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Evaluation
Collaborative

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Peer Review and Mentoring Grant Evaluation Report

for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction



Report Information

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With special thanks to Daniel Marlin for editing

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>.

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Introduction

The Peer Review and Mentoring Grant (PRMG) program was authorized by the Wisconsin Legislature approximately 25 years ago to support the development of mentoring programs and peer assistance per Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 34. Administered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), PRMG provides grants to consortia of school districts, independent charter schools, and Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) for new teacher mentoring and ongoing professional learning.

DPI's Licensing, Educator Advancement and Development (LEAD) team requested formative evaluation support from the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative to help document the implementation and impact of PRMG. This report represents the first known evaluation of the PRMG program, and it is the first part of a planned three-year evaluation designed to provide feedback regarding grant administration and effective practices among participating school districts and CESAs.

This initial report on PRMG has two primary objectives. The first objective is to provide a descriptive overview of grantees and learn about applicant responses to grant requirements. This information will help DPI with potential revisions to the grant-making process. The second objective is to provide baseline information for the ongoing, longer-term PRMG evaluation.

Context

As required by PI 34, Wisconsin school districts must provide mentoring and ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators during their first three years in the profession. The PRMG has undergone several changes in grant guidance over time, but the program's fundamental focus is to help districts with new teacher support, as required by PI 34. 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. Individual grant funding has remained at this same amount since the PRMG was first authorized.

Grant requirements are included in application materials accessible from the DPI [website](#) and stipulate that applicants submit the following: general applicant information; a project abstract; readiness assessment; plan-do-check-act entries to detail program goals, implementation plan, and monitoring activities; and budget details with a budget narrative. Grant-specific prompts are included in the DPI application template. Prospective applicants may access grant guidance through information provided via webinar and/or office hours with the DPI grant coordinator on the LEAD team.

Process/Methods

The PRMG evaluation represents a mixed-methods study spanning three years. First year activities focused on understanding the program history. Based on the background information, we co-developed a [logic model](#) with the LEAD team to articulate PRMG program goals, resources, and expected outputs and outcomes. This logic model also helps inform evaluation plan development. Year 1 also included a literature review of research on effective mentoring practices. Year 2 will include interviews with select districts and all CESAs, as well as surveys of initial educators and mentors to further understand mentoring practices across the state. Year 3 will focus on case studies of mentor programs for the purpose of identifying promising practices and challenges encountered by grant recipients. In addition, year 3 will examine teacher retention and changes in teacher practice attributed to mentoring.

The current study focuses on the following questions:

- 1) What are the basic characteristics of districts, CESAs, and consortia applying for the PRMG?
- 2) How are grantees proposing to use PRMG to support mentoring and orientation?
- 3) How do PRMG proposals reflect current research on effective mentoring practice?

Limitations

This preliminary study is based on document reviews, including grant requirements and grantee submissions. The findings, therefore, are limited to an analysis of what grantees proposed in response to the grant criteria. It is possible that the study team did not have available or may have misinterpreted grantee descriptions of their programs, results from prior grants, numbers of mentors trained, and numbers of new teachers supported. Additionally, we did not know if applicants implemented the activities proposed in their applications. Future studies will include selected interviews and surveys to shed light on grant recipients' activities and the related program impacts.

Report Organization

The remainder of this report includes four sections:

Section 1 provides a brief overview of the literature on effective mentoring practices.

Section 2 includes descriptive findings from the grant proposals on the nature of planned mentoring programs and how the programs are intended to train mentors and support new teachers.

In **Section 3**, we report on how grant proposals reflect effective practices identified in the literature.

Section 4 provides recommendations and considerations for future PRMG competitions and next steps in the PRMG study.

Section I: Key Features of Effective Mentoring Practices

High-quality induction and mentoring programs matter. High-quality programs are comprehensive in their design and implementation, including structural, foundational, and instructional elements. Four key features of comprehensive induction and mentoring programs identified in the research literature include:

- High quality mentoring with rigorous mentor selection criteria,
- Dedicated time for mentoring,
- Ongoing professional learning for both mentors and beginning teachers, and
- Ongoing communication and support from school leaders.

Comprehensive programmatic approaches can also represent promising strategies for retaining teachers, improving teacher effectiveness, and improving student outcomes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kini & Podolovsky, 2006; Moir, 2009; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, n.d.; Paliokas & Killion, 2013; Young et al., 2017). A more detailed description of the four features of comprehensive induction and mentoring programs are included in Appendix A. The four themes from this literature review informed our analysis of the grant applications.

Section 2: Descriptive Findings

The applications were reviewed to learn about applicant representation, proposed mentor training, supports provided to new teachers, and budget allocations. We next report findings from the descriptive review. Findings are also provided regarding how proposed grant activities reflect the literature on effective mentoring practice.

Descriptive Summary of PRMG Awards

DPI made 59 PRMG awards of \$25,000 each for the 2022-23 school year, with all applicants receiving awards (which has not been the case every year). All 12 of the state’s CESAs received awards, with the remaining 47 awards going to local school districts applying as consortia. Many, although not all, PRMG awards to districts included one or more CESAs or other providers (e.g., Dane County New Teacher Project) in their budget request to provide mentoring and professional development support for initial educators.

