Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness (EE) System Pilot Evaluation

The Peer Mentor Role

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BACKGROUND

The Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness (EE) system is being designed to revolutionize how educators are evaluated in the state of Wisconsin. It includes processes for evaluating teacher practice and principal practice, developing and tracking student and school learning outcomes, and identifying the "value-added" of educators on student state assessments through statistical analysis. These components will eventually be combined to identify the overall effectiveness and developmental needs of all Wisconsin educators. During the 2012-2013 school year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) rolled out their first phase of the EE system. Each district participating in the development pilot was asked to implement one aspect of the system, as a means of providing districts the opportunity to work through the process before the EE system is officially implemented state-wide. Further, the pilot provides DPI the opportunity to learn from district efforts to implement each EE component and to improve the system before the second phase, when districts will pilot the full system during the 2014-2015 school year.

THE PEER MENTOR ROLE

As part of the developmental pilot, DPI instructed each district to nominate a peer mentor to support the implementation of EE and lay the foundation for full implementation in subsequent years. DPI did not, however, provide districts with much direction as to what this person should do during the pilot to achieve these ends. Further, no training specific to peer mentors was provided. The Teacher Practice Process Manual (Version 1) defines the peer mentor as:

“A teacher or other educator who is trained to do informal observations. A peer mentor/observer may be a department-head or grade-level lead or other instructional leader. Peer mentor/observers are trained in the framework and Educator Effectiveness process.”

Further, in response to requests for further clarification of the role, DPI emailed pilot districts the following guidance:

“What can the peer reviewer do to support the process?

The peer reviewer can support their colleagues in preparing for the mid-year review. Reviewing the data on student growth, and determining next steps, or appropriate adjustments can be done collaboratively as a team, or on an individual basis. The peer reviewer can offer formative feedback and support with the documentation needed to conduct the mid-year review.

Any changes or adjustments in instructional strategies needed to support the goal can be further supported through partnership between peer reviewer and teacher.”

Given the ambiguity of the role, DPI was interested in utilizing the experiences of sites during the developmental pilot to explore how the peer mentor role could best be utilized by districts to aid the implementation of EE moving forward. This report summarizes the results of phone interviews conducted with peer mentors about their experiences in the role.

METHODS
DPI is working with the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee to evaluate the implementation of the EE System. The purpose of this evaluation is to leverage the experiences of pilot districts to provide DPI with actionable, timely information that informs changes and improvements to the EE System. The evaluation utilizes multiple methods to explore the challenges facing districts implementing EE, how districts overcome these challenges, and how DPI can best support districts.

One such method employed by the evaluation team involved interviewing peer mentors. The purpose of these interviews was to address the following three questions, though other issues are discussed throughout this summary:

1. How have peer mentors supported and developed the EE process?
2. What have been the challenges facing peer mentors to support the process?
3. How have peer mentors worked to overcome these challenges?

The evaluation team conducted phone interviews with peer mentors engaged in all four pilot areas. On February 6th, 2013, we sent an email to 148 peer mentors, as identified by school districts, asking for volunteers to participate in a short phone interview about their experiences as peer mentors in the EE pilot. Peer mentors who expressed an interest in participating were sent a consent document (Appendix) outlining the conditions of their participation. Using the attached protocols (Appendix), interviews were conducted until saturation of concepts was reached, i.e., when nothing new was likely to be learned from interviewing additional peer mentors.

Ultimately, 21 peer mentors were interviewed, including five piloting the teacher practice element of the EE system, five piloting student learning objectives, four piloting school learning objectives, three piloting principal practice, three piloting both teacher practice and student learning objectives, two piloting both teacher practice and principal practice, and one piloting both principal practice and school learning objectives. The peer mentors interviewed for this evaluation represent a variety of educator roles, including six teachers, five principals, one associate principal, one retired principal, one CESA representative, six directors of curriculum and instruction, two Title 1 coordinators, and one director of standards, assessment and accountability. They were experienced, having been educators for an average of 24.5 years (range: 5 to 42 years) and in their current role for an average of 8.4 years (range: 1 to 33 years).

RESULTS

Across all pilot areas, peer mentors held overwhelmingly positive opinions of both the EE System in general and the peer mentor role specifically. In fact, only one person suggested they did not want to be a peer mentor next year. They felt that, even though the role demands a major time commitment, the role is critical to the success of the EE process; peer mentors provide another view point for each step of the EE process, including the development of SLO goals and/or to professional growth goals and lesson plans for observations.

Across pilot areas, what activities have peer mentors engaged in?

