



COLORADO
Department of
Higher Education

Teacher Mentor Grant Program

Legislative Report on Senate Bill 19-190



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The Colorado Department of Higher Education
Report to the Colorado State Legislature

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COLORADO
Department of
Higher Education

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Introduction

Senate Bill 19-190 created the Teacher Mentor Grant Program within the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). The purpose of this program is to provide funding to educator preparation programs (EPP) that partner with local education providers (LEP), including school districts, boards of cooperative services, and charter schools to provide training and stipends for teachers who serve as mentors for teacher candidates participating in clinical practice and novice teachers in their initial years in the field. Grants are subject to available appropriations and qualifying applications and have a duration period of up to three budget years, subject to annual review and renewal. Funding for this program is legislatively renewed each year as part of the state budget.

As established by the legislation, grants are awarded to partnerships consisting of at least one LEP and at least one EPP. CDHE is charged with establishing application requirements. The department must also ensure that, to the extent practicable, grant recipients include applicants of varying sizes from rural, urban, and suburban areas across the state. The department can only award grants to applicants who commit to implementing a teacher mentor program that:

- Recruits teachers who have at least three years of experience teaching and, to the extent practicable, are rated effective or higher through a licensed personnel performance evaluation system and hold a master certificate or are national board certified;
- Provides training in mentoring best practices for all teachers who are recruited to serve as mentor teachers;
- Ensures that the employing LEP provides time within the mentor teacher's schedule to deliver oversight and support for the teacher candidate;
- Pays each mentor teacher a stipend of at least \$2,000 per school year or at least \$2,500 per school year if the mentor teacher holds a master certificate or is national board certified;
- Provides mentoring for newly employed teachers through an induction program for at least two school years after initial employment;
- Collects and provides nonidentifying data concerning teacher effectiveness ratings, retention and other job satisfaction and success measures for teachers who receive mentoring through the teacher mentor program.

The bill also requires CDHE to provide an annual report by January 15 of each year on the implementation of the Teacher Mentor Grant Program. The report¹ is to include:

- The number, amount, and duration of the grants awarded and the names of educator preparation programs and local education providers participating in the grant recipient partnerships;
- A summary of the information received from grant recipients including teacher effectiveness ratings, retention, and other job-satisfaction and success measures, for teachers who receive mentoring through the program;
- Any regulatory or legislative recommendations for improving the implementation of teacher mentor programs across the state.

As shared with prospective applicants, the expected outcomes (developed by CDHE personnel) of this program include:

- Strengthening the clinical preparation of teacher candidates;
- Strengthening the development, practice, and retention of novice teachers, and;
- Increasing the alignment between teacher candidate preparation and early career development.

To apply for the grants, applicants submit proposals outlining the program's particular design, including a rationale for the program including any history between the partners; an outline of EPP and LEP clinical roles and responsibilities; key components of the program including how it adapts for specific district and school partners; and the method of mentor selection, specifically including those guidelines called for in the legislation.

CDHE guidance for the proposals outlines other requirements for projects to be funded:

- Budgets and all items contained within are not to exceed \$225,000;
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¹ This legislative report called for in C.R.S. 23-78-105(4) is separate from the full educator preparation report that is prepared annually according to C.R.S. 23-1-121.

- Mentor teacher stipend amounts are included in each budget and not used to offset program costs;
- Indirect costs are not permitted; allowable costs include clinical faculty stipends/salaries, travel for face-to-face meetings, mentor seminar materials; and tuition costs to earn the CDE mentor teacher endorsement.

After submission, CDHE staff evaluate proposals using a rubric aligned with the language of the enacting bill.

Program Implementation—2021 to 2024

A total of five EPPs applied and were selected to receive funding and participate in the program. In this section, each program's contributions and work are highlighted to present a full picture of their individual and collective efforts.

Adams State University (ASU)

LEP Partnerships: Center Consolidated School District and San Luis Valley BOCES (Multiple Districts)

Adams State University's partnerships with the local LEPs began before the origin of the Teacher Mentor Grant Program but have been strengthened through this work, offering opportunities to further support their teacher candidates and the local school districts' needs for qualified educators, providing students with a higher level of support, enhanced field experiences, and a superior mentor/mentee experience. ASU's program has helped 44 teachers to earn the mentor teacher endorsement with some of them mentoring multiple individuals during and since their time in the program. The 12-credit hour program includes in-person meetings with ASU faculty once a month, synchronous virtual sessions once a month, and asynchronous modules, readings, and discussions throughout.