The 47 PRMG awards to school districts for 2022-23 explicitly named a total of 104 districts, either as the prime applicant or as a partner in a consortium application.¹ This means that PRMG awards directly served about 25 percent of the state’s 421 local school districts (not including non-district charter schools). To provide a sense of how 2022-23 PRMG awards were distributed geographically across the state, Table 1 on the following page shows the distribution of districts awarded by CESA. While all 12 CESAs received awards, as noted above, the “coverage rate” of PRMG awards in terms of the percentage of districts within each CESA named in funded awards varied substantially, from zero percent of the districts located in CESAs 3 and 10 to all 17 of the districts located in CESA 12.

¹ Several PRMG applications from districts or consortia of districts described plans to work with other districts which were not explicitly named in the proposal. The awards received by all 12 CESAs, furthermore, were not always clear on how many of their member districts (nor districts located in other CESAs) would receive services under the CESA awards. Accordingly, we describe the “coverage” rate of the 2022-23 PRMG awards as being “at least 24.7 percent” of the state’s local school districts even though the actual coverage rate is likely higher.

Table 1: 2022-23 PRMG Awards by CESA and District

CESA	# OF DISTRICTS RECEIVING 2022-23 PRMG AWARDS*	# OF DISTRICTS IN CESA	PRMG COVERAGE RATE**
1	6	45	13%
2	23	74	31%
3	0	31	0
4	8	26	31%
5	22	35	63%
6	8	39	21%
7	5	37	14%
8	2	27	7%
9	1	22	5%
10	0	29	0
11	12	39	31%
12	17	17	100%
TOTAL	104	421	25%

*As either the prime awardee or as part of a consortium

**Does not include PRMG awards directly to CESAs (only to districts)

Additional data on the distribution of 2022-23 PRMG awards are provided in Table 2 below, which shows the geographic locale code of the 104 districts explicitly named in the 47 funded awards made to districts (not including awards to CESAs). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses four main locale codes (City, Suburban, Town, and Rural) to describe all public schools in the U.S. in terms of their population and proximity to populated areas, with each of the four main locale codes having three sub-categories. NCES does not assign locale codes to school districts (only to individual schools), since some districts have schools with different locale codes (for example, a district may have both Town-Fringe and Rural-Fringe school sites). Accordingly, for the analysis below we report the most common locale code of the schools within each of the 104 districts that received 2022-23 PRMG awards.

As reflected in Table 2, no PRMG awards went to the largest (City) districts, which may reflect the relatively small size of the awards (\$25,000) and the fact that larger districts have a more varied set of funding sources for supporting new educator induction and mentoring. By far the largest share of PRMG grants (nearly 80%) went to smaller districts (those with Town or Rural locale codes).

Table 2: 2022-23 PRMG District Awardee by NCES Locale Code

LOCALE CODE	# OF PRMG AWARDS TO DISTRICTS	% OF TOTAL PRMG AWARDS TO DISTRICTS*
City Large	0	0
City Midsize	0	0
City Small	2	2%
Suburban Large	12	12%
Suburban Midsize	4	4%
Suburban Small	4	4%
Town Fringe	9	9%
Town Distant	17	16%
Town Remote	3	3%
Rural Fringe	8	8%
Rural Distant	28	27%
Rural Remote	17	16%
Total	104	100%

*Not including PRMG awards made directly to CESAs

Mentors and Other Roles Included in Applications

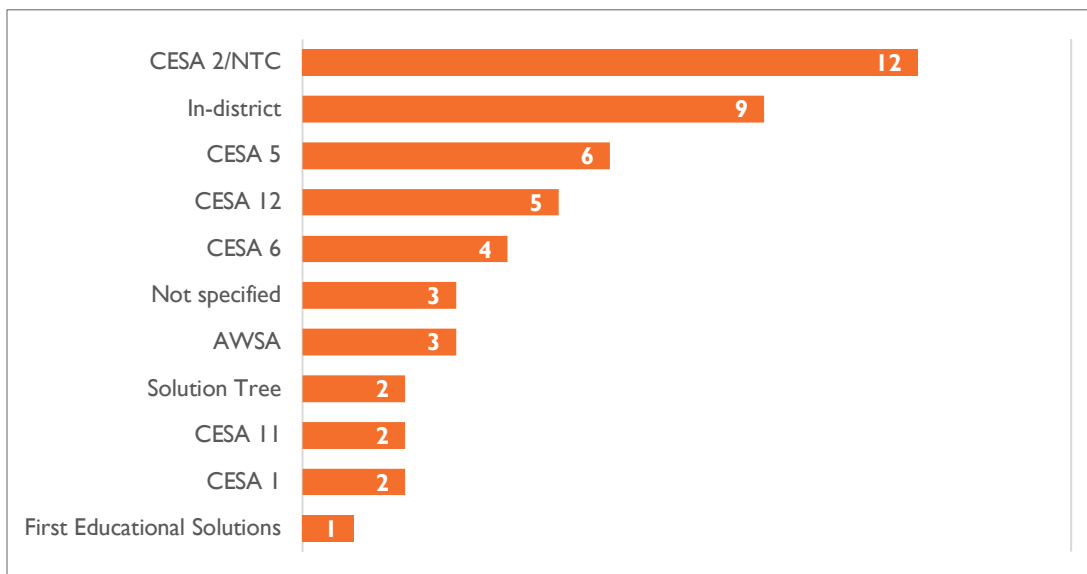
Of the 47 district applications, 26 applicants clearly identified the number of mentors who will participate in 2022-23 grant activities. Of those 26 applications, 14 also provided counts of mentors for each of the districts in the grant application. The total number of mentors identified in all applications is 475. Since 21 district applications did *not* include the number of mentors participating in grant activities, the total number of mentors who received training and/or a stipend from the PRMG grant could be significantly higher. The number of mentors identified in a particular application ranged from one to fifty. In addition to mentors, some applications included other roles in training activities, such as:

- 8 included all initial educators
- 6 included coaches
- 5 included administrators
- 1 included all teachers
- 1 included all ELA teachers

Who Provides District Reported Training Activities

Mentors and other school staff identified in the applications attended training and/or received stipends for their work. Seven district applications did not include training. Of the remaining district applications that described training, providers are represented in Figure 1.

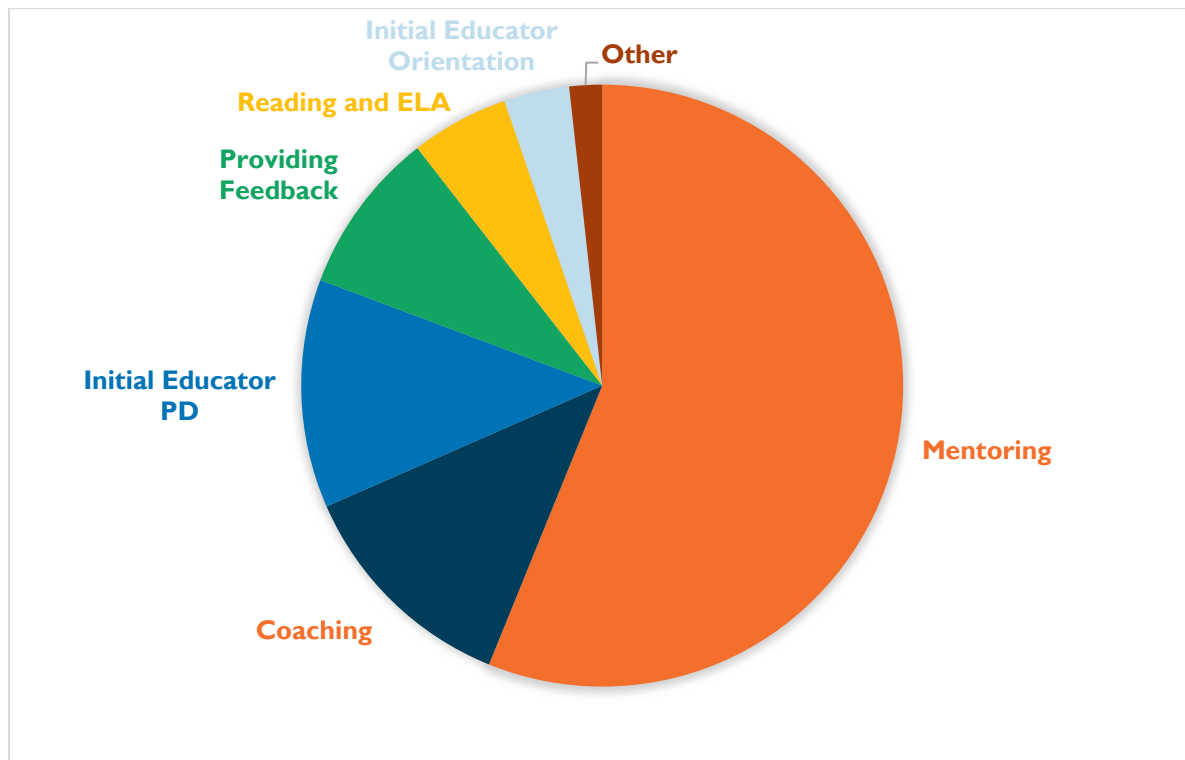
Figure 1: Providers of PRMG-Funded Training



Training topics

As shown in Figure 2, district applicants included trainings focused on mentoring (n=32) and coaching (n=7), as well as providing feedback (n=5) including rapid cycle feedback, reading and ELA (n=3), initial educator professional development (n=7), and initial educator orientation or onboarding (n=2).

