
Part 1: Definitions

- **Question 1: What is a Mastery Framework Policy?**

A mastery framework policy is a policy adopted by a school district or governing board of a nonpublic high school that authorizes the district or nonpublic high school to create the structures necessary to allow the awarding of units based on successful completion of relevant portions of the [North Dakota Learning Continuum](#). The mastery framework policy would be adopted by the local school board for public schools. It should comprehensively address all parts of the North Dakota Learning Continuum as a baseline. Please refer to the North Dakota State Board Association's model policy for a policy template.

- **Question 2: What is a Mastery Framework? How is this different from the Mastery Framework Policy?**

The mastery framework is a locally developed document that provides standard operating procedures and practices to award units of credit aligned to the North Dakota Learning Continuum. In contrast, the mastery framework policy is adopted by a school district or governing board of a nonpublic high school that authorizes the creation of a mastery framework. The district creates the document after the local school board for public schools adopts a mastery framework policy. The mastery framework clearly illustrates the guardrails and pathways for students to demonstrate learning aligned with the North Dakota Learning Continuum and articulates how successful completion is determined. Ideally, the mastery framework would be developed by school-level leadership and staff, with the approval of district-level leaders. The mastery framework is publicly available for students, parents, and families to interact with and understand, just as a school's traditional graduation pathway is outlined and articulated.

- **Question 3: What is the [North Dakota Learning Continuum](#) (NDLC)?**

A learning continuum is a transparent document containing progressions of competencies that identify the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions (e.g., academic and 21st century skills - also referred to as essential skills) each learner will be expected to demonstrate throughout their K-12 educational career and beyond. The North Dakota Learning Continuum is a statewide resource developed by North Dakota educators for North Dakota learners. It was built through close collaboration with stakeholders across the state, including parents, educators, students, career and technical education, higher education, and other stakeholders. This statewide framework was created under the authority granted to the State Board of Public School Education under [NDCC 15.1-01-03](#).

- **Question 4: What does the term “mastery” mean?**

Mastery-based learning in North Dakota refers to an education system in which student progress is based on a student's demonstration of mastery of competencies aligned with the North Dakota Learning Continuum rather than progression based on a student's completion of individual courses, time spent sitting in a class, or the student's age or grade level. Mastery-based learning may also be referred to interchangeably by other terms, such as proficiency-based, personalized, or competency-based learning.

Part 2: Components of a Mastery Framework Policy

- **Question 5: What must be included in a mastery framework policy?**

A mastery framework policy identifies the portions of the North Dakota Learning Continuum that must be mastered for a student to attain either the units necessary for high school graduation required under [NDCC 15.1-21-02.2.2](#), or the instruction required in elementary and middle schools required under [NDCC 15.1-21-01](#). The framework policy should also authorize the appropriate entity, either a school district or a nonpublic high school, to create a mastery framework to provide the standard operating procedures and practices to award that credit.

- **Question 6: What types of credit units can be awarded through a mastery framework policy?**

Schools and districts with a mastery framework created under a board-approved mastery framework policy can award any units specified under [NDCC 15.1-21-01 and 15-21-02](#) if students have demonstrated learning and mastery of the associated competencies within the North Dakota Learning Continuum. The above sections of the statute cover required instruction for elementary and middle schools and required units in high school. The traditional high school unit, also referred to as a credit, is defined in [NDCC 15.1-21-03](#).

- **Question 7: Should a district mastery framework policy address the entire North Dakota Learning Continuum?**

Yes, [NDCC 15.1-21-02](#) specifies that the district or governing board creating the policy is responsible for identifying which portions of the North Dakota Learning Continuum are to be mastered for each unit of credit. Still, all components of the Learning Continuum should be addressed collectively under the comprehensive mastery framework policy as a graduation pathway.

- **Question 8: Are there any examples of a mastery framework policy a district could use as a template?**

The North Dakota State Boards Association (NDSBA) serves as a resource for policy development and templates that school boards can use. Policy services information is available on [their website](#).

