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Peer Review and Mentoring Grant Evaluation: Year 2 Summary of Studies

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Report Information

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About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at <http://www.wec.wceruw.org>.

Introduction

Wisconsin school districts face growing challenges recruiting and retaining teachers. Lower numbers of qualified applicants, teacher turnover, and limited resources press on districts as they seek to meet staffing demands (DPI, 2024). Well-designed teacher induction programs, including mentoring support, can help develop and keep beginning teachers in the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Keese et al., 2023). The Peer Review and Mentoring Grant (PRMG) was initiated in 1997¹ to encourage Wisconsin districts to develop mentoring programs and support initial educators and is the focus of a three-year evaluation conducted by the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) Licensing, Educator Advancement, and Development (LEAD) team. The evaluation is designed to assess the grant program's successes and areas for improvement, with the overarching goal of supporting DPI as it provides resources to districts to improve mentor training and new teacher support.

The three-year evaluation is guided by the following questions: *What districts pursue the PRMG and what does the funding support? How well does the PRMG application process support grantees in submitting high-quality applications? How are grantees leveraging PRMG resources for mentor training and mentee support? And, what impacts do mentors and mentees report from participating in their PRMG-supported district mentoring program?*

During Year 1 (2022-23), the WEC evaluation team worked with the LEAD team to identify program goals, resources, and expected outputs and outcomes related to PRMG participation and then reviewed all grant applications submitted by 2022-23 award recipients. The resulting evaluation [report](#) summarized grant distribution, district types, and proposed activities for mentor training and new teacher support. The report also identified promising practices, gaps in grantee-provided information about their mentoring programs, and research-informed mentor program characteristics that could guide future mentoring efforts and studies.

Year 2 evaluation activities were built on the findings and recommendations from the Year 1 study. This report summarizes the Year 2 evaluation activities and related reports, which were designed to provide formative feedback to inform DPI and Wisconsin districts on how the grant process and supported mentoring programs may improve. These reports include:

Report 1: Survey [results](#) from district and CESA grant leaders about the PRMG application process

Report 2: [Findings](#) from interviews with a sample of PRMG grantees to learn about how they were leveraging grant funding

Report 3: Initial educator [survey](#) results on mentor support received and perceived impacts

Report 4: Mentor [survey](#) results on mentor activities and perceived impacts

From the evidence collected and analyzed across these reports, we identified the following key findings:

- **The PRMG program has positively contributed to the development of mentor programs;**
- **Mentors are primarily experienced peer classroom teachers;**

¹ The grant program was implemented to support districts with PI 34, regulations that require districts to provide initial educators (those in their first three years) with a trained mentor and ongoing learning opportunities.

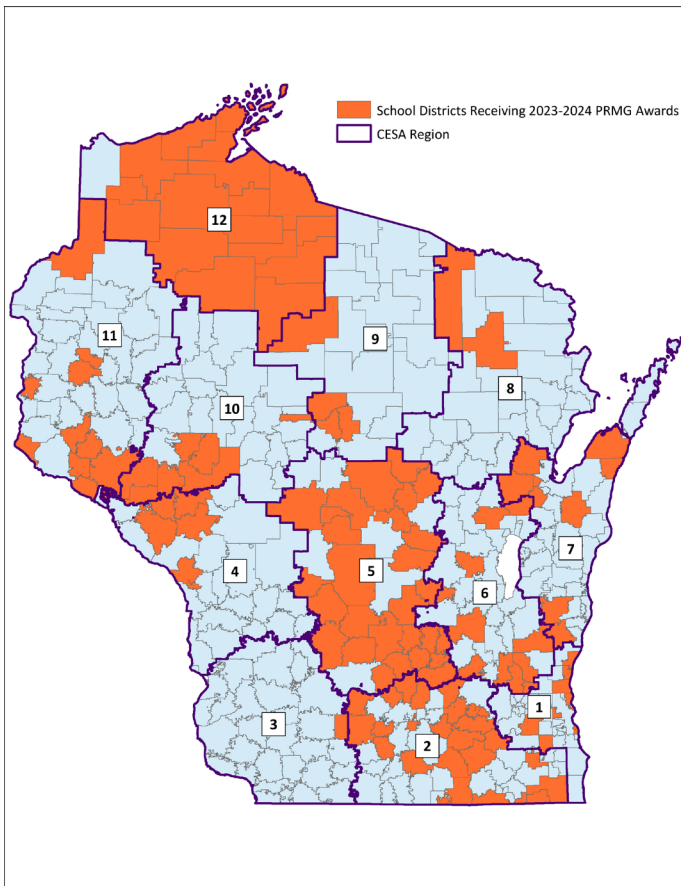
- While most mentors are trained, some report receiving no training;
- Mentors provide support in many key areas;
- Mentor support is making a difference; and,
- There are several ways that mentoring could be strengthened to further improve new teacher support.