Figure 2: Focus of PRMG-Funded Training



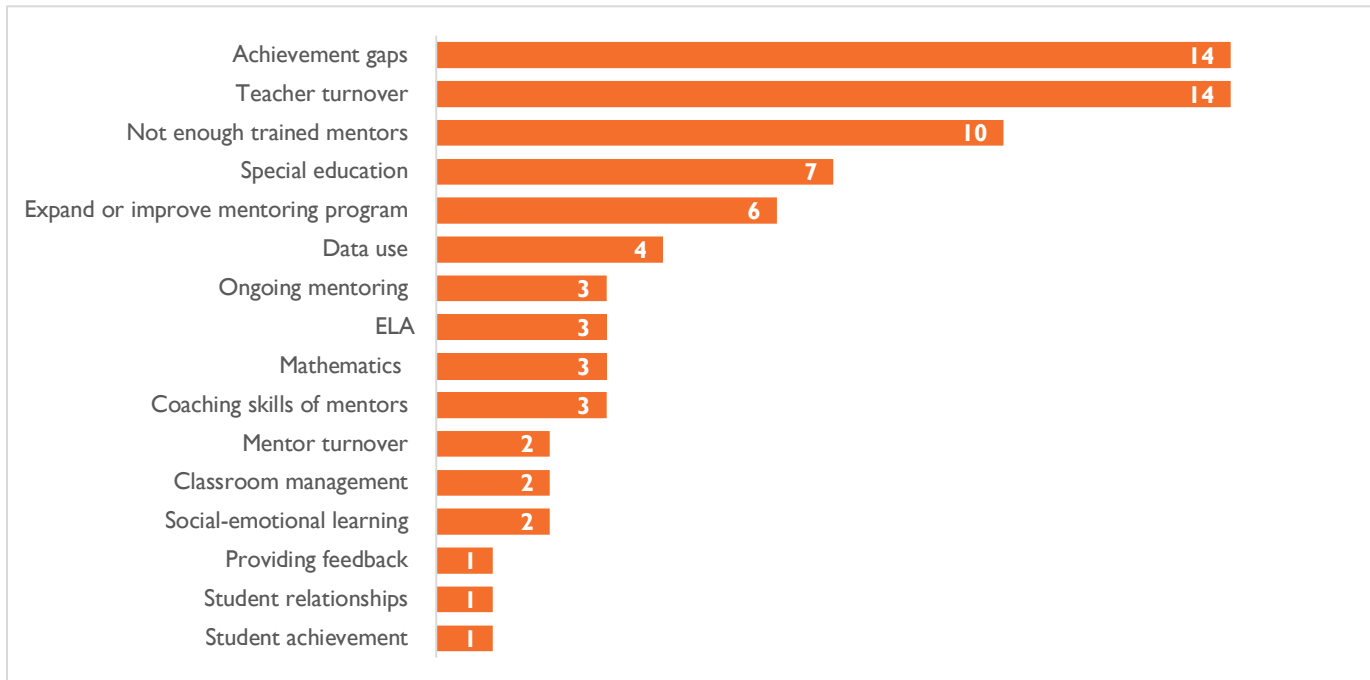
Unique trainings reported by individual districts included:

- Standards-based grading
- Professional learning communities
- Fast Bridge
- Special Education
- Mathematics and Science
- Differentiated instruction
- Leadership training
- Equity and inclusion
- Social-emotional learning

Twelve of the applicants indicating mentor training as an area of focus identified using the New Teacher Center training approach used by CESA 2; four of the five that reported feedback training were doing so through CESA 6; and four of the applicants that were providing training for initial educators did so through CESA 12, which included culturally responsive classroom management and equity-focused support seminars.

Figure 3 demonstrates applicant-identified training needs:

Figure 3: Needs Identified by Applicants



District Reported Mentor Use

The majority of applications did not address how trained mentors would be used beyond being assigned to initial educators. Four applications reported that mentors would be assigned to first-year teachers; one application reported first- and second-year teachers; and one application reported second- and third-year teachers. Two other applicants indicated that they had a full-release mentor, but it is unclear if this practice is in addition to or instead of other mentors who also have teaching responsibilities. Most applications lacked information about whether mentoring took place during dedicated school time or outside of contract hours. There was also little information on how frequently mentors worked with and met mentees; a few applications reported that mentees would work with mentees weekly. Additionally, it was unclear how many mentees a mentor would support. For the thirteen applications that did include the specific focus of the mentoring, the focus areas included:

- Mathematics (n=3)
- Reading (n=3)
- Special Education (n=2)
- Social-emotional learning (n=2)
- Science (n=1)
- Data use (n=1)

One application reported that the trained mentors would be used to train other untrained mentors. Another application reported that mentors would be used to create tools to support initial educators' data use.

District Monitoring of Mentoring Activities

Applicants provided numerous ways through which they planned to collect information about their mentoring activities to inform improvement. These strategies included attendance at trainings, training completion rates, exit slip feedback from trainings, and feedback from mentors and initial educators on mentor activities. The two most frequently cited methods were surveys (n=19) and student data (n=14). It is relevant to note that student data is a lagging measure when evaluating PRMG impact, meaning impact may not immediately be apparent in the student data. Those methods were followed by School or Student Learning Objectives (SLOs; n=7), mentor logs (n=7), and observations (n=7). Some applications included details about how data would be used (e.g., review progress and revise goals or refine program as appropriate) and by whom (e.g., mentor coordinator, mentor planning committee, leadership team, or administrators), while other applications provided long lists of data sources without a plan for analysis or details about how the findings will be used.