ASU program administrators reported that mentors have increased their self-efficacy as the academic years have progressed and valued their class and professional experiences. "We found that by meeting every two weeks we were able to see the teacher progress through the materials, first internalizing the teachings and applying the listening and learning in their classroom to eventually being able to apply it to working with their peers. This is slow progress. This cognitive shift took reflection and practice to develop."

Mentor candidates complete a survey at the end of each term where they address questions about their experience in the course and how the implementation of mentoring/coaching has impacted them and their work. The results of the survey demonstrate that the mentor candidates increase their understanding of and

skills in mentoring because of participating in the program. Candidates draw connections between what they learn in the program with becoming a better teacher, suggesting that their self-efficacy also increases because of program participation. Data from surveys also suggests that the mentors are good coaches with their mentees and that the mentors encourage their mentees to be more reflective in their practices, a known positive practice for improving teaching. All participants in year three of the program indicated that they would recommend the program to colleagues.

Data has also been collected from mentees who have been paired with newly trained mentors who went through the ASU program. Besides the encouragement to be more reflective, a strong theme in the results was that mentors provided resources not just for general teaching but for struggling students. Mentees feel supported in their practices and mentors reported that all mentees served during the third year of the program will be returning to the classroom in the next academic year.

Colorado Mountain College (CMC)

LEP Partnerships: Aspen 1, Buena Vista SD, Eagle County RE-50, Garfield 16, Garfield RE-1, Garfield RE-2, Lake County R-1, Salida R-32, Steamboat Springs RE-2, Summit RE-1

Colorado Mountain College's program is oriented toward ensuring that a cadre of highly skilled teachers receives training, support, and recognition to become mentor teachers able to support newly trained teachers and creates a permanent mentoring support structure, improving teacher retention, job satisfaction and teaching success in the classroom. Each of CMC's district partners has a strong collaborative history with the EPP and is in a community that is either in or near a high-cost tourist industry-dominated community. CMC has trained approximately 60 new mentors through the first three years of the Teacher Mentor Grant Program, guiding them to develop formal mentoring skills that directly assist in supporting newly graduated rural teacher candidates from CMC's education baccalaureate program. This work builds on an already established informal mentoring program by providing additional professional credentials and augmented skills for teachers willing to serve in the mentor role. As a full preparation program, CMC supports about 200

student teachers and has an average of about 90 mentor teachers per year working with those mentees², with some mentors serving more than one student.

In AY 21-22, 25% of CMC's mentor teachers working with their candidates participated in the mentor endorsement program, with that growing to 30% in 22-23. This is a population of mentors that have staying power within CMC's programs; 58% of the program's mentors have been serving in that role for two to four years and 8% have served for five or more years. Many of CMC's mentor teachers return each year to work with their candidates rather than hosting a candidate as a once-in-a-career experience. Program leadership believes that their students thrive when mentor teachers return year after year because of the tremendous experience they have gained from collaborating with multiple teacher candidates.

CMC's mission through this program is to recruit their graduates to return as mentors after they have gained successful teaching experience. This initiative is crucial to that work, especially with the introduction of new pathways in teacher apprenticeships. By engaging their experienced graduates as mentors, CMC aims to enhance the support and guidance provided to current students, ensuring a robust and sustainable teaching community within their programs.

University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS)

LEP Partnerships: Colorado Springs SD11, Fountain-Fort Carson SD8, Widefield SD3, Harrison SD2, Calhan SD RJ-1

The College of Education at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs began offering the coursework for the Mentor Teacher endorsement in the fall of 2023. The program offers two three-credit graduate courses and concludes with a capstone action research project in which participants explore, experiment, and evaluate improvements to their mentoring practices and share their findings at an in-person symposium.

² Colorado Mountain College's corps of mentors is made up of educators who have gone through the program provided by this grant and others who have not completed the program but have had experience in this support role for multiple years.

