viewing was 98% live and 2% watching asynchronously after the event.

PLC participants were asked to stay in the same PLC topic for all five sessions. Of the school team members who attended at least one session (N=98), 54% attended one session, 40% attended two or three sessions, and 6% attended four or five sessions. Very few switched to a different PLC partway through the year.

Attendance at the youth advisor/adult ally sessions was optional but encouraged, and 40% of schools participated. A median of four schools participated in each youth advisor/adult ally session, with a median of three students attending from each school.

Attendance at the three in-person school visits organized by the PL providers was also optional but encouraged, and 40% of schools participated. Almost all of this participation was on the 3-day visit to Competency Collaborative schools in New York City. Of the visits to MBLC schools in Washington, only one Cohort 1 school participated in one of the two visits. The visits were filled to capacity, but almost all of the participants in the Washington visits were from Cohort 2 schools.

[11] https://sites.google.com/greatschoolspartnership.org/mblc-community/home?pli=1

Table 2: Participation in MBLC Professional Learning Activities

Activity	Requested Minimum Level of Participation	Participation Per School
Coaching	Monthly (i.e., 9 to 10 times)	Average = 10 meetings Median = 12 meetings Met minimum = 87%
Webinars (n = 6)	One or more MBLC school team members	Average = 2.0 team members Median = 1 team member Met minimum = 55% (30%)[1]
Community Gatherings (n = 4)	Three or more MBLC school team members[2]	Average = 2.8 team members Median = 2 team members Met minimum = 55% (30%)[1]
Leaders' Community of Practice (n = 4)	One school leader	Average = 0.6 school leaders Median = 0 school leaders Met minimum = 30% (25%)[1]
PLCs (n = 5)	Three or more MBLC school team members[2]	Average = 1.7 team members Median = 1 team member Met minimum = 30% (5%)[1]

[1] The first number is the percentage of schools whose *average* attendance at this activity met the requested minimum. The second number is the percentage of schools that met the requested minimum at *each* session of the activity.

[2] This was lowered to one or more school team members when calculating the "met minimum" percentage in the next column for the four schools with fewer than 100 students.

SBE staff and the PL providers recognize that there are competing priorities for schools' professional learning time and that participation has been below the SBE staff's requested levels. Participation also declined from Year 2 to Year 3 in all event types except coaching, in which participation increased. Many schools in both years said that the coaching has been very valuable (and the Year 2 evaluation report presented findings that educators and school leaders found their PL activities on a wide range of topics valuable). The increase in coaching participation may also reflect that coaching had a higher level of accountability in Year 3 than in Year 2, with SBE staff calling schools that missed multiple coaching meetings and insisting that they make up the time with their coaches.

The concerns of some MBLC school team members about the amount of time needed to meet the initiative's professional learning expectations is understandable, given the intense demands on educators and school leaders. At the same time, participating in all MBLC events at the "requested minimum level" in Table 2 would require roughly 130 staff hours during the school year and an additional 60 hours during the summer. For a four-person MBL school team, this would require just under an hour per week per team member during the school year, on average, plus two days in the summer, and paying staff for that time would consume only a small portion of the school's MBLC budget. However, most schools participated below this requested level.

After similar patterns of participation in Year 2, the professional learning providers made changes for Year 3 including offering fewer webinars, changing the PLCs to be five-session series focused on high-priority areas of MBL and CRSE transformation, and scheduling the first PLC session to take place in person at

the first quarterly community gathering. They also stopped holding virtual office hours, which were underutilized in Year 2.

The PL providers have restructured the events again for Year 4. In-person gatherings will be reduced from four to three, in August (two days), October, and May. Virtual events will take place in the six months from September to June that don't have an in-person gathering. Instead of the four separate categories of events (webinars, PLCs, leaders' community of practice, and youth advisor sessions) offered in Year 3, there will be a single after-school meeting per month. It will start with webinar-style content delivery. Then participants will split up into strands, where the PL providers said they will "get a more PLC kind of experience, and they'll be able to talk immediately about how to apply what they just heard on the webinar. They may also have some ongoing content they're focusing on."

The patterns of PL participation in Years 2 and 3 continue to raise the question posed in last year's evaluation report about what level of engagement should be required. Voluntary participation is preferable, and low participation does not necessarily indicate low interest or motivation. Teachers are tired at the end of a school day, which is when most of the virtual events have taken place, and school staff typically have many competing priorities. Schools that fell substantially below SBE's minimum expectations for participation in the network's virtual gatherings in Year 3 were all funded for Year 4, but they received reduced funding. This suggests that participation in the virtual events is somewhat optional. If the virtual events are not optional, ensuring participation may require more than the proposed restructuring, particularly because Year 4 funding is substantially lower than in Years 2 and 3.

In addition to the coaching and events provided by the MBLC, many schools used MBLC funds to participate in professional learning with other organizations and consultants. Two schools mentioned sending staff to PBLWorks trainings, and two schools brought PBLWorks or another project-based learning consultant to work with their staff on-site. One school hired a consultant to work with their staff on standards-based practices, and one school brought in a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant from one of Washington's regional Educational Services Districts. Finally, as discussed in the Managing Change section, several schools provided release time to their own educators to serve as MBL consultants or specialists within the school.

State Policy and Supports

Several state policies that facilitate mastery-based learning in Washington and ways the state could amend those policies to increase utilization were discussed in the Year 2 evaluation report.[12] The policies included mastery-based crediting, equivalency crediting, and Alternative Learning Experience rules, as well as waivers from credit-based graduation requirements. The report also reviewed state-level shifts that would support MBL implementation including (1) the state playing a role in developing or vetting competency frameworks, learning progressions, and ways to assess them; (2) revising the state's grading systems and standardized transcript format to fully support mastery-based grading; (3) revising funding approaches that disincentivize schools from facilitating off-campus learning opportunities; and (4)

[12] Levine, E. (2023). Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative evaluation report, Year 2. Aurora Institute. https://aurora-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/MBLC-Evaluation-Year-2-Report-FINAL-9.7.23.pdf

amending existing statutes to incorporate the field's updated definition of mastery-based learning to reflect the importance of equity, student agency, and other key MBL elements.

This section presents additional developments in state-level policy and supports that took place in the past year or emerged during this year's data collection. In July 2023, Washington passed legislation enabling a new performance-based graduation pathway option. The state has multiple pathway options that provide students with different ways to demonstrate their readiness for graduation. The performance-based pathway "allows students to show what they know and can do in real-world, hands-on ways that align with their individual goals for life after high school."[13]

SBE staff members believe that this individualized pathway, which allows students to use performance-based assessments to demonstrate graduation readiness, will help MBLC schools transition to deeper CRS MBL implementation. School districts decide which graduation pathways to offer, and the SBE staff hope that more districts will offer the performance-based pathway over time. SBE contracted with the Great Schools Partnership to develop a suite of resources to support districts and schools in making this pathway available to students.[14]

A state resource that the professional learning providers said has been very helpful for advancing CRSE in MBLC schools is the Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CCDEI) Standards for Educators by the Washington Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB).[15] A state bill passed in 2021 required PESB to align the state's educator standards with the CCDEI standards to "ensure every educator in our state is prepared, trained, and equipped with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to create stronger, more supportive student-centered learning environments." The bill provided definitions of cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The standards set out four domains of CCDEI work: (1) understanding self and others; (2) student, family, and community engagement; (3) learning partnerships; and (4) leading for educational equity. For each domain, the standards provide key components and observable indicators.

Updates to the state's teacher evaluation system that districts will be required to use by the 2025-26 school year include many elements that are aligned with MBL and CRSE instruction and assessment practices. The system's new rubrics[16] require teachers to develop student learning goals that "invite students' attention to learning through their interests, active learning, and/or sense of belonging" and that "support students' ownership for their learning, making space for student voice and empowerment." Formative assessment practices are described as achieving "maximum learning benefit [when] students receive feedback or productive and supportive interaction, rather than a score or grade." This guidance

[13] Washington State Board of Education. (2023). New graduation pathway option. https://www.sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/Performance-Based%20Pathway%20Next%20Steps%20Handout%20%28HB%201308%29_ada.pdf

[14] Washington State Board of Education. (2024). Performance-based pathway. https://www.sbe.wa.gov/our-work/performance-based-pathway

[15] Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board. (2021). Cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion standards for educators. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_1nf9XWXJKT_a3lOP169VmVc3U0l1ze0/view

[16] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2024). Student growth goal rubrics. https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/final-revised-student-growth-goal-rubrics_0.pdf

not to grade formative assessments is valuable, because it aligns with MBL principles, but almost all MBLC schools do count formative assessments toward students' grades (as shown later, in Figure 32). Last, the Proficient and Distinguished levels of the teacher evaluation rubrics require evidence that students are monitoring their own progress, have opportunities to assess their own work and/or that of peers, and are being invited to provide feedback (which can be anonymous) on their perceptions of instruction and the classroom environment.

In 2024, several senators introduced Senate Bill 6264,[17] which was influenced by the MBLC initiative and informed by their conversations with SBE staff members and visits to several MBLC schools. SBE staff said that the bill "was quite responsive to the approach we're taking in this work." It included provisions to address several of the challenges raised and recommendations presented in the MBLC Year 2 evaluation report, including (1) authorizing full-time enrollment funding for students enrolled in MBLC schools and other schools with waivers from credit-based graduation requirements, (2) recommending a process for OSPI to create competencies aligned with state learning standards, (3) developing an alternative high school transcript format that is consistent with mastery-based learning; and (4) adopting the field's updated definition of mastery-based learning. The bill passed the Senate but did not make it out of the House during the brief legislative session.

A final development in 2024 is that OSPI launched a process to review the state's learning standards. One of their goals for the review process is to "Refine and prioritize the learning standards with a lens of clarification, integration, and understandability."[18] The current timeline is for the revised English language arts, mathematics, and science standards to be adopted in 2024, with other academic disciplines to follow one to two years later. One MBLC school said that they have stopped their work on developing priority standards, because they don't want their effort to be wasted if it conflicts with what they anticipate OSPI will soon require. The SBE staff wondered if OSPI's project might hold potential for moving closer to having a state-approved set of higher-level academic competencies. SBE staff and the PL providers believe that having those competencies, accompanied by corresponding success criteria, would be one of the most important catalysts for advancing mastery-based learning in Washington.

An additional issue relevant to schools across the state is the complexity of communicating nontraditional grading approaches to state, federal, and national systems such as the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and TRIO and Running Start programs. Educators and school leaders said that eligibility and admissions requirements of these systems are based on traditional grading, which creates barriers to student access and challenges for schools to determine student eligibility. Schools have developed local workarounds, but state-level supports would benefit MBLC schools and others using innovative grading approaches.

[17] State of Washington, 68th Legislature. (2024). Senate Bill 6264: An act relating to supporting the implementation of competency-based education. https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Bills/6264.pdf?q=20240124162159

[18] Washington Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction. (2024). Washington State learning standards review. https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/learning-standards-instructional-materials/washington-state-learning-standards-review

Core Benefits and Outcomes

This section addresses outcomes related to higher-level goals of the initiative, including changes in educator preparedness to implement MBL and CRSE, shifts toward deeper implementation, changes in school climate and cultural responsiveness, and changes in student engagement and ownership of their learning. Later sections explore shifts in knowledge, beliefs, educator practices, and school policies that comprise these higher-level outcomes.

Preparedness to Implement MBL and CRSE – Educators and school leaders reported becoming substantially more prepared to implement MBL and CRSE over the course of the initiative (Figure 2). The percentage of educators reporting that they were moderately or very prepared increased steadily by about 27 percentage points for both MBL and CRSE across the three time periods. (The Year 2 and Year 3 surveys asked how prepared they felt "today." The Year 2 survey also asked how prepared they had felt at the beginning of the school year.) The percentage of school leaders reporting that they were moderately or very prepared increased by 20 percentage points for both MBL and CRSE.

A substantial minority of educators and school leaders reported feeling unprepared or only a little prepared at the end of Year 3. Far more educators and school leaders felt moderately prepared than very prepared. This is consistent with the understanding discussed in the report that transforming fully takes longer than the duration of the MBLC initiative. School staff discussed needs such as time to develop new practices and collaborate with colleagues, strategies for working more efficiently, visits to high-implementing schools, models of successful practice in each academic discipline, more coaching from expert practitioners, ways to reliably measure progress, and funding to sustain and deepen transformation.

A typical comment from an educator who rated herself as unprepared to implement MBL was, "I need to see how a high school English teacher manages to personalize instruction for over 100 students a day. Even if grouped, that's a lot of student assessments to prepare and evaluate. With three different preps and all the other jobs/roles we have in a small school, there just isn't enough time to reinvent the wheel on a daily basis." Another English language arts teacher at the same high school rated himself as moderately prepared and wrote, "MBL and CRSE are great! I hope we can get more teachers on board."

As in this example, large differences among educators in the same school were common. That is likely due in part to some educators having more professional learning opportunities, such as MBLC school team members or educators in departments that are pursuing change more intensively. It can also reflect different levels of CRS MBL knowledge or mindsets, as discussed in the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs section.

Shifts Toward Deeper MBL and CRSE Implementation – Educators and school leaders were asked about the school's and their own shifts toward deeper MBL and CRSE (Figure 3). About two-thirds of educators agreed that they and their school had shifted toward deeper implementation during the past two years. School leaders rated the level of change about 10-15 percentage points higher than educators.

Figure 2: Preparedness To Implement MBL and CRSE

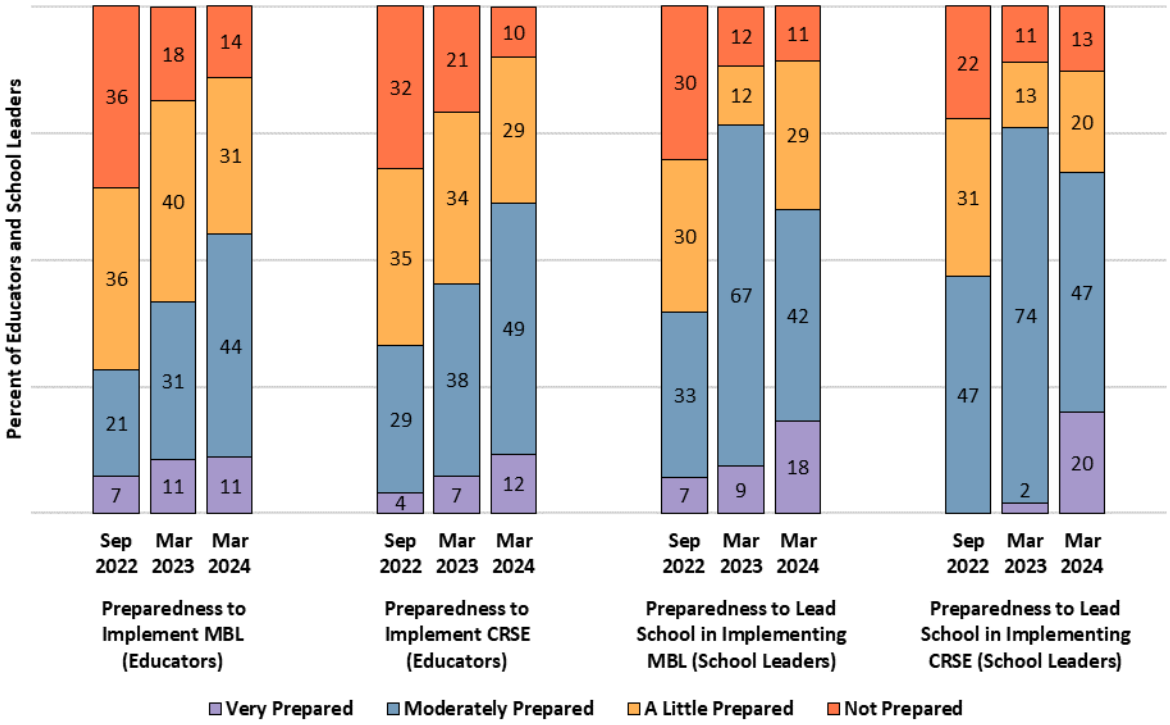
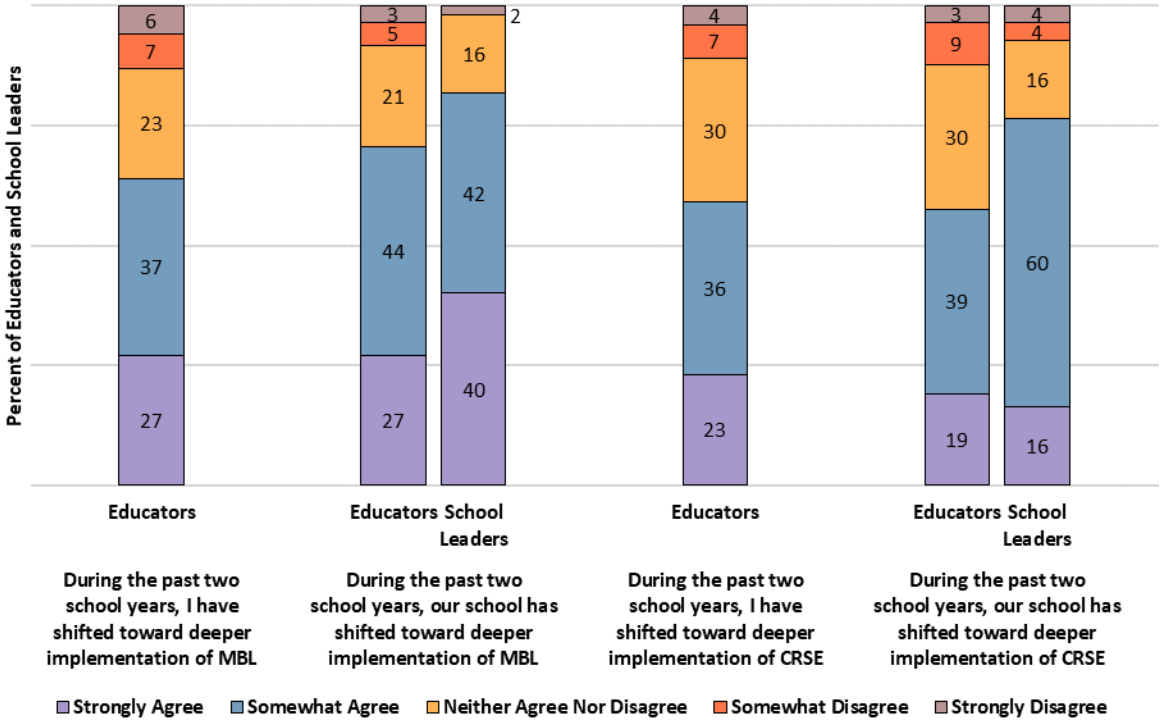


Figure 3: Shifts Toward Deeper MBL and CRSE Implementation



These findings include substantial variation across schools (Table 3). For example, the percentage of educators who said that they have shifted to deeper implementation during the past two years is 33% for MBL and 25% for CRSE at the lowest school, compared to 100% for MBL at the six highest schools and 100% for CRSE at the two highest schools. To illustrate the underlying distribution, Figure 4 shows the proportion of educators at each school who agree that they have shifted to deeper MBL implementation during the past two years. All items in Table 3 have response distributions shaped similarly to the distribution in Figure 4, with minor variations in range, average, and median.

One factor in this variation was school size. Comparing schools of fewer than 400 students (n=16) with schools of more than 500 students (n=7), more educators at the smaller schools agreed that they had shifted toward deeper MBL practice than educators at the larger schools (80% versus 58%). However, the rate of agreement also varied substantially within each group of schools – from 35% to 100% for the smaller schools and from 33% to 72% for the larger schools.

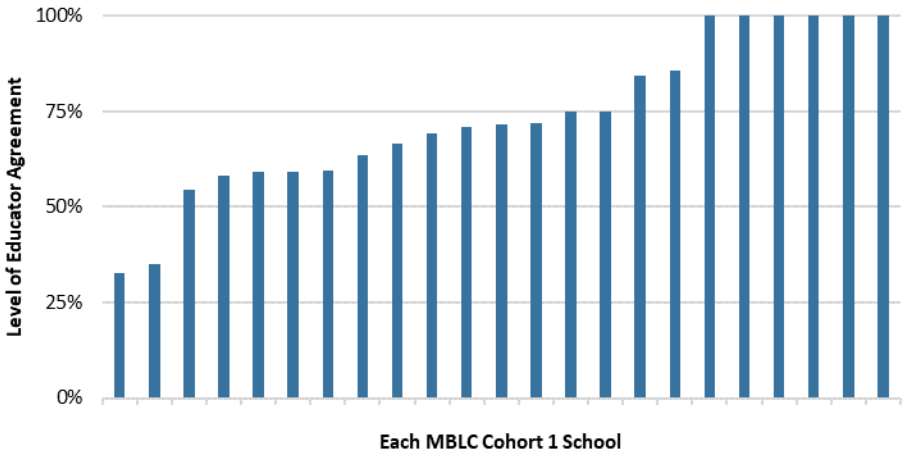
For CRSE, more educators again reported shifting at the smaller schools than the larger schools (70% versus 57%), and again there was wide variation within each group. Just 11% of educators disagreed that they had shifted to deeper CRSE practice during the past two years, and most of them were from five schools whose average rate of disagreement was more than triple the rate of the other 18 schools.

Table 3: Educators' Level of Agreement About MBL and CRSE Shifts By School

	Lowest School (% Agree)	Highest School (% Agree)	Average School[1] (% Agree)	Median School[1] (% Agree)
In my work as educator during the past two school years:				
I have shifted toward deeper implementation of MBL	33	100	74	71
I have shifted toward deeper implementation of CRSE	25	100	66	63
During the past two school years:				
Our school has shifted toward deeper implementation of MBL	25	100	78	83
Our school has shifted toward deeper implementation of CRSE	15	100	65	63

[1] Indicates the average and median of each school's level of agreement.