Peer mentors supported all EE participants in a variety of ways
Peer mentors worked with teachers 50% of the time, compared to 34% with principals and 16% with superintendents.

Peer mentors were engaged in coaching 70% of the time, compared to 25% for evaluating, and 5% for other activities.

Even considering the importance of the role in the EE pilot and peer mentors’ positive attitudes toward it, many mentors identified ways they felt the peer mentor role could be improved.

**Across pilot areas, what are some challenges for the effective use of peer mentors?**

- The most common challenge identified for effectively performing the peer mentor role was a lack of time.
- Peer mentors who were teachers had a particularly difficult time. They reported having to rearrange their schedules, hire substitute educators, or to fit the work in before and after school. This issue is more critical to address considering no peer mentors reported receiving any compensation for their time.
- Peer mentors wanted more clarity from DPI as to how to perform the peer mentor role well.

**Across pilot areas, what are some ways to foster the effective use of peer mentors?**

- Although the lack of definition provided by DPI on the best way to use peer mentors was somewhat intentional, current peer mentors preferred that DPI would provide more direction for the role moving forward.

  ★ **Tied to this, peer mentors would benefit from training specific to their role, and as part of this training, they would like examples of how the peer mentor role looks in other types of districts (both small and large).**

- Some also reported that PDP (or any mentor/coaching program) training and experience would be helpful to peer mentors. Seven peer mentors had received this training.
- Once the role is better defined, the term peer mentor in fact should be changed to be more reflective of the activities they are expected to engage in.
- Respondents were clear that peer mentors should be viewed strictly as supporting the EE process, and not used as formal evaluators.
- Peer mentors who held administrator positions, such as directors of instruction, were better able to fit peer mentor responsibilities within their job responsibilities.

  ★ **Peer mentors must be provided adequate time and resources to allow them to provide the necessary support to EE participants**

The following sections summarize the specific activities engaged in by peer mentors in each of the four developmental pilots. Also presented are challenges and opportunities for the effective use of peer mentors to support each piloted EE component.
Four mentors supported/coached teachers on the use of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to complete the self-rating of performance.

Three supported/coached teachers on the use of the self-rating of performance to identify 2-3 professional practice goals related to the Framework.

Seven supported/coached teachers on the completion of the Educator Effectiveness Plan prior to the evaluation planning session.

Six participated in an evaluation planning session.

Five participated in pre- and post-observation discussions.

Two already supported/coached on completing the rating of professional practice.

Six observed practice.

Five supported/coached teachers on the use of evaluation results to inform performance goals and professional development.

**What are some challenges for the effective use of peer mentors to support EE teacher practice?**

- Peer mentors are not confident that they fully understand how to support this process. Some reported struggling while working with teachers to develop SMART goals, while others reported difficulties working with principals to identify evidence for observations that fit.
- Another peer mentor was not sure of what their goals should be, whether it is to mentor teachers or the principal.

**What are some ways to foster the effective use of peer mentors to support EE teacher practice?**

- One pilot site created a peer review team that videotaped themselves teaching, presented their goals, watched the videos and helped each other with a self-assessment for all the domains and components. A video-taped team observation could count as one of the required observations.
- Another site developed a professional learning community of teachers and mentors.
- One peer mentor described how they provided directors, superintendents, and HR with updates on their progress in implementing the EE system.
- Another mentor suggested that DPI should build into their support structure a mid-year check-in with piloting districts.
- One suggested that peer mentors are more effective when mentoring teachers at their same instructional levels so they would know the relevant Common Core standards; mentors need to know the content and grade level requirements of those they work with.

**STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES PEER MENTORS**

**What specific activities have Student Learning Objectives peer mentors engaged in?**

- Four mentors supported/coached teachers, and two mentored supported/coached principals, on the preparation of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs): reviewing student data, identifying the student population, and identifying evidence sources to measure student growth.
- Three worked with teachers and three with principals to approve, or assist in the approval, of SLOs based on the criteria included in the Selection and Approval Rubric.
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- Two mentors supported/coached teachers with the data collection, progress monitoring, and adjusting instructional strategies.
- Three participated in the mid-year meeting between educator and supervisor.
- Two mentors supported/coached teachers with mid-year SLO adjustments.
- None have supported/coached teachers with the final collection of evidence yet.
- None have assisted in the rating of SLOs yet.

