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Facilitator Guide
An Introduction to Mastery-Based Learning

In contrast to conventional grading systems, where instruction is organized around time-bound tasks, a mastery-based learning system places essential skills and understandings at the center. Students are graded based on their progress toward achieving specific learning goals. In effect, these systems tend to be more equitable: teachers assess and give feedback to students in transparent and authentic ways, based on academic skills rather than perceptions of behavior or attendance. In this session, participants develop an understanding of the essential components of mastery-based learning and reflect on current classroom and school policies and practices through a mastery-based lens.

Session Overview
TIME: 60 MIN

Reflection and Connection: 15 MIN
Discuss the limitations of grading students based on averages

Research and Inspiration: 20 MIN
Develop an understanding of essential components of mastery-based learning

Interactive Application: 20 MIN
Self-assess existing school and classroom practices and policies

Next Steps: 5 MIN
Decide on path forward

Learning Objectives:

› Understand that in a mastery-based learning system, learning goals are grounded in skills and knowledge; assessments and instruction are aligned to goals; and grades and feedback reflect students' progress toward goals

› Explore how instructional and grading practices support mastery-based learning

Steps			Materials
Prep ✓		› Decide whether you will use the Sample Analysis of the metaphor of the car in the *Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Mastery versus Averages* or use your own analysis when sharing in Step 2. › Decide whether you will use a discussion protocol (and which one) to facilitate the conversation in Step 4	⤓ Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Mastery versus Averages
Full Session 60 MIN			⤓ Slides ⤓ Note Catcher
15 MIN 💭	1	Use a metaphor to explore why a grade based on mastery of skills and knowledge can be more powerful than an average score	⤓ Mastery versus Averages
	2	Share reflections and questions about the value of grading based on how well students have demonstrated mastery of skills and knowledge	⤓ Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Mastery versus Averages
20 MIN 💡	3	Learn how grading practices in a mastery-based learning system can be more transparent and empowering than in conventional systems	⤓ Why Mastery-Based Learning?
	4	Discuss implications of shifting grading and instructional practices to become more mastery-based	**EXTENSION** ⬀ What a Difference a Word Makes: Assessment FOR Learning Rather Than Assessment OF Learning Helps Students Succeed
20 MIN ✏	5	Self-reflect on existing school and classroom policies and practices through a mastery-based learning lens	⤓ Mastery-Based Learning Self-Reflection
	6	Plan small ways to integrate mastery-based learning elements into classrooms	
5 MIN ➡	7	Complete an Exit Ticket	⤓ Exit Ticket
	8	Decide on a path forward	
Follow-Up		› Review participants' Exit Tickets and provide additional resources and support. › Determine next steps for professional learning, such as proceeding to the next session in this series.	⬀ If appropriate: Mastery-Based Learning Session 2: Grading Policies That Highlight Mastery

⤓ Download materials for this session at https://eskolta.org/learningcenter/sessions/an-introduction-to-mastery-based-learning/
⤓ For tips on facilitation, visit https://eskolta.org/learningcenter/topic/methods-for-facilitation/

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Reflection and Connection | 15 MIN

In the session opening, participants consider a metaphor to explore what different methods of grading communicate about students' learning.

1. Analyze a Metaphor for Mastery | 8 min

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Analyze a Metaphor for Mastery:

Consider the example of a car trying to make its way uptown through New York City as a metaphor for student learning.

Next time we checked, we were at 34th

We arrived at 86th street

We left from 28th street

Later we were at 59th street

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This activity primes participants to think critically about what is missing when grade reports show students only an average over time.

FACILITATOR: Distribute the handout *Mastery versus Averages* while displaying the corresponding slides. Invite participants to analyze the example of a car driving uptown in New York City as a metaphor for student learning.

PARTICIPANTS: Consider the example of the car's journey as a metaphor for your own students' learning. In pairs, discuss what you think each of the three reports of the journey tells us about the journey and what they leave out. Which one do you think best reports on a student's learning "journey"? How might you describe that journey differently?

As they mull over the metaphor, encourage participants to draw from their own experience in how they report on students' progress and to be creative in thinking about what an ideal report of student learning might look like.