CESA Applications

As noted above, each of the 12 CESAs applied for and received a 2022-23 PRMG award. CESAs identified a variety of needs within their applications, the most frequently-cited of which was addressing student achievement (n=6), followed by the need for more trained mentors (n=5). Also reported was the need to support teacher retention or to address high levels of teacher turnover (n=3). Two CESAs identified the high number of districts with IDEA/ESSA identifications within their CESAs.

Beyond the general need for trained mentors, some CESAs also included which specific areas of support mentors needed to be able to provide to their initial educators. These included:

- Classroom management
- Supporting social-emotional learning
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Assessments
- Engagement
- Differentiation
- High number of teachers with emergency licensure

Seven of the 12 CESA PRMG awards also identified needs related to school leaders. Specifically, they mentioned the level of trust in principals, principal turnover, and principal training on coaching and feedback. Two CESAs (9 and 11) facilitated a cross-district principal professional learning community (PLC) supporting principals, while two others (3 and 4) provided training only to principals. The CESA 3 training focused on the data inquiry process using a curriculum from EAB Educational Consulting. CESA 3 districts also received support on auditing and reviewing current mentor practices and systems within their schools. Notably, no individual districts within CESA 3 applied for a PRMG. CESA 4 focused on new administrators and provided an orientation session, attendance at the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA) Coaching Academy, and monthly virtual check-in sessions focused on the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership.

As shown above in Figure 1, CESAs 2, 5, and 12 had the largest number of district applications identifying them as their source for training mentors. CESA 2 bases its support on training from the New Teacher Center, and consultants work with district/school leaders on building structures within schools to support mentoring. CESA 5 offers in-house feedback and coaching training for mentors and administrators, book studies for initial educators and mentors, and a deep dive into Educator Effectiveness. CESA 12 also offers training to mentors, administrators, and initial educators. Mentor training is focused on instructional coaching and the DPI-developed Mentoring Essentials training. CESA 12's administrator training is focused on feedback and coaching for equity, and initial educator training seminars focus on equity and culturally responsive classroom management.

Seven CESAs included information in their applications on which curriculum they would utilize for training, while five CESAs did not. Of the ten CESAs offering mentor training, three utilized DPI's Mentoring Essentials, one used the New Teacher Center, one was in-house developed, and five did not specify in their application which curriculum would be used or developed to train mentors.

Proposed Uses for Funds

The twelve CESA grantees all proposed to use the majority of PRMG funding for salaries and fringe for CESA staff developing or conducting training programming for mentors or teachers. Five CESAs included amounts for outside training vendors, which averaged \$5,500. The others provided the training from within. One CESA allocated \$7,600 for an outside consultant. Three CESAs provided small stipends for district participants (local team leaders or coaches). Relatively small amounts (typically about \$500-\$1000) were allocated for travel, food, books, or materials.

At the district level, it is more difficult to summarize intended funding use since applicants reported their budgets in different ways, and because they used grant money to support many different components of their programs. Often partner districts within a consortia appeared to be planning to use the money differently than the lead districts. However, there were three distinct funding patterns we observed from the PRMG applications. First, 18 grantees planned to use substantially more than half of their grants to pay for professional learning for mentors or coaches (and in a few cases, new teachers) from outside vendors, usually CESAs, as discussed above. The second pattern, shown by 11 grantees, was to use most of the grant funding for mentor stipends and substitute coverage, and in some cases, to also include stipends for new teachers and allocations for district administrative staff to lead/coordinate efforts. The remaining 18 grantees planned to use the grant funding on a more balanced mix of externally-provided professional learning and stipends for mentors, substitutes, and/or new teachers.

Addressing PI 34 Requirements

Next, we consider how grantees addressed basic PI 34 requirements. Currently, district applicants are asked to identify the degree to which they are meeting PI 34 requirements to include trained mentors, mentors assigned to initial educators, ongoing orientation, and support to initial educators. Our review of 2022-23 applications suggests that not all districts are meeting basic requirements reflected in PI 34. As shown in Table 3 below, a majority (70 percent) of districts partially meet these requirements.

Table 3: Applicants Meeting PI 34 Requirements

PI 34 REQUIREMENTS	CESA APPLICANTS (N=12)	DISTRICT APPLICANTS (N=47)
Fully Meeting	8%	26%
Partially Meeting	33%	70%
Unreported	59%	4%

There is inherent complexity in these numbers because applications represent consortia consisting of two or more districts. It is difficult to determine with certainty if the baseline percentages represent the consortia as a whole or are representative of the fiscal agent district charged with writing and submitting the application. Per DPI guidance, CESA applicants are not required to submit the baseline percentages. The data do suggest that several districts are not providing minimal PI 34 induction and mentoring support to initial educators. Applicants that are not meeting or barely meet basic requirements, accordingly, are less likely to see an impact in teacher retention, practice, or student outcomes.