Part 3: Who Can Develop and Adopt a Mastery Framework Policy & Mastery Framework

- **Question 9: What is the process for developing a mastery framework policy and an aligned mastery framework?**

The process for developing a mastery framework policy and framework begins with the school board adopting a mastery framework policy (step 1), progresses to the district level to craft the mastery framework operating procedures and practices (step 2), and concludes with school-level implementation (step 3). Every step along the way should be aligned with and informed by the North Dakota Learning Continuum. See the graphic below for a visual representation of this process.



- **Question 10: Does adopting a mastery framework policy and mastery framework look different for an elementary, middle, or high school?**

Any school may adopt a mastery framework once authorized by a board-approved mastery framework policy. [NDCC 15.1-01-03](#), which grants the State Board of Public School Education the authority to develop the learning continuum, specifically “allow[s] a district-approved mastery framework policy to award credits under sections 15.1-21-01 and 15.1-21-02,” citing sections of code applicable for elementary, middle, and high schools.

For elementary and middle schools, units of time (i.e., credits) are typically irrelevant for learners; however, school days and courses are often driven by time. Implementing a mastery-based education framework in elementary and middle school systems would articulate how students navigate through their day and learning in their mastery framework. While 15.1-21-01 does not use the term “units,” the law’s explicit inclusion of this section should be interpreted as allowing elementary and middle schools to award credit under a mastery framework in the same way as high schools, based on student demonstration of learning as aligned to the North Dakota Learning Continuum.

For high schools, NDCC 15.1-21-03 defines the traditional high school unit of instructional time. This section of the statute also recognizes that a unit of time will be defined differently for those districts with an approved mastery framework authorized by a district-adopted mastery framework policy.

- **Question 11: Who develops the mastery framework policy and creates the mastery framework?**

Local school boards, either those governing public or nonpublic schools, are responsible for drafting and approving the mastery framework policy. District-level leadership and school staff complete the development of a mastery framework. While creating the framework, the local school context and alignment to the North Dakota Learning Continuum are considered. Schools are then responsible for implementing the mastery framework once created.

- **Question 12: Are all school districts required to adopt a mastery framework policy?**

No, this is not a requirement. Adopting a mastery framework policy and developing a subsequent mastery framework is an optional opportunity in state statute for districts that wish to pursue a mastery-based learning system.

- **Question 13: Should an individual school adopt a mastery framework policy, or should it be district-wide?**

[NDCC 15.1-21-02](#) delegates explicitly the authority to develop a mastery framework policy to a school district or governing board of a nonpublic high school. Although a board may approve a policy for a subset of students (i.e., students only in one school), systems transformation toward personalized, competency-based learning should include all students and all learning environments. Individual schools interested in awarding units based on the North Dakota Learning Continuum should work with their school district or governing board to create a mastery framework policy and an accompanying mastery framework applicable to all.

- **Question 14: What components should a mastery framework include?**

The mastery framework policy is a locally created document, and there are no state requirements regarding what an accompanying framework should include. For this reason, mastery frameworks created in response to the authorization given through a board-approved mastery framework policy will vary from district to district. However, there are some common elements that districts will likely need to consider when designing their mastery framework. These include the following:

Category	Aligned Areas
Communications	Establishing communication structures that ensure stakeholders, such as parents and community members, understand the process being used to create the policy and the changes being implemented, and have an opportunity to provide input into the process
School Structures	- Identifying the school level(s) (e.g., elementary, middle, and/or high school) that the mastery framework covers - Addressing any modifications that may be required to the district's technology policy - Detailing any changes to instructional time requirements related to the learning environment or earning high school credits
Professional Learning	- Addressing educator professional development structures to ensure that they align with and support the district's mastery-based approach - Addressing leadership development structures to ensure that they align with and support the district's mastery-based approach
Curriculum and Instruction	- Updating curriculum and instructional strategies to ensure that they align with and support the district's mastery-based approach - Addressing any necessary changes to policies impacting students receiving specialized services, including special education or English language learner (ELL) services
Assessment	Evaluating local assessment systems and structures to ensure that they align with and support the district's mastery-based approach
Course Offerings	Identifying impacted courses, including both traditional and college and career pathway options
Credit and Data (Demonstration of Mastery)	- Clarifying how successful completion of portions of the learning continuum will be determined, including grading and reporting policies - Crosswalking the North Dakota High School graduation requirements and the North Dakota Learning Continuum to determine if the framework will be used in a high school setting - Clarifying how the district will document and report student learning, both locally and to the state - Clarifying policies impacting students who transfer into or out of the district

Part 4: Adherence to State Requirements

- **Question 15: Do high schools operating under a mastery framework policy still have to adhere to state instructional time requirements pertaining to individual high school credits?**

No, [NDCC 15.1-21-03](#), which sets specific high school instructional time requirements for individual credits, “does not apply to units attained from a district-approved mastery framework.”