2. Share Reflections | 7 MIN

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Share Reflections:

- What reflections or questions arose for you about ways of reporting on student learning?
- How might you "grade" a student's journey differently?

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Providing an opportunity for discussion allows participants to process their reflections, unearth connections to their own learning experiences, and engage in collaborative inquiry with colleagues.

FACILITATOR: Use the sample analysis or your own analysis in the *Facilitator Cheat Sheet: Mastery versus Averages* to facilitate a discussion about the meaning of the metaphor as it relates to reporting on student learning. Ask participants to share the reflections they discussed in pairs with the larger group.

PARTICIPANTS: What reflections or questions arose for you about ways of reporting on student learning? How might you "grade" a student's journey differently?

As pairs share out, collect ideas and questions on a whiteboard or piece of chart paper to return to throughout the session.

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Research and Inspiration | 20 MIN

Mastery-based learning emphasizes alignment, scaffolding, and transparency. In this activity, participants explore these essential elements of mastery-based learning.

3. Explore Learning Principles | 7 MIN

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Explore Mastery-Based Learning Principles:

Read **Why Mastery-Based Learning?** and use the 4A's graphic organizer in the Note Catcher to capture your thinking.
- What is one takeaway you **agree** with?
- What is one **assumption** the author makes?
- What is one thing you would **argue** with?
- What is one thing from the research you **aspire** to do?

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Participants will explore research on mastery-based learning, including its essential elements and its potential impact on students.

FACILITATOR: Distribute the research brief **Why Mastery-Based Learning?** Direct participants to use the 4A's graphic organizer in their **Note Catcher** to capture their thinking as they read.

PARTICIPANTS: As you read **Why Mastery-Based Learning?**, take notes on your thinking: What is one takeaway you agree with? What is one assumption the author makes? What is one thing you would argue with? What is one thing from the research you aspire to do?

As they read, encourage participants to think about the ways that they already incorporate elements of mastery-based learning into their classrooms.

4. Discuss | 13 MIN

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Discuss:

- How does this research reinforce, extend, or challenge your existing thinking about learning, assessment, and grading?

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Engaging participants in discussion protocols helps to structure and support authentic conversation and provides teachers models of activities they can use with their students.

FACILITATOR: Facilitate a discussion about participants' responses to the overview of mastery-based learning.

PARTICIPANTS: How does this research reinforce, extend, or challenge your existing thinking about learning, assessment, and grading?

Because mastery-based learning systems can touch on each aspect of a classroom—from assessment to feedback to instruction—as participants generate questions or insights for further exploration, keep track of those in a "Parking Lot" to return to in future sessions.

Extension | 20–30 MIN

Have participants read the article What a Difference a Word Makes: Assessment FOR Learning Rather Than Assessment OF Learning Helps Students Succeed, and discuss how the principles around mastery-based learning can shift the way we think about assessment.

Interactive Application | 20 MIN

Participants try putting what they've just learned into practice.

MATERIALS:
Distribute
*Mastery-Based
Learning
System Self-
Reflection*

5. Self-Reflect | 13 MIN

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Self-Reflect:

Use the **Mastery-Based Learning Self-Reflection** to identify strengths and new opportunities to introduce elements of mastery-based learning into your own classroom or your school.

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This activity allows participants to apply their conceptual understandings of mastery-based learning to their own school and classroom.

FACILITATOR: Distribute the *Mastery-Based Learning Self-Reflection* handout and ask participants to review the four components of a mastery-based learning system.

PARTICIPANTS: Use the *Mastery-Based Learning Self-Reflection* to identify strengths and new opportunities to introduce elements of mastery-based learning into your own classroom or your school.

Consider whether or not you'd like participants to share their reflection to drive future professional support and school-wide policy development. You might ask them to record their reflections on chart paper or in a shared digital document for future reference.
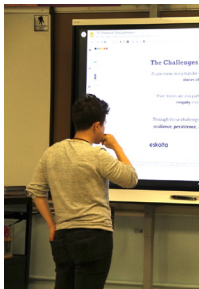
6. Consider Steps to Apply | 7 MIN

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Consider Steps to Apply:

Based on your self-reflection, select one or more next steps to strengthen or incorporate an essential component of mastery-based learning in your classroom.

