

# Peer to Peer Best Practices

## A Study of Peer to Peer Programs in North Dakota, 2023

In our first phase of research, 13,295 articles were reviewed leading to a critical examination of 145 research articles studying comparable peer mentoring programs. In the second phase, interviews with graduated mentors, mentee families, and program leaders provided valuable insight into the Peer to Peer program in North Dakota schools. Finally, data was collected from five schools in North Dakota including teachers/staff/administrators and over 2,000 students.

### Making Sense of the Forest of Existing Knowledge



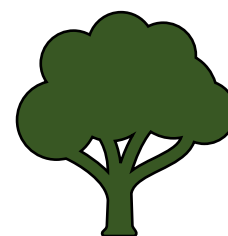
Peer mentoring intervention and instruction (PMII) programs vary in their delivery and goals. They share in common partnering peer mentors with students with disabilities, often in order to improve skills in at least one area.

- ◆ PMII programs are typically small in scope, working with few students and often focus on students with a specific disability or type of disability.
- ◆ PMII programs appear to promote peer relationships, student performance, and the development of competencies, such as social and academic skills.

### What We Learned from North Dakota Peer to Peer Programs

The Peer to Peer programs in North Dakota focus on modeling appropriate social behaviors, building friendships, developing leadership and communication skills, and promoting independence and self-advocacy. Using our data, we found...

- ◆ General education students reported their school tries to include everyone.
- ◆ Mentors reported perceived changes due to the program in their ability to advocate for themselves and others along with their communication and leadership skills. They reported gaining friendships through the program.
- ◆ Mentees reported perceived changes due to the program in their ability to try new things, independence, the number of friends they have, and their goal-setting. They report liking the teacher and the Peer to Peer program.
- ◆ Interviews with program leaders demonstrated that they are passionate about this program, they perceive schools as benefitting greatly from Peer to Peer, and there is strong community support behind the program. While there are similar program goals and perceived impact at all schools, there is quite a wide variation in program delivery.



### Growing Peer to Peer – Seeds for Future Programs



- ◆ Introduce clearer program guidelines while maintaining flexibility to meet student demographics and needs which may vary across time and school.
- ◆ Peer to Peer programs should clearly define the expectations for each role, including program heads/leaders, teachers, mentors, and mentees.
- ◆ Additional funding would likely enhance the program impact and the ability of new schools to begin Peer to Peer programs, considering the time commitment program leaders and aids contribute outside of the school day.
- ◆ Programs should consider additional ways to increase mentee agency and autonomy.
- ◆ Assessment of the program at all levels to ensure consistency between goals and impact would be beneficial. Surveys could be used to assess student outcomes and fidelity.

# Best Practices of Peer Mentoring

## Program Level

- Clear program description and goals
- Formalized program, mentor, and mentee expectations
- Established manual with activities, lesson plans, and curriculum
- Access to training for program coordinator or teacher
- Ongoing evaluation process to ensure program success
- Flexibility to meet grade and school needs

## Teacher Level

- Access to training to provide scaffolding to mentors
- Provide meaningful activities for students to create connections among mentors, mentees, and the school community
- Support learning opportunities to better understand disabilities
- Ongoing evaluation to ensure mentor and mentee success
- Flexibility to meet diverse student needs

## Mentor Level

- Agreement to expectations and commitment
- Utilization of ongoing training
- Collaboration with teacher and mentees to meet diverse needs
- Development of inclusivity and respect
- Demonstrate stronger leadership, social, and self-advocacy skills

## Mentee Level

- Agreement to expectations and commitment
- Individualized goal development
- Development of autonomy, agency, inclusivity, and respect
- Demonstrate stronger social, behavioral, and independent skills
- Opportunity to express and share skills collaboratively