The remainder of this report elaborates on these findings, provides recommendations and considerations to enhance mentoring and new teacher support, and concludes with next steps with the evaluation.

PRMG has positively contributed to the development of mentor programs

The PRMG program in 2023-24 provided 58 grants to 135 districts with funding to support mentor training and mentoring activities.² All 12 CESAs also received PRMG funding. Figure 1 presents the districts receiving grants and the CESA regions in which they are located.

Figure 1: PRMG funding distribution



² Consortia of school districts, independent public charter schools, and CESAs may apply for PRMG funding annually, with a limit of \$25,000 per award, which also requires a 20 percent local in-kind or fiscal match.

As reflected in figure 1, the PRMG program has supported districts in most areas of the state, with the highest concentrations in CESAs 2, 5, and 12. The distribution may indicate that smaller districts find the resources (though limited) worth the application effort, while larger districts with larger student populations and concomitant funding may be better positioned to support induction programs through other resources. It is unclear, however, why some CESAs have lower representation. One possible explanation is that some CESAs are more proactive or successful in encouraging their member districts to apply.

As affirmed by both district leaders and CESAs, the PRMG program has enhanced the development of mentor training and new teacher support. According to CESAs, PRMG funding has been instrumental in catalyzing the creation and expansion of mentor training programs. Several CESAs highlighted that without PRMG support, they would not have initiated mentor training due to cost concerns. This funding enabled CESAs to offer mentor training at reduced or no cost, which is important given district budget constraints. CESAs also reported using PRMG funds to establish mentor networks and provide stipends, ensuring mentors could participate in training sessions outside of regular work hours.

District leaders credited PRMG support for enabling new induction and mentoring initiatives that would have otherwise been unfeasible, thus fostering a more supportive environment for educators and enhancing professional development opportunities. Districts reported that the “money has been helpful” and that it allowed them “to do some good things.” They appreciated the “flexibility” with which they were able to use the funding. The flexibility allowed them to address various needs identified through district surveys and feedback mechanisms. Additionally, several district interviewees shared that PRMG resources allowed them to offer mentor stipends, and that without the stipends, they “would struggle...to have accountability.” Others articulated that it is “really important” to pay mentors stipends because they are being asked to meet with new educators during their prep time and after school. One district interviewee shared how they used the grant funding to have everyone “...in the same room, using the common language around teacher effectiveness and the rapid cycle feedback.” They discussed how important that activity was and that they would not have been able to make time for it without the funding.

Mentors are primarily experienced peer classroom teachers

The majority of mentors reported having mentor experience prior to the 2023-24 school year, and 77 percent reported having more than 11 years of teaching experience, as shown below:

Table 1: Mentor years of teaching experience

RESPONSE (N=472)	3-5 YEARS	6-10 YEARS	11-14 YEARS	15-20 YEARS	21+ YEARS
How many total years of teaching experience do you have?	7% (n=34)	16% (n=74)	16% (n=75)	20% (n=96)	41% (n=193)

Respondents to both the mentor and mentee surveys indicated that the peer mentor role was primarily filled by classroom teachers. Eighty-six percent of the mentors identified as peer classroom teachers, with 11 percent identifying as instructional coaches and 2.5 percent responding that their role was either principal, retired educator, pupil service staff, or a full-release mentor. Although a smaller number reported that their district role was a coach, CESA mentor trainers and district mentor leads shared during our discussions that the role of mentor is evolving to be more coach-like. In some instances, district leaders reported challenges to building mentoring programs that were more than a buddy system. Relatedly, in open-ended comments, mentors articulated a need for more clearly defined mentor roles and expectations.