In the first year of the program, 22 educators from local districts enrolled in the program parallel to their work with UCCS teacher candidates in their professional year (the final year of their initial program). Almost all the participants completed the program and were eligible for the mentor endorsement as of May 2024. UCCS staff engaged participants with a common survey before and after completing the program. On nearly all the questions, program participants' responses demonstrated noteworthy improvements in key areas of mentor development. They expressed more openness to new teaching practices in general and indicated a 20% or greater improvement in participants' self-reports related to collecting and analyzing data about student performance, planning for supporting new teachers and providing goal-driven feedback, building capacities for new teachers in building positive classroom communities and advancing equity, increased professional growth by adapting new teaching practices, and confirming their commitment to remain a teacher. Additionally, UCCS faculty and staff maintain that the program has strengthened relationships between the College of Education and their school district partners, laying the groundwork for more strategic student teaching placements in the future.

University of Colorado Denver (UCD)

LEP Partnerships: Denver Public Schools, Aurora Public Schools, Jeffco Public Schools, Mapleton Public Schools, St. Vrain Public Schools, and 21 The Partnership for Rural Educator Preparation (T-PREP) Rural Education Consortium through Otero College and Trinidad State College

Through the SB19-190 Teacher Mentor Grant Program, the University of Colorado Denver has established the Mentoring for Excellence in Equity Grant (MEEG) program with the explicit goal of "seeking to honor mentor teachers' expertise, insight and experience through professional learning designed to deepen their skills as equity-minded mentors and teacher leaders and lead to the CDE Mentor Teacher added endorsement."

The UCD program is designed for participants to earn nine graduate credits through a collection of modules that stack into a graduate clinical teacher certificate and can be taken during any semester. These qualified educators mentor and co-teach with pre-service teachers in partner districts around the state. While the modules are asynchronous, participants engage in monthly virtual communities of practice to support each other and collaborate. Once mentors successfully mentor a teacher candidate for two semesters, they can submit their culminating portfolio to be recommended for the mentor endorsement. Finally, to keep the program affordable and sustainable, UCD has developed a cost model that offers the program's learning at a more than 50% discount from regular tuition rates and allows participants to apply their certificate to any of their professional personalized master's degrees, providing a secondary pathway for career advancement.

Through the first three years of the program, UCD has supported almost 100 mentor teachers from across dozens of school districts and now has a cohort of four lead mentors who completed the program during its initial years and are now working alongside UCD faculty and current mentors to support the program and further develop their teacher leadership.

Mentors rate their experiences in the program exceedingly high and indicate that the program has had a significant impact on their practice and their perception of themselves as capable teacher leaders who can positively influence their school culture and beyond. UCD reports that they are gaining a more critical mass of mentor teachers from individual schools they regularly partner with and are excited to pilot a mentor learning lab model with mentors from past cohorts to serve as lead mentors within their school communities.

Western Colorado University (WCU)

LEP Partners: Thompson SD, Platt Valley SD RE-7, Delta County SD, Douglas County Schools, Telluride SD R-1, Fort Morgan SD RE-3, Poudre SD, Montrose County SD, Brush SD RE-2J, Jeffco Public Schools, Rangely SD RE-4, Canon City Schools

Western Colorado University's curriculum is designed to develop and refine mentors' skills in coaching their mentees to be highly effective beginning teachers and allows them to earn the mentor teacher endorsement on their professional license. Once mentors earn the endorsement, they can continue toward the completion of a master's degree with an emphasis on mentoring beginning teachers. Program participants who choose that path are provided a three-credit scholarship by the institution. The program identifies four mentor skills as essential to their success in the program: healthy relationships, consistent communication, exchanging constructive feedback, and providing all three throughout the academic year. The coursework is designed to develop the proficiency of mentor teachers in all the required standards.

Through the first three years of the program, WCU has hosted almost sixty new mentor teachers, most of whom have hosted WCU traditional or alternative licensure candidates and even a few from other state programs, a fact that speaks to the program's statewide reach. WCU reports that 100% of educators who have completed the mentor program remain in the teaching profession, as are 100% of the mentees who worked with program participants, showing the effectiveness of the program in the retention of veteran and novice educators alike.