Coordination with Educator Effectiveness

Our review of PRMG awards also explored coordination with Wisconsin's Educator Effectiveness (EE) system as one of the areas identified in the application to align and sustain mentoring activities with other district practices. For the most part, grantees are connecting grant-funded activities with EE, although there appears to be considerable variation in how these connections are described.

Looking first at the twelve CESA grantees, four specifically referenced coordination of mentor training or support provided by mentors with the EE process. For example, one stated that PRMG work will be coordinated with services offered through EE and other programs, and that mentoring has focused on Framework for Teaching (FFT) components such as engagement, culture for learning, classroom management, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness. CESA 6, which has its own EE process, also described coordination of grant-funded work with its evaluation process. One CESA mentioned coordination with the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership (WFPL) and School Learning Objectives (SLOs) as methods of measuring grant results. The remaining six applications did not specifically mention coordination with or use of EE as part of the programming to be supported by the grant. Of these six, one noted that the mentoring had improved teachers' perceptions of EE, and another mentioned the use of the grant to build new educator skills that might be inferred to be covered by the FFT components.

Of the 47 district-level grant applications, 40 mentioned some connection with the EE process, standards, or components. Thirty-seven applicants provided specific information which suggested that grant activities or mentoring will be coordinated with EE by using EE standards for mentoring or by having mentors support new teachers in completing the EE process. For example, one applicant stated, "the project will align directly with teachers' EE goals and process. They will be able to use the same data for the EE goals that district administrators use for monitoring progress for this project." Another applicant explained that mentors conduct monthly classroom visits and provide feedback and strategies based on the FFT to the initial educators. Five of these applicants singled out the SLO process as an area of support by mentors.

Thirteen applicants indicated that the main connection to EE was that SLO and/or observation information was used to identify needs for mentoring and/or would be used for evidence of mentoring or grant success. Five applicants referred to coordination, but their statements were too general or unclear to link them to new teachers' EE processes or practices. Seven applicants did not mention any specific connection with EE in their applications. One application mentioned alignment with the district's emphasis on multi-tiered systems of support and professional learning communities. Another application mentioned alignment with a district emphasis on differentiating instruction and using high leverage instructional practices. Three other applicants stated that the grant activities would align with efforts to improve professional dialog and coaching conversations.

Section 3: How Grant Proposals Reflect Research Base

There were four predominant themes on effective practices derived from the literature on peer review and mentoring. First, it is recommended that mentoring be high quality and that the selection criteria go beyond seniority-based measures. Second, mentors and mentees need adequate shared time to engage in mentoring activities. Third, professional learning for mentors and beginning teachers is needed. And fourth, the support of school leaders for the system of mentorship was critical to its success.

When comparing the 2022-23 PRMG applications with the themes from the literature, few applications addressed these four themes. Specifically, few applicants reported how mentors were selected or when (and how often) mentoring would happen. Some applications did indicate that mentors would work with teachers during contract hours, but most applications lacked clear references to any common planning time. Professional development was abundantly addressed, with many applicants describing ongoing learning and networks for mentors with in-district coaching from CESAs for mentors. Lastly, some districts indicated how mentors would be a part of ongoing meetings with district leaders who were overseeing the mentoring program.

This overall lack of alignment to literature could indicate that districts are missing an opportunity to build strong mentoring programs, and/or it could be a result of the application requirements not prompting districts to report on these effective practices. Even so, we did identify some applicants who included these best practices. Examples where applicants address the four themes are highlighted below.

High Quality Mentor

The Oregon School District partners with the Dane County New Teacher Project to train mentors using the research-based New Teacher Center (NTC) Model. The training curriculum and ongoing seminars build mentor skills reflected in the literature, which include observation and feedback, analysis of student work, and optimal learning environments.

Quality Mentor Time

The McFarland School District prioritizes dedicated time for mentoring by using release-model mentors "whose dedicated time allows for more than 1:1 model peers." This district's goal is to create a "mentoring program closer to New Teacher Center's model, which recommends 180 minutes of meeting per month."

Ongoing Professional Development

Similar to many CESAs, CESA 12 offers quarterly mentor network meetings and beginning teacher professional development. Several district applicants integrate training specific to their identified student academic goals. Examples include Cudahy, which adds social/emotional strategies, and Muskego-Norway, which includes training specific to best practices in ELA and Math and includes teachers in years 4 and 5 in its professional development.

Communication and Support from School Leaders

Aligning induction and mentoring to other improvement initiatives is a practice suggested in New Teacher Center's Induction Program Standards as a Foundational Goal (1.1): "Program leader and key decision-makers create a program vision, mission, and program design focused on advancing student learning and accelerating beginning teacher effectiveness within a comprehensive system of development for all educators." Wisconsin Heights School District aligns mentors' work with the EE process by scheduling monthly classroom visits with new teachers for observation and by "using the WI EE as a guide for feedback and strategies for best instructional practices."