Figure 4: Educators' Level of Agreement by School that They Have Shifted to Deeper MBL Implementation During the Past Two Years



Educators were asked how regularly they are implementing CRS MBL strategies in their classrooms. About one in six said they weren't implementing any yet, and almost half said they were just beginning to implement a few (Table 4). Most of the rest are implementing regularly for a portion of the time, and about one in ten are implementing consistently for most or all of the time.

Table 4: Educators' Level of CRS MBL Implementation

	Not Implementing Any Yet	Just Beginning to Implement a Few	Implementing Regularly for a Portion of the Time	Implementing Consistently Most or All of the Time
How regularly are you implementing CRS MBL strategies in your classroom?	15%	44%	30%	11%

Educators' reported level of implementation varied widely across schools. Table 5 combines the two highest-implementation categories from Table 4 and shows that the average implementation rate for educators in the highest third of schools (78%) is four times the rate for the lowest third of schools (19%).

School size was also a factor. Teachers in schools with fewer than 400 students (N=16) reported higher implementation rates on average than schools with 500 to 1400 students (N=7) (Table 5). This relationship was fairly consistent and statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 27.3$, $p < .001$). However, four of the larger schools reported substantially higher implementation rates than five of the smaller schools, suggesting that school size is just one of multiple factors that influence a school's level of implementation. An educator from one of the larger schools said,

> I think we are in a space where the early adopters are seeing improvements. The fence-sitters and saboteurs are beginning to wonder if this work will go away. Some have decided to retire.

> Our new principal is implementing new policies and trainings to support this meaningful work. As an early adopter, I am hopeful that the administrators who brought this to us will remain in our community until we have reached MBL and CRSE as standard operating procedure.

Table 5: Educators' Level of CRS MBL Implementation by Level and Size

How regularly are you implementing CRS MBL strategies in your classroom?	Regularly for a Portion of the Time or Consistently for Most or All of the Time
Tertile of Schools	
Highest Third (N=7)	78%
Middle Third (N=8)	50%
Lowest Third (N=8)	19%
School Size	
Fewer Than 400 Students (N=16)	53%
More Than 500 Students (N=7)	36%

Changes in Learning, Assessment, and School Climate – Almost half of educators and two-thirds of school leaders agreed that learning and assessment have become more engaging, authentic, and culturally responsive because of their school's work to shift toward deeper MBL and CRSE (Figure 5). About half of educators agreed that their school has become more culturally responsive, welcoming, affirming, and emotionally and physically safe because of its work to shift toward deeper MBL and CRSE (Figure 6).

When educators, school leaders, and students were asked about changes in the school's cultural responsiveness and students' sense of being welcomed, affirmed, and emotionally and physically safe, their responses made clear that these domains are deeply interconnected and strategies to improve them overlap substantially.

One school leader said, "I think we're more culturally aware than we've been. And then I think the next step is to become more culturally responsive." A second school leader who was present responded, "But the kids get it … because they don't tell on each other for most things, but now they do [tell on each other] when somebody's not honoring who they are, whether it's their pronouns, their culture, or their whatever. That never used to happen." An educator in another school made a similar observation:

> If someone makes a racist comment, the kids will immediately toss it out there, and there's no ignoring it. It's immediately acted on at the highest level. And that cohesion between students, faculty, and staff, everyone on the same page, an instant action, is different. … We're all aware of who we want to be and what it takes to get there much more than we were before. It has taken it out of just being another rule in the books to being a living part of ourselves, of our connections to each other.

Figure 5: Effects of Schools' MBL and CRSE Shifts on Learning and Assessment

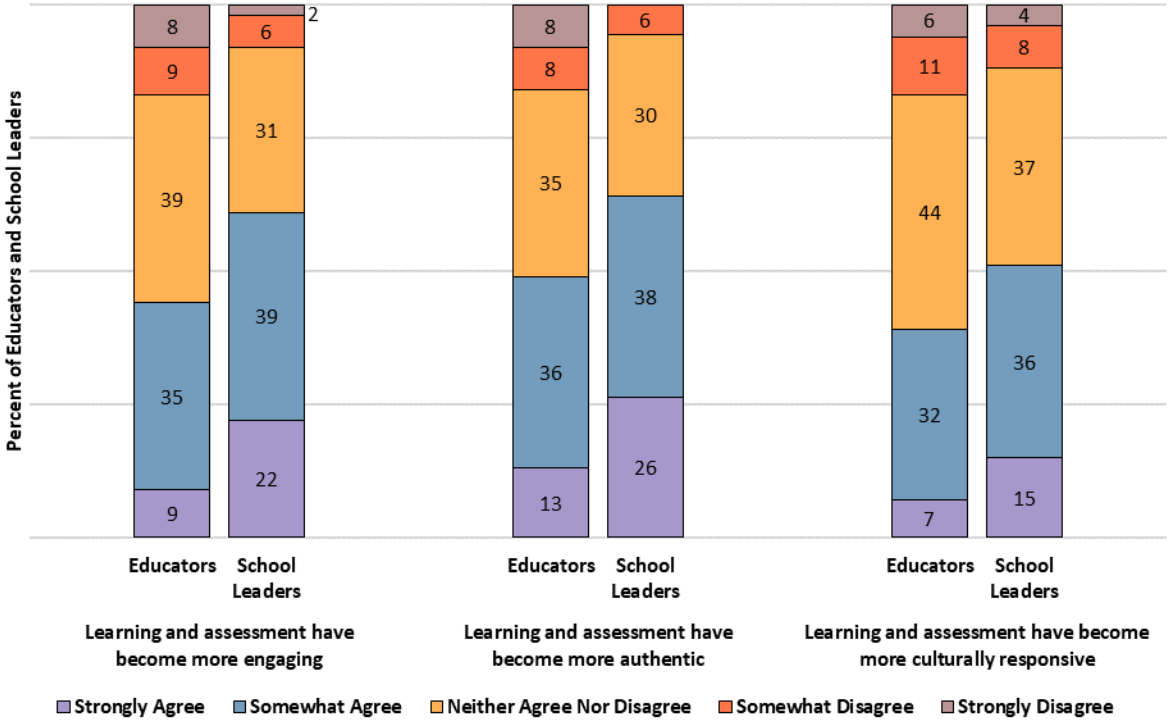
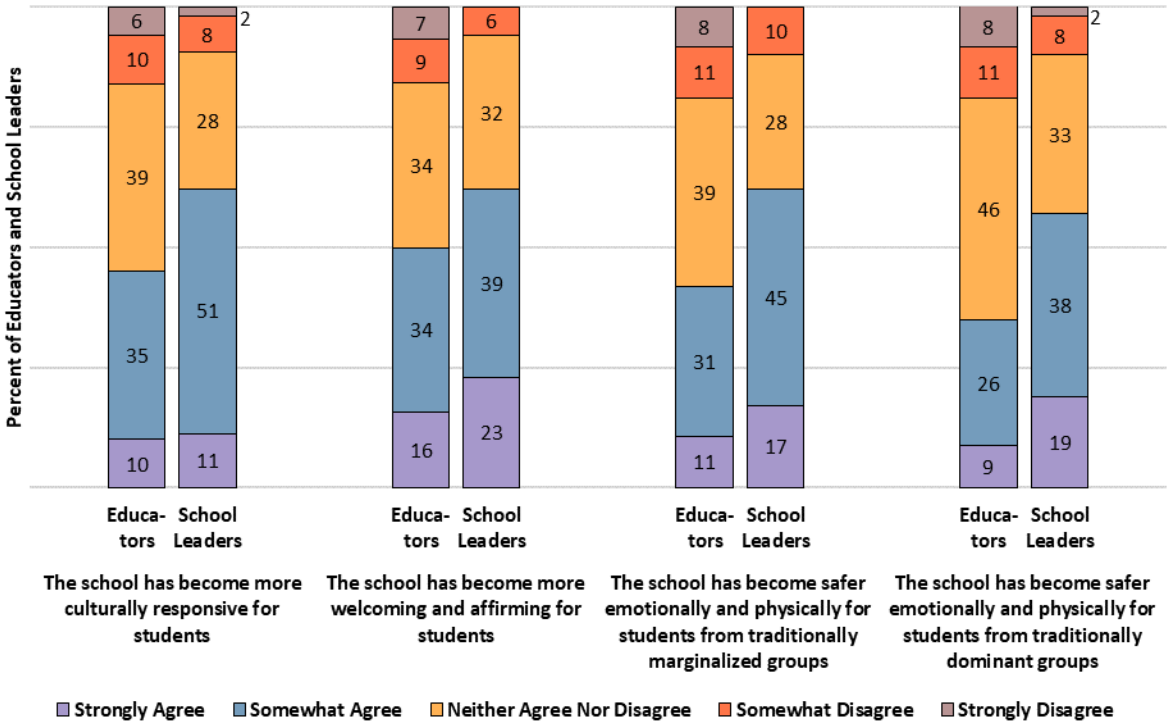


Figure 6: Effects of Schools' MBL and CRSE Shifts on School Climate



In contrast, a student said, “There’s been times where kids have been made fun of or racial slurs have been used, and nothing has been done … no repercussions, even though the teachers looked at them while they said it.” Other factors that made students feel less welcome were receiving an overwhelming number of assignments at once, disliking their advisory teacher, bathrooms that were unclean or where students were smoking, or hearing students being insulted for their disability, poverty, or other factors that were out of their control.

Many students said that they felt very welcome and affirmed at school because they felt safe, their advisory felt like a home base, group projects helped them make friends, the school offered a program to welcome new students, local tribal police stopped by frequently, and their teachers were friendly, nonjudgmental, interested in them personally, open to diverse opinions, and used students’ preferred pronouns. Many but not all students felt that school had become more welcoming in the past year, and they recognized the school’s deliberate attempts to achieve this.

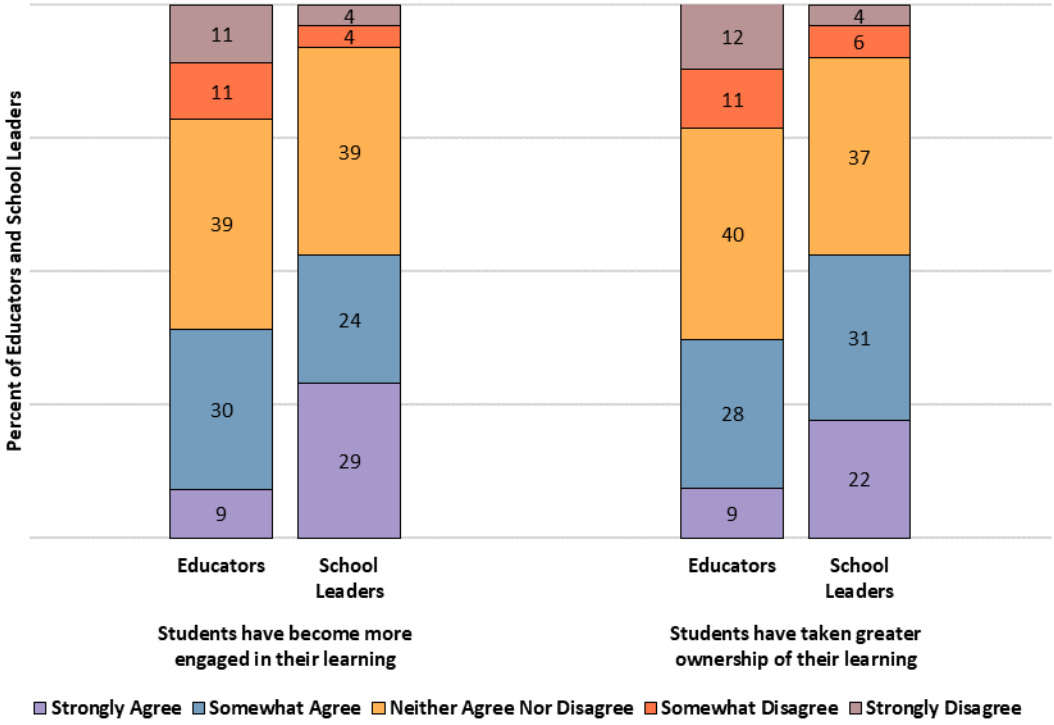
The relationship between feeling safe and welcome and the ability to engage in learning was consistent and went in both directions. On the negative side, students said, “If there are bad things, I just block them out, but it really affects some people I know, like if they’re being bullied or picked on, it’s very distracting” and “When the halls are chaotic or there are lots of subs and things are crazy, it’s rattling and I just want to go to the nurse.” On the positive side, many students made comments such as “When I feel that a teacher cares about me personally, I am way more likely to be engaged in their class and listen to what they’re teaching me and also do my work at the same time” and “My teachers are very welcoming and I feel very comfortable around the people in my courses, and that helps me be able to think about learning and be invested in what I’m doing in school.”

Educators and school leaders at every school said that increasing students’ sense of belonging and safety is a high priority. Their strategies included advisory periods (often with the group staying together for multiple years), social-emotional learning activities, circle protocols for ordinary and restorative conversations, dividing the school into smaller houses for deeper personalization, educators consistently greeting students as they enter classrooms, assignments that help educators and students get to know each other, assemblies where students receive awards for displaying school values, and various school picnics and other community-building events. These strategies are often led by students or guided by student input. Some schools administer school climate surveys over time to assess progress.

Many school staff said that these activities are making students feel safer and more welcome, and also that the strategies are often new and going through multiple cycles of implementation and refinement. An educator said, “There’s a big shift where we want to know the whole student, not like machines where you’re just gonna do this work and then switch and go to math. We want to know how you’re doing.” These strategies enable him to “learn so much more about students. They bring their whole selves, so I also know when things are not going well for them.”

Changes in Student Engagement and Ownership – About a third of educators and half of school leaders agreed that students have become more engaged in and taken greater ownership of their learning as a result of the school’s work to shift toward deeper MBL and CRSE (Figure 7). Educators who had not seen engagement improve said that “high levels of student apathy right now make this difficult,” that allowing retakes and eliminating penalties for late work had reduced students’ motivation, or that their school was not yet implementing CRS MBL fully.

Figure 7: Effects of Schools' MBL and CRSE Shifts on Student Engagement and Ownership



Educators who had seen student engagement improve said that students have become more willing to give their opinions and engage with each other, that rubrics have helped students understand what is expected of them and earn higher grades, and that being able to go at their own pace helps them stay engaged and progressing academically.

Most of these educators said that increased engagement has led to improved academic performance. Others had not seen academic gains but believed that increased engagement is a step toward that goal. "I definitely feel that students are more engaged," an educator said. "That doesn't mean they complete everything. It doesn't mean that they're finding success. But they're coming to school more, and that's their big win this year. The next step is to find academic success." Another educator said that students who have never asked for help before "have actually come to me and said, 'Hey, I need some more practice on this. Can you help me through this?'"

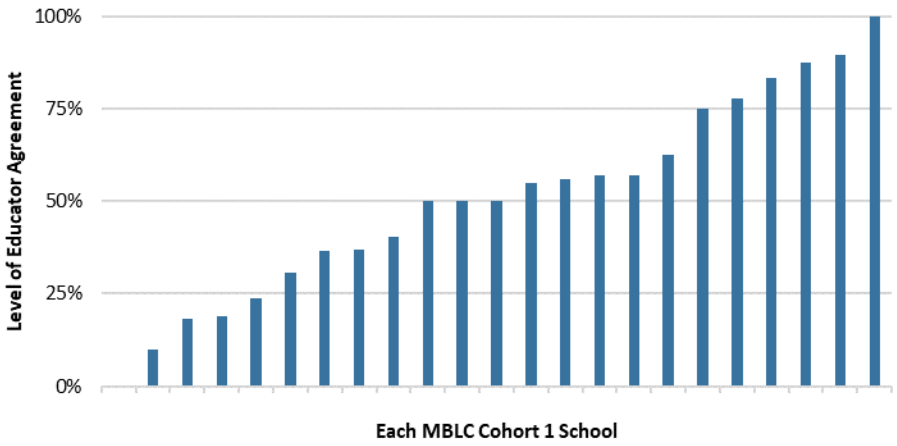
Schools varied widely in educators' level of agreement that their school's work to shift toward deeper MBL and CRSE had yielded positive impacts in each of the areas just presented (Table 6). For example, the percent who said that learning and assessment have become more engaging was 15% at the lowest school and 100% at the five highest schools. To illustrate the underlying distribution, Figure 8 shows each school's level of agreement for one of these questions: whether the school's CRS MBL work has made the school more culturally responsive for students. All items in Table 6 have response distributions shaped similarly to the distribution in Figure 8, with minor variations in range, average, and median.

Table 6: Educators' Level of Agreement About MBLC Impacts By School

As a result of my school's work to shift to shift toward deeper MBL and CRSE:	Lowest School (% Agree)	Highest School (% Agree)	School Average[1] (% Agree)	School Median[1] (% Agree)
Learning and assessment have become more engaging	15	100	59	52
Learning and assessment have become more authentic	15	100	64	63
Learning and assessment have become more culturally responsive for students	0	100	49	46
The school has become more culturally responsive for students	0	100	51	50
The school has become more welcoming and affirming for students	5	100	59	57
The school has become safer for students from traditionally marginalized groups	0	100	47	50
The school has become safer for students from traditionally dominant groups	0	89	40	36
Students have become more engaged in their learning	0	100	50	50
Students have taken greater ownership of their learning	10	100	50	45

[1] Indicates the average and median of each school's level of agreement.

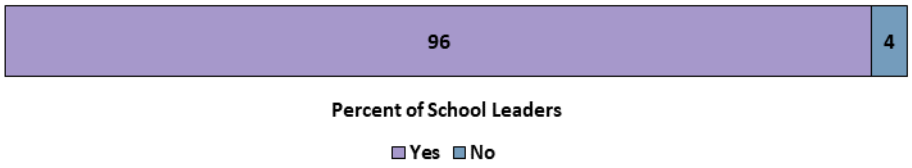
Figure 8: Educators' Level of Agreement by School that the School's CRS MBL Work Has Made It More Culturally Responsive for Students



Differential Impacts by Subgroup – One of the evaluation questions was whether the impacts discussed above on learning conditions such as student engagement and school climate, cultural responsiveness, and safety differed across ages, student demographics, or other relevant factors. The administrator interview and the educator survey had open-ended questions about this. Many responses mentioned a variety of student subgroups who have been helped by CRS MBL, but the responses didn't address whether those impacts were different than the impacts on other student subgroups. Of the respondents who did address differential impacts, most said that they had not observed differences. The few who said that they had observed differences said that the greatest gains were among students with IEPs and "traditionally marginalized students."

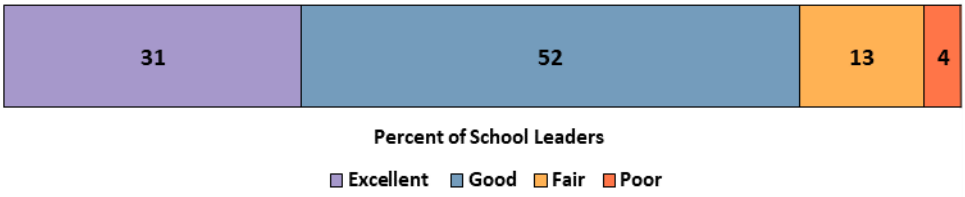
School Leader Ratings of Project Quality – Two items about the MBLC initiative's quality were added to the school leader survey to support the SBE staff's reporting requirements for federal funds that supported the MBLC. The first item asked if school leaders would recommend participating in the MBLC to school leaders at other schools that are exploring transformation to a more student-centered and equitable learning approach. Nearly all responses were favorable, with 96% of school leaders saying they would recommend the MBLC to others (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Would you recommend the MBLC to other school leaders?



The second item asked school leaders to rate the overall quality of the MBLC initiative. Five out of six school leaders rated the MBLC's quality as good or excellent (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Quality of the Overall MBLC Initiative

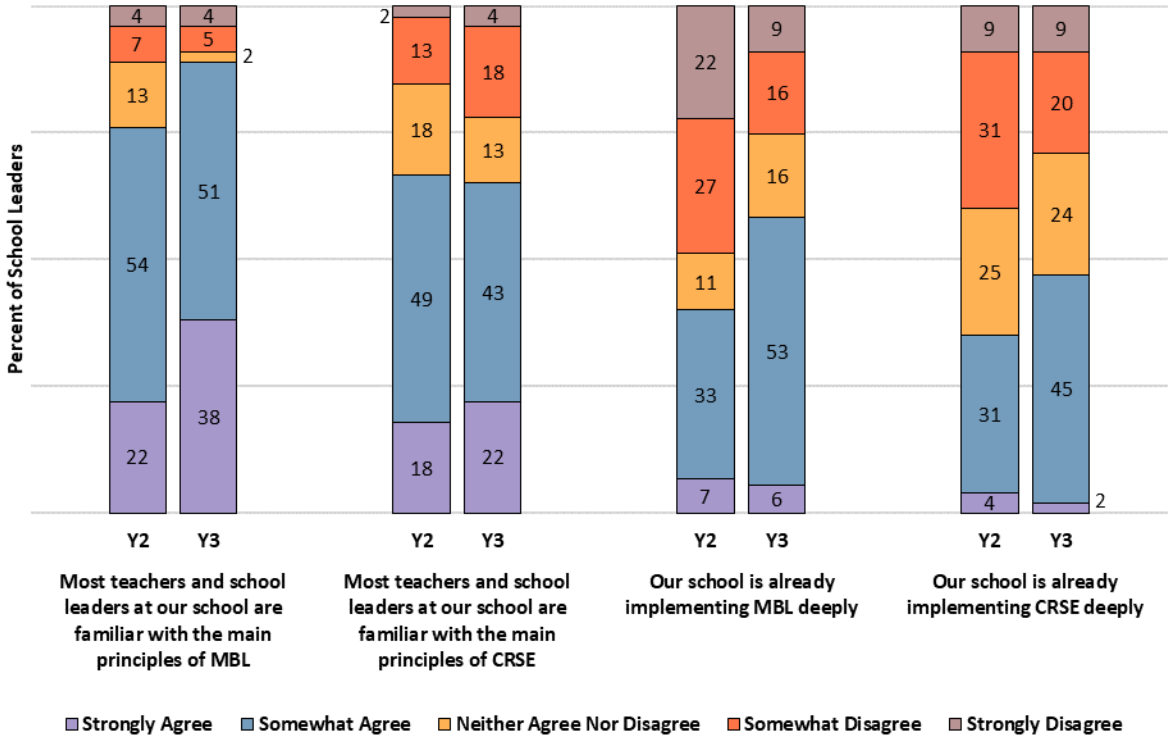


Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs

The knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that staff in each school have about MBL and CRSE are influenced by the MBLC network, professional learning, and policy contexts discussed earlier. They are essential to guiding shifts in structures, culture, and pedagogy at MBLC schools.