Program leadership has also engaged with district partners to determine mentor best practices that lead to a positive student teacher residency experience. The themes identified through that research led to revisions of the program’s original course content, the development of a lead mentor program, and the creation of an open education resource (OER), which is housed within the course and available to any WCU mentor or anyone who would like information on mentoring. Lead mentors completed the initial program for mentoring and were then assigned cohorts of current mentors, where they facilitated course discussions and functioned as liaisons for the university. Within their school districts, lead mentors took on impactful work, including action planning to re-establish positive school culture after the pandemic by implementing a Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program, action research, and subsequent professional development on poverty’s impact on students within the district, and new training on reading programs for novice teachers in their school’s induction program.

Due to their training, lead mentors have an outsized impact by taking the skills they learned in the program and transferring them to their schools, thus becoming leaders in best practices in induction, which is connected to the long-term retention of new teachers. Through surveys, participants in the program have shared that they found it to be valuable and prepared them with a variety of skills and support for their role and developed their leadership skills. Western’s data gathering finds that the mentor teachers they have developed over the first three years of the program have impacted the educational experiences of over 1,500 K-12 students across their partner districts, primarily in rural parts of the state.

Program Implementation—2024-25

For the 2024-25 year, all institutional participants from the previous year applied for and were granted funding to continue or enhance their work after a statewide application was distributed. Those partnerships and their levels of funding are detailed in Table 1 below. The duration of each grant can be a period of up to three budget years and they are subject to annual review and renewal in such cases. The table below includes funding levels and numbers of mentors served throughout the life of the program.

Table 1: Teacher Mentor Grant Program Implementation for 2021-25

Educator Preparation Program	Partner Local Education Provider(s)	2021-24 Total Funding Received	2024-25 Funding Received	Current Award Duration	Mentors Trained/Mentees Served 2021-24
Adams State University	Center Consolidated SD San Luis Valley BOCES (Multiple Districts)	\$270,170	\$114,000	1 year	44 Mentors/55 Mentees
Colorado Mountain College	Western Rockies LEPS: Aspen 1 Buena Vista SD Debeque SD 49 Eagle County RE-50 Garfield 16 Garfield RE-1 Garfield RE-2 Lake County R-1 Park County RE-2 Salida R-32 Steamboat Springs RE-2 Summit RE-1	\$211,273	\$112,680	1 year	58 Mentors/approx. 85 Mentees
University of Colorado Colorado Springs	Pikes Peak LEPS: Colorado Springs SD 11 Fountain-Fort Carson SD 8 Widefield SD 3 Harrison SD 2 Calhan SD RJ-1 Academy SD 20 El Paso SD 49	\$75,020	\$84,960	1 year	22 Mentors/25 Mentees

Educator Preparation Program	Partner Local Education Provider(s)	2021-24 Total Funding Received	2024-25 Funding Received	Current Award Duration	Mentors Trained/Mentees Served 2021-24
	Lewis-Palmer SD 38				
University of Colorado Denver	Denver Public Schools Aurora Public Schools Jeffco Public Schools Mapleton Public Schools Cherry Creek Public Schools St. Vrain Public Schools T-PREP District Partners	\$454,883	\$152,072	1 year	71 Mentors/approx. 300 Mentees ³
Western Colorado University	Thompson SD Platt Valley SD RE-7 Delta County SD Douglas County Schools	\$387,360	\$126,389	1 year	57 Mentors/approx. 60 Mentees

³ According to UC Denver staff, mentors trained through their program serve within their extensive partner schools network and continue to mentor candidates even after program completion. Most mentor two different candidates during an academic year, one in each semester, and others mentor one candidate in the entire year. Hence, this is a cumulative calculation of mentees that considers their work across the initial years of the program.

