



Co-Teaching

Fact Sheet

Definition

Co-teaching, according to *WV Policy 2419: Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities*, is defined as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space. Co-taught classrooms include shared instructional responsibilities between the special and general educators. Co-teaching teams work together to plan, organize, instruct, and assess the same group of students.

Why Co-Teaching

Federal law clearly states that a student with special needs has the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004) mandates the provision of FAPE in the least restrictive environment. Ideally, this would be the general education classroom.

As co-teachers, a general and a special education teacher will plan, organize, instruct, and assess the same group of students. Co-teaching will support academic diversity in the general classroom and provide all students with access to the county and state curriculum. Co-teaching fosters:

- Specialized instruction;
- Increased options for flexible grouping of students;
- Enhanced collaboration opportunities for the teachers;
- Collaboration to help problem-solve;
- Flexibility to try things not able to be done alone;
- Collaboration in classroom and lesson preparation;
- Sharing of classroom management responsibilities;
- Diversity and size of classrooms;
- More opportunities for small group and one-to-one learning;
- Delivery of a more energetic, creative lesson;
- The higher instructional intensity and differentiated instruction;

- Reduction of the negative stigma associated with pull-out programs; and
- Feeling of connectedness for students with disabilities.

Other benefits of co-teaching include:

- Reduced student/teacher ratio;
- Increased instructional options for all students;
- Diversity of instructional styles;
- Increased student engagement time; and
- Higher student participation levels.

Four Absolutes of Co-Teaching

Four absolutes must be in place to ensure future success in reaching the fullest potential of co-teaching.

1. Professional Working Relationships

Professional working relationships are at the very heart of a successful co-teaching classroom. Co-teaching pairs must take time to build positive working relationships and open communication. Co-teaching is much more than content knowledge and useful strategies. Co-teaching is undoubtedly more than two teachers teaching in the same room. Co-teaching is two professionals working together to grow and enhance the learning experience of a group of children. Co-teaching is the mending of two great educators by communicating and delivering effective models through thoughtful planning and intentional reflection.

2. Co-Planning

Effective planning in a co-teaching setting goes beyond procedures and content selection in a class. Co-planning allows both teachers to lend their areas of expertise and training to meet the needs of the learners best. Planning consists of determining when to plan, exchanging teaching materials before planning time, keeping an open mind to new ideas, and having direction for the next planning session. Being intentional about planning means setting time aside to review lesson ideas, and formative assessment drive the plans.



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3. Monitoring

Monitoring can refer to the school administration being deliberate in observing and coaching co-teaching pairs. However, much of the monitoring process rests with the co-teaching teams. Co-teachers will regularly debrief and honestly discuss the successes, as well as challenges of the co-taught lessons. To determine if:

- Students achieve the learning goals of the lessons;
- Co-teachers use excellent communication skills;
- Lessons include various models of delivery; and
- Lessons adjusted to improve student outcomes.

4. Scheduling

Scheduling students with disabilities first is identified as a best practice to ensure teachers have collaborative time in meeting student goals. Special educators need to make sure the schedule structure addresses the learning goals of a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Steps to Implement the Absolutes of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching can be a productive experience when on-going planning and communication are in place beginning on day one. Here are six helpful steps when preparing for a co-teaching experience.

1. Establish rapport.

The co-teaching team needs to establish a relationship even before the students enter the building. Get to know each other on a personal level. Co-teaching teams will typically teach together for at least an entire year or longer. Start to determine particular commonalities.

When the co-teaching teams have a healthy relationship and rapport with each other, the students feel more comfortable in the classroom. Students can sense tension as well as harmony within the learning environment. A positive

relationship will help minimize misunderstandings and motivate the team to resolve problems before they escalate.

2. Identify teaching styles and use them to create a cohesive classroom.

Determine who loves doing things like experiments or using manipulatives. How are the experiments completed and manipulatives used in the class? How are student behaviors managed? What are the teachers' discipline methods? Examine instructional and discipline styles so the team can combine the best of both teachers' techniques to create a cohesive classroom. Find a balance that makes everyone comfortable. When planning lessons together, use the varying styles to complement one another and thus enhance the experiences and the delivery of instruction. Creating a cohesive classroom with consistent expectations occurs when both teachers are on the same page with instruction and discipline styles.

3. Discuss strengths and weaknesses.

How can each instructor's strengths and weaknesses be utilized? An excellent way to do this is to have co-teaching teams make a list of strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes. Then take the lists, compare them, and highlight the strengths that are dominant for one teacher and allow that person to be the lead teacher in those areas. Differentiate instruction using these strengths to meet the needs of a larger group allowing for individualized instruction.

4. Discuss the Individualized Education Program and content-related education goals.

To create an Individualized Education Program (IEP), the special educator must involve the general educator in the special education process. Students in special education are the responsibility of both educators, so the general educator must be informed about the IEP for each student. Otherwise, the two teachers cannot effectively execute the plans.