While most mentors are trained, some received no training

As discussed in the Year 1 report, districts indicated that developing more trained mentors represented one of their biggest needs. In the Year 2 mentor survey, 82 percent of mentors responded that they participated in mentor training during the past three school years. However, 18 percent reported that they had not participated in any training. Interviews with CESA and district leaders suggested that mentor training primarily occurred through district or CESA programs. The mentor survey results confirmed these findings, with 39 percent reporting that they were trained through a district program and 32 percent through a CESA program. And while 81 percent of mentors who participated in training reported that the training prepared them for their mentoring role, only 58 percent reported that they participated in ongoing mentor training.

Mentors provide support in many key areas

Mentors and mentees participating in the surveys were asked to indicate which kinds of assistance they had provided (mentors) or received (mentees) within the context of their mentoring relationship during the school year. Table 2 includes 16 common mentoring activities included in the survey and the frequency with which mentors and mentees identified them as part of their mentoring experience. The list is ordered by the frequency with which mentors identified the activities.

Table 2: Supports provided during mentoring

AREAS OF SUPPORT	MENTORS	MENTEES
Understanding school/district procedures and policies	95%	86%
Student behavior	93%	83%
New teacher social or emotional support	92%	77%
Student information system	91%	74%
Family communications and student conferences	87%	79%
Classroom management	86%	79%
Understanding and fitting into the culture of the school	85%	76%
Understanding the Educator Effectiveness System	80%	80%
Demonstration of teaching techniques	79%	73%

AREAS OF SUPPORT	MENTORS	MENTEES
Developing or using student assessment tools	77%	72%
Using data to inform instruction	77%	70%
Student Learning Objectives	75%	74%
Observation of and feedback on teaching practice	72%	72%
Understanding program supports for students (e.g., English Language Learners, Special Education)	71%	66%
Preparing lessons that address learning standards	70%	65%
Understanding and working with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds	62%	65%

As reflected in Table 2, Understanding school/district procedures and policies and Student behavior represented the two most common areas of support identified by both mentors and mentees. Eighty percent of both mentors and mentees indicated assistance with the Educator Effectiveness System. Interviews with CESA and district leaders also pointed to understanding and leveraging the EE System as a common focus of mentor and induction activities. For both groups, the three least commonly identified activities were: Understanding program supports for students (e.g., English Language Learners, Special Education); Preparing lessons that address learning standards; and, Understanding and working with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

There was some variation in activities identified by mentors and mentees. For example, while 85 percent of mentors reported supporting teachers with understanding and fitting into the culture of the school, 76 percent of teachers reported this support. The discrepancy of mentors more reporting activities compared to mentees (of 5% or more) is observed for 11 of the 16 items. It is difficult to draw conclusions about the differences in responses since the sample of respondents was not matched.

When asked how helpful mentor support was related to the activities listed, the areas most identified by mentees as “very helpful” were: New teacher social or emotional support (55% very helpful), Understanding school/district procedures and policies (54%), and Student information system (53%). The areas the fewest mentees identified as “very helpful” were: Understanding and working with students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds (26% very helpful), Understanding and fitting into the culture of the school (32%), and Developing or using student assessment tools (34%). These latter responses suggest areas mentors may want to explore through training and in conversations with their mentees.

Mentor support is making a difference

Stakeholders across different roles and perspectives perceived mentoring initiatives positively, citing improvements in educator practices, potential retention benefits, and increased confidence among new teachers. According to the district and CESA survey, a significant majority (89%) agreed that mentoring practices had notably improved, underscoring positive sentiment towards program effectiveness. Moreover, 93 percent acknowledged a positive impact on new educator practices, suggesting a beneficial influence on pedagogical approaches. Seventy-six percent of respondents agreed that mentoring initiatives were contributing positively to teacher retention, indicating a potential role in addressing staffing stability challenges.

CESA and district interviews provided a broad perspective on the program's impact. Interviewees expressed the belief that their programs have contributed to improved teacher retention rates, higher satisfaction levels among educators, and a notable trend of mentor-trained personnel remaining within districts. While optimism was prevalent among CESA and district leaders, uncertainties were acknowledged about local data on which to base assumptions of program impact.