Share your ideas with a partner.

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This activity provides participants with an opportunity to identify next steps for applying today's learning in their own classroom.

FACILITATOR: Invite participants to consider how they might incorporate mastery-based learning practices in small ways in their classrooms to support student growth.

PARTICIPANTS: Based on your self-reflection, select one or more next steps to strengthen or incorporate an essential component of mastery-based in your classroom. Share your ideas with a partner.

If time permits, invite participants to share their next steps with the full group, noting opportunities for peer collaboration based on shared goals.

Extension | 20–30 MIN

Have groups of teachers work in grade teams or departments to consider how to strengthen or implement elements of mastery-based learning across classes.

Next Steps | 5 MIN

Based on where the group lands, invite participants to commit to completing follow-up steps before the next meeting.

MATERIALS:
Distribute
Exit Ticket

7. Wrap-Up | 3 MIN

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Learning Wrap-Up

- Reflect on what you learned today.
- How do your takeaways compare to the session's Learning Objectives? How were these objectives addressed today?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
1. Understand that in a mastery-based learning system, learning goals are grounded in skills and knowledge; assessments and instruction are aligned to goals; and grades and feedback reflect students' progress toward goals
2. Explore how instructional and grading practices support mastery-based learning

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Reflecting on learning promotes closure and consolidation of new knowledge and skills.

FACILITATOR: Distribute the *Exit Ticket*. Invite participants to share how their thinking has shifted.

PARTICIPANTS: How do your takeaways compare to the session's Learning Objectives? How were these objectives addressed?

Consider highlighting specific insights or questions that emerged during the session and how they connect to the Learning Objectives.

8. Next Steps | 2 MIN

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What's Next?

- Explore strategies for identifying symptoms and root causes of student disengagement due to a lack of a sense of belonging.
- Learn more about how surface-level practices can engage with students' strengths.
- Develop a plan for implementing a surface-level practice with a specific student.
- Learn more about how communication practices can engage with students' strengths.
- Practice using listening and speaking skills to deepen understanding of students' strengths.

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Establishing next steps ensures that today's work is carried forward.

FACILITATOR: Offer next steps or follow up with participants based on their *Exit Ticket* responses.

PARTICIPANTS: What's next for your professional growth? What will you take back to your classroom? What resources will you need? How will you impact student learning? What evidence would determine that impact?

Participants may be at different places at this point. Provide specific recommendations based on readiness, such as in the chart on the following page.

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Next Steps | *CONTINUED*

Based on where the group lands, invite participants to commit to completing follow-up steps before the next meeting.

If participants need to…	Support them in…
Deepen understanding of the purpose and value of mastery-based learning	Reading and discussing research on mastery-based and competency-based learning systems: ❯ Le, C., Wolfe, R., & Steinberg, A. (2014). The past and the promise: Today's competency education movement. Students at the Center: Competency Education Research Series. ❯ Jones-Miller, J. (2013) A better grading system: Standards-based, student-centered assessment. ❯ What is competency education? Video produced by the Nellie May Education Foundation (2017). ❯ American Institutes of Research (2014). Looking under the hood of competency-based education.
Explore the research behind aspects of mastery-based learning in assessment, feedback, and instruction	Reading and discussing research on elements of mastery-based learning: ❯ Writing empowering learning goals: Connie M. Moss and Susan M. Brookhart (2012). "Learning targets: helping students aim for understanding in today's lesson" ❯ Aligning assessment to learning goals: Tips from Dr. Marzano on Formative Assessment & Standards-Based Grading ❯ Providing individualized feedback and support: Hattie, J. (2009). Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. New York, NY: Routledge. (excerpt)
Learn more about what makes a high-quality grading system when the focus shifts from grades based on seat-time to mastery of skills	❯ Exploring Mastery-Based Learning Session 2: Grading Policies That Highlight Mastery
Understand the criteria for writing and implementing high-quality learning goals	❯ Exploring Mastery-Based Learning Session 3: Creating Learning Outcomes That are Empowering and Meaningful
Understand ways to personalize assessment and instruction in a mastery-based learning system	❯ Exploring Mastery-Based Learning Session 4: Planning Assessment and Instruction That Supports Mastery-Based Learning