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It is also essential to discuss modifications and accommodations, as well as the goals and objectives to ensure student success in the classroom. Both teachers should work together to meet student goals and ensure adequate progress.

In the same way, the general education teacher should discuss with the special education teacher his or her goals for the students, as the general education students are the responsibility of the special education teacher as well. Both educators should be addressing the goals, objectives, and mandatory curriculum for that grade level for all students.

5. Formulate a plan of action and act as a unified team.

Decisions are made continuously throughout the year, by formulating a plan of action at the beginning of the year, disruptions will be minimal. Consider the following items in a plan of action:

- Scheduling;
- Expected classroom behaviors;
- Classroom procedures, such as classwork, homework policies and turning in work;
- Consequences of not following rules and procedures;
- Grading; and
- Communication between home and school.

Talk about what will be acceptable behavior in the classroom as well as how each teacher will respond to actions that are not acceptable. Be consistent when dealing with parents and meet as a team for conferences. Determine teacher roles in advance so that teachers send a common message and do not contradict each other or foster misunderstandings during the meeting.

6. Take risks and grow.

A beautiful aspect of co-teaching is that it allows the team to take risks; it will enable teachers to learn from each other and grow as professionals. When teachers take risks in instruction, co-teaching

provides a safety net. When there is only one teacher in the room, and an activity fails, the teacher often must stop and move on and then analyze later why it fell apart, without the assistance of someone else in the room observing the lesson. However, with the other teacher in the class, the activity can be supported and redirected when it does not go as planned.

What Co-Teaching is NOT

Simply dividing the tasks and responsibilities among two people. For example, co-teaching is NOT:

- One person teaching one subject followed by another who teaches a different topic.
- One person teaching one subject while another person prepares instructional materials at the copier or corrects student papers in the teachers' lounge.
- One person teaching while the other sits and watches.
- One person's ideas prevail regarding what to teach and how to teach it.
- Someone is simply assigned to act as a tutor or assistant.

Co-Teaching is a way:

- To build more reliable connections between teachers and students;
- To provide both support and professional development for cooperating teachers;
- To better meet preK-12 student needs;
- For teachers to enhance their communication and collaboration skills; and
- For teachers to build strong relationships.

Models of Co-Teaching Delivery

Lead and Support

One teacher leads, and another offers assistance and support to individuals or small groups. In this role, planning must occur by both teachers, but typically one teacher plans for the lesson content, while the other does specific planning for students' learning or behavioral needs.

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Station Teaching Model

Students are divided into heterogeneous groups and work at classroom stations with each teacher. Then, in the middle of the period or the next day, the students switch to the other station. In this model, both teachers individually develop the content of their stations.

Parallel Teaching Model

Teachers jointly plan instruction, but each may deliver it to half the class or small groups. This type of model typically requires joint planning time to ensure that as teachers work in their separate groups, they are delivering content in the same way.

Alternative Teaching Model

One teacher works with a small group of students to pre-teach, re-teach, supplement, or enrich instruction, while the other teacher instructs the large group. This type of co-teaching requires more planning time to ensure completion of the logistics of pre-teaching or re-teaching; also, the teachers must have similar content knowledge for one teacher to take a group and re-teach or pre-teach.

Team Teaching/Duet Model

Both teachers share the planning and instruction of students in a coordinated fashion. In this type of joint planning time, equal knowledge of the content, a shared philosophy, and commitment to all students in the class are critical. Many times, teams may not start with this type of format, but over time they can effectively move to this type of co-teaching if they have continuity in working together.

Documentation of Co-Teaching

Document specialized instruction provided to an eligible student within a co-taught general education classroom in the special education services section of the IEP as a General Education Environment (GEE) service. Base the extent and frequency of this service on the number of minutes per week that the special education teacher will be

providing specialized instruction within the co-taught classroom.

The Supplementary Documentation Checklist Form, located in the resources section of the Online IEP, provides general educators with an option for documenting the delivery of services listed in the supplementary aids and services section of the IEP. The form contains the student's supplemental services, including the location where those services are required; the extent/frequency of each service; and the initiation and duration dates. It also provides a gridded calendar chart for documenting the dates of service provision.

The information in this document was developed from the following resources:

Co-Teaching Solutions

<http://www.coteachsolutions.com/>

National Education Association

<http://www.nea.org/tools/6-steps-to-successful-co-teaching.html>

University of Kansas

http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/?q=collaboration/cooperative_teaching/teacher_tools/types_of_co_teaching

St. Cloud State University

<https://www.stcloudstate.edu/soe/coteaching/>

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West Virginia Department of Education

<https://wvde.us/special-education/initiatives/co-teaching/>