The mentee survey revealed nuanced responses regarding how new teachers benefited from mentoring. The large majority (88%) reported that mentoring had moderate to substantial positive effects on their teaching practices, with 50 percent indicating a moderate improvement and 38 percent noting a substantial improvement. Additionally, more than half (51%) noted a positive influence on their commitment to continue teaching within the district, demonstrating potential retention benefits. While 78 percent of respondents indicated that working with their mentor improved their classroom management practice (51% “a moderate amount” and 27% “a lot”), 22 percent indicated that it did not at all improve their classroom management, suggesting this important area of new teacher practice could use additional focus. Some of the comments initial educators shared about their mentor support included:

“My Mentor is wonderful and has been so helpful. She goes above and beyond to make sure I have what I need.”

“I feel like I was supported very well in my school and that I am valued as a person and an educator. I know that the school wants me to stay here for years to come.”

There are several ways that mentoring could be strengthened to further improve new teacher support

Although mentoring has been perceived as largely having a positive impact, mentors, mentees, and district and CESA leaders shared ways that mentoring could be strengthened. First and foremost, mentors and mentees expressed a need for more time working together. Mentors requested more training and more engagement and support from their administrators. Relatedly, mentees also indicated that they would like more interactions with their principal. And finally, district and CESA leaders stated that more funding was needed for the various costs of implementing a robust mentoring program.

More time for mentorship

Mentors and mentees were asked in the surveys to approximate the number of hours mentors spent working with mentees in an average month. Sixty-five percent of mentees reported spending three hours or less per month with their mentor. Similarly, 50 percent of mentors reported spending three or less hours per month with their mentee. [Guidance](#) suggests 60-90 minutes of dedicated time weekly for mentoring, a threshold indicated by 49% of mentors and 35% of mentees. Although mentors reported more time spent, both groups wanted additional time to engage in mentoring. From the open-ended comments in both the mentor (n=328) and mentee surveys (n=226), the theme with the largest number of comments was “more time” for mentoring, with 128 comments among mentors and 63 among mentees.

Related to this finding, both groups reported that they would like time formally allocated to mentoring. Among mentors responding to the survey, 85 percent reported having no formal release time for mentoring, while 5 percent had partial release and 4 percent had full release. Six percent reported “other” (e.g., as needed, during professional development, after school). Some mentors expressed the desire for “common collaboration time with our mentees” or “more time during the workday to meet and observe each other.” As one mentee wrote, “Juggling schedules to find time to meet was very difficult - extra support in both scheduling and making sure meetings with mentors were able to happen on a regular basis would be very helpful.”

District and CESA leaders interviewed also indicated that limited staff time to engage in mentoring activities was a significant challenge. They described complications related to sending mentors to in-person training at CESAs as well as identifying dedicated meeting time for mentors and mentees to work together.

More training for mentors and support from administrators

In open-ended survey comments, mentors requested more frequent training and support from their administrators. For example, when asked how the mentor experience could be improved, one mentor said, “More frequent training opportunities and collaboration with administrators.” Another requested, “More guidance from administration on what should be covered, aside from daily tasks within the classroom.” Related to collaboration with administrators, in the same mentor survey, most (74%) reported that they met with their school or district administrator at least once to talk about initial educators’ support needs, but 26 percent reported that they did not meet with administrators for this purpose at all. Similarly, CESA interviews described the need to continue messaging to administrators the importance of robust mentoring and new teacher support. When interviewed, CESA leaders stated that they struggle to convince administrators that mentoring should be more than a “buddy system.”

Support for new educators from principals also represents an area for improvement. Only 37 percent of mentees reported that they had regular check-ins with their principals to discuss needed and available support. Some elaborated in the survey’s open-ended comments to call for increased supervisor support. For example, one initial educator stated, “I am not well supported and have had only one check-in from my principal...for the 11 months I have been in the district.” Another shared that, “It would be beneficial to meet with my supervisor(s), to have more support and clarification of what my role is in the classroom and if I am meeting expectations.”