Most school leaders agreed that their staff are familiar with the main principles of MBL, increasing from 76% in Year 2 to 89% in Year 3 (Figure 11). About two-thirds agreed that their staff are familiar with the main principles of CRSE, a small decrease from Year 2 to Year 3. The percentage of leaders believing that their school is already implementing MBL and CRSE deeply increased substantially, from 40% to 59% for MBL and from 35% to 48% for CRSE. Almost all of these school leaders agree somewhat, rather than strongly, suggesting that they see their transformation as still in progress.

Figure 11: Current Knowledge and Implementation of MBL and CRSE

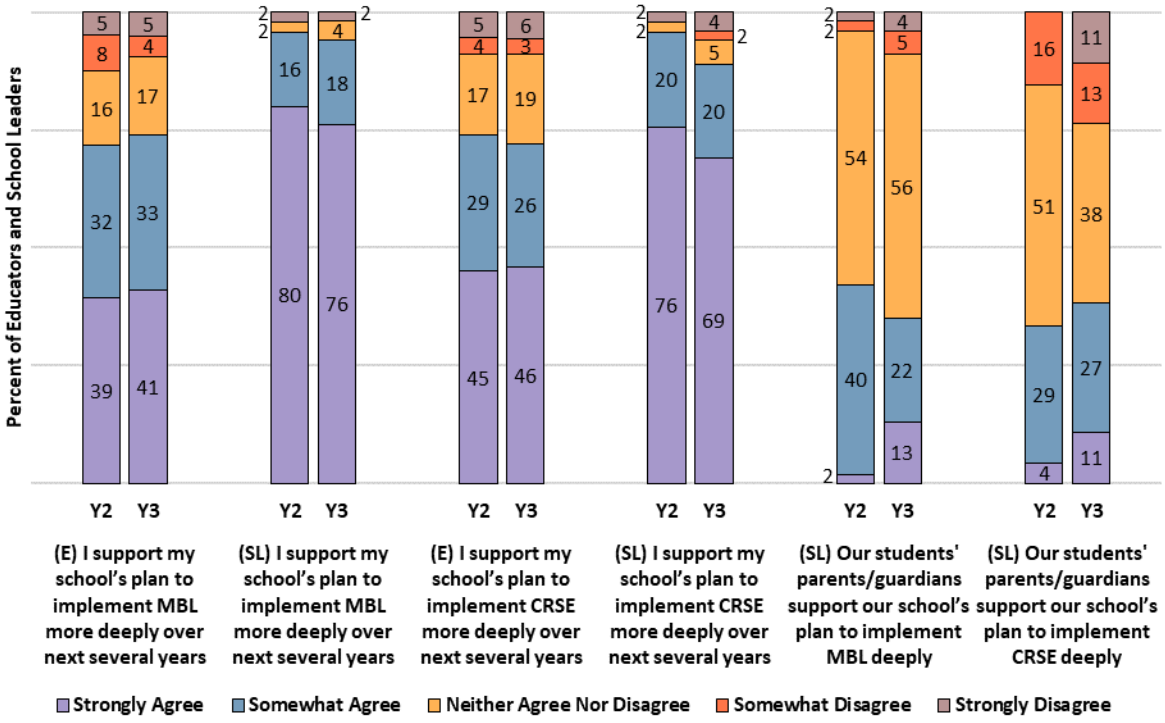


About three out of four educators and almost all school leaders support their school's intention to implement MBL and CRSE at progressively deeper levels over time, with a small decrease for school leaders in Year 3 (Figure 12). While there are large differences between schools on this pivotal indicator, the variation is smaller than on the outcomes presented in Tables 3 and 6 above. Educators' level of support for deeper MBL over time was 52% at the lowest school and 100% at the highest school, with an average of 83%. Their level of support for deeper CRSE over time was 50% at the lowest school and 100% at the highest school, with an average of 76%. Relevant to the educators (and the small number of

school leaders) who do not support their school's transition, the PL providers emphasized that "Time is needed for the beliefs to shift as well as for the technical shifts to happen."

Just 30% to 40% of school leaders believed that parents and guardians support the school's plans to implement MBL and CRSE, and about half of school leaders appeared uncertain about families' level of support. This may reflect that many schools are at an early stage of transformation and have not communicated much with families about it. About a quarter of school leaders believe that families don't support the schools' focus on CRSE, an increase from 16% in Year 2, which may reflect current public conversations about the role of education in topics such as equity and systemic racism.

Figure 12: Support for Implementing MBL and CRSE by Educators, School Leaders, and Families

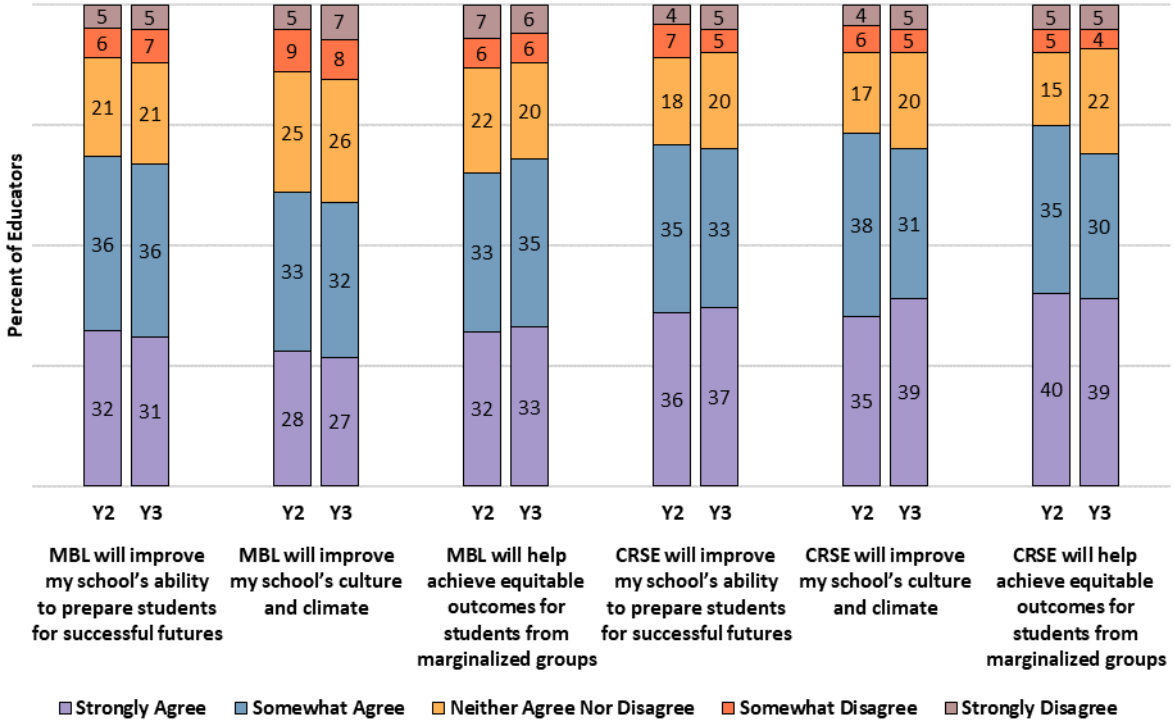


About two-thirds of educators believe that implementing MBL and CRSE deeply will improve their school's culture and climate, ability to prepare students for successful futures, and ability to achieve equitable outcomes for students from historically marginalized groups (Figure 13). These findings were fairly consistent from Year 2 to Year 3, with a trend of slightly decreased support across the three CRSE questions. The survey findings are consistent with comments that educators and school leaders made during interviews. Their concerns focused on implementation challenges such as their capacity and the pace of change, but most believed that MBL and CRSE would benefit students.

While changes at the network level were fairly small, some schools had large changes from Year 2 to Year 3. For example, the percentage of educators agreeing that "Implementing MBL deeply will improve my school's ability to prepare students for successful futures" decreased by 29 points at one school and increased by 26 points at another school. The staff of the school with the large decrease had a prominent,

public dispute during Year 3 about aspects of MBL implementation within the school. The school with the large increase hired a new principal in Year 3 who was admired and appreciated by the staff and made major schoolwide shifts to deepen MBL and CRSE implementation.

Figure 13: Educators' Beliefs About Impacts of Implementing MBL and CRSE Deeply



"The most important precursor to all of this is our mindset as it applies to what we believe about kids," an educator said. "Most folks are well-intentioned, but CRSE and MBL are only effective once we address our underlying biases and our grievances toward systemic changes that impact our practice." Another educator emphasized the need to help his colleagues develop mindsets that favor MBL: "I think we are struggling with how to approach teachers who have been using traditional, non-MBL practices for a long time. We need help figuring out how to help these teachers figure out the 'why' behind MBL. Without that, we end up skipping that essential philosophical discussion and trying to implement new grading systems, but those won't be effective without the philosophical shift."

Perhaps he had in mind a colleague like this educator, who deeply opposed many core CRS MBL beliefs and strategies:

> I am so sick and tired of race baiting. Quit putting students into victim groups. Students are not doing well because they do not know the basics of math and cannot read, and they refuse to work in class. It has nothing, and I mean nothing, to do with their race, gender, or whatever made-up victim group keeps going in here. We need to be teaching students about excellence. Period. We are not. We allow late deadlines and multiple opportunities to do things they should have been prepared for the first time. The idea of student choice and alternative assessments is absurd. The

> most rigorous way to assess a student's understanding of the material in math class is to test them. I would love it if students could move at their own pace, but that requires a level of maturity and responsibility that most students do not possess. We need to quit living in fantasy land. School needs to become a place again where all students are required to work and achieve. That is not the case right now. Quit putting liberal policies into schools. It is why we are in this mess in the first place.

Another educator wrote that his district's data from OSPI showed that "Black students are outperforming White students at the high school level," and therefore "perhaps we should stop focusing on 'traditionally marginalized races' and start focusing on lifting all students to a higher standard." However, the state's website showed the opposite – that white students outperformed Black students by about 10 percentage points on the district's state assessments. So the work of changing mindsets toward CRS MBL may also require correcting misinformation.

Most educators in MBLC schools do have favorable mindsets toward CRS MBL, as shown in Figures 12 and 13 above. These include a growth mindset, with educators saying: "I'm just starting down this road and I'm thirsty for more," "I am in the early stages but do think this will be positive in terms of student engagement and learning. There is a tremendous amount of work left to do to get there," and "I think I just need to do more of it – learn more, teach it, reflect, and adjust my practice accordingly."

Other educators were open to CRS MBL but wanted more support to implement it. One said, "MBL will be hard for teachers to embrace until they are provided with adequate support to maintain discipline in classrooms where students are expected to work independently or in small groups." Another educator said,

> I would appreciate seeing examples of MBL in the classroom. In all of our PD so far, I have not seen a successful, real-life example. The philosophy sounds great, but I wonder about the logistics of the practice. I am also concerned that … the workload will go directly on the teacher without any proper support. I support MBL, but I do not support overloading teachers. It seems that class size and support staff directly affect how successful MBL is.

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education

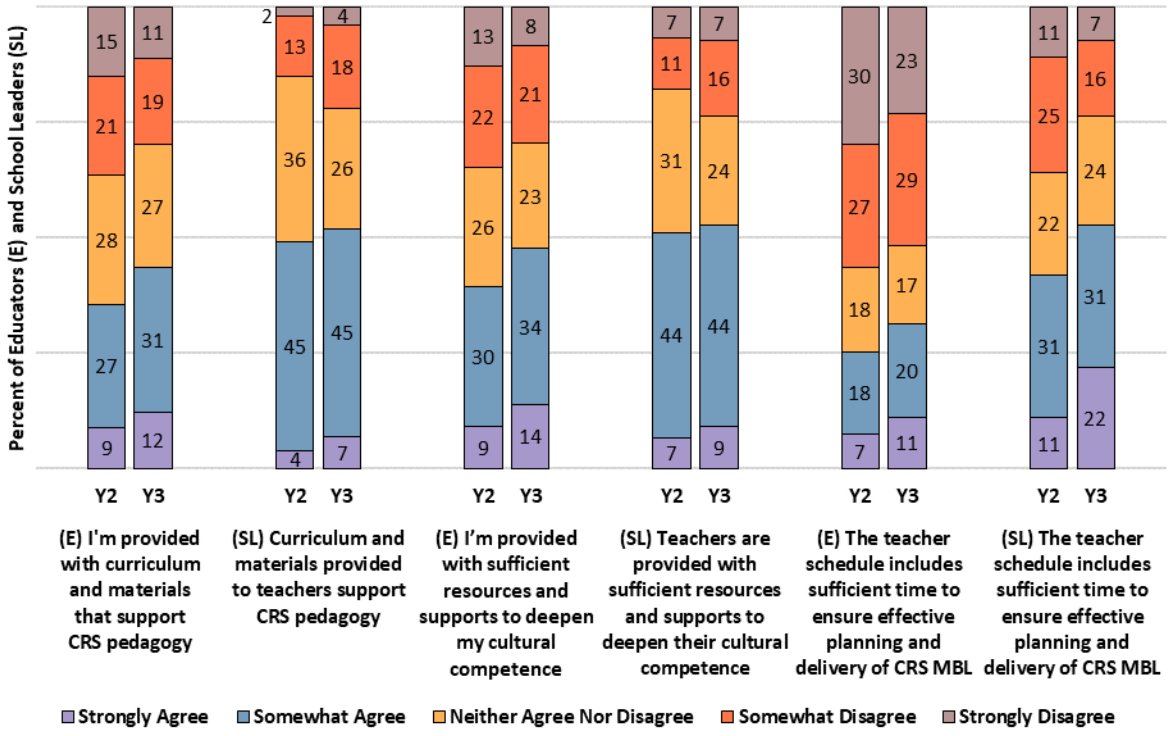
MBL and CRSE are deeply interconnected. When asked about their work to advance CRSE, many educators and school leaders talked about honoring students' strengths, promoting student agency, improving school climate and students' sense of belonging, implementing equitable grading and restorative justice practices, and working to ensure that every student succeeds. Those are all key elements of creating a more culturally responsive and sustaining learning environment,[19] and they are primarily addressed elsewhere in the report, particularly in the Educator Practices and School-Level Policies and Practices sections.

[19] Center for Collaborative Education. (2020). Building for equity: A guide for inclusive school redesign. https://cce.org/building-for-equity-a-guide-for-inclusive-school-redesign/

This section focuses on elements of CRSE that invoke culture and equity more explicitly, such as building cultural competence and celebrating diverse cultural identities. Most staff at MBLC schools support CRSE, but implementing it deeply will require learning more CRSE principles and practices, using school data more systematically to address inequities, and providing needed curriculum, resources, professional learning, schedules, and planning time.

CRSE Resources and Structures – More educators and school leaders agreed in Year 3 than in Year 2 that educators are provided with curriculum and materials that support culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy, that they receive enough resources and supports to deepen their cultural competence, and that their schedule includes enough time for effective planning and delivery of CRS MBL (Figure 14). The increases ranged from 3 to 11 percentage points. There is still substantial room for growth, as about half the school leaders and less than half the educators agreed with these items.

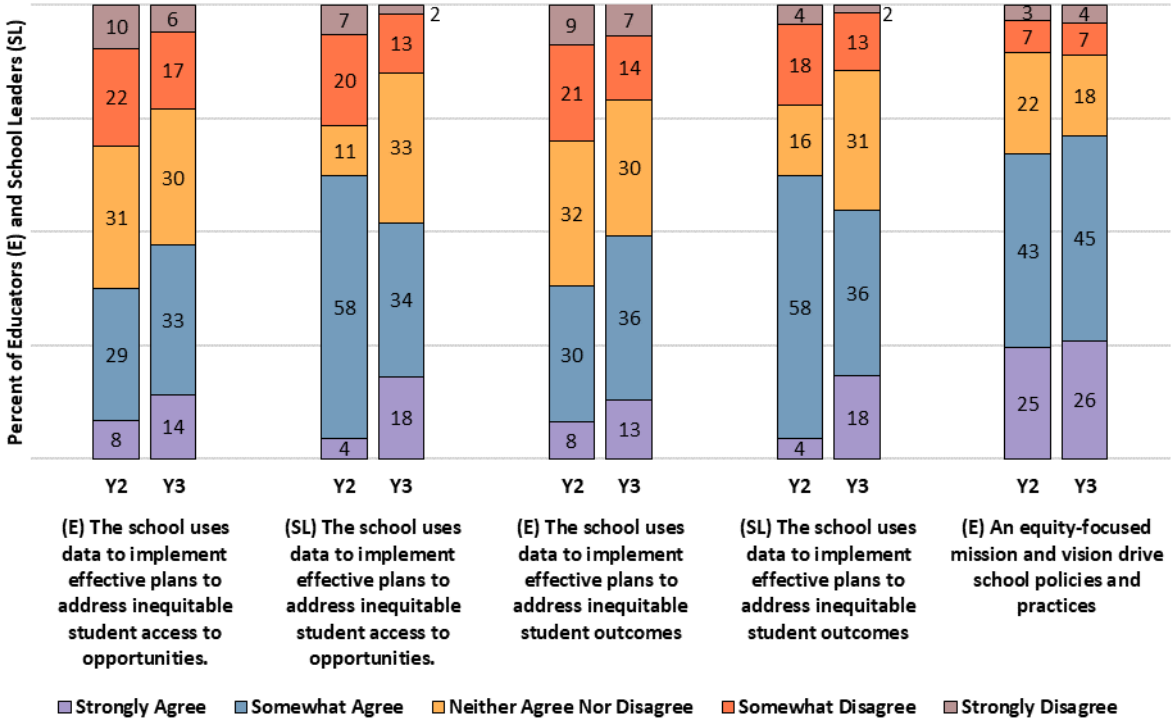
Figure 14: CRSE Resources and Structures



Educators and school leaders were asked if they agreed or disagreed that their school uses data to address inequitable student outcomes and access to opportunities (Figure 15). While educators' agreement increased slightly from Year 2 to Year 3, school leaders' agreement fell by about 10 percentage points.

Educators were also asked if an equity-focused mission and vision drive school policies and practices, and the level of agreement (71%) in Year 3 was the highest of any item in this section. Many educators seem to view their school's equity-focused aspirations favorably but believe that much work remains to achieve them.

Figure 15: CRSE Structures



Improving CRSE Structures, Culture, and Pedagogy – MBLC educators and school leaders engaged in a wide range of activities to improve CRS pedagogy and school culture. Many were described in the Year 2 report, and additional examples from Year 3 include:

- Creating an anti-bias tool that is used in all adoptions of new curricula.
- "Re-tooling the English department … to open up the canon. Picking books that represent lots of different authors and protagonists from different cultures and life experiences."
- Doing professional learning on the John McCoy (lulilaš) Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State curriculum and asking teachers to report on how they're incorporating the curriculum into their classrooms. Examples that teachers mentioned included discussing key treaties in social studies class (including "what the government gained versus what tribal nations lost") or discussing how "environmental issues disproportionately affect minority populations" in AP environmental science class.
- Increasing attendance by students' families at student-led conferences from 10% to 100% by doing intensive outreach to families and hosting student-led events such as awards nights that recognized students' academic, personal, and community accomplishments and invited families to share their cultural foods with the school community. The principal said, "It's been made very clear to the staff at this school that family engagement, particularly of students from marginalized backgrounds in our community, is of utmost importance."
- Responding to racist incidents strongly, decisively, and using restorative practices.

- Spending Title IV funds on after-school activities such as groups for Mexican dancing or LGBTQ+ students and allies.

Students also described numerous opportunities to celebrate their culture and traditions, such as:

- Projects focused on human migration, family trees, genetics, students' personal biographies, and researching various cultures through history and literature.
- Community gatherings to honor groups such as Native Americans on Orange Shirt Day, with dancing, drumming, cultural foods, and presentations by visiting tribal and community leaders.
- Displays such as bulletin boards about different groups and cultures; signs recognizing cultural and religious holidays; and posters for Black, Hispanic, and Women's History months.
- Celebrations and observances of holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and Día de los Muertos.

Many students found these activities fun and affirming. They "felt seen" when their culture was acknowledged, and it made them feel more engaged and invested in their learning. One student said he felt "super alienated" and "got some hateful comments" during a presentation about the genetics of people from his culture. Another student shared a challenge of trying to engage earnestly in CRSE work: "I find it kind of a sensitive topic, because I'm just trying hard to be respectful to everyone and not to offend anyone, and that can make it kind of hard to learn everything. But I just try as much as I can."

Students at every school described classroom and schoolwide activities about different cultures and traditions, but most agreed that these opportunities were infrequent, had not increased in the past year, and were more common in history, English language arts, and world language classes than in other academic disciplines. One student made an eloquent case for his school focusing on CRSE more deeply: "We don't really prioritize being sensitive towards others enough. If we prioritized culture over learning for a few days, we would make way more strides than just focusing on education, because it's preparing us for the future … and contributing to society.

Building Cultural Competence – Educators and school leaders described many strategies to build their cultural competence. Several schools had discussions with students from traditionally marginalized groups to learn what they are experiencing and what they want and need to feel welcome and be successful. A school leader said, "I heard from students that they've been subjected to racist and homophobic slurs, that our hallways were not safe places, and that this had happened in classrooms and teachers would not [get involved]." He worked with the students to lead a panel discussion for staff. He said the students were trying to convey to staff that "We're looking to you for support when something like this happens. You don't ignore it just because it's uncomfortable. You address it in a respectful way. Not only will that help make it stop, it will also send a message that you support and care for us. If you ignore it, that sends a different message."

