

# Co-Teaching

A How-To Guide: Guidelines for Co-Teaching in Texas

A collaborative project of the Texas Education Agency and the Statewide Access to the General Curriculum Network



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**The Statewide AGC Network, including the Preschool LRE Specialists**

**Ruth Ahrens-Hurd**, Special Education Teacher, Northside ISD

**Sharon Beam**, General Education Teacher, San Angelo ISD

**Jeanie Bell**, AGC Specialist, ESC-5

**John Bond**, Coordinator/DHH AGC Lead, ESC-20

**Cheryl Bricken**, AGC Specialist, ESC-15

**Kathy Callaway**, General Education Teacher, Roundrock ISD

**Paul Cantu**, Coordinator, North East ISD

**Zandra Celis-Hardin**, Special Education Teacher, Alamo Heights ISD

**Margaret Christen**, Manager, Federal Policies/State Programs, TEA

**Billy Costello**, Vice Principal, San Angelo ISD

**Sherry Cragen**, AGC Specialist, ESC-12

**Mike Desparrios**, AGC Specialist, ESC-18

**Jim Gonzales**, AGC Specialist, ESC-13

**Dottie Goodman**, Program Specialist, TEA

**Kimberly Grona**, Special Education Teacher, Roundrock ISD

**Traci Hightower**, General Education Teacher, Austin ISD

**Kris Holliday**, Special Education Director, Alamo Heights ISD

**Barbara Kaatz**, Program Specialist, TEA

**Lisa Kirby**, AGC Specialist, ESC-20

**Dr. Judith Moening**, Special Education Director, North East ISD

**Kristi Pritchett**, General Education Teacher, Killeen ISD

**Vicki Rainwater**, AGC Specialist, ESC-1

**Kay Wagner**, Special Education Teacher, San Angelo ISD

**Paul Watson**, Parent/CAC Member/TCIP AGC Member

**Misti Wetzels**, Special Education Teacher, Killeen ISD

**Dawn White**, Coordinator/AGC State Lead, ESC-20

**Robin White**, Preschool/PPCD Specialist/Preschool LRE State Lead, ESC-20

**Kelly Woodiel**, Transition Specialist, ESC-20

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# How to Use this Document

The intent of this document is to provide non-regulatory guidance to LEAs regarding setting up and implementing effective co-teaching models for delivery of specially designed instruction to students who are eligible for special education services. The document is organized with the intent that LEAs can use it in part or in its entirety. Accordingly, some information is repeated in multiple sections of the document.

The organization of the document, as detailed in the Table of Contents, is as follows:

**Introduction:** Establishes a common vocabulary, defines co-teaching, and describes the six co-teaching approaches;

**Guidelines for Administrators: Considerations for Beginning a District-Wide Co-Teach Program:** Provides information for district-level administrators on setting up and implementing a co-teach program;

**Guidelines for Campus Administrators: Considerations for Beginning a Campus Co-Teach Program:** Provides information for campus-level administrators on setting up and implementing a co-teach program; and

**Guidelines for Teachers: Considerations for Implementing Co-Teaching in Your Classroom:** Provides information for classroom teachers on planning and implementing an effective co-teach program.

Each section is independent and can be read as a stand-alone section; links to previous sections are provided where appropriate.



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# Introduction

As educational personnel strive to meet state and federal accountability mandates to improve the achievement of students with disabilities, schools are exploring various inclusive service delivery models to fulfill the needs of diverse learners. The co-teach model is one effective model allowing general and special educators to differentiate and deliver instruction with assurances that all students have full access to the grade-level expectations of the general curriculum. While all schools must have inclusion services as part of their continuum of special education services, no school is required to choose co-teaching as one of or as their only inclusive service delivery model. The purpose of this document is to help districts and schools establish a common understanding of various co-teaching configurations and to explain considerations necessary to implement and evaluate an effective co-teaching program.



## **A Common Vocabulary: Inclusion, Co-Teaching, Access to the General Curriculum**

**Although educators use co-teaching and inclusion synonymously, they are actually two very distinct concepts. The following definitions provide a common understanding of terminology.**

***Inclusion is a belief system that values diversity and fosters a shared responsibility to help all students to reach their potential.***

According to Villa and Thousand (2005, p.3) an inclusive belief system requires schools to create and provide “whatever is necessary to ensure that all students have access to meaningful learning. It does not require students to possess any particular set of skills or abilities as a prerequisite to belonging.” In inclusive environments, placement considerations and decisions regarding the delivery of supplementary aids and services are based on student data to assure that the needs of the student are the primary consideration. Highly inclusive schools may offer some services in separate settings. Schools that describe themselves as having “full inclusion” are often referring to *where students sit* rather than to the beliefs of the educators providing services.

***Co-teaching is a “service delivery option, a way to provide students with disabilities or other special needs the special instruction to which they are entitled while ensuring that they can access the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment...[It] is one way that students in inclusive schools may receive their services” (Friend, 2008, pp. 12-13).***

During instruction, educators assume different roles as they move between different co-teaching configurations to meet specific learning objectives and student needs efficiently.

***Access to the general curriculum is a legal requirement that emphasizes the importance of aligning instructional expectations with enrolled grade level content standards mandated of all students.***

For students who are enrolled in Pre-K, content standards are Pre-K Guidelines or the locally adopted Pre-K curriculum; for students enrolled in grades K-12, content standards are Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). In some instances, students with disabilities require modifications and/or accommodations to demonstrate proficiency or to develop foundational skills aligned with the grade-level standards. *Access to the general curriculum* means more than just being present in a general education setting; it literally means *accessing* the same curriculum other students access, regardless of disability.