Improved mentor guidance and pairing

In the open-ended responses, some mentors (n=33) stated that it would be helpful to have more clearly defined roles or guidelines for mentoring. As one commented, “We need a better system for the expectations of the mentors and beginning teachers in our district.” Both mentors and mentees identified that having a better fit or match would improve the mentor process. As a mentor stated, “My mentee is a high school teacher, and I am a middle school teacher. I am not familiar with all of the requirements and procedures of the high school. This makes it difficult to help with questions about school procedures.” Similarly, a new teacher stated, “It would be helpful to have mentoring specific to your area (i.e., School Counseling, Teacher (specific grade), Special Education Teacher, Nurse, School Psychologist, etc.). I liked my mentor, but he did not know anything about my field of work.”

Grant application improvements

District survey respondents and leaders interviewed indicated that the grant application was a challenge based on some section redundancies and time needed to complete the application. Some also mentioned that the consortium requirement caused coordination complications and did not necessarily lead to improved mentor training or support. Some of these issues were addressed by DPI for the 2024-25 application cycle, particularly related to streamlining the grant application.

Funding and timing of grant support

Increased grant funding and accelerated timing of awards would also support districts and CESAs as they implement their programs. Applications were due to DPI by May 1, 2023 and funding was awarded in October 2023. Although all CESA and district applicants received awards, there were more applicants than the amount available to fund each at the maximum grant, so each received slightly reduced funding. Some grantees commented that while the award reduction was slight, it necessitated some changes from initial plans.

By and large, awardees across the board were appreciative of the funding, but many CESA and district interviewees expressed a need for increased funding. District leaders stated that more money would improve their mentor programs, specifically related to mentor training, certifications, and compensation for mentors. One district leader described the result of a small mentor stipend: “sometimes people will do the bare minimum because they know the pay is not great.”

Recommendations

To further improve new teacher mentoring support, the following recommendations emerged from the Year 2 studies.

Increase funding for the PRMG program.

The Year 2 evaluation demonstrates that the PRMG program has contributed to successes with mentor training and support. Although certainly not definitive proof of impact, the findings suggest that the small investment is providing needed support and justifies increased funding, particularly if combined with ongoing evaluation. Other neighboring states provide more funding for mentoring support. While Wisconsin funds the PRMG at \$1.6 million annually, [Minnesota](#) has funded a new mentoring and induction program emphasizing support for diverse educators with a \$7.9 million pilot program. In Michigan, legislation created a \$50 million program to support [development of mentor standards, curriculum and training](#), and district mentor and induction programs. The legislation also provides \$500,000 to fund an external evaluation of the initiative.

Create sharing and networking opportunities for mentors and new educators.

Through continued studies (e.g., the Year 3 evaluation), identify and share with the field promising mentor training and mentoring practices, as well as how districts and CESAs have overcome challenges. For example, identify where and how districts are building in time for mentoring and share with the PRMG community of districts. Provide networking opportunities for mentors to learn from peers and for new educators, particularly those in smaller rural communities, to collaborate and build community with peers.

Continue to educate school and district leaders.

Communications and resources targeted to school and district leaders are needed so that they understand mentoring best practices and how they can best support mentoring programs, mentors, and initial educators. As discussed above, CESA leaders shared that it was a challenge educating school leaders about mentoring best practices. Relatedly, a substantial percentage of initial educators reported limited interactions with their school principals. Mentors also indicated wanting more support from administrators and a need for improved guidance and training. Additional resources and support for school and district leaders could help them improve their induction and mentoring systems to better support and retain educators.

Update mentor training and track training completion.

During our interviews with CESA and district leaders, they requested updated mentor training materials (i.e., Mentoring Essentials) as well as examples of ongoing training topics and materials to provide to mentors. In the mentor survey, mentors stated a need for more frequent, ongoing mentor training. Findings also indicate a considerable number of mentors are not receiving training. Both grant requirements and reporting could further encourage and track training completion.

Next steps for the evaluation

The evaluation studies conducted thus far have been leveraged by the DPI LEAD team to make changes to grantee guidance through the application process and are also informing potential changes going forward. To further inform both DPI and Wisconsin school districts, the Year 3 evaluation study will:

- Include case studies of mentoring and induction activities with three to five school districts. Districts will be selected based on additional analysis of data collected through the Year 2 interviews and surveys of mentors and mentees.
- Continue to survey mentors and new educators to learn about practices and perceived impact as well as follow-up on feedback shared during Year 2.

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