- **Question 16: What if my school/district wants to pursue changes to how we operate in areas outside the mastery framework?**

The mastery framework policy authorized by [NDCC 15.1-21-02](#) explicitly addresses two state requirements related to instruction for schools operating under such a framework - the awarding of units for elementary and middle school instruction as well as high school units ([NDCC 15.1-21-01](#) and [NDCC 15.1-21-02](#)) and high school unit instructional time ([NDCC 15.1-21-03](#)).

School districts or governing boards of nonpublic high schools wanting to pursue additional flexibilities from state requirements beyond these two areas of state statute should identify the specific laws governing those areas and apply for an Innovation Education Program Waiver to request flexibility from those requirements as authorized under [NDCC 15.1.06-08.1](#). Statute specifically allows schools or school districts to apply for a waiver from the requirements of the following NDCC chapters:

- [15-20.1](#), related to Career and Technical Education
- [15.1-06](#), related to various school issues, including but not limited to school calendar, school day length, and accreditation
- [15.1-18](#), related to teacher qualifications
- [15.1-20](#), related to school attendance
- [15.1-21](#), related to curriculum and testing
- [15.1-22](#), related to kindergarten
- [15.1-25](#), related to postsecondary enrollment
- [15.1-32](#), related to special education
- [15.1-38](#), related to English language learners

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has created [Innovative Education Program Planning Proposal and Application documents](#) that districts must complete when applying for a waiver. These rules and expectations are outlined in [NDCC 15.1-06-08.2](#) and [NDAC 67-19-03](#).

- **Question 17: Do schools operating under a mastery framework policy still need to adhere to yearly instructional time requirements?**

Yes, [NDCC 15.1-06-04](#) specifies yearly hours of instruction requirements for elementary, middle, and high schools and defines a full day of instruction at these levels. Schools operating under a mastery framework policy should still adhere to these requirements regarding the total hours of instruction that must be delivered in a specific year. Districts seeking to obtain waivers from existing instructional time requirements should submit the [Innovation Education Program waiver](#) before changing the number of hours of instruction each student receives.

- **Question 18: Do students operating in schools using a mastery framework policy still need to meet [North Dakota's graduation requirements for high school](#)?**

Yes, NDCC [15.1-21-02.2](#) states that a mastery framework policy must identify the portions of the North Dakota Learning Continuum that must be mastered to ensure that students attain the units necessary for high school graduation. Systems utilizing the mastery framework as a pathway to graduation must ensure their frameworks crosswalk the North Dakota graduation requirements with the North Dakota Learning Continuum to ensure alignment and coverage.

- **Question 19: Our school has developed its own set of competencies. Can we use these within a mastery framework and an aligned policy?**

Yes, if they meet or exceed the rigorous expectations of the North Dakota Learning Continuum.

- **Question 20: Do students receiving credit for a course with an accompanying state assessment, such as math or English, still need to take that assessment, even if they receive credit for the course under a mastery framework policy developed by the district?**

Yes, currently, students receiving credit under a mastery framework policy are still subject to state testing requirements under [NDCC 15.1-21-08](#)

- **Question 21: How should a school record the grade received/successful completion in a course earned using a mastery framework policy?**

How schools and districts determine to record student learning and mastery will vary based on the unique needs of their systems. The state does not define this as traditional or competency-based education models. This element should be transparent and articulated in the mastery framework created by the district under the mastery framework policy.

