

## Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

# CO-TEACHING

### WHAT IS CO-TEACHING?

Co-teaching or team teaching occurs when two or more certified professionals work together to teach a shared classroom of students. The team often consists of one general education teacher and one special education teacher. Co-teachers share responsibility for delivering instruction and assessing student learning. There are six general models for co-teaching in practice:

1. **One-Teach/One Observe**- One teacher leads the instruction and the other observes and collects data.
2. **One Teach/One assist**—One teacher actively teaches while the other teacher assists by moving around the classroom and providing individual support to students.
3. **Station teaching**—Students are separated into small group stations. Teachers provide instruction and support to the small groups.
4. **Parallel teaching**—Students are divided into two groups. Each instructor teaches one group of students. The instruction of the two groups occurs in parallel.
5. **Alternate teaching**—Similar to parallel teaching, students are divided into two groups, often one large group and one small group. The large group receives instruction and the small group receives alternate instruction.
6. **Team teaching**—This is the most fluid model. Both teachers instruct and support students alongside each other.



### WHY IS CO-TEACHING IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

- Co-teaching benefits all students in the classroom.
- Students receive the benefit of two teachers.
- Co-taught classes ensure students with special education services are receiving instruction in core content areas in the least restrictive environment.
- Teachers can collaborate and share teaching responsibility.

### IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Co-teaching success is built on the relationship between the teachers.
- Teachers are viewed as equals in the teaching partnership.
- Teachers must have dedicated time to plan together.
- Teachers should choose a co-teach model that best meets the needs of their students.
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## **CASE STUDY: CO-TEACHING** **Hidden River Middle School**

Hidden River Middle School has developed a strong PLC culture. As a part of this culture, our collective staff has built and continuously refines our comprehensive MTSS. We stress that supports across the tiered levels are a service not a place. Built into Tier 2, supplemental supports, are our co-taught classes.

One co-teacher speaks to co-teaching in relation to a strong PLC. Co-teaching requires classroom teachers to give up control of their classroom. Doing this involves a mind shift for classroom teachers. The PLC model also does to a degree, but inviting someone into your classroom as an equal partner can be difficult for teachers who have traditionally been in charge of what goes on in their four walls and it can be threatening at times to some people. I want classroom teachers to embrace the opportunity to learn from someone who has different experiences and two different teaching styles and gifts that are different than what they have. I learned so much from the teachers that I've co-taught with and it is worth the possible discomfort. You can't go into co-teaching thinking that you can be prepared for it because it's one of those things that you can learn about but until you experience it and that's when the learning really begins.

Co-teaching is very valuable, but co-teaching is limited because not every classroom has a co-teacher with a special education background. Therefore, another way that we meet the needs of all our kids, is that we share students with the other teachers in our grade level PLC. We share students during our MTSS tier two period, called hawk time which is 30 minutes long. We also do it during our full class periods. We determine which students need reteach or extra scaffolding, which need more practice, and which students need an extension lesson that goes beyond and then as needed we switch up the students. It is like a big fruit basket upset and it takes a bit of coordination figuring out who goes where and which teachers are going to teach what. We all take responsibility for all of the seventh graders and they are all our kids. So, it is worth the time that it takes to organize. Then, we have three separate lessons going on and it is incredibly powerful and the students feel empowered by it. Also, ideally, we will complete formative data analysis on students sharing two or three times within a unit. We never make any educational decisions without the input of our team. We all have our own teaching styles, and we keep those, but we do our best to leverage each teacher's strengths to meet the needs of all the students. I would say collaboration is essential to this whole process and it takes some getting used to but it is very much worth the time.

Another co-teacher shares more on establishing parity and sharing responsibilities. I have been co-teaching four years now. The number one thing that helps support students on this continuum of services is going to be through co-teaching and co-planning. When we look at co-teaching, we need to look at it as a partnership and oftentimes in training, it's referred to as a marriage, where inside of marriage, you need to build trust, you need to cultivate a relationship and an understanding and respect for one another. When you do this, you are able to provide that cohesive instruction and a really warm and inviting environment for your students. This work takes time, flexibility and an open mind towards another person's ideas and it definitely does not happen overnight. It is a process. Co-planning is really essential. Co-planning is actually where that trust and strength of the co-teaching relationship starts. So ideally co-planning would be built into your master schedule where teachers could have common prep time in order to do this co-planning, but we understand that is not always the case. In our building we have two special education teachers. One teaches Language Arts and I teach math. We have three grade levels, and we have multiple teachers we work with. Therefore, it is impossible for us to have the exact same prep with all of these teachers therefore we have to get creative which goes back to the flexibility piece. Others will also mention the willingness to give up your classroom for some general education teachers. Just like in a marriage, where somebody where you are going to live together inside of a house in co-teaching, you're going to want shared spaces inside your classroom. This could be two teachers, having two desks in the room. It could be putting both names on the doors so all walking by and coming in know there are two teachers in this class. Sharing an understanding of our shared roles and responsibilities goes toward establishing parity. Presenting to students that they have two teachers in the room shows them they have two teachers that they can go to for questions and help. In terms of instruction, we have a team-teaching approach. It may not always be the general education teacher taking the lead on the instruction. We each take turns taking the instructional lead and supporting. We share all of the roles and responsibilities in the classroom. Celebrating all student growth is probably one of the most powerful successful things that we do as teachers and as a building. It is really important to remember that co-teaching takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of patience. But it is well worth the effort and the journey when you watch that gap close through your very highly intentional instruction and models and teamwork.

## RESOURCES

1. **Cook, L & Friend, M.** (1995, November). Co-Teaching: Guidelines for Creating Effective Practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, Vol 28(3), 1-16.
2. **Murawski, Wendy & Swanson, H..** (2001). *A Meta-Analysis of Co-Teaching Research. Remedial and Special Education - REM SPEC EDUC.* 22. 258-267.
3. **Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E. and Mcculley, L.** (2012), Collaborative models of instruction: The empirical foundations of inclusion and co-teaching. *Psychol. Schs.*, 49: 498-510.