Summary of Findings

In our review of the 59 PRMG applications for 2022-23, we found a wide range of depth and detail. Applicants were predominantly from smaller districts, with higher concentrations of applicants located in CESAs 2 and 5, followed by CESAs 11 and 12. District self-reported data shows that 70 percent were “partially meeting” PI 34 requirements related to mentoring. Relatedly, districts identified a lack of trained mentors as one of their biggest needs. That said, only about half of applicants addressed which activities mentors would participate in during the grant year to become trained and subsequently how they would support initial educators.

The majority of district applications described activities that connect with the EE System. This suggests that most applicants were attempting to align their grant-funded activities with the EE process. As noted above, while the applications were not specific to the four effective mentoring practices identified in the literature, our review still found some examples of where those practices are taking place, and these instances may be opportunities for follow-up evaluation activities.

Section 4: Recommendations and Considerations

The following recommendations and considerations are based on the findings from the PRMG application review and the mentoring practices identified in research. Reflecting on these recommendations and considerations may help DPI leaders who oversee the PRMG program strengthen the application and review process, ideally improving peer mentoring practices in Wisconsin – which in turn should promote greater rates of retention among initial educators in the short term as well as more effective classroom practice and improved student achievement in the medium and longer term.

Consider application requirement changes and review criteria to strengthen alignment to PI 34 requirements

Alignment to each of the required components of PI 34 should be supported with other structural and programmatic practices if districts wish to impact retention, teacher practice, and student outcomes. Asking PRMG applicants to explicitly assess the degree to which they have addressed the required components of PI 34 within their planned activities may lead to action plans that are more directly aligned to addressing identified mentoring gaps. Asking applicants to provide a percentage that represents the degree to which they are meeting requirements can be problematic, primarily because CESAs and each of the consortia partners are not asked to report such percentages. Additionally, applicants are allowed to propose addressing needs outside of PI 34 requirements, even though they may not yet be meeting the PI 34 requirements.

The Plan section of the application helps to illustrate this point. The subsections, “Needs assessment,” “Demonstration of Needs Statement,” and “Practice Priority Statements” represent an important part of the application, as they inform the applicant’s identified activities and budget. However, there is excess content included in this section of the application, some of which may be more appropriate in the grant guidance resources as opposed to within the application itself. For example, the “Action Plan - Example” could be moved to the guidance document, and there are numerous sub-questions which could be cumbersome to address.

Streamline the application and guidance document in order to focus on what is important

Currently, the application has a word count of approximately 2,000 words (5,000 if the standard “Assurances” language is included), and the guidance document for this application has approximately 6,000 words. Streamlining prompts to include those that focus applicants’ attention on best practices and information needed may help DPI gather more pertinent information. For example, the Needs Assessment section has numerous prompts and guidance within the application, but grantees were not encouraged to be specific about mentoring needs. Additionally, keeping example responses in the guidance document instead of the application could again help applicants focus on aspects of their responses more critically aligned with PI 34 and questions reflecting the literature on peer review and mentoring.

Make connections between professional practice and desired outcomes

The literature consistently points to a correlation between comprehensive, multi-year support of initial educators and the improvement of practice, retention, and student outcomes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Schuls & Flores, n.d.; Young et al., 2017). This finding could support a common theory of action for all applicants. To better align the application process to literature, PRMG-related guidance resources could include a standard needs assessment protocol. In this way, applicants produce a statement that incorporates both practice and student outcomes. An example follows:

If (insert action related to mentoring) then (insert district specific practice to address root cause) and (insert educator outcome goal).

After completing the steps needed to determine local needs, applicants could then populate the above stem with priority goals. An example could read:

If initial educators in years 2-3 are provided with consistent, instructionally-focused mentoring/coaching support in the area of content based literacy, then instructional practices to support reading will improve and student outcomes on MAP assessments will improve.

Strengthen application content

Adding a few basic requirements to the PRMG application could provide a fuller picture of the practices that prospective awardees are trying to implement and a better understanding of what is happening in the field. Applicants could be asked to include:

- Information for each district for all sections of the application, not just the lead district
- The number of mentors and mentees involved in grant year activities
- How mentors will be used and when mentors and mentees will work together
- The mentoring model (e.g., 1:1, release-model, etc.) and method for mentor selection
- How data on perceptions and impact will be collected, who will analyze the data, and how it will be used

It should be noted that adding new prompts might then call for reducing others in order to streamline the application.

Require CESA applicants to identify the training curriculum they will use

The application does not currently ask CESAs to share the curriculum they will use for training purposes. In some instances, CESAs provided this information, but in others they did not. This information will help to better capture how CESAs are assisting districts with mentoring and assist with future analysis of the PRMG.

Focus funding on peer mentoring before other supports

Teacher mentoring should be prioritized before applicants use funds for other activities, such as principal induction, coaching, and peer review. Clearer articulation of the goal for this funding would help align the application, review, and awards processes to elements of comprehensive induction and mentoring programs.

Consider revising the awards criteria to encourage applicants to use research-based training

Awards processes could be restructured in a way that encourages consortia to participate in research-based comprehensive training programs. Applicants utilizing New Teacher Center training via CESA 2 were providing training and support most closely aligned with best practices identified from the literature. Given the limited funding available, it is important that districts use strategies most closely aligned with research on peer review and mentoring.