Educator Preparation Program	Partner Local Education Provider(s)	2021-24 Total Funding Received	2024-25 Funding Received	Current Award Duration	Mentors Trained/Mentees Served 2021-24
	Telluride SD R-1 Fort Morgan SD RE-3 Poudre SD Montrose County SD Brush SD RE-2J Jeffco Public Schools Rangely SD RE-4 Canon City Schools				

“This endorsement makes me feel more confident in being a leader within my school and district. I feel reaffirmed that what I’m doing makes a difference to children and now other teachers.”—Program completer

Data Reporting

C.R.S. 23-78-105(4) requires that each grantee “collects and provides to the department of higher education nonidentifying data concerning teacher effectiveness ratings, retention and other job satisfaction and success

measures for teachers who receive mentoring through the teacher mentor program.”⁴ The partner programs that have received grant funding, along with CDHE staff and The Evaluation Center at the University of Colorado, collaboratively developed a survey to explore the impact on mentor teachers participating in these programs using limited remaining program funds in the previous fiscal year. The content was aligned with the Colorado standards for mentor teachers and relevant literature on mentoring. The survey included three different components:

- Rating mentor competencies aligned to the standards based on the preparation they received in the program;
- Rating several “impact” statements that aligned with the literature asking mentors how their preparation and participation in the program and as a mentor have impacted them;
- Several open-ended responses to gather further understanding of impact and feedback for continuous improvement.

All five programs surveyed their mentor teachers and comprehensive results were tabulated by The Evaluation Center and shared back with the institutions and CDHE. A summary of results from 2023-24 candidate self-assessments is shared below and the entire report by The Evaluation Center is available upon request to CDHE.

- Participants reported high levels of confidence and proficiency across the five main competency areas, averaging 8.12 on a 10-point scale.
- When it comes to instructional leadership, 61% of respondents rated their skills as an 8 or higher on a 10-point scale.
- 78% of respondents rated themselves as an 8 or higher in best practices that maximize student achievement.

⁴ Data on teacher effectiveness and retention will be included in future reports once data become available through the Colorado Department of Education.

- 77% reported high confidence and proficiency in their ability to develop collaborative, respectful, pedagogy-focused mentoring partnerships.
- 65% rated their skills at 8 or higher in the domain of the ability to model and build capacity for equitable, rigorous standards-aligned instruction.
- 76% reported high confidence and proficiency in their ability to model and build capacity to provide equitable, inclusive, culturally responsive classroom environments.
- Additionally, more than 90% of program participants responded that the mentor teacher preparation they received encouraged them to reflect on their profession and teacher practices, impacted their professional practices, and enhanced their professional identity.
- 94% agreed that it was true or very true that the programs increased their satisfaction with being a teacher and 95% stated that their commitment to remaining as an educator was confirmed through this work.

Additionally, since the inception of the Teacher Mentor Grant Program, the participating programs have successfully trained more than 250 new mentors for various districts around the state with more taking part in 2024-25, and those mentors have served more than 500 mentees collectively.

Conclusion

Providing mentorship to novice teachers is an essential part of their growth into effective educators. The funding for this grant program has already yielded positive results, as shown in the survey results presented in this report. Current grantees have illustrated that their models are malleable and replicable across the state and country. For example, program leaders were selected to present their practices and results to programs around the nation at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's national convening in February 2024. The positive results of the Teacher Mentor Grants have also resulted in the Colorado General Assembly broadening the program's statutory language to include novice teachers in their initial three years of teaching in addition to teacher candidates in their clinical practice. In doing so, the General Assembly has made this program one that strengthens mentor practices, bolsters initial educator efficacy and confidence, and enhances retention rates to suppress educator burnout.

The Teacher Mentor Grant Program is especially effective for Colorado in two ways. First, it creates a cycle of mentorship for participating programs. With more than 200 new mentors across the state, district partners,

and other preparation programs that partner with those districts, benefit from the intensive training offered by this group of EPPs. These efforts and continued funding of the program mean that there will be a substantial number of trained mentors available to provide support to early career educators for years to come. Additionally, with state funding supporting educator mentorship, Colorado elevates professional growth through the field and ensures that advancement includes a spectrum of leadership roles that are not limited to administrative positions. By offering opportunities to be trained for mentorship, stipends for their time, and skills that can be applied to a broad range of leadership roles (instructional coach, content specialist, etc.), educators in the field are uplifted and their efforts are recognized with supplementary earnings, a valuable strategy for overall retention in the workforce.