**What are some challenges for the effective use of peer mentors to support EE Student Learning Objectives?**

- Not all peer mentors felt comfortable with their understanding of the Common Core.
- Peer mentors did not have enough examples of SLOs to pull from.
- Teachers need help identifying the instructional strategies that will help them reach their SLOs.
- Questions about mid-year adjustments – peer mentors need more guidance on how much to adjust SLOs.
- Some peer mentors felt that three SLOs and three practice goals were too many – they will end up not being meaningful.
- Some peer mentors were not sure what to do with the SLOs once they are created. They were unsure if they should be submitting these to DPI for approval.

**What are some ways to foster the effective use of peer mentors to support EE student learning objectives?**

- Peer mentors reported that the EE process was much easier when their district already has a peer coaching/mentoring model and SMART goal development.
- Peer mentors working collaboratively with all participants (teachers and principals) makes developing SLOs easier.
- Peer mentors could act as a liaison with DPI.

**SCHOOL LEARNING OBJECTIVES PEER MENTORS**

**What specific activities have school learning objectives peer mentors engaged in?**

- Two mentors supported/coached principals for preparing School Learning Objectives.
- One worked with a principal to approve or assist in the approval of SLOs based on the criteria included in the Selection and Approval Rubric.
- One mentor supported/coached a principal on the collection of data, progress monitoring, and if necessary, adjusting strategies.
- None have participated in the mid-year meeting between educator and supervisor yet.
- One has supported/coached a principal with mid-year SLO adjustments.
- One mentor supported/coached a principal with final collection of evidence.
- None have assisted with the rating of SLOs

**What are some challenges for the effective use of peer mentors to support EE school learning objectives?**

- Peer mentors are not very involved in the SLO process.
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- Not enough time has elapsed since the training to work through this process.
- As was the case with Student Learning Objectives, there was some confusion about whether School Learning Objectives are submitted to DPI for approval.

**What are some ways to foster the effective use of peer mentors to support EE school learning objectives?**

- The SLO peer mentor must be familiar with the types of data available in a district to develop appropriate SLOs.

**PRINCIPAL PRACTICE PEER MENTORS**

*What specific activities have Principal Practice peer mentors engaged in?*

- Four out of six reported supporting/coaching principals on the use of the Principal Framework to complete the self-rating of performance.
- Three reported supporting/coaching principals on the use of the self-rating of performance to identify 2-3 professional practice goals related to the Framework.
- Two mentors supported/coached principals on the completion of the Educator Effectiveness Plan prior to the evaluation planning session.
- Three participated in an evaluation planning session.
- Two participated in pre- and post-observation discussions.
- One has already supported/coached on completing the rating of professional practice.
- One has observed practice.
- None have supported/coached teachers on the use of evaluation results to inform performance goals and professional development.

**What are some challenges for the effective use of peer mentors to support EE principal practice?**

- Because of late training dates, the shortened timeline did not provide districts enough time to work through the SLO process.

**What are some ways to foster the effective use of peer mentors to support EE principal practice?**

- Peer mentors should act as a “sounding board” for principals.
- An effective peer mentor can facilitate “getting people out of their own buildings”. They can help facilitate collaboration across schools.

**MOVING FORWARD WITH THE PEER MENTOR ROLE**

The results of these surveys suggest that the responsibilities of the peer mentor, coaching and supporting EE participants, are critical for the success of the EE System. Even with minimal direction provided by DPI for how to support the process, pilot peer mentors were actively engaged in nearly all aspects of the EE System. Still, there were several suggestions made by peer mentors for ways to improve the
effectiveness of peer mentors. The following summarizes some of the key issues that should be addressed by DPI:

- Most peer mentors felt strongly that peer mentors need to be a facilitator, a coach, and a mentor…not an evaluator. This person is a sounding board, someone to bounce an idea off of, someone to ask for input and someone that can provide suggestions. They should be viewed strictly as a resource and support person.
- Peer mentors should be better trained on how to best support the EE process. They should be the ‘local expert’ on the EE System and processes.
- Peer mentors need to understand the data available to school districts if they are going to be effective in supporting the SLO process.
- Peer mentors need to be prepared to help teachers and principals write/review their SLOs and practice goals, based on data and supporting the strategies that they identified for achieving these goals.
- Peer mentors should make sure that everyone stays on track for completing the process.
- Peer mentors should facilitate the communication between teachers and principals.
- If a peer mentors is an administrator, they can support the process across buildings; if they are a teacher, they should be coaches and stay within their building.
- Peer mentors that have to spend time beyond their current job time commitments should be compensated for this additional work. In not, teachers could be released from instructional time to complete the role, or the role could be built into an administrator’s responsibilities.
- Peer mentors would benefit from the opportunity to collaborate with other peer mentors.
Dear EE Pilot Participant,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the evaluation of the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System (EE) Developmental Pilot. It is vitally important to the success of the state EE system that we learn as much as possible during the pilot stage this year.