Staff from three schools had worked with tribal leaders to understand how to incorporate Native issues into school curricula accurately and respectfully, "being mindful of their customs and culture and not trying to dig too deep into things that aren't meant for us to know." They shared the dilemma of wanting to be culturally responsive but worrying about "saying the wrong thing" and therefore "really leaning on the materials supplied by the district." One school was trying to develop strategies to support students whose tribal practices may require them to miss school for weeks at a time. A school leader said,

> It's a burden on the tribe to expect them to come and tell us what to teach. They don't have the resources of people whose job it is to come to the school to do that. They have things moving through their education departments and their culture at a thoughtful pace as they figure out what they want to share. So that slows us all down, but with valid reasons. We're cautious because we want to be thoughtful and respectful.

One school conducted a whole-staff book group on *The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves* by Shawn Ginright, followed by discussion to build the staff's cultural competence and try to address the implications of being a mostly white staff in a school with a majority of students of color. Another school worked to understand Latino cultural norms in order to communicate more effectively with students' families, such as extending personal invitations rather than mass emails and engaging in some social conversation before "diving into business." A long-time educator shared his evolution toward a more culturally responsive mindset, saying

> The longer I teach, the more it becomes apparent that you need to consider a student's background. If a student's acting this way today, [is it because they're] being a jerk? Or did something happen that morning that caused it? So I'm more aware of it … It's a holistic view that you have to understand your students in your classes, and you have to teach and communicate and react and build relationships accordingly.

Needs and shortcomings in cultural responsiveness were also apparent. An educator said, "We've had some issues with racism among students, and we wanted to have staff take a look at their biases and things like that, but we haven't really gotten anywhere with any of that." Another staff member, when asked about opportunities for students to receive credit for standards they meet through activities in the community, demonstrated a fixed mindset and a lack of cultural competence about her students' accomplishments, strengths, and potential. She said, "Our communities here have many students who – if they were to go home with an assignment – it would never get done. They live in chaos. [School] is their safe place where they can get their learning done. Their learning will not take place at home."

A teacher of color on a mostly white staff felt that some of her colleagues could do more to build their cultural competence and rise to the occasion when challenges arise related to cultural issues. She said that too many staff take a stance of "I'm not an expert on race." When this happens, she often thinks,

> You could do more. You could go deeper. You could engage more in that … Instead of saying, "I don't know how to deal with that," just deal with it! We're all professionals. We can deal with it, and we can all help each other get there. Their intentions aren't the problem, it's just their implementation of certain things … Are you circling back and saying, "I'm not an expert, but I did learn or read or talk with people, and now I think this is how I should tackle it"? Because if you're doing that piece, great! … We're a majority Brown and Black population. We don't have the space or time to be making pronouncements like that and leaving it there … Students are always looking at how you act and what you say. [Stepping up as a leader] sticks with kids, but a teacher's inaction does too.

The PL providers also emphasized the importance of educators building cultural competence in their academic disciplines. A school coach described an educator teaching about the roots of American democracy who was unaware of the important contributions of Native Americans. The coach gave the

teacher some key resources, and "six months later the teacher said, 'Oh my God, how could I have been teaching the birth of American democracy without teaching about the Haudenosaunee?'"

Many educators have asked the coaches what resources are available in Washington to build this type of knowledge. One coach said that currently there aren't enough resources to offer, "and it can't just be us. I think it's the responsibility of the teacher to fill the gap, but a lot of responsibility also rests on principals, superintendents, us, and the state coordinators of the project to ask, 'How can we provide experiences and learning opportunities that will, to the best of our ability, address those gaps?'"

Academic Credit for Anytime/Anywhere Cultural Learning – A central tenet of MBL is that students should receive credit for competencies they master, regardless of where the mastery takes place, but schools face many challenges in putting this into practice. Students at the majority of MBLC schools can seldom or never earn credit for out-of-school activities, as shown later in Figure 21.

One school described giving a few students credit for out-of-school cultural activities. A student who was struggling academically but worked intensively outside school on a traditional Mexican approach to training and riding horses was able to demonstrate mastery of some academic standards by doing a presentation about it at school. "It completely changed our relationship with her," the principal said, "because she started to gain some confidence in what she was doing. It honored her background, it brought in some of the things that she did culturally that mattered to her that she was not getting any credit for here, and it got her closer to graduating on time."

Another school is working with a local tribe to discuss how students might receive mastery-based credits for cultural activities they do outside of school. However, the school leader explained that the tribe is hesitant about entering that type of arrangement because they don't want the school to be in the role of passing judgment on tribal activities.

One educator said her school believes that awarding credit for out-of-school activities is inequitable, because not all students have access to those activities. She compared it to the school's policy of not grading homework because work or family responsibilities prevent some students from completing it. "It's always tricky to assess work that's not produced in class," she said. "So if students do something outside school and they want to share it, we will give the space and time for that. But as far as a score in the gradebook for something like that – no."

It's not clear if this position is held by other MBLC schools, but the initiative should amplify that it has a different stance on this issue. Its position is that schools should address the challenge this educator raises by working to improve equity of student access to out-of-school opportunities and by awarding mastery-based credits equitably. Not grading homework may be consistent with MBL principles, but withholding credit from students who have demonstrated mastery is inconsistent with MBL principles.

CRSE Political Context and the MBLC Network – Pushback on some CRSE principles and activities continues to happen in some MBLC schools and communities. One school leader described "lots of backlash from a vocal minority in our community if you talk about anything related to diversity." Leaders of MBLC schools said that family and community responses have included:

- A school board member wanting to stop doing land acknowledgments because they're "divisive" and "shine a light on negative things that have happened in the past."

- Allegations that a school staff member who advised a student group to support LGBTQ+ rights was a “groomer” and child abuser.
- Comments such as “White boys are struggling more than anybody right now. Why aren’t you spending more time talking about white males in your school?”
- Complaints that the school was putting litter boxes in the bathrooms for students who want to be treated like “furries” (i.e., cats and other furry animals). This was related to a myth that was spread nationally during public discussions of bathroom policies for transgender students.

A school leader who went on the MBLC trip to New York City said that a key strength of the MBL schools there was a strong sense of purpose that they had developed in collaboration with the community. He contrasted that with his own school, where “there’s a reticence to work with the community, because [school staff are] afraid to discuss racism,” and fear that opponents will react negatively to “anything that has to do with diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

An SBE staff member agreed that “There’s an ongoing risk of pushback associated with the culture wars, particularly in what’s going to be a rather divisive election year.” In discussions of a bill during the 2024 legislative session, there was more public opposition to MBL and CRSE than in the past. Regarding the objections to CRSE, the SBE staff member added, “I’m not sure that [the people objecting] were really understanding what’s actually happening in these classrooms and school buildings … I think it was a rhetorical objection, not an informed objection.”

The professional learning providers emphasized that an essential aspect of building CRSE is patiently helping people consider new ideas and behaviors that they may never have considered before. “As an example,” a PL provider said, “in one of my schools, a group of white teachers was talking about how important tolerance is, and I said, ‘Tolerance is not anywhere near enough. Picture that the people on either side of you are tolerating your presence here. How do you feel right now?’ And they’re like, ‘Oh, okay, now we get it.’”

The SBE staff and the PL providers also recognize the need for more of the CRSE professional learning and support to be led by experts based in Washington, who will have deeper local knowledge and greater credibility in the eyes of some school and community members. An SBE staff member said,

> People want local relevance, or at least statewide relevance, and you can’t have that unless you have local CRSE experts. All of us feel like that has been really lacking in the project. We need to figure that out, whether it’s just CRSE expertise, and then somebody else can bring in the MBL, or ideally a local person who can do both. But that’s a tall order at this point … We have ideas, we’ve asked some folks in the state, and we’re going to continue to search for that.

A school leader in a rural area agreed, saying that he had often told his MBLC coach, “We have to talk about [CRSE] through a different lens than what a person from Seattle or New York might do.” Many of his staff have “rolled their eyes” at some of the CRSE and DEI training they have received, particularly messages that they heard as “You should feel guilty about who you are” and “If you’re not thinking this way, then you’re not thinking the right way.” (SBE staff acknowledged that individuals’ perceptions are important but emphasized that the PL providers did not make those types of statements.)

This school leader said that his staff was more receptive to a training provided by a few of their fellow staff members in collaboration with the local Educational School District (a regional support organization). “It was more personal and fitting to our demographics,” the school leader said. “It was a big win. It was pretty much the same stuff but with a different spin on it. It was way more interactive and not so much in your face. It just resonated with the people in our area.” This type of messenger and approach may provide an entry point to deepen understanding and action with staff members such as one who said, “The CRSE push is ludicrous, and is simply risen from the social-issues hysteria that took place during COVID. In my classes, everyone has the right to feel safe and always will, but I have a huge issue with having to push certain agendas.”

Even schools that embrace CRSE risk what the PL providers call “Pillar One Syndrome.” They are referring to the three pillars of CRSE, that “(1) Students must experience academic success; (2) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.”[20]

The PL providers have observed that some schools are more comfortable focusing on the first pillar – “the teaching and learning stuff, the technical things, the rubrics and project-based learning” – which the coaches acknowledge is very important. But it’s harder for some schools to talk about the second and third pillars, such as “Who feels the most sense of belonging in the school, and how are we creating or failing to create that?” The coaches focus on all three pillars in their work with schools to deepen CRSE.

Due to aspects of the MBLC application process described earlier, some Cohort 1 schools were not aware enough of the expectation that they would work on all three CRSE pillars. SBE staff and the PL providers believe that emphasizing this expectation to Cohort 2 schools from the outset is one of the essential lessons learned from the initial years of the pilot. As each school works to implement CRSE more deeply, the issues and practices discussed in this and other sections suggest a variety of strategies that will require engagement from all stakeholder groups in the MBLC initiative.

School-Level Policies and Practices

School-level policies and practices that influence MBL and CRSE implementation include structures for educator collaboration and support, development and transparency of competency frameworks, and crediting and assessment practices, each of which are discussed in this section. They also include the available curriculum, materials, and planning time discussed in the CRSE section.

Many findings presented in this and the next section imply a preferred direction of change, such as toward deeper staff collaboration or more personalized supports for students. For some policies and practices, MBL principles are explicit about what schools should eventually achieve, such as expressing all competencies in language that students can readily understand. But other areas lack specific targets, such as how often PLCs should meet or how much choice students should have in how to demonstrate their learning. In these latter areas, the evaluation reports on the direction of change over time, but setting goals for the extent of change requires decisions at the school and district levels.

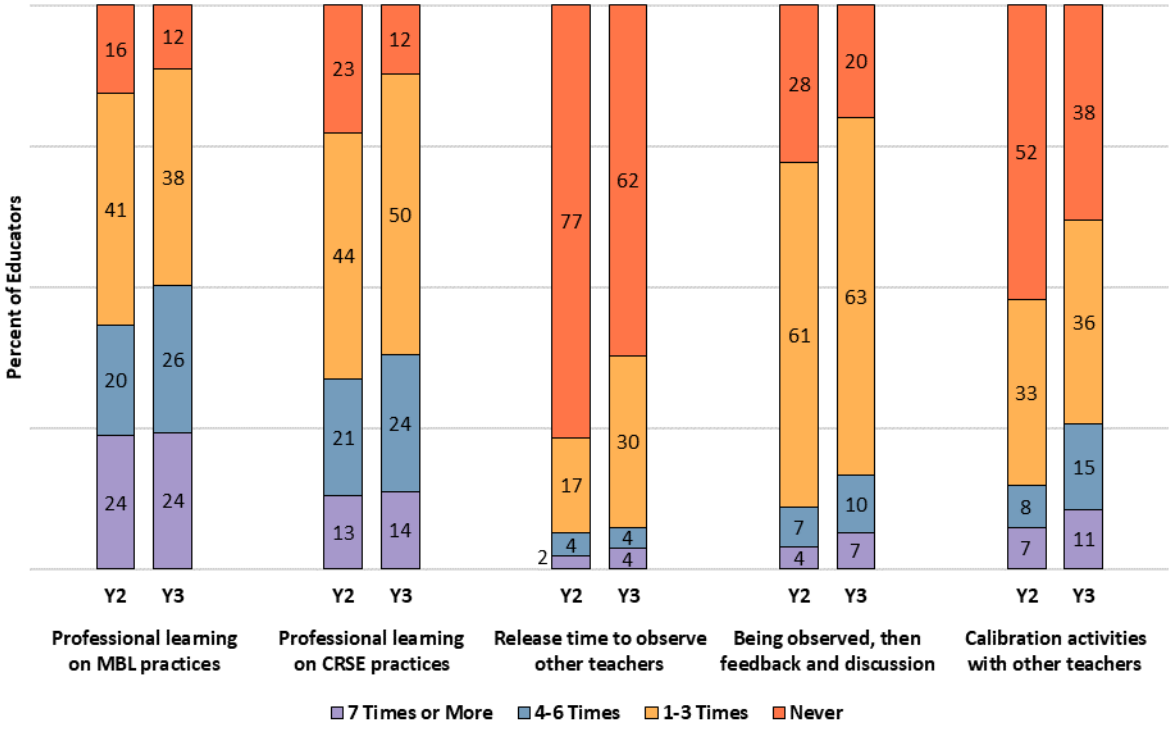
[20] Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that’s just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. Theory into Practice, 34(3), 159-165. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1476635

Educator Collaboration and Supports – Professional learning appears again in this section, because each school conducts internal PL in addition to the state-level activities discussed earlier. Some of the local professional learning is led by MBLC school-team members who have attended network events and are sharing with colleagues what they have learned.

Opportunities for release time to observe other educators increased from 23% to 38% (Figure 16). Engaging at least once in calibration activities – working with other educators to develop a common understanding of what student proficiency looks like – increased from 48% to 62%. These are notable increases in educator supports, but the majority of educators nonetheless had no release time to observe other educators. As in this example, both the relative and absolute levels of each activity are important.

Professional learning opportunities for educators on MBL and CRSE practices increased slightly. A substantial amount of PL on these topics happened in some schools, such as four or more opportunities focused on MBL (50% of educators) and CRSE (38% of educators). However, about half the educators had three or fewer opportunities, and part of that group had none.

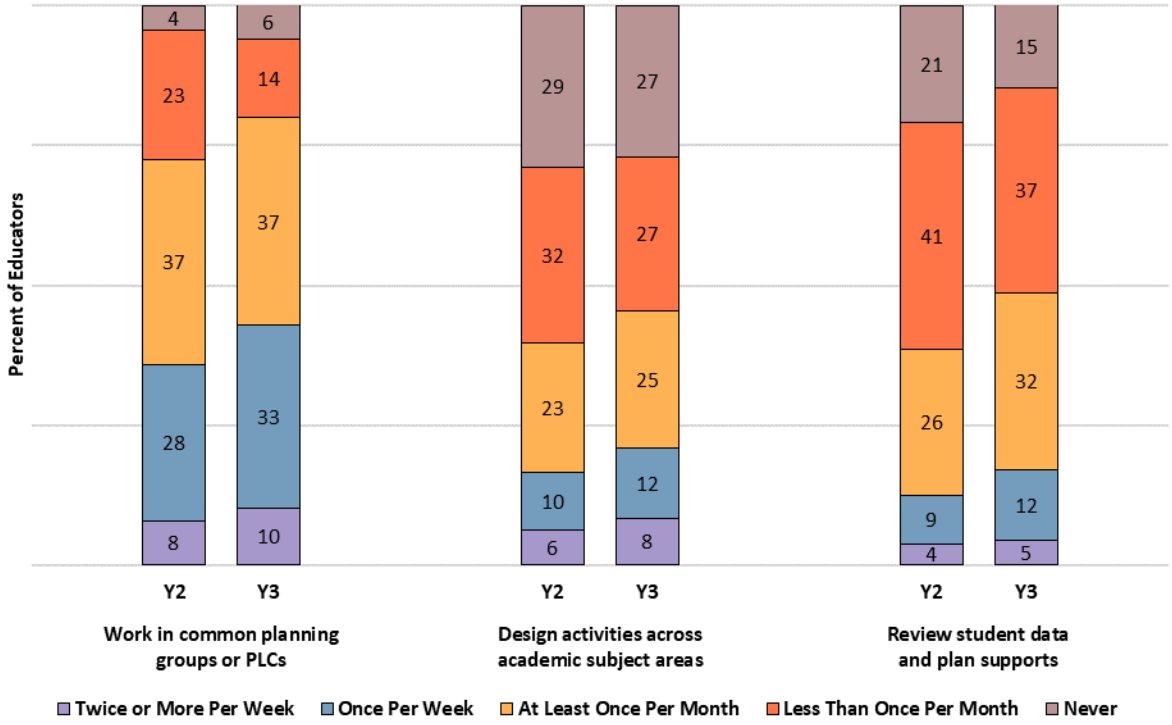
Figure 16: Educator Supports During the Current School Year



The most common form of collaboration was working in common planning groups or PLCs, which 80% of educators did at least once per month in Year 3 (Figure 17). About half that many collaborated with other educators at least monthly to design learning opportunities across academic subject areas or review student data to discuss how to support individual students most effectively. These were increases of 6 to 10 percentage points from Year 2.

Common planning time and multidisciplinary learning are interdependent, because educators need to work together to develop and offer learning activities that span academic disciplines. One model used in MBLC schools is for educators to plan activities together but carry them out separately within their respective courses. Another model is to combine the teachers and students of multiple classes in innovative ways. One school did this by creating a daily two-and-a-half hour block that combines English, social studies, and science and focuses on project-based learning. This school also uses their six half-days each year to conduct design challenges in which students prototype, test, and refine devices such as miniature wind turbines. A school that lacked common planning time used MBLC funds to create mini-grants to fund teacher collaboration during non-contract hours on multidisciplinary projects.

Figure 17: Educator Collaboration During the Current School Year



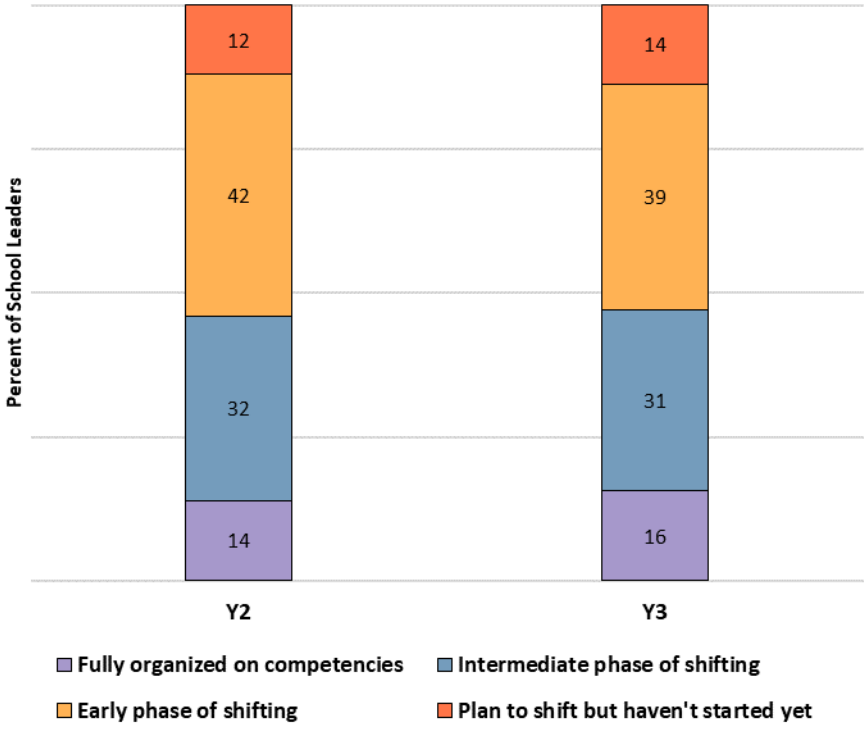
Competencies – School leaders were asked where their school is in the process of organizing learning around competencies (Figure 18). The survey explained that competencies "describe the skills and knowledge students are expected to master" and "draw higher-level connections across content areas."

In both Years 2 and 3, about three out of four school leaders said that their school was in an early or intermediate phase of this process. Several leaders said that their school is already fully organizing learning around competencies, and several said that their school plans to shift to competencies but hasn't started yet. Every school said that they plan to organize learning around competencies.

Given that crafting learning outcomes was one of the MBLC's top priorities for all schools, it's a favorable outcome that almost all schools have started the process. Moreover, most of the schools that said they

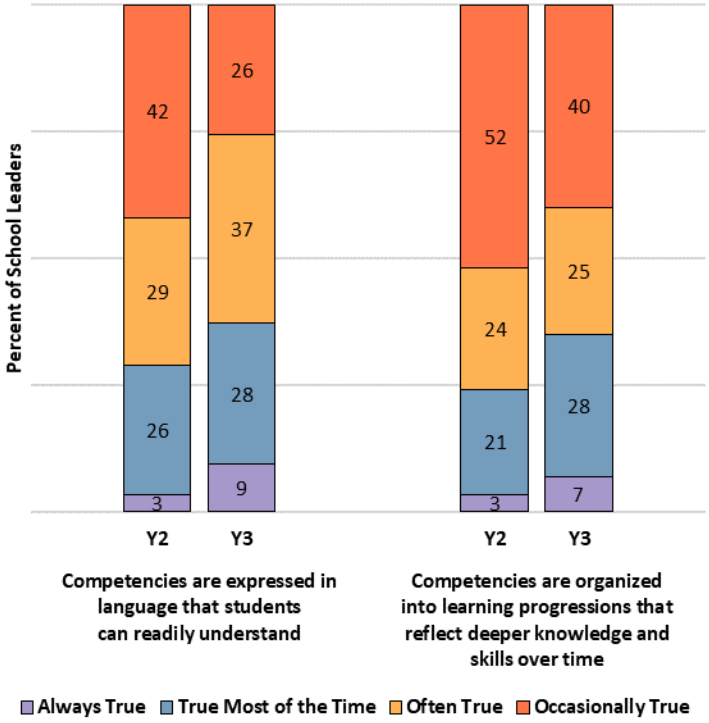
"plan to shift to competencies but haven't started yet" have nonetheless begun crafting their learning outcomes. The fact that, at the end of Year 3, almost half the schools are still in an early phase of shifting to competencies points to the magnitude and complexity of this part of MBL transformation. It also affirms the perspective from SBE staff and the PL providers, discussed in the State Policy and Supports section, that having a state-approved set of competencies (or learning outcomes) aligned to the state standards would be an important catalyst for schools shifting to mastery-based learning.