Part 5: Other Questions

- **Question 22: I represent a district, and my school board is allowing our district to create a mastery framework. What do we do now?**

The creation of a mastery framework as authorized by a district mastery framework policy is a local decision, and as such, operational decisions about next steps will likely look different from district to district. However, because of the way the law is structured, districts will likely need to consider a common set of questions, such as:

- What school level(s) do we want the mastery framework to apply to (e.g., elementary, middle, and/or high school)?
- How will stakeholders in the district and the broader community be brought together to develop/commit to the why for a mastery framework
- How can we ensure that the mastery framework development includes the voices of the broader community?
- If the mastery framework is used as a pathway to graduation for high school students, how will we successfully crosswalk our framework with state graduation requirements to ensure alignment and coverage?
- Are there any other flexibilities we need to request that may require an Education Program Waiver from the state?
- What current policies will we need to address? (See also question 14 with suggested components that districts may need to consider when crafting their mastery framework)

See also question 14 for additional suggestions of common elements that districts will likely need to address when creating a mastery framework.

- **Question 23: Will our school or district's state funding be impacted by adopting a mastery framework policy?**

No, adopting a mastery framework policy will not impact state funding allocation.

- **Question 24: Does our school need a new transcript or report card to adopt a mastery framework?**

No, creating a mastery framework under a mastery framework policy does not require a new transcript to record learning. Schools may choose to do so, however, and if they choose to use a transcript other than the North Dakota eTranscript required under [NDCC 15.1-06-06](#), they must submit an [Innovation Education Program Waiver](#) to do so.

- **Question 25: Whom should I contact at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction if I have any questions not covered in this FAQ?**

You can contact Ann Ellefson at aellefson@nd.gov or 701-328-2488.

- **Question 26: What happens if a student leaves a school operating under a mastery framework to go to a school using traditional instruction, or leaves a school using traditional instruction to go to one utilizing a mastery framework?**

While not required, it is highly recommended that districts adopting a mastery framework policy to deliver some or all units via mastery establish policies and procedures in the mastery framework to enable students who transfer into the district from a school not using a mastery framework to transition seamlessly into the new educational environment.

Part 6: Statutory Authorities

- **Question 27: What state law gives the district or the governing board of a nonpublic high school the authority to develop a mastery framework policy and a subsequent mastery framework?**

[NDCC 15.1-21.02](#) gives school districts or governing boards of nonpublic high schools the authority to adopt “a mastery framework policy and award units based on the successful completion of the relevant portions of the [North Dakota Learning Continuum](#).”

- **Question 28: What law allows the state to develop the North Dakota Learning Continuum?**

The State Board of Public School Education is granted the authority under North Dakota Century Code (NDCC) [15.1-01-03](#) to “establish and certify” the learning continuum to waive instructional time requirements under various sections of state law ([NDCC 15.1-21-01](#), [15.1-21-02](#), and [15-1-21-03](#)). [NDCC 15.1.02-04](#) grants the superintendent of public instruction the authority to facilitate the development of the Learning Continuum in collaboration with the Department of Career and Technical Education to allow a “district-approved mastery framework policy to award credits.” The Kindergarten through Grade Twelve Education Coordination Council is granted the authority under [NDCC 15.1-01-04](#) to review the learning continuum and provide recommendations to the state board of public education.

- **Question 29: How was the North Dakota Learning Continuum Developed?**

The Learning Continuum was developed in collaboration with stakeholders across North Dakota through a virtual design process. The process, led by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Northeast Educational Services Cooperative, and KnowledgeWorks, in collaboration with the Department of Career and Technical Education, was grounded in the North Dakota standards and other national research. The North Dakota Review Council reviewed the draft and solicited public comments. The North Dakota Learning Continuum was approved by the State Board of Public School Education after receiving feedback and recommendations from the ND K-12 Coordination Council.

- **Question 30: Does the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction have any role in approving or overseeing a locally adopted mastery framework policy?**

No, the NDCC does not give the Department or any other state entity any oversight role related to mastery framework policies or mastery frameworks created by districts or nonpublic school governing boards. Districts are responsible for ensuring that their mastery framework policy meets the requirement that students operating under a mastery framework policy can still attain the units necessary for high school graduation under [NDCC 15.1-21-02.2](#).