**What does my participation involve?**

Persons interviewed for the evaluation will participate in short tape-recorded interviews (30 to 60 minutes) about the EE pilot. These may occur in person or over the phone. Interviews will focus on how things are going and supports needed for the EE initiative. This work is not an evaluation of you. We are evaluating the DPI EE implementation and processes. What we learn from you will be vital for understanding how well the system is designed and how it might be improved as the state moves toward the second pilot stage and full implementation.

**Will what I say to you be confidential?**

The Evaluation Team will not share any specific information we learn from you with anyone outside of the Evaluation Team. Reports will be de-identified so that individual responses and opinions cannot be traced back to an individual. However, given the nature of our discussion it may be possible for someone with personal knowledge of your district or you to infer the identity of participants. We therefore ask you to consider this when answering questions.

Thank you again for generously volunteering to help us understand the EE system.

Best Regards,

Curtis Jones  
jones554@uwm.edu
Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Evaluation

Peer Mentor Phone Interview – Teacher and Principal Evaluations Protocol

Background

My name is (INSERT NAME OF INTERVIEWER) and I work with the University of Wisconsin, which was contracted by DPI to conduct an independent evaluation of the Educator Effectiveness (EE) System. One of the questions central to our evaluation is “How do districts use the peer mentor role to support their implementation of EE?” As a peer mentor in the developmental pilot, your experiences this year can provide DPI with invaluable information about how to define the role and train peer mentors as the system is fully implemented.

Procedures

First, I need to go over some housekeeping business: I want to review the consent information for participating in this brief interview today and tell you a little bit more about the process.

CONDUCT CONSENT PROCEDURE (Statement read to interviewee)

Do you have any questions? Okay, let’s get started.

TURN RECORDERS ON, STATE DATE and INTERVIEWER NAME

I would like to ask you a few questions about your background, so I have a better understanding of how you may have formed your opinions.

   i. Other than the peer mentor role, what role(s) do you have in your district?__________

   ii. How many years have you been in your current role? __________________________

   iii. How many years have you been an educator?______________________________

Questions

Next I would like to talk with you about your experiences as a peer mentor this year.

1. Which EE component(s) is(are) your district implementing this year? (Teacher evaluation, principal evaluation, SLOs) ______________________
2. In general, how are things going so far for you and your colleagues in the EE pilot?

3. How are things going so far for you specifically as you try to fulfill the peer mentor role?
   a. What is going well and what do you attribute to it going well?
   b. What is not going well and what do you attribute to it not going well?

4. Are you currently, or have you served in the past, as a PDP reviewer or mentor?
   a. If yes, was that work helpful/informative to your role as a peer mentor in the EE System? How so/why not?

5. In your role as a peer mentor in the EE pilot, who have you been working with and what percent of your time was spent with each?
   a. Teacher? ______ %
   b. Principal? ______ %
   c. Superintendent or Designee? ______ %

6. What has been the nature of your work with each? What tasks did you engage in?
   (For each person they work with probe to get specifics about the tasks they help with. For SLOs (teacher) did they help them review SLOs?)

7. Did you engage in any of the following activities?

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1 No</th>
<th>2 Not yet, but planning to</th>
<th>3 Yes with teacher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Support/coach on the use of the Danielson (or principal) Framework for Teaching to complete the self-rating of performance</td>
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<td>B. Support/coach on the use of the self-rating of performance to identify 2-3 professional growth goals related to the Framework</td>
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<td>C. Support/coach the completion of the Educator Effectiveness Plan prior to the evaluation planning session</td>
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<td>D. Participate in the evaluation planning session</td>
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<td>E. Participate in the pre- and post-observation discussions</td>
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<td>F. Support/coach the rating of professional practice</td>
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<td>G. Observed practice (announced and unannounced)</td>
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<td>H. Support/coach the use of evaluation results to inform performance goals and professional development</td>
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8. What percent of your time spent as a peer mentor has been dedicated to:
   a. Coaching
b. Evaluating
   c. Other

9. As a peer mentor, what was the most effective support or coaching you could provide the principal working through the teacher practice component? Please be specific.

10. As a peer mentor, what was the most effective support or coaching you could provide the teacher working through the teacher practice component? Please be specific.

11. How have you managed the tasks (time, resources) of a peer mentor? Did you have to reorganize your schedule?

12. What direction have you received from your district and/or building administrator about what you should be doing as a peer mentor?