Figure 18: Schools' Level of Organizing Learning Based on Competencies



The percentage of school leaders who said that their competencies are often, most of the time, or always written in language that students can readily understand increased from 58% in Year 2 to 74% in Year 3 (Figure 19). The percentage who said that their competencies are often, most of the time, or always organized into learning progressions that reflect students' deeper knowledge and skills over time also increased substantially, from 47% to 60%. No respondents selected the "Never True" option.

Figure 19: Structure of Competencies



Transparency – Transparency of learning expectations and progress are important in MBL schools. The percentage of school leaders who said that students receive a list of required learning outcomes often, most of the time, or always increased from 38% in Year 2 to 56% in Year 3 (Figure 20). Substantial increases also occurred in the frequency of all students having learning outcomes listed in a personalized learning plan and students and families being able to track progress on learning outcomes at any time. However, more than half of school leaders said that these resources are never or only occasionally available for their students.

Educators described transparency strategies including giving students a list of standards at the beginning of a unit and using rubrics to specify the standards to be assessed on any assignment. One educator said that her school's learning management system, which allows students to view all standards and assessment results, empowers students to do what they call "going standards shopping." Students get to know the standards and then sometimes make the case to her that they have demonstrated mastery on standards in addition to the ones she had specified for a given assignment.

Mastery-Based Crediting Policies – Policies for awarding credit based on demonstrated mastery and anytime/anywhere learning are not used extensively at most MBLC schools. Changes in the use of these policies from Year 2 to Year 3 were small, with the exception of a 9-point increase in students being able to earn credit for demonstrating mastery through activities they do outside of school (Figure 21). About three-fourths of school leaders said their students can never or only occasionally be placed in classes based on mastery rather than age or grade level or receive credit as soon as they meet all learning outcomes in a class.

Figure 20: Transparency of Learning Expectations and Progress

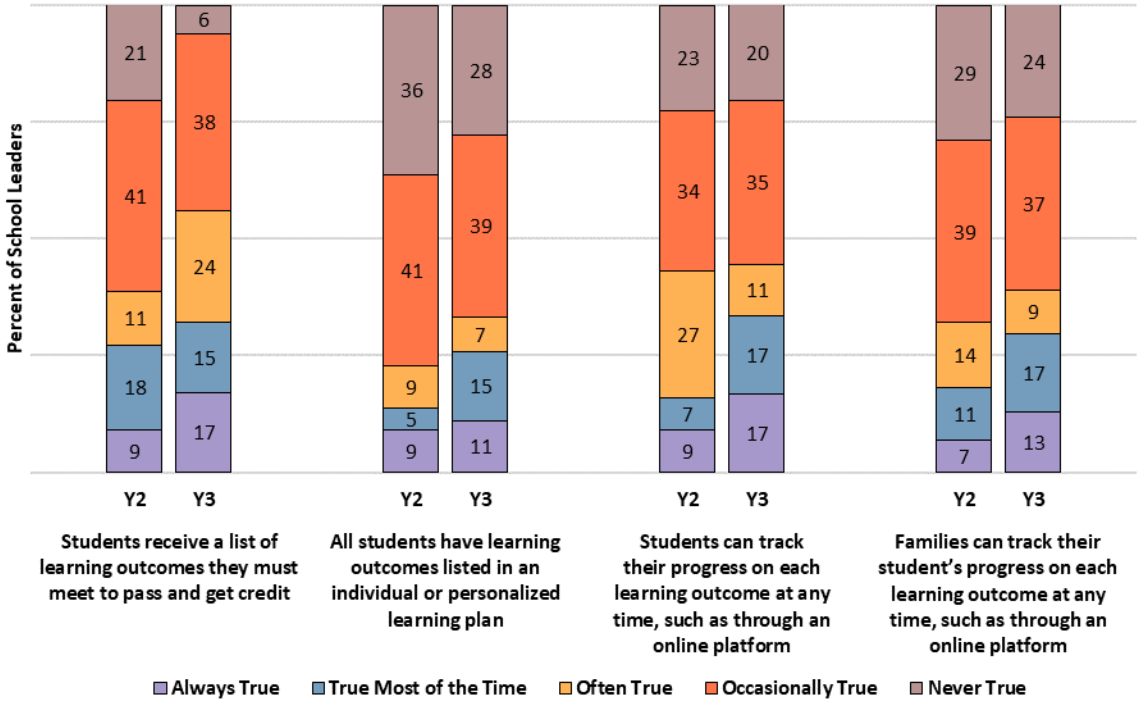
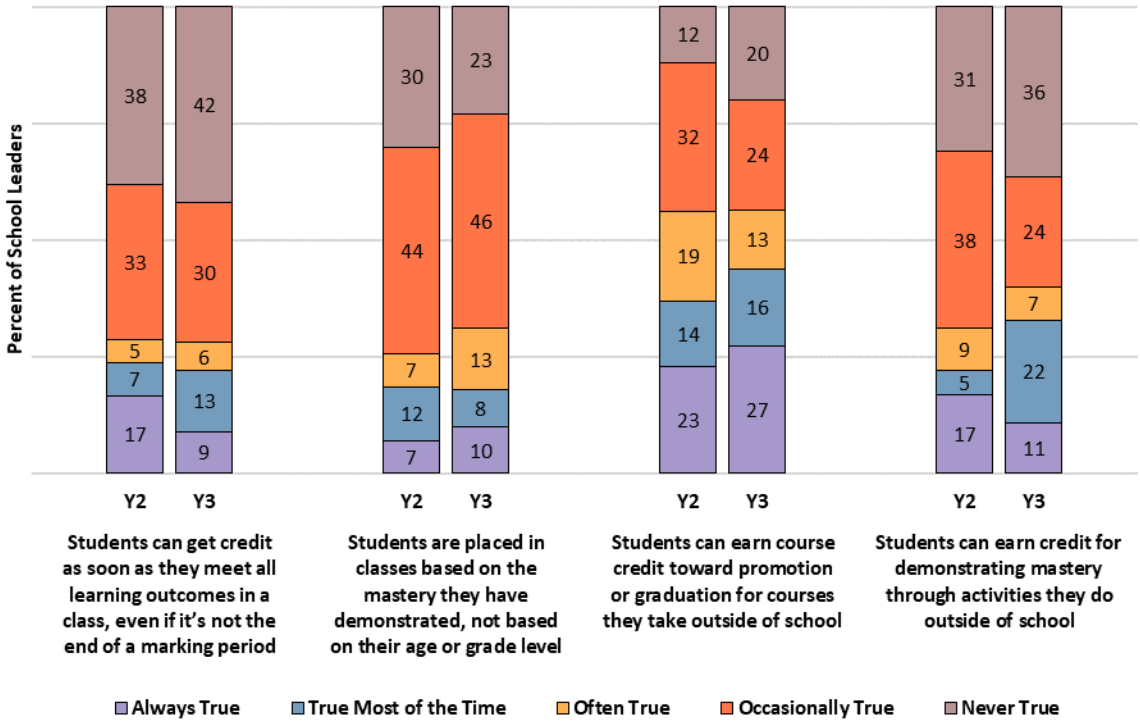


Figure 21: Mastery-Based Crediting Policies



Policies that allow credit for learning that happens outside school vary based on the type of learning. More than half of school leaders said that students can often, most of the time, or always earn full credit for courses they take outside of school, but this drops to 40% when students demonstrate mastery through out-of-school projects, service learning, or work-based learning.

Most schools find it more difficult to award credit for learning that takes place outside the school building, because they need to develop capacity and procedures to support and assess the learning. One school used MBLC funds to start a credit-bearing half-year capstone course for students to develop and carry out interest-based projects. A career and technical education teacher at another school said that students never make use of his offer to earn credit for projects they complete outside of school, but he thought that would change if the school gave students more support and guidance.

Supporting anytime/anywhere learning may require schools to shift mindsets. A school leader said,

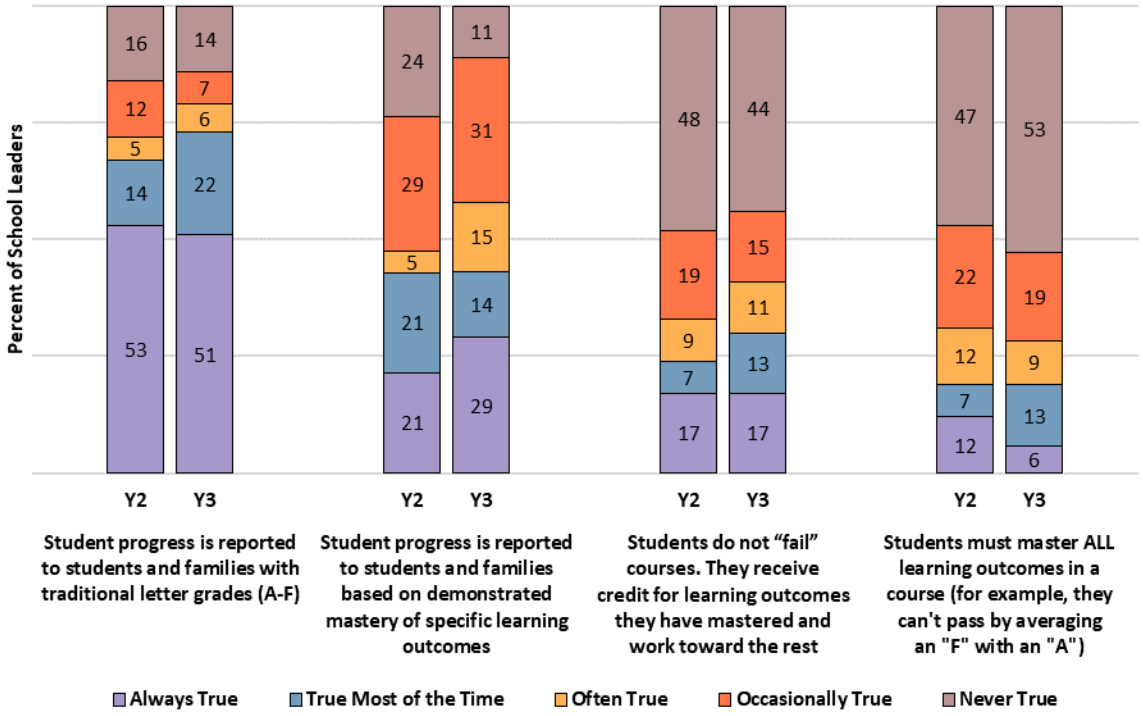
> This idea of being able to show competency versus having to earn your way with seat time pushes the system and pushes some people. There's this fear that kids are somehow getting away with something if they're not sitting in a class for 180 days. "Is that really earning a credit?" They don't have an issue with giving World Language credits to bilingual students, but they have a harder time seeing it in other areas.

Another school occasionally awards credit for learning that took place outside school, but "it's always been backfilling," a school leader explained. "We say, 'Oh, you might not graduate? Here – we can give you credit for this,'" such as physical education credit for a non-school athletic activity. The school is trying to move toward a more asset-based model where they ask, "What are ways you can demonstrate what you're learning outside of school so we can give you credit and honor the work you're doing?" They want to change the message from "We're just doing this to let you graduate" to "We're celebrating that you're graduating with these credits."

School-Level Assessment Policies and Practices – Schools with well-developed competency frameworks and mastery-based assessment systems report student progress on specific learning outcomes. Almost half of school leaders said that their school does this often, most of the time, or always, compared to about three-quarters who report progress with traditional letter grades (Figure 22). Many MBLC schools use both systems, which can reflect that school preferences differ from state reporting requirements. About one in three school leaders said in Year 3 that their school most of the time or always gives credit for outcomes students have already mastered rather than assigning failing grades or requiring students to repeat a grade level. These findings are all small increases from Year 2.

About one in five school leaders said that their school most of the time or always requires students to demonstrate mastery of all competencies, rather than averaging high and low grades, and this was unchanged from Year 2 to Year 3. A barrier to implementing this practice is that some schools must enter student assessments into a district information management system that averages assessment grades. These systems typically do not require students to reach the school's "meeting" level on every standard, and the district may set a passing level such as 1.75 on a 4-point standards-based grading scale. Even in the absence of district-imposed constraints, some MBLC schools' assessment systems have that same general structure. An important question for these schools is whether they have enacted alternative strategies to ensure one of MBL's key features – that students advance upon demonstrated mastery and are not promoted with problematic gaps in their learning.

Figure 22: School-Level Assessment Policies and Practices



Educator Practices

Educator practices are influenced by each of the sets of conditions discussed earlier – state policy, the MBLC network, professional learning, knowledge and attitudes about MBL and CRSE, and school-level policies and practices. This section discusses changes in many aspects of educator practice including responsive pacing, differentiation, personalized supports, student agency, assessment and grading practices, promoting habits of success, and opportunities for applied and anytime/anywhere learning.

Responsive Pacing – About half the educators said in both years that most of the time or always, on a typical school day most students are working on the same material (Figure 23). About half to two-thirds of students often, most of the time, or always have the opportunity to move more slowly than other students without penalty (70%), move on to other topics if they demonstrate mastery sooner than other students (48%), or go deeper and exceed the minimum required level of performance (64%). There were small increases in each of these areas from Year 2 to Year 3.

The frequency of these practices likely reflects the school context in addition to each educator's pedagogical decisions. Just over half of school leaders, when asked to describe their school's policies and preferences about summative assessment practices, said in Year 3 that allowing students to advance at different paces based on demonstrated mastery is encouraged or required (Figure 24). This was a large change, from 27% in Year 2 to 56% in Year 3. Accompanied by other educator supports, this shift in school policies and/or preferences could be an important precursor to educators adopting more responsive assessment practices.

Figure 23: Educators' Implementation of Responsive Pacing

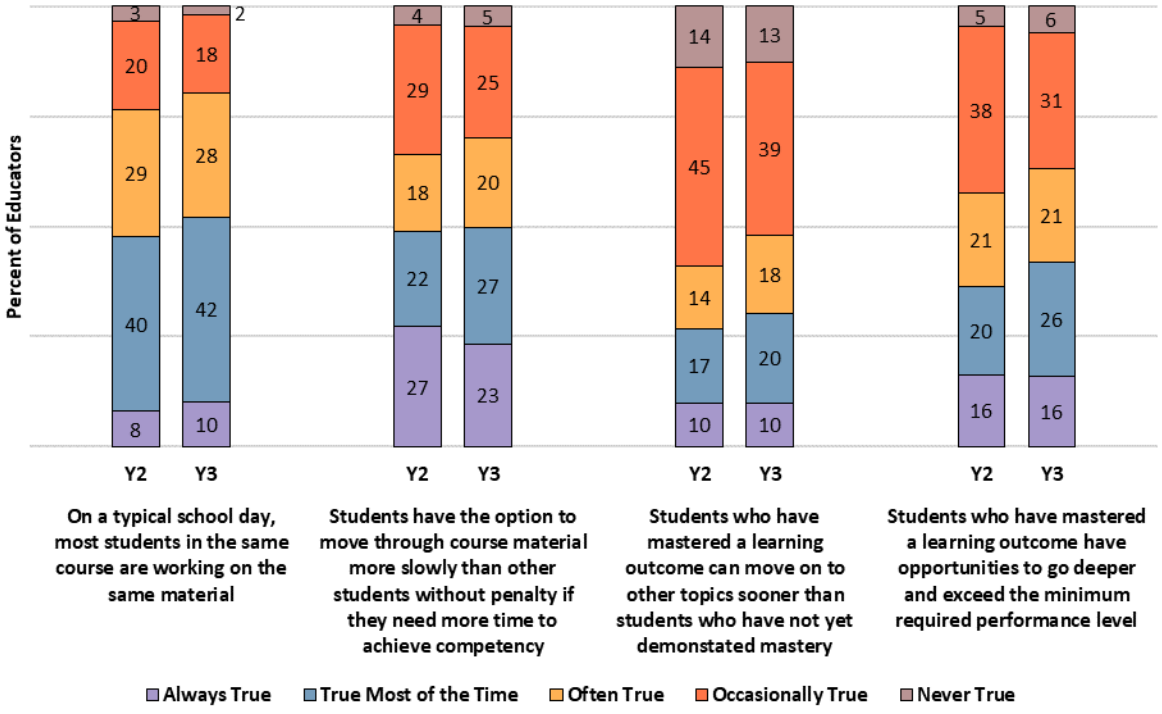
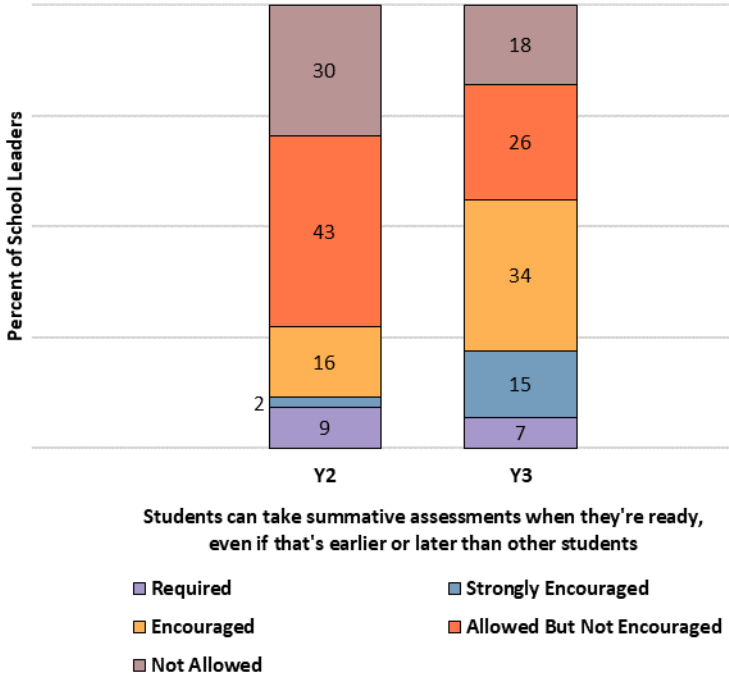


Figure 24: School Stance on Responsive Pacing of Summative Assessments



Students at most schools felt that their teachers provided limited opportunities for responsive pacing. They typically favored being able to progress at different paces, explaining that it reduces stress, is more efficient, and allows them to spend more time on topics they find more difficult or more interesting. It also enables them to produce higher-quality products and accommodates students who are on athletic travel teams. Students who appreciated responsive pacing said, “It definitely makes me understand the subject more if I can spend more time on stuff that I need to” and “It gives me less stress. Like if everyone else is ahead, and I’m the only one behind, I can ask [for help] later, and it makes me feel more comfortable.”

Other students wanted responsive pacing to provide more opportunities for enrichment, saying “I feel like there’s more opportunity for people who fall behind than people who get done quickly,” “I would be way better off if I was able to move on to something else rather than just sit around and read,” and “If you’re more advanced, I don’t think you should have to work at a less high level. If you want to get into an AP class or go to an Ivy League school, I feel like we should be able to have those opportunities.”

Students at one school also highlighted that “responsive” should not mean hands-off or unstructured. They said that the previous year’s learning was so fully self-paced that many students fell behind. They appreciated the additional structures that the school put in place for the current school year.

Several educators are not using responsive pacing because they don’t know how. One educator said, “When I have 21 or more students in a class, and if they’re all at a different level, I don’t know how I can possibly do that.” Other educators have gradually shifted to responsive pacing strategies such as putting an entire year’s course materials online, letting students move at their own pace with teacher support, and providing early enrollment in the next year’s courses or online enrichment opportunities for students who finish before the end of the year.

A science teacher said that all students needed to complete the same lab on the same day due to unique and time-consuming equipment setups for each lab, but each student collected their own data and could therefore move at different paces on lab writeups, revisions, and related assessments. A math teacher, after learning from diagnostic testing that many students were struggling, brought paraprofessionals into her classroom that enabled more differentiation. “There are still days where it’s everyone listening together to me teaching a skill,” she said, “but there are more days when the students are more in charge, choosing their group, going to the person that they can get help from, and working on different assignments, so I’m very excited about that.”

Differentiation and Personalized Supports – Most educators are providing differentiation in some areas (Figure 25). About three out of four said that students often, most of the time, or always receive personalized supports, regardless of how well they are doing in school and as needed to make timely progress. It’s less common for students to have the opportunity to choose different ways to learn the same material, with about half of educators in both years saying that students have this option more than occasionally. Each of these domains increased a small amount from Year 2 to Year 3.

About a third of educators reported meeting individually with each student at least once per week in Year 3 to discuss their work and progress, and twice that many reported doing this at least once per month (Figure 26). These are increases of five and ten percentage points from Year 2.