Next steps for evaluation

The evaluation team proposes the following next steps to build on Phase I findings in order to help inform DPI's understanding of the implementation of peer mentoring, and to share best practices with districts in Wisconsin so that they can learn and grow their own practices:

- In Phase 2, conduct phone interviews with leads from a sample of PRMG districts and all twelve CESAs to learn about how they implement PRMG activities.
- Also in Phase 2, survey initial educators and mentors in PRMG districts to identify how they engage in mentor training and support activities as well as their perceptions of the activities' utility and impact.
- In Phase 3, conduct case studies of districts using PRMG funds to implement effective mentoring practices. The case studies will include document reviews and in-depth interviews with select CESA facilitators who are offering strong mentor training and support.
- In both phases the evaluation team will also seek to learn how mentoring supports retention of initial educators.

References

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Appendix A: Literature Review Summary

High Quality Mentors

High quality mentoring begins with the mentor selection process (New Teacher Center, 2018; Cutter, 2007). Quality mentoring is complex and attends to the professional, technical, and personal support of teachers. Effective mentors possess characteristics that support each of these intersecting identities. The Southern Regional Education Board (2018) suggests “selecting mentors using criteria such as years of experience and past evaluation scores can be problematic because teaching and mentoring have distinct knowledge bases and skill sets.”

Training mentors for the role is important. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction defines a mentor as “a licensed educator who has successfully completed state-approved mentor training who demonstrates exemplary classroom practice and the effective collaborative qualities necessary to work with beginning educators” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2019). Attributes of mentors identified in the literature included maintaining effective people/communication skills, understanding content and professional standards, and providing effective feedback (Parker et al., 2021; American Institutes of Research, 2015; Koki, 1997; New Teacher Center, 2018a, 2018b, & 2019c).

The importance of maintaining an instructional focus within mentor/mentee interactions is noted as an important “shift” in mentor practice within comprehensive programs. Young et al. (2017) describe instructionally focused support in mentoring as strongly affecting gains in student achievement. The New Teacher Center (2018a) points to a mentor practices that reflect “continuous improvement toward equitable outcomes “as helping to address student needs. This recommendation presses upon mentors to conduct classroom observations and provide effective feedback. Knowledge of the practices described in professional standards allows the mentor to formatively assess and provide feedback on practice (Paliokas & Killion, 2013; New Teacher Center, 2018a & 2018b).

Quality Mentoring Requires Time

Many of the sources reviewed identify the need for a multi-year, differentiated induction and mentoring program which includes regular meetings between mentors and mentees (New Teacher Center, 2018c; Marzocchi, 2021; Paliokas & Killion, 2013; Southern Regional Education Board, 2018). Teachers get better over time when supported with professional development, reflective practice, and collaboration with colleagues – all of which are components of comprehensive induction and mentoring programs.

The literature is not consistent in quantifying the amount of time needed for effective mentoring. However, the New Teacher Center (2018c) identifies 60-90 minutes of protected, weekly time “to allow for the most rigorous mentoring/coaching activities.” Districts use a variety of approaches to arrive at dedicated time, including substitute coverage for the mentor to observe beginning teacher practice and conduct feedback conversations, release model mentoring (which releases mentors from part or all of their teaching duties to support beginning teachers), and utilizing retired teachers (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2019; Southern Regional Education Board, 2018).

Ongoing Professional Development

Systemic approaches to professional learning build capacity in both the teachers and mentors. (Elfers et al., 2022). Effective mentors require training specific to skills needed for supporting the professional, technical, and personal support of beginning teachers. Professional learning in communities of peers affords both mentors and beginning teachers the opportunity to develop skills with and receive feedback from their peers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Center on Great Teacher Leaders, 2022; Parker et al., 2021). Likewise, beginning teachers benefit from collaborative learning (Moir, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007). Teachers in rural schools feel “professionally isolated” (Hayes et al., 2019), and strategies to address this challenge include online communities and partnerships with local universities and education service centers.

The Role of School Leaders

School leaders play a key role in the implementation of comprehensive induction programs. Leaders create working conditions necessary for beginning teacher learning and professional growth (Elfers et al., 2022; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Program clarity and transparency is essential and comes from the involvement of key stakeholders in the program design and related communication. Mentors are one of many observers, and the role of each and purpose for the observations and resulting feedback must be clear to all stakeholders. For example, DPI (2019) clarifies the mentor’s role as someone having “input into the formative and confidential (between mentor/beginning teacher) formative assessment of the educator, but...not considered a part of the formal evaluation process.”

School leaders determine the allocation of resources (time, money, materials), provide schedules to allow for dedicated mentoring time, and determine conditions such as teacher caseload, schedule, room assignments and class sizes – all of which can impact a beginning teacher’s experience. Lastly, school leaders determine the degree to which the induction and mentoring program design and implementation are collaborative and involve multiple stakeholders. “In order for induction work to be woven into the fabric of a district, it needs to be integrated and aligned with district priorities” (Elfers et al., 2022).

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