## Definition of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is a learning environment in which two or more certified professionals share the responsibility of lesson planning, delivery of instruction, and progress monitoring for all students assigned to their classroom. As a team, these professionals share the same physical classroom space, collaboratively make instructional decisions, and share the responsibility of student accountability (Friend, 2008, p. 4). Co-teachers share a common belief that each partner has a unique expertise and perspective that enriches the learning experience; together they provide opportunities for students to learn from two or more people who may have different ways of thinking or teaching. They work together to achieve common, agreed-upon goals. Paraprofessionals are not included in the definition of co-teaching because their roles are to provide instructional support. The paraprofessional is not accountable for student achievement and is not equal in licensure as certified professionals.

### Co-Teaching is NOT

- **Teachers teaching alternating subjects;**
- **One person teaching while the other makes materials or grades student work;**
- **One person teaching a lesson while the others sit, stand, and watch without function or assignment;**
- **When one person's ideas determine what or how something should be taught; or**
- **One person acting as a tutor.**

Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2004, p. 2)

## Purpose of Co-Teaching

Today's classrooms have students with a diverse range of abilities and needs that bring unique challenges to teaching in a standards-based learning environment. Co-teaching brings together two or more certified/licensed professionals who can use their expertise to design rigorous learning experiences tailored to meet the unique needs of all students. For example, general educators may have specific expertise in the areas of curriculum and instruction, classroom management, knowledge of typical students, and instructional pacing. Special educators may have additional expertise in the areas of differentiating instruction, monitoring progress, understanding learning processes, and teaching for mastery.

Just as students have different learning preferences, teachers have different teaching styles.

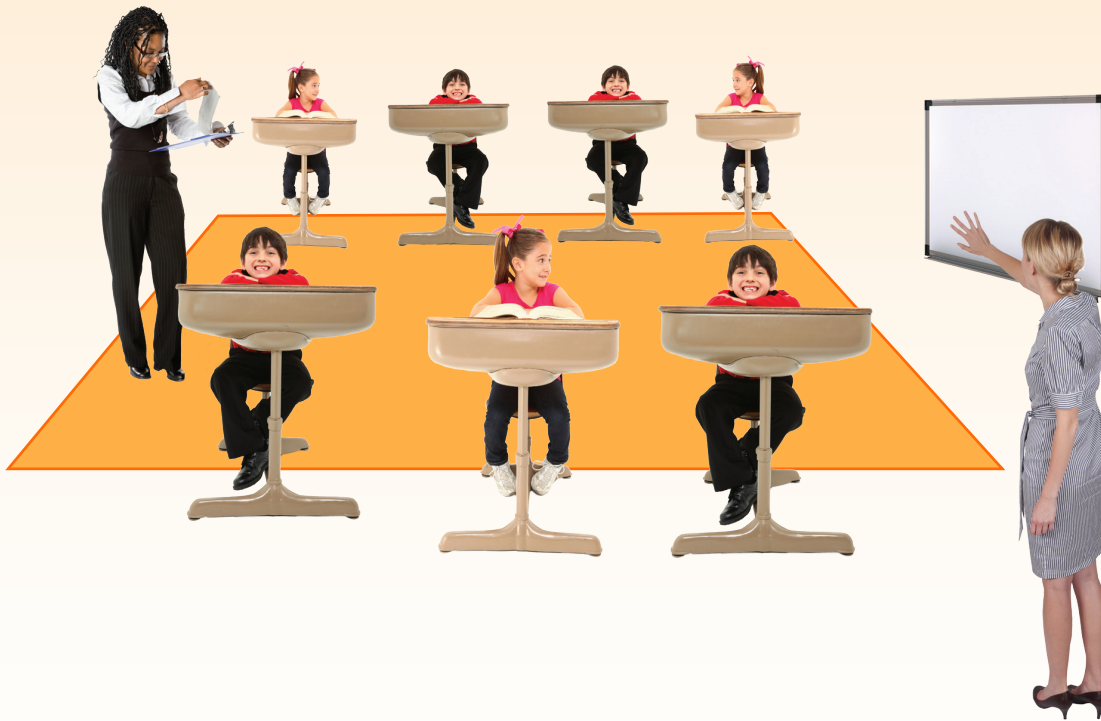
Co-teaching provides students with opportunities to learn in environments that model collaboration, demonstrate respect for different perspectives, and utilize a process for building on each other's strengths to meet a common goal. In effective co-teaching classrooms, teachers model and support these skills to create collaborative learning environments that are results-driven and standards-based.



## Six Co-Teaching Approaches

Co-teaching can look different from classroom to classroom. As co-teachers compare student needs and abilities to the instructional objective for a particular lesson, they must decide the best way to structure both teaching and learning. Friend and Cook (2010) identify six arrangements that are commonly found in co-teach settings:

### 1. One Teaching, One Observing



Because student decisions should be based on data, **One Teaching, One Observing** allows one teacher to provide instruction while the other collects data on the students' academic, behavioral, or social skills. This observational data can be used to inform instruction and document student progress. This model allows the teachers to have valuable data to analyze in determining future lessons and teaching strategies.

Online resources for curriculum based measurement include:

- Curriculum Based Measurement: A Manual for Teachers <http://www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfdocs/cbaManual.pdf>; and
- The National Center on Response to Intervention Curriculum Based Measurement Modules [http://www.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1172&Itemid=150](http://www.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1172&Itemid=150).

## 2. Station Teaching



**Station Teaching** allows teachers to work with small groups. Teachers begin by dividing the content into three segments and grouping students so that one-third of the students begin with each part of the content. Two groups are teacher-led and the third group works independently. During the lesson, the students rotate through the “stations” until they complete all three sections of the content. This approach is beneficial because it allows teachers to create small group activities that are responsive to individual needs.

### 3. Parallel Teaching