Figure 25: Differentiation and Personalized Supports

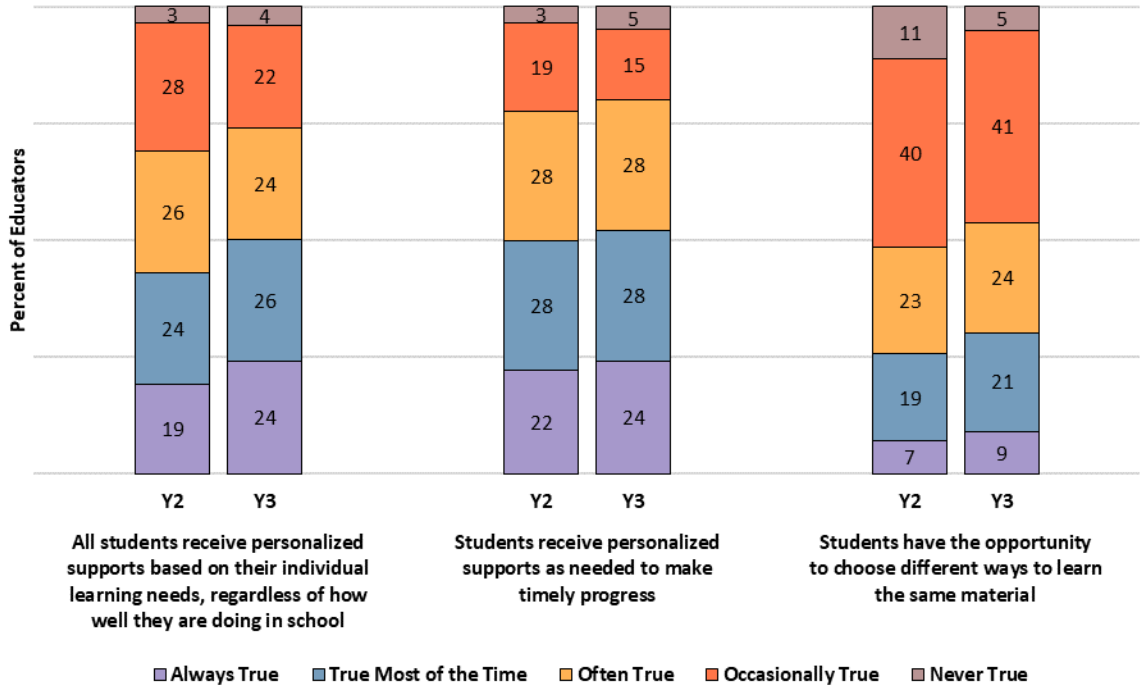
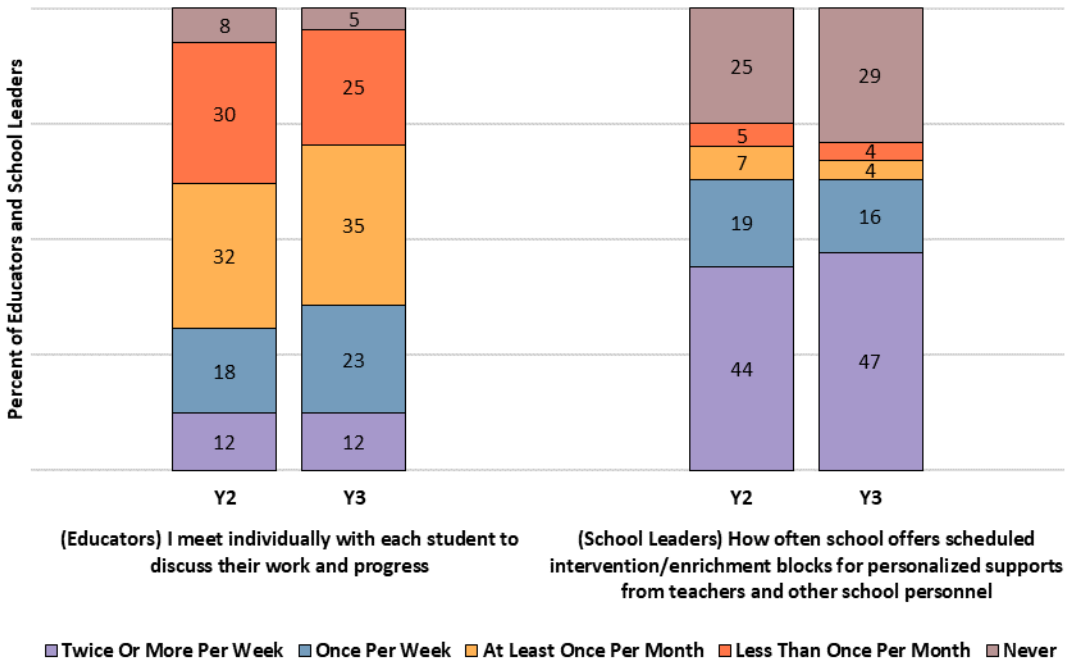


Figure 26: Personalized Supports



One school structure that can facilitate these meetings is intervention and enrichment periods scheduled during the school day, when students can receive personalized supports from their teachers or other school personnel. About two-thirds of school leaders said that their school offers these at least once per week, but a quarter said that their school has no intervention and enrichment periods.

Student Agency – As student voice and choice expand in MBL schools, the balance of decision-making shifts from educators to students in several domains of learning and assessment. In most MBLC schools, students have at least some input, but in Year 3 the educator remains the primary decision-maker about which topics and activities students focus on in class (79%), what schoolwork they do outside of class (60%), how they will demonstrate their learning (67%), and when they take assessments (81%) (Figure 27). The percentage of educators who said that opportunities for students to have some input increased slightly from Year 2 to Year 3.

Students described opportunities for choice in more than a dozen different core and elective courses, from what human right or Greek god to study, to what career to research, to what game to play in physical education, to what passion project to pursue. They also mentioned many opportunities to choose how they were assessed, but far fewer opportunities to choose when they were assessed. Some said that opportunities for choice had increased in the past year, but this varied by school, and some teachers offered much more opportunity for choice than others.

Almost all students agreed that being able to choose important aspects of their learning increases their level of engagement. “Doing my own topic makes me way more motivated,” one student said. “When it’s something I’m genuinely interested in, I put the time in.” Another student, speaking for herself and two friends who nodded as she spoke, said that choice “makes [school] more enjoyable but not more motivating. We’re pretty motivated people.” An outlier opinion came from an eighth-grader who said that choice sometimes backfires, and “a couple days later, I’ll realize that I’m not actually that interested, even though I thought I was. Then the motivation dies down. Whereas if they just told me what to do, then I might be more motivated to do it.”

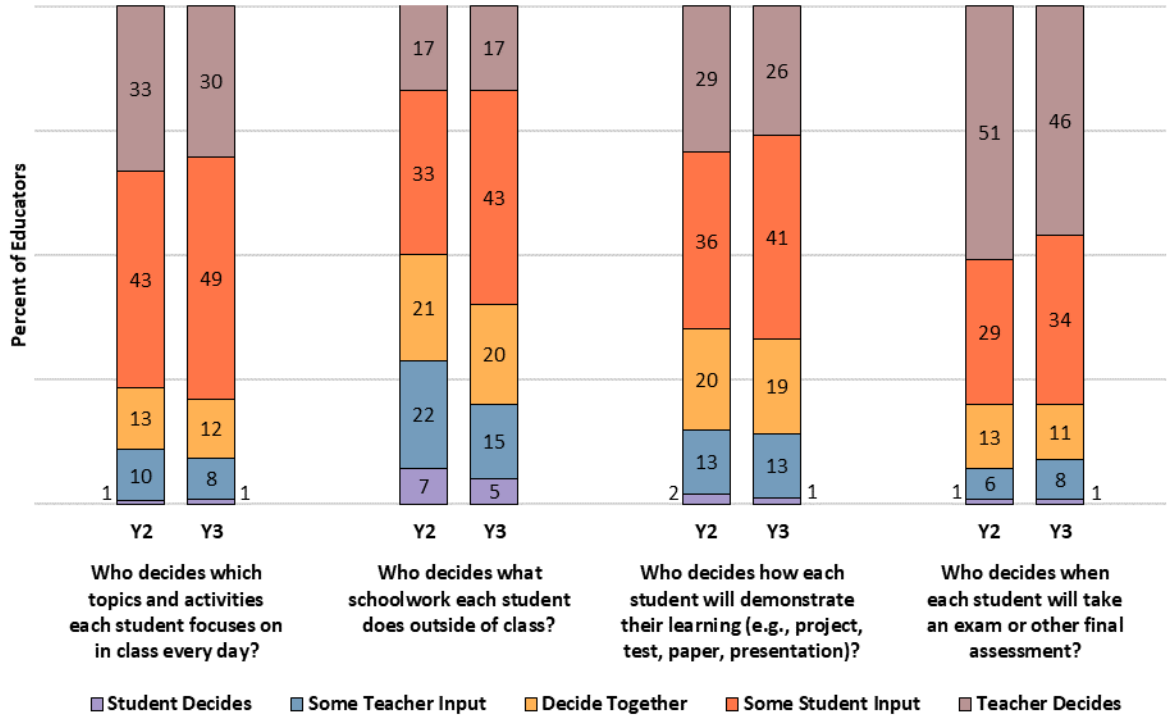
When describing her shift to fostering more student agency in class, an educator said, “When I’m writing my daily plans, one question is always ‘Where do the kids have any type of voice and autonomy in this?’ Because if we just fall back on our habits as teachers, it’s easy not to worry about student voice.” After explaining how she incorporated student choice into a unit, she displayed an impressive learner’s mindset, saying, “But that’s just me kind of getting my feet wet with this. I know that more can be done. Student voice is one of the cogs in the wheel of project-based learning that we’re trying to focus on. I’m actually leading PD on that next week, and I’m not an expert at this, but I don’t care – I figure we can learn together.”

Another teacher explained, “I’ve been significantly expanding students’ options for topics they’re interested in learning and fitting those within the standards that we’re trying to accomplish. … So I give them freedom and the autonomy within something that’s highly structured but loosely organized. That’s been the biggest thing.” Efforts to foster students’ sense of agency are also evident at the school level, as discussed throughout the report in relation to cultural responsiveness, school climate, transparency, and anytime/anywhere learning.

An obstacle to implementing student-driven, responsive assessment is that most schools’ grading systems don’t allow grade changes after the end of a marking period or make the process complex and

time-consuming. Another reason that some educators are reluctant to offer responsive pacing of assessments is that they have experienced students postponing assignments and then overwhelming themselves and the educator with too many assessments at the end of the marking period.

Figure 27: Student Agency in Learning and Assessment Decisions



Summative Assessment Practices – Performance-based assessments that involve complex real-world tasks or personally meaningful projects are an essential component of mastery-based learning. About two-thirds of educators say they use these for summative assessment often, most of the time, or always (Figure 28). In comparison, 40% of educators used traditional tests often, most of the time, or always – a 10-point decrease from Year 2 to Year 3. Traditional tests can be included in a balanced system of assessments within MBL schools, but their reduced usage suggests a shift toward mastery-based practices.

About a third of educators in both years allowed students often, most of the time, or always to choose how they want to be assessed from multiple options. This is a key MBL practice, but about a quarter of educators said they never offer this option, and about a third offer it only occasionally. About twice as many school leaders (67%) as educators said in Year 3 that this practice is encouraged or required in their schools, a 10-point increase from Year 2 (Figure 29).

Figure 28: Summative Assessment Practices

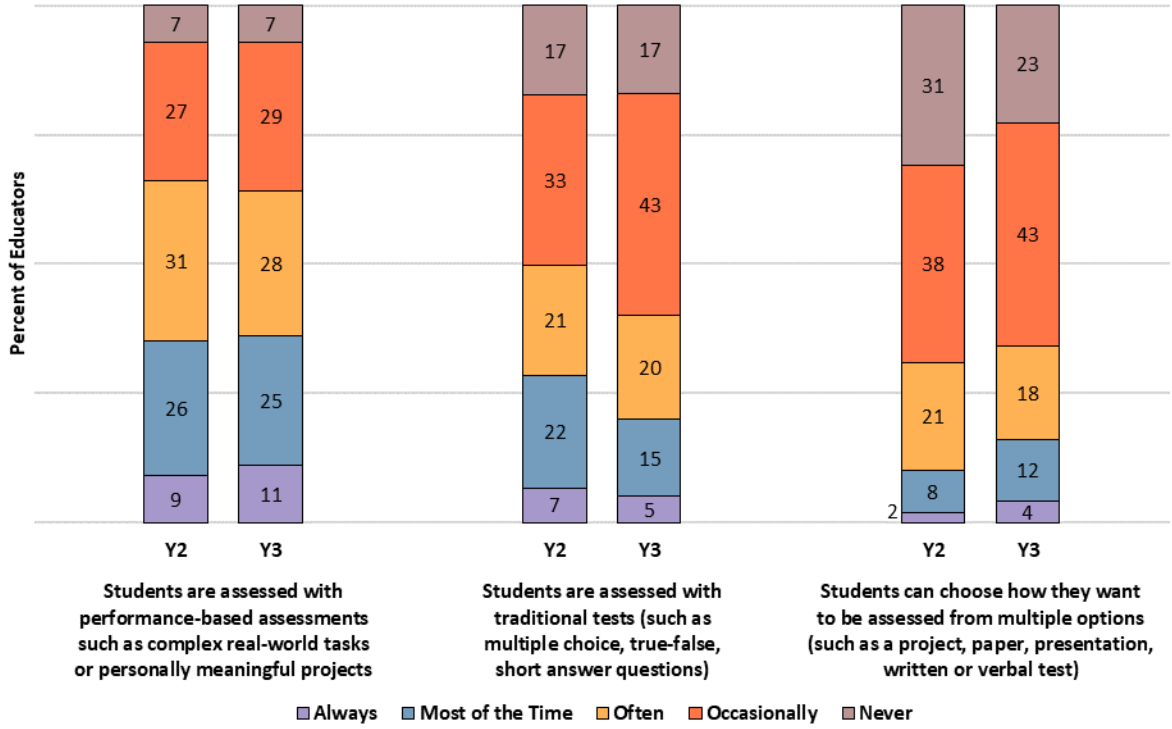
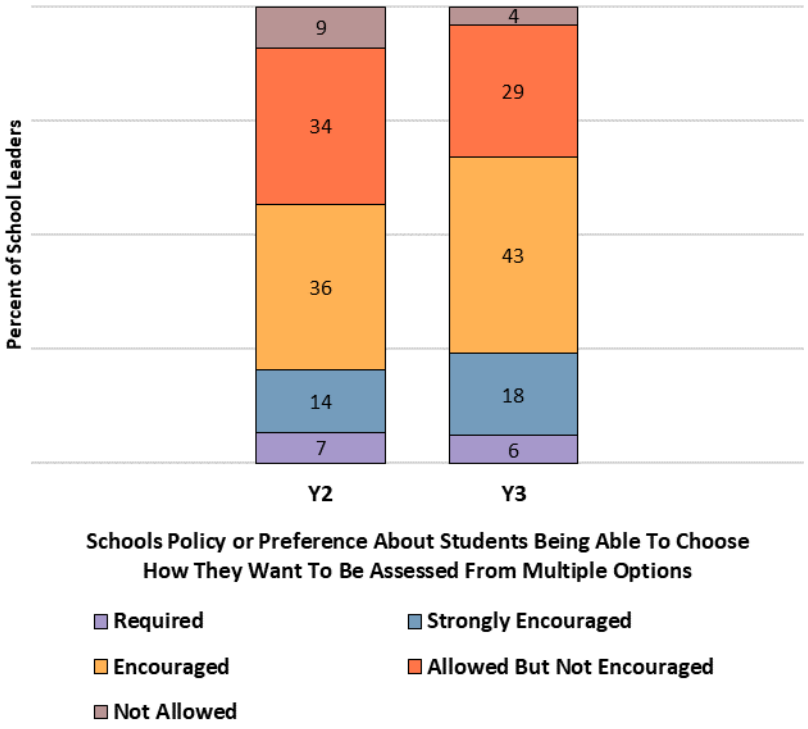


Figure 29: School Stance on Students Choosing Summative Assessments



The discrepancy between school policies and educator practices is not surprising, particularly in the early stages of transformation efforts. Even if a school encourages new practices and educators support the change, it can take time for them to learn new strategies and put them into practice.

Educators described a range of stances and strategies related to providing multiple assessment options or inviting students' assessment ideas. "I won't do that," one educator said. "I tried it, and it was so much work, and it was so hard for me to create multiple rubrics. I can't do that. I don't have time." Another educator provides a default assessment option but welcomes students to advocate for alternatives "if they really come to me and talk through it. It gets them to that messy point where I'm giving up a lot of control, which is hard, but it can lead to amazing outcomes."

Many educators encouraged their students to propose a variety of assessments, although this was less common in math and science courses. "[Having a] choice makes them so much more involved and enthusiastic about their projects," an educator said. She manages the resulting complexity by using a common rubric for each standard, regardless of how the student demonstrates mastery. Students first show their learning to fellow students and receive feedback; then they present it to the teacher. One educator mentioned that she typically offers a traditional test as one option, and about a quarter of her students select it.

When students take a summative assessment but fall short of mastery, about 70% of educators most of the time or always allow students to retake or revise with no penalty (Figure 30). Forty percent allow the student to use a different type of assessment always, most of the time, or often, and about two-thirds arrange for students to receive additional learning supports. This latter category increased moderately from Year 2 to Year 3, compared to small changes in the other three practices shown in the figure.

School leaders were asked about these same practices in their schools, and all four were required or encouraged at higher rates in Year 3 than in Year 2 (Figure 31). Three of the practices had substantial increases in the intended direction of change – allowing retakes without penalty (from 77% to 87%), allowing students to demonstrate understanding using a different type of assessment (from 57% to 72%), and providing additional supports (from 86% to 96%). Requiring or encouraging the fourth practice – allowing retakes but penalizing students for not passing the first time – also increased (from 35% to 43%), but this change was inconsistent with deeper MBL implementation. Most educators seem opposed to this practice, with just one out of five using it often, most of the time, or always.

School policies and preferences corresponded fairly closely with educator practices in these four domains, but the surveys do not establish a causal connection. One notable difference is that nearly all school leaders (96%) said that arranging for students who don't pass summative assessments to receive additional learning supports is encouraged or required, whereas a third of teachers said they never or only occasionally do this. This may reflect that some staff other than educators are primarily responsible for arranging supports or that some educators lack capacity to provide or arrange supports.

Most educators allow retakes and revisions without penalty, but a common concern is that the opportunity for retakes reduces students' motivation to prepare for the initial assessment. One school is developing a system of "retake tickets" in which students have to show that they have completed relevant assignments and formative assessments before retaking corresponding summative assessments. Some educators allow students to select a different format or modality for their retake, such as verbal instead of written.

Figure 30: Educator Strategies When Students Don't Pass Summative Assessments

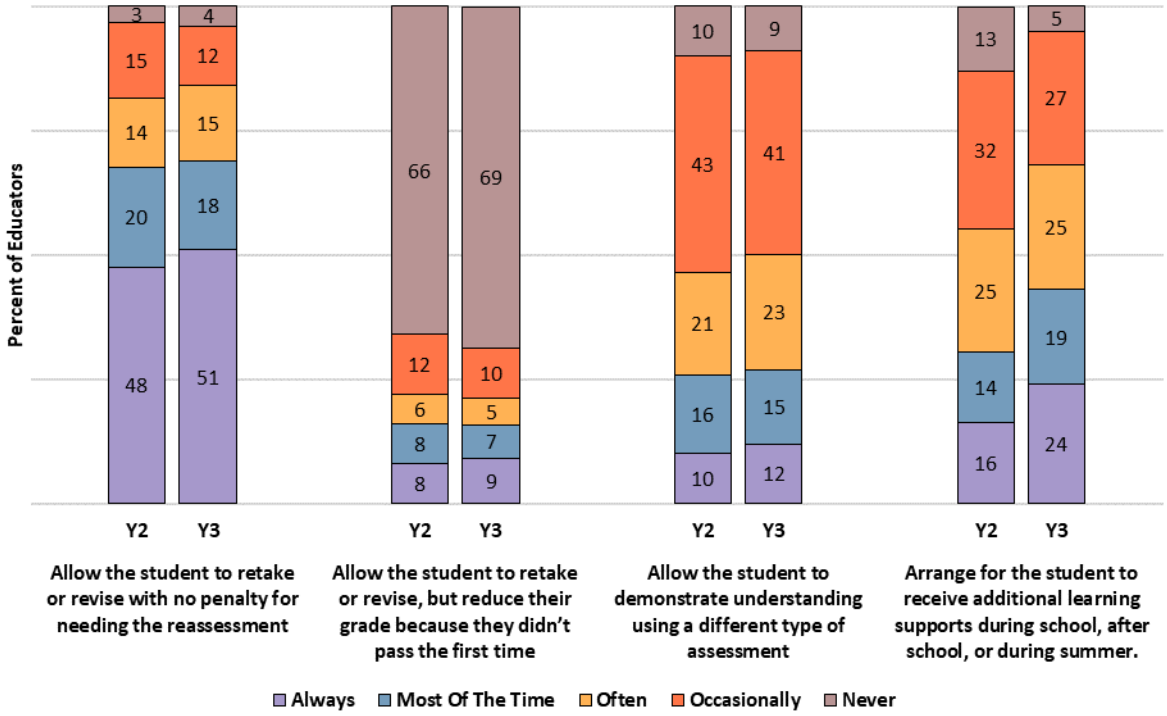
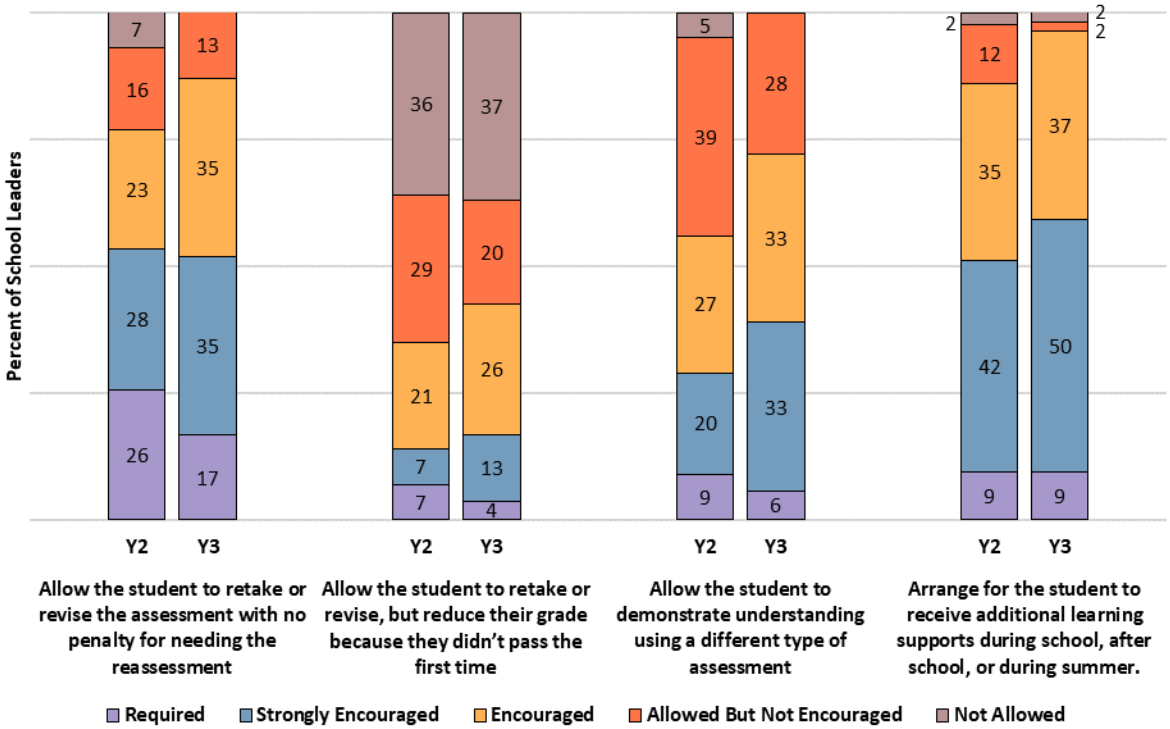