13. What support (if any) have you received to help you in your role as peer mentor?

14. Did you receive a stipend or other form of compensation? If yes, what?

15. How would you define what the peer mentor role should be doing moving forward?

16. What would you change, if anything, about the way in which you fulfilled the peer mentor role this year (what would make it easier, more effective, etc.)?

17. If asked to be a peer mentor in the future, would you agree to be one?
   a. Yes (probe as to why)
   b. No (probe as to why)
   c. Not sure (probe as to why)

Closing

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your involvement in the EE Developmental Pilot or any other feedback about the evaluation of the EE System?

Thank you for your time!

Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Evaluation
SLO Peer Mentor Phone Interview Protocol

Background

My name is (INSERT NAME OF INTERVIEWER) and I work with the University of Wisconsin, which was contracted by DPI to conduct an independent evaluation of the Educator Effectiveness (EE) System. One of the questions central to our evaluation is “How do districts use the peer mentor role to support their implementation of EE?” As a peer mentor in the developmental pilot, your experiences this year can provide DPI with invaluable information about how to define the role and train peer mentors as the system is fully implemented.
Procedures

First, I need to go over some housekeeping business: I want to review the consent information for participating in this brief interview today and tell you a little bit more about the process.

**CONDUCT CONSENT PROCEDURE** (Statement read to interviewee)

Do you have any questions? Okay, let’s get started.

**TURN RECORDERS ON, STATE DATE and INTERVIEWER NAME**

I would like to ask you a few questions about your background, so I have a better understanding of how you may have formed your opinions.

iv. Other than the peer mentor role, what role(s) do you have in your district? __________

v. How many years have you been in your current role? __________________________

vi. How many years have you been an educator? ________________________________

Questions

Next I would like to talk with you about your experiences as a peer mentor this year.

18. Which EE component(s) is(are) your district implementing this year? (Teacher evaluation, principal evaluation, SLOs) __________________________

19. In general, how are things going so far for you and your colleagues in the EE pilot?

20. How are things going so far for you specifically as you try to fulfill the peer mentor role?
   a. What is going well and what do you attribute to it going well?
   b. What is not going well and what do you attribute to it not going well?

21. Are you currently, or have you served in the past, as a PDP reviewer or mentor?
   a. If yes, was that work helpful/informative to your role as a peer mentor in the EE System? How so/why not?
22. In your role as a peer mentor in the EE pilot, who have you been working with and what percent of your time was spent with each?
   a. Teacher? ______% 
   b. Principal? ______% 
   c. Superintendent or Designee? ______% 

23. What has been the nature of your work with each? What tasks did you engage in?
   (For each person they work with probe to get specifics about the tasks they help with. For SLOs (teacher) did they help them review SLOs?)

24. Did you engage in any of the following activities?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Support/coach the educator with preparation of Student or School Learning Objectives (SLOs): review student data, identify student population, identify evidence sources to measure student growth</td>
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<td>J. Approve or assist in the approval of SLOs based on the criteria included in the Selection and Approval Rubric</td>
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<td>K. Support/coach the educator with the collection of data, progress monitoring, and if necessary adjusting instructional strategies</td>
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<td>L. Participate in the mid-year meeting between educator and supervisor</td>
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<td>M. Support/coach the educator with mid-year SLO adjustments if necessary</td>
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<td>N. Support/coach the educator with final collection of evidence</td>
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<td>O. Assist in the rating of SLOs</td>
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</table>

25. What percent of your time spent as a peer mentor has been dedicated to:
   a. Coaching
   b. Evaluating
   c. Other

26. As a peer mentor, what was the most effective support or coaching you could provide the principal working through the SLO process? Please be specific.

27. As a peer mentor, what was the most effective support or coaching you could provide the teacher working through the SLO process? Please be specific.

28. How have you managed the tasks (time, resources) of a peer mentor? Did you have to reorganize your schedule?
29. **What direction have you received from your district and/or building administrator about what you should be doing as a peer mentor?**

30. **What support (if any) have you received to help you in your role as peer mentor?**

31. **Did you receive a stipend or other form of compensation? If yes, what?**

32. **How would you define what the peer mentor role should be doing moving forward?**

33. **What would you change, if anything, about the way in which you fulfilled the peer mentor role this year (what would make it easier, more effective, etc.)?**

34. **If asked to be a peer mentor in the future, would you agree to be one?**
   a. **Yes** (probe as to why)
   b. **No** (probe as to why)
   c. **Not sure** (probe as to why)

**Closing**

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your involvement in the EE Developmental Pilot or any other feedback about the evaluation of the EE System?

**Thank you for your time!**