Figure 31: School Policies and Preferences When Students Don't Pass Summative Assessments

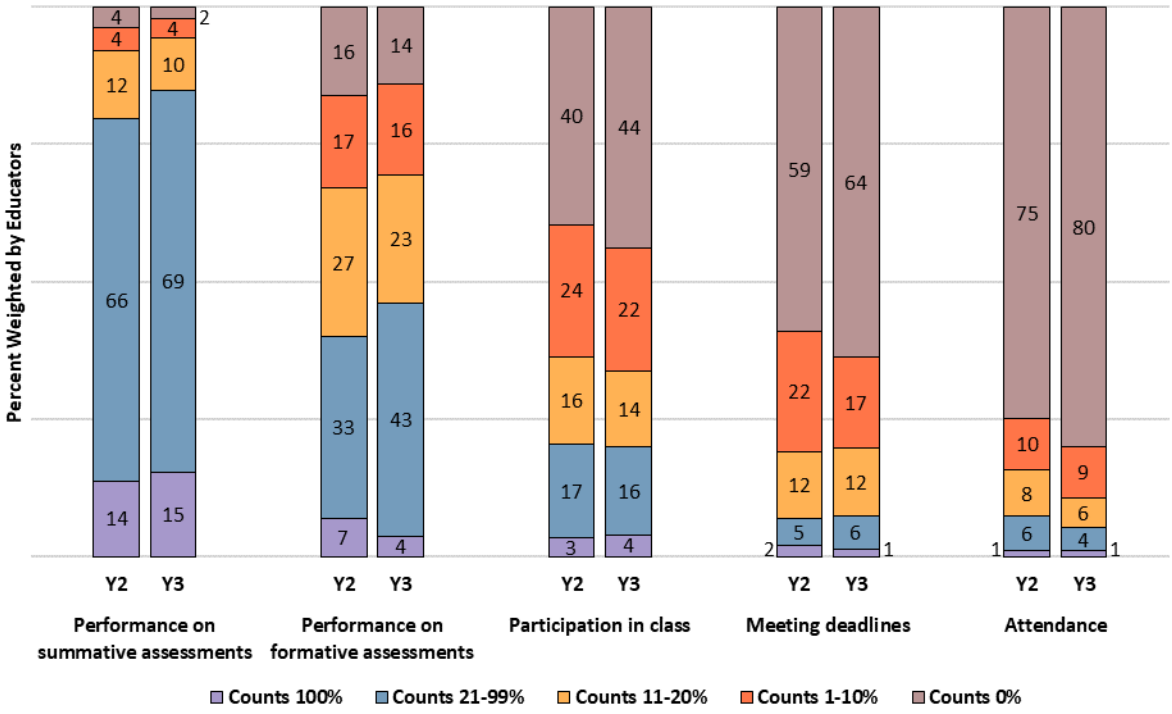


Multiple educators said that they like offering revision opportunities because it allows students to reflect and deepen their learning, which students often find gratifying. It also enables educators to sit with students, learn what they don't understand, and guide them to deeper understanding through discussion, questioning, and additional assignments.

Grading Practices – In high-implementing MBL schools, academic grades are based on demonstrated mastery of academic competencies. Formative assessments are essential, but, by definition – due to being formative rather than summative – should not be counted in final grades. Non-academic factors such as attendance, participation, and timeliness are important to promote, and high-implementing MBL schools may assess them but typically do not count them in academic grades.

Educators were asked how much they count these factors when determining whether a student will pass and receive credit for a course or a set of learning outcomes (Figure 32). For the most part, their responses were substantially different from the MBL grading principles just described. In both Years 2 and 3, almost all educators (96%) counted formative assessments toward academic grades, and about half counted them for more than 20% of the grade.

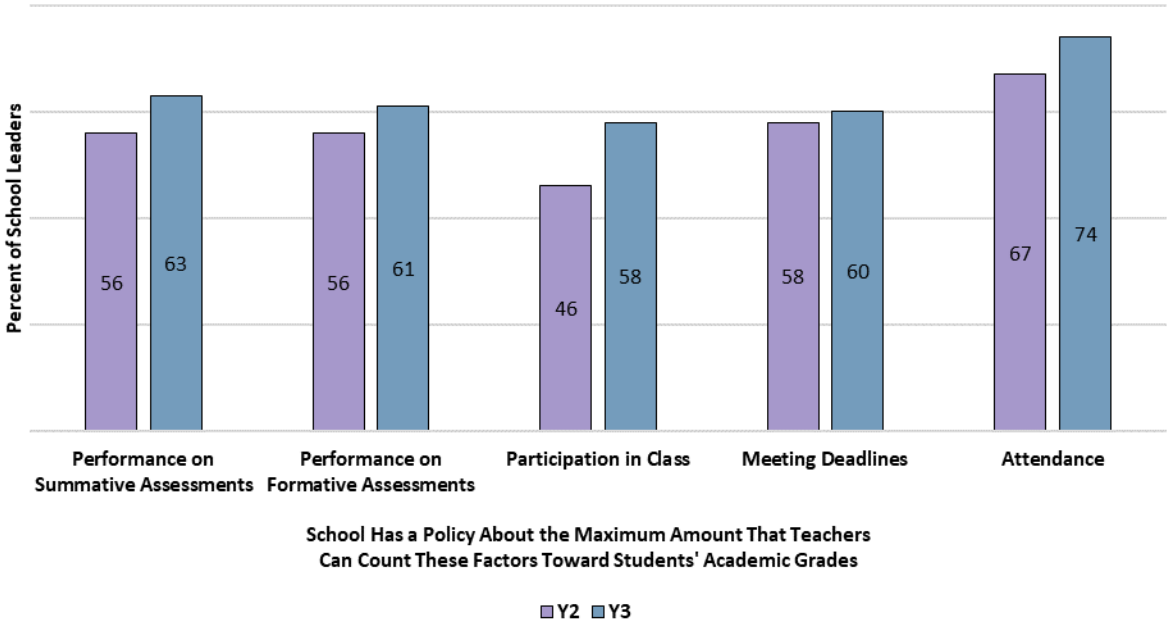
Figure 32: Factors and Weighting in Academic Grades



There were small decreases from Year 2 to Year 3 in educators counting habits of success such as participation, attendance, and meeting deadlines toward academic grades, but many educators count them substantially. Follow-up discussions with some respondents could be helpful, such as to understand educators who said they count attendance, participation, or meeting deadlines for 100% of academic grades or that they count summative assessments for less than 20% of academic grades. This seems to reflect a different interpretation of the question than was intended.

School leaders were asked about their school's policies related to these same grading practices. In each of the five areas, about 60% to 75% of school leaders said their school has a policy, and there were small to moderate increases from Year 2 to Year 3 (Figure 33). Having schoolwide policies sends clear and consistent messages to students about how they will be assessed.

Figure 33: Schools With Policies on What Can Be Counted in Academic Grades



Of the leaders whose schools did have policies, very few allowed counting attendance toward final grades, but many allowed counting participation in class, meeting deadlines, and performance on formative assessments (Figure 34). From Year 2 to Year 3, grading policies on all three of these factors moved toward deeper alignment with MBL principles.

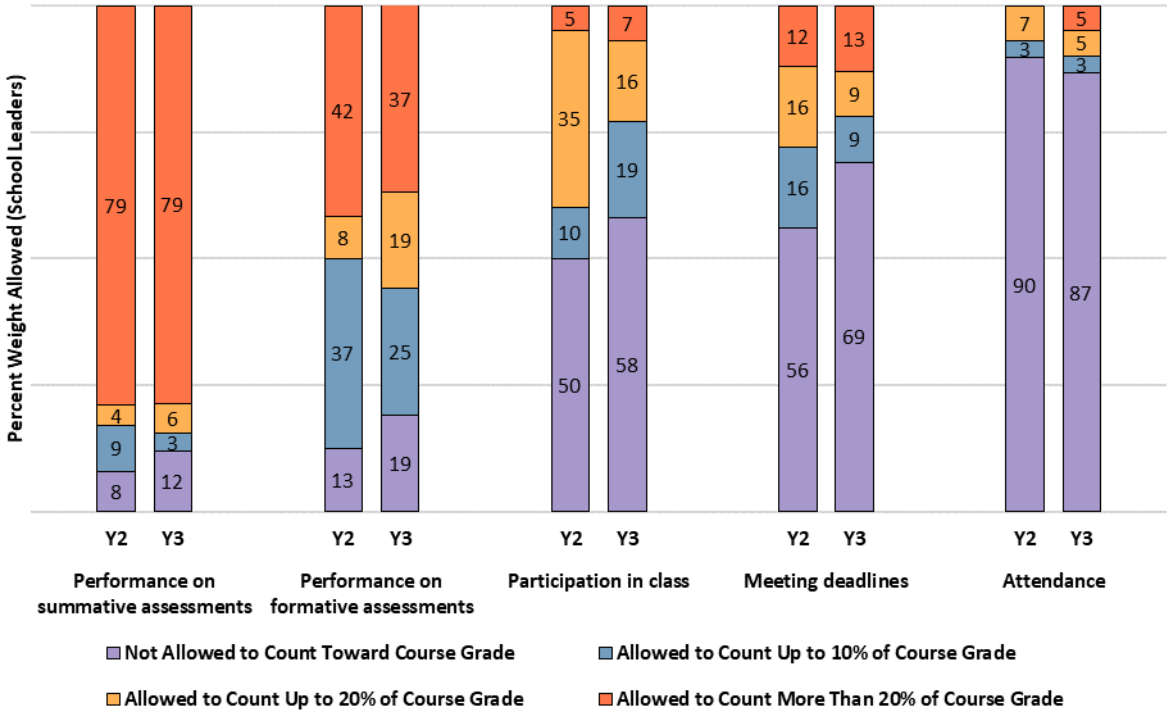
Similar to the earlier comment about educators' grading practices, follow-up discussions with some school leaders could be informative. For example, one out of five said that summative assessments are not allowed to count for more than 20% of course grades, and one out of eight said they're not allowed to count at all. This seems to reflect a different interpretation of the question than was intended.

The fact that almost all educators count formative assessments and habits of success toward academic grades, and that most school leaders say this is permitted, is a crucial topic for professional learning. It may partly be a terminology issue, in that formative assessments by definition are not counted toward academic grades. The important question is whether students are being penalized for their initial limited understanding even if they later demonstrate mastery.

One school emphasized that mastery-based grading is an equity strategy. A school leader said, "The quote that keeps resonating for me is, 'The only fair grade is an accurate grade.' The grade needs to be an accurate reflection of your knowledge and understanding of the content, not that 'I'm a hard worker,'

so a big topic of conversation among our staff has been how the accuracy of the grade and the feedback from the teacher work together to provide a more equitable experience for learners."

Figure 34: School Policies About What Can Be Included in Academic Grades



Several educators said that they count grades on practice assignments toward final academic grades because many students skip ungraded assignments and then lack the practice they need to demonstrate mastery on the corresponding summative assessments. At the same time, many educators agree that students should not be penalized for practice, citing the common analogy with performance in sports practice versus the actual game.

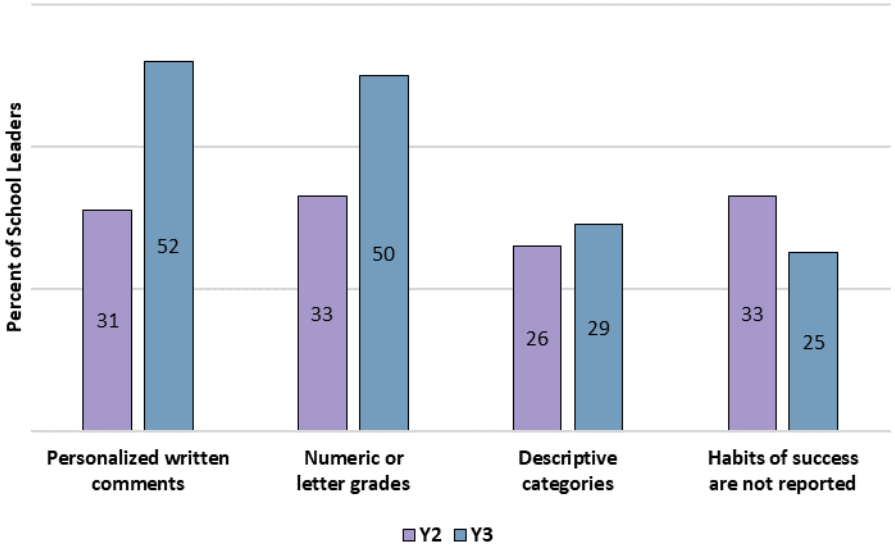
This issue presents a conundrum for educators and school leaders who want to move more deeply into mastery-based learning and assessment. A common response of CRS MBL proponents is that engagement will increase when schools create safe and welcoming learning environments, structure learning in more compelling ways, and help students build growth mindsets, effective learning strategies, self-direction, and other habits of success. As schools move in that direction, they seem to need more guidance and open discussion about when and how to shift to practices such as assessing formative work and habits of success separately and basing academic grades only on demonstrated mastery of academic knowledge. Achieving this transformation requires changing mindsets, practices, and institutional structures such as grade-reporting systems.

In the meantime, educators and school leaders described a wide range of strategies for grading formative assessments and habits of success such as communication, collaboration, self-direction, and others. In Year 2, almost all educators (96%) agreed that they see helping students build habits of success as a

high priority. (Due to the near unanimity, the question wasn't asked again in Year 3.) About four out of five school leaders agreed that helping students build habits of success is a high priority for their school, with a small increase from Year 2 to Year 3.

Assessing habits of success by using personalized written comments or numeric or letter grades increased substantially from Year 2 to Year 3, and the use of descriptive categories such as "developing," "applying," and "extending" increased slightly (Figure 35). About three-quarters of school leaders said their school reports on habits of success using at least one of these methods, and a third reported using multiple methods.

Figure 35: How Schools Report Student Progress on Habits of Success

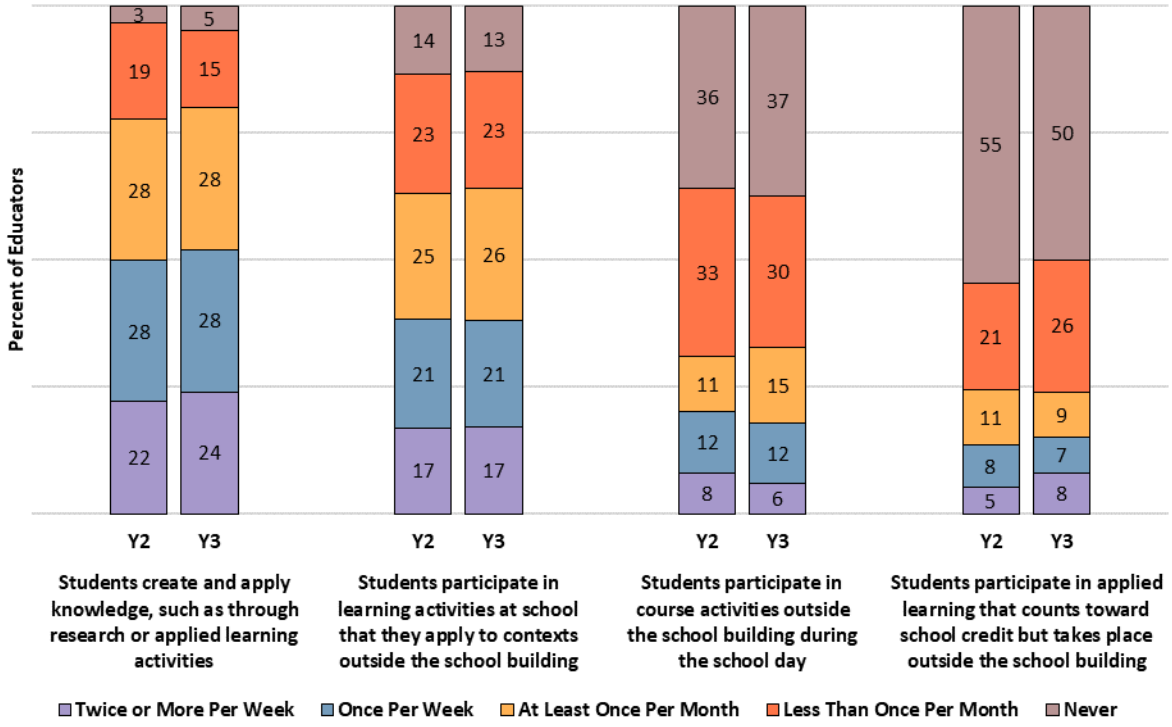


One school had a deeply innovative strategy for assessing and reporting on habits of success. They have six "portrait of a graduate (POG) standards" corresponding to several habits of success. When students have evidence of demonstrating one or more of the POG standards, they enter it into the school's learning management system. If they show mastery of all six standards during the school year, they earn a half credit. If they do this for all four years of high school, they earn two credits. Although these credits are in addition to the 26 credits required for graduation and are currently optional, the process provides opportunities for student agency, focuses students' and the school's attention on habits of success, and makes habits of success a more concrete topic for discussion, advising, assessment, and reporting.

Applied and Anytime/Anywhere Learning – MBL schools provide opportunities for students to learn through creating and applying knowledge inside and outside of the school building, as well as recognizing demonstrated mastery whenever and wherever it takes place. Educators said that at least once per month, their students created and applied knowledge (80%) and participated in learning activities at school that they applied to real-world contexts outside the school building (64%) (Figure 36). Many educators said students had these opportunities at least weekly. Much lower percentages of students at least once per month participated in course activities outside the school building during the school day (33%) or participated in applied learning activities that count toward school credit but take

place outside the school building (24%). More discussion of out-of-school learning is in the School-Level Policies and Practices section.

Figure 36: Applied and Anytime/Anywhere Learning Activities



Many schools' shifts toward project-based learning are increasing students' opportunities to create knowledge and apply it to real-world contexts. Projects have included trying to prevent algae blooms in a local lake, simulating a natural disaster response, growing tomatoes in math class, branding and marketing products in metal arts class, responding to various community needs, designing houses to keep penguins cool in rising temperatures, and many others.

Educators said that project-based learning offers numerous opportunities for student agency and that students often find projects more engaging than traditional activities, resulting in higher-quality work and deeper learning. "Trying to access student voices has always been at the forefront of creating my instruction for the kids," an educator said, "but with project-based learning, and with their reflection at each milestone, I'm able to hear their voices more and understand each of them individually and what's happening in their process in a much deeper way."

Managing Change

All MBLC schools are managing complex change processes. Some were addressed earlier in relation to state policy, the MBLC network, professional learning, and CRSE. Others were discussed in the Managing Change section of the MBLC Year 2 evaluation report, which should be seen as a companion to this section. Those strategies were developing a shared vision, making use of early adopters, supporting experimentation, planning and prioritizing, managing time, insisting on change, and celebrating change.

An additional set of enablers, challenges, and needs for managing CRS MBL transformation are discussed in this section, including launching strategically, developing a phased and focused implementation plan, devising flexible time and support strategies, determining consistency expectations, navigating district demands, monitoring and managing implementation, and developing evidence of success. Each MBLC school uses these strategies to different extents, depending on local circumstances.

Launching Strategically – Leaders at one school regretted how they rolled out their shifts to MBL and CRSE. "We didn't start in a way that got everybody on board, and with the superintendent just saying, 'Hey, you're *going* to do this,' it created a lot of confusion and resistance, and now we need to go back to the beginning." With the goal of getting the staff "to understand and have a 'why' for this," the school is working with their MBLC coach to lead the staff through identifying their core values and beliefs, what they understand about how students learn, and how that relates to MBL and CRSE.

Several schools launched their CRS MBL shifts by pursuing strategies to shift mindsets and help educators build new skill sets. "In a change process, a lot of what you're doing is going out and having individual conversations with people," a school leader said. "You're gently pushing them out of their comfort zone and trying to get them to do new things and have a little success and then trying to build on that success. And it takes time to be able to do that."

An educator at the same school said, "I don't think you ever bring anybody along by telling them. They have to try something, and you bring them along by showing them the benefit of it. So those are the types of things we've tried to adopt. Our approach is not to shove it down somebody's throat, but to say, 'Hey, this cool project was really exciting and fun.' Then they might say, 'I want to do something like that!'"

A challenge with that approach is that change may happen too slowly to accrue the successes needed to build and maintain momentum and support. Another school leader believed in building understanding and a shared vision for change but also said,

> I'm comfortable that I'm getting some resistance and losing credibility with some people, because I know what's good for kids … When I came here, they were doing things that schools were doing back in 1989. There's nothing anyone could say to me that would take away the value of students tracking their own growth on a proficiency scale and how much that benefits their learning. The MBLC is helping us learn to do that. They're helping us get people out of our little town and see what other schools are doing.

Launching effectively and finding the right pace of change is a challenge that needs to be navigated by leaders who know the contingencies of their local context, collaborate sensitively and strategically with their staff, and have support from experts in MBL and CRSE transformation.

Developing a Phased and Focused Implementation Plan – Schools can be overwhelmed by the scope of changes needed to transform to MBL and CRSE. "We're working on so many things, so it's just been change, change, change, change – and constant change isn't sustainable," a school leader said. "We need focused change, where we know our growth areas and don't get distracted from them, so we can become more sustainable and stable." Focused change, for some schools, requires a new level of intentionality. As another school leader explained, "In the past, our professional learning was much more piecemeal, choppy, whatever the district supplied for us. Now we are pushing an agenda."

Two schools described phased implementation plans designed to address this challenge. One school did a pilot in Year 2 in which two teachers used a mastery-based approach. Then in Year 3, every teacher was asked to teach one class using a mastery-based approach, because most teachers didn't feel ready for full implementation in all of their classes. In both years, the staff spoke often to share best practices and discuss what was and wasn't working. They also received coaching from more experienced MBL colleagues, such as the two teachers who led the Year 2 pilot. "It's been going really well," one of the teachers who served as a coach said. "I think most of the teachers are on board, and when I walk into classrooms, MBL is happening, so it's been positive."

A second school used project-based learning (PBL) as their entry point. During the first phase, which they called "Building the Foundation," all educators received PBL training and were expected to do at least one PBL project with students to start learning how it works. The next year the school used MBLC funds to send many staff members to an extended training with PBLWorks, and educators were asked to do a more fully developed PBL project and incorporate key MBL elements such as student voice, choice, and reflection. In the second phase, "Defining Learning," the school focused on staff developing a common definition of learning and understanding how students learn and build skills. This work was informed by focus groups with students, staff surveys, MBLC consultants, and reviewing education research. The third phase, "Supporting Learning," will be ongoing and focuses on elements such as classroom practices and environment, assessment, grading, staff collaboration, and the school schedule.

Devising Flexible Time and Support Strategies – Most MBLC schools have some scheduled planning and professional learning time devoted to advancing their CRS MBL work. These include weekly late-start or early-release days, full days in August and during the school year, and common planning periods during the school day. One school used MBLC funds to conduct a two-day, staff-led summer institute. Another school has two planning periods per day, one individual and one with team members. A common challenge is ensuring that these times remain focused on learning and planning for CRS MBL, rather than being diverted to other priorities.

In one school, an experienced teacher wanted to comply with his school's expectation to conduct one class using a mastery-based approach, but he was struggling to understand how it worked. He asked the principal for time with a colleague who had been implementing MBL more fully. The principal arranged a release day for the two teachers to work together. Afterwards, the teacher who was new to MBL said, "Oh my gosh, I totally get it now. I think I understand this." He did the same thing for a second day, this time with a teacher in his own discipline, figuring out how to tie MBL practices to his subject area. Then he

asked for four more solo release days, which the principal provided, and the teacher spent one day per week for a month really figuring out how to shift his strategies and systems.

Now his shift to MBL is well underway. As one product of this process, the educator showed the principal a plan of how he would use mastery-based strategies to work with a group of students who weren't meeting a particular standard. "This level of innovation is something I haven't seen from him before," the principal said, "and he's been teaching here since the '90s. Things like that [in our school] have been a direct result of this MBLC work." The principal was referring to the grant funds, which paid for the release days, as well as guidance provided by the MBLC coaches and events.

This story shows what can be accomplished with the right supports and mindsets. Some education leaders and funders may see the cost of the release days as an unscalable obstacle to change – and it may not need to be fully scaled, because some educators transition to MBL without the level of personalized support that this teacher received. What the story highlights is the widely recognized but insufficiently addressed reality that the typical school year provides too little professional learning and common planning time for the level and pace of change that deep CRS MBL transformation requires. Whether it's through innovative scheduling during the school day or funding devoted to after-school or summer professional learning, the depth and pace of transformation will be greater when motivated educators are given time and supports commensurate with the complexity of the shifts they're being asked to make.

Determining Consistency Expectations – Reflecting on what one of his teachers learned during the MBLC visits to five schools in New York City, a school leader said that the "big takeaway is maintaining consistency within the buildings … So we're gonna have a lot of talks on that. Where should we be consistent? Where are we not? What kind of changes do we need?"

Another school leader said, "Within the building, we have people with different ideas and iterations of what mastery-based learning ought to look like. Some have very strong feelings about having a looser structure, and others want a tighter structure, so that creates some tension between staff."

Many educators and school leaders believe that consistency is helpful both for students and educators. For example, a school might decide that ratings for each outcome assessed in any course will be Not Yet, Meets Standard, or Exceeds Standard, and that every subject will use 10 common outcomes: Argue, Be Precise, Collaborate, Communicate, Conclude, Create, Discern, Innovate, Investigate, and Plan.[21] One MBLC school has a policy that any summative assessment must have a retake opportunity within 10 days after grading, and the teacher can extend the deadline or increase how many retakes are allowed.

Each school navigates the types and extent of consistency locally, but they encounter common questions and decisions: What is the rationale for consistency? Which practices must be consistent? Where should there be more flexibility? Who decides? What are the pros and cons of different strategies? What can we learn from schools who have done this already? This is another promising area for professional learning and sharing best practices from across the MBLC network and beyond.

[21] The Young Women's Leadership School of Astoria. (2022). Mastery handbook: Teacher's edition. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XtP4vxRV-kWyP-Wn1rpmVodM9644G1ly/view?pli=1

Navigating District Demands – An educator in a medium-sized district described pressure from district leaders to administer common assessments that every teacher in her grade and subject area in every school in the district were expected to administer according to a common pacing guide. This included not only common summative assessments, but even common formative assessments. ("What's more disturbing," the educator said, "is they think that's equity.") The educator, who was transitioning to project-based learning and other CRS MBL strategies more quickly and deeply than other teachers in her school, received multiple messages and a visit from district administrators pressuring her to adhere to the common assessments. The required pacing of the district's formative assessments was so out of synch with her students' projects that she never showed students their scores so they wouldn't be demoralized by their expectably low performance.

The school's principal defended the educator, telling the district, "If you've given us the green light to go forward with MBL, you can't hold us accountable to the pacing guide. We're going to combine standards in a different way to produce projects for kids." He told the district that the school will continue to do the common assessments, but the pacing might be different. The district leaders who had given the school permission to do MBL accepted this, he said, but "there's still some friction with certain groups." He added that the school leaders' role "is to protect our teachers, to tell them, 'It's OK, we can do this.' Giving them permission to do the work is critical, because a lot of times they're fearful to do it and think they're going to get their hand slapped."

Monitoring and Managing Implementation – When describing resistance to change from some of his staff, a school leader said, "I don't know how you'd even monitor whether they're just shutting their doors and saying, 'Yeah, whatever. You have no idea what I'm doing.' So unless you're going to be a gradebook tracker, or you require teachers to turn in samples of what their students are doing, we can't know." This seems like a valuable area for coaching and sharing best practices among school leaders in the MBLC network. This school leader seems to be struggling with applying strategies for managing transformation, and others may be in the same position, but some school leaders in the MBLC network appear to be managing this effectively.

Developing Evidence of Success – "To get permission from the district to continue doing this," a school leader said, "we need to be able to show whether we're doing it well and that our efforts are making a difference. Part of the challenge is, how do we measure that? I don't know what that looks like yet. We've got to figure out how to quantify it." Many schools are likely being asked – or will increasingly be asked over time – to demonstrate that they are implementing CRS MBL with fidelity, that it's yielding its intended outcomes within expected time frames, or both. Supporting schools in defining and documenting implementation, outcomes, and time frames, and sharing successful evaluation strategies that schools in Washington and nationally are already using, is one way that the initiative and the state can support expansion of CRS MBL approaches over time.

Recommendations

Strategies to improve CRS MBL in current and future MBLC cohorts and Washington's K-12 education system appear throughout the Year 2 and Year 3 evaluation reports. Many of the broadest and highest-leverage strategies are gathered here as a series of recommendations for state policies and supports, the MBLC network, professional learning, school-level policies, and educator practices.

State Policies and Supports

- Continue supporting the Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative. Findings from the first three years demonstrate that the initiative has made substantial progress toward its objectives, learned and improved in response to early challenges, and shown promising initial results. It has also demonstrated that transforming schools and districts toward CRS MBL, and creating state and local policies and supports to facilitate that transformation, is a long-term process that requires innovation and refinement across multiple cohorts of schools to fully realize its potential and evaluate its effectiveness.
- Develop a state-approved set of mastery-based competencies, learning progressions, and success criteria aligned to state standards that mastery-based schools or districts could opt into as an alternative to the existing system. These resources would be potent catalysts and accelerators for schools seeking to implement mastery-based learning.
- Update state reporting systems to fully support and accurately reflect the meaning of standards-based grades. Current incompatibilities thwart aspects of standards-based grading, schools' ability to implement it fully, and student access to programs that base eligibility and admissions on traditional grading.
- State policies and structures that currently enable mastery-based learning also create obstacles in some cases, such as additional reporting requirements and different funding levels. Schools may also risk losing some funding if they enable accelerated pacing and awarding credit for some types of learning conducted outside the school building, two key features of mastery-based models. The state should continue investigating these policies and developing responses that would facilitate mastery-based learning policies and practices.
- Update state legislation to incorporate the field's 2019 definition of mastery-based learning, rather than current use of the 2011 definition.[22] This update would make explicit the importance of student agency, varied pacing and pathways, transparent competencies, timely and actionable assessments, and embedding strategies to ensure equity for all students in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.
- Support re-introducing legislation similar to 2024 Senate Bill 6264 and contribute lessons learned from the MBLC and a review of other states' policies that support CRS MBL.

[22] Levine, E., & Patrick, S. (2019). What is competency-based education? An updated definition. Aurora Institute. https://aurora-institute.org/resource/what-is-competency-based-education-an-updated-definition/

MBLC Network

- Support Cohort 1 schools and their districts to prepare for sustainability after MBLC funding ends. Identify or develop case studies of MBL schools that have successfully transitioned from external funding to internal support. For schools in Cohort 2 and any future cohorts, provide this support from the outset of their work in the initiative. Implement the SBE staff's plans to organize conversations with district leaders about how districts and the state can support each other to continue incentivizing and sustaining CRS MBL innovation.
- Leverage evidence on which school expenditures of grant funds have been most effective in advancing progress toward deeper MBL and CRSE implementation. In particular, consider requiring a portion of the grant to support school staff who will develop or deepen their CRS MBL expertise, serve as internal coaches, and begin building capacity that will support sustainability within the school and across Washington. A possible component or incentive of this work could be creating pathways to earn job-embedded credentials such as graduate credits or master's degrees in CRS MBL in collaboration with local institutions of higher education (such as the Northern Cass School District's Teacher Leadership Academy[23]) or existing resources such as the 2Revolutions graduate programs.[24] Another model of building internal MBL expertise is provided by the South Carolina Competency Fellows program.[25]
- Continue revising the work-planning and reporting process to support schools in developing more tangible goals aligned with the MBLC's implementation graphic and planning systematically about what steps will be taken, how much time is needed, and whether outcomes were achieved. Ensure that work plans contain explicit strategies to provide for well-protected, collaborative staff planning time focused on advancing MBL and CRSE.
- Reassess what requirements, if any, should be placed on participation in MBLC network professional learning activities. If levels of participation are suggested rather than required, develop alternative pathways and accountability to ensure that MBLC schools who do not participate at the suggested levels are using a sufficient portion of their grant funds to advance their professional learning and prospects for meeting the goals in their work plans.
- Revisit the practice of providing equal funding to schools regardless of size. Evaluate whether larger schools need increased funding and coaching to achieve timely progress. Explore models such as larger schools providing matching support for hiring or developing an internal CRS MBL specialist.
- Create more strategies to recognize and celebrate successes, amplify best practices within the MBLC network, and share inspiring resources from the broader field of personalized, mastery-based learning.
- Expand work on the MBLC's objective to "establish a statewide infrastructure to provide needed … communications support to enable school districts/schools to implement MBL." A variety of

[23] Levine, Eliot. (2020). The evolution of competency-based transformation in Northern Cass. *Competency*Works blog, Aurora Institute. https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/the-evolution-of-competency-based-transformation-in-northern-cass/

[24] https://www.2revolutions.net/graduate-programs

[25] reDesign. (2024). A competency-based blueprint for supporting statewide learning: 2024 spotlight on South Carolina. https://learn.redesignu.org/pages/a-competency-based-blueprint-for-supporting-statewide-learning

forms of communication with families, school and district staff, and community members about the rationale for MBL and CRSE, the changes taking place, and the outcomes of the work will be essential for deepening implementation and supporting sustainability. Providing these resources at the state level is a high-leverage strategy for supporting the success of individual schools.

- Develop processes to identify a school's level of CRS MBL implementation in relation to common criteria and the school's own goals for change. This will improve the ability to draw conclusions about the pace and quality of implementation and, in the future, may qualify schools for state waivers and funding that facilitate deeper implementation.

Professional Learning

- Continue prioritizing discussions with schools about strategies to maximize the investment of well-protected and collaborative staff planning time focused on advancing MBL and CRSE. Provide examples of staffing and scheduling innovations from other schools in the MBLC and nationally that have successfully created this dedicated planning time. The PL providers have named this as an essential success factor, and school leaders have continued to name it as a high-priority need.
- Facilitate more opportunities for every MBLC school to visit high-implementing, mastery-based schools in Washington and nationally. These visits can be deeply inspiring, energizing, and informative, transforming a school's understanding of what is possible. Many educators and school leaders appreciated the in-person and virtual visits during Year 2 and want more. Consider requiring every school to send a team on an in-person visit with a portion of the grant funds earmarked for this purpose. To the extent possible, match visitors with schools that are similar to their own school on dimensions they consider important and want to observe.
- Increase the amount of in-person coaching. Both the coaches and the schools have described this work as particularly beneficial and in demand. This may be a longer-term goal, given the current MBLC budget, but as in-state CRS MBL expertise grows over time, including expertise within schools and districts, the cost of coaching should decrease.
- Encourage Cohort 1 schools to use the new self-assessment tool that was used with Cohort 2 schools. Even though the tool is designed "to help MBLC schools assess where they are in terms of the essential beginning components of CRS MBL," many Cohort 1 schools are still working on those beginning components. The process could help shape their work planning for Year 4 and beyond. The tool's introduction adds that it "does not include all the practices that may be used in a CRS MBL system." It would be valuable for the MBLC to develop a second self-assessment tool or use an existing tool that includes more advanced practices and could be used by schools as they deepen their implementation.
- Ensure that educators and school leaders understand that CRSE encompasses not only strategies explicitly tied to culture, such as building cultural responsiveness and celebrating diverse cultural identities, but also components they may associate more closely with MBL, such as honoring students' strengths, promoting student agency, improving school climate and students' sense of belonging, implementing equitable grading, and working to ensure that every student succeeds.
- Explore additional strategies to engage school staff and community members who oppose aspects of MBL and CRSE and to correct any misconceptions about the approach and how it

supports the school's goals. Speak with them and their school leaders to understand their opposition and potential entry points. Develop a range of approaches and messengers tailored to different audiences.

School-Level Policies and Educator Practices

The evaluation findings suggest dozens of potential areas for schools to focus their efforts during Year 4 and beyond. The findings also highlight numerous successful practices that MBLC schools are using or developing. An overarching need is to provide sufficient time and support to deepen implementation. The surveys and interviews asked about many of the key school and educator shifts in structures, culture, and pedagogy. Some of these focused on earlier stages of transformation, such as developing mindsets and competencies, and some on later stages, such as calibrating assessment across teachers. Every shift has potentially high impacts, and each school's needs and priorities are different.

Each school should assess their own needs and set ambitious but achievable goals in collaboration with their MBLC coach and other experts. The new MBLC self-assessment inventory and others are available, as well as resources to improve policies and practices in every domain assessed by the inventories. Many of these resources are referenced on the MBLC website and others are available from organizations nationally that focus on advancing MBL and CRSE.

As schools put CRS MBL policies and practices into place, an important focus area is quality. For example, most educators said that students created knowledge and applied school learning to real-world contexts at least monthly. These are important MBL practices that can be carried out at many levels of quality and depth. The same is true of student agency, culturally responsive curriculum, meaningful assessment, personalized supports, and many other areas. Over time, MBLC schools should continue to assess and strive to improve the quality of their CRS MBL policies and practices.

Conclusions

The MBLC has provided substantial evidence of success in promoting deeper MBL and CRSE implementation and positive impacts on early outcomes that set the conditions for academic achievement, such as school climate, cultural responsiveness, student engagement, and student ownership of their learning. About three-quarters of educators and nearly all school leaders support their school's plans to implement MBL and CRSE more deeply over the next several years. Educators and school leaders reported substantial shifts toward greater preparedness to implement MBL and CRSE, and about two-thirds of educators and three-quarters of school leaders said that they and their schools have shifted toward deeper MBL and CRSE implementation.

Students shared their perspectives on four key MBL and CRSE strategies: selecting learning opportunities based on their interests, learning at different paces, celebrating diverse cultures and traditions, and fostering a more welcoming and affirming school environment. These approaches made

students feel more engaged and invested in their learning. Most students wanted schools to expand their use of these strategies, which they said they had experienced at low to moderate levels.

The largest positive shifts reported by educators and school leaders were in schoolwide practices, such as using data to address inequitable outcomes, assessing students' habits of success, providing release time for educators to observe each other's practice, and giving students lists of required learning outcomes. There were also many positive shifts in individual educators' practices – such as meeting individually with each student to discuss their work and progress, providing opportunities for enrichment, and excluding attendance from academic grades – but they were mostly smaller than the shifts in schoolwide policies and practices. In some cases, this may reflect that structural changes at the school level can encourage or enable later shifts in educator practices.

More than four out of five shifts in educator and school practices identified in the surveys were in the direction intended by the initiative. This figure rises to 94% if very small shifts (increases or decreases of three percentage points or less) are excluded to account for possible sources of bias, such as higher response rates in Year 3 and respondents who only completed the survey in one of the two years. The preponderance of shifts in the intended direction strongly suggests that the initiative is contributing to schools moving toward deeper MBL and CRSE practices.

The initiative has also created and supported conditions in schools and the state to facilitate CRS MBL implementation. It has sustained the MBLC's statewide network of schools, offered two-and-a-half years of extensive professional learning and coaching opportunities, provided funding and guidance for schools to engage in many activities to deepen their implementation, and secured a fourth year of funding at a reduced level for all schools. Almost all school leaders said that they would recommend participating in the MBLC to school leaders at other schools that are exploring transformation to a more student-centered and equitable learning approach. Five out of six school leaders rated the overall quality of the MBLC initiative as either good or excellent.

Additional factors influencing implementation included strong support and guidance from school leaders, school staff developing a shared vision for transformation, carrying out a phased and focused implementation plan, navigating district demands, educators serving as early adopters and internal coaches, allocating sufficient time for professional learning and collaboration, supporting experimentation, monitoring and managing implementation, and celebrating change.

Much remains to be done to realize the MBLC's vision. Almost half the educators described themselves in Year 3 as just beginning to implement a few CRS MBL strategies in their classrooms, and most other educators described themselves as implementing CRS MBL strategies regularly or consistently. A substantial minority of educators do not feel well prepared for the shift to CRS MBL or believe that it will improve equitable student outcomes or school climate. Moreover, many educators who do believe in its benefits do not feel that they have sufficient curricula, supports, or time to ensure effective planning and delivery. (To draw meaningful conclusions about the MBLC's effectiveness, it's worth noting that many educators using more traditional approaches face those same challenges.)

Attitudes about CRS MBL and depth of implementation vary widely across MBLC schools. For example, the proportion of educators who say they implement CRS MBL practices regularly is four times as high in the top third of schools than in the bottom third. Schools also differ substantially in the proportion of educators who believe that their school's CRS MBL work has led to increased student engagement,

authentic assessment, and cultural responsiveness. Smaller schools, on average, have shifted more quickly than larger schools, but school size is just one of many factors influencing implementation.

Throughout the initiative's first two-and-a-half years, SBE staff and the MBLC schools have come to a growing understanding that the journey to deep implementation will require consistent effort and resources well beyond the current grant period. This was confirmed through interviews with educators, school leaders, students, SBE staff, and the professional learning providers. It is also consistent with the time frame observed nationally for schools to reach deep levels of MBL and CRSE implementation.

Washington has invested deeply and made substantial progress toward realizing each of the MBLC's objectives:

- Establishment of a statewide infrastructure to provide needed professional development, policy, and communications support to enable school districts/schools to implement MBL.
- Demonstrate that schools can successfully implement MBL 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 MBL successfully.
- Positively impact student engagement and progress toward learning goals.

While continued efforts are needed to fully accomplish the MBLC's goals, the state's decisions to fund Cohort 1 for an additional year and to launch Cohort 2 signal that they see the early outcomes as favorable enough to continue the pilot. They recognize that CRS MBL transformation is a long-term, iterative process. The lessons learned, the infrastructure built, and the processes refined during the first two-and-a-half years have improved the conditions for Cohort 1 schools to continue their transformation and for schools in Cohort 2 and future cohorts to make faster and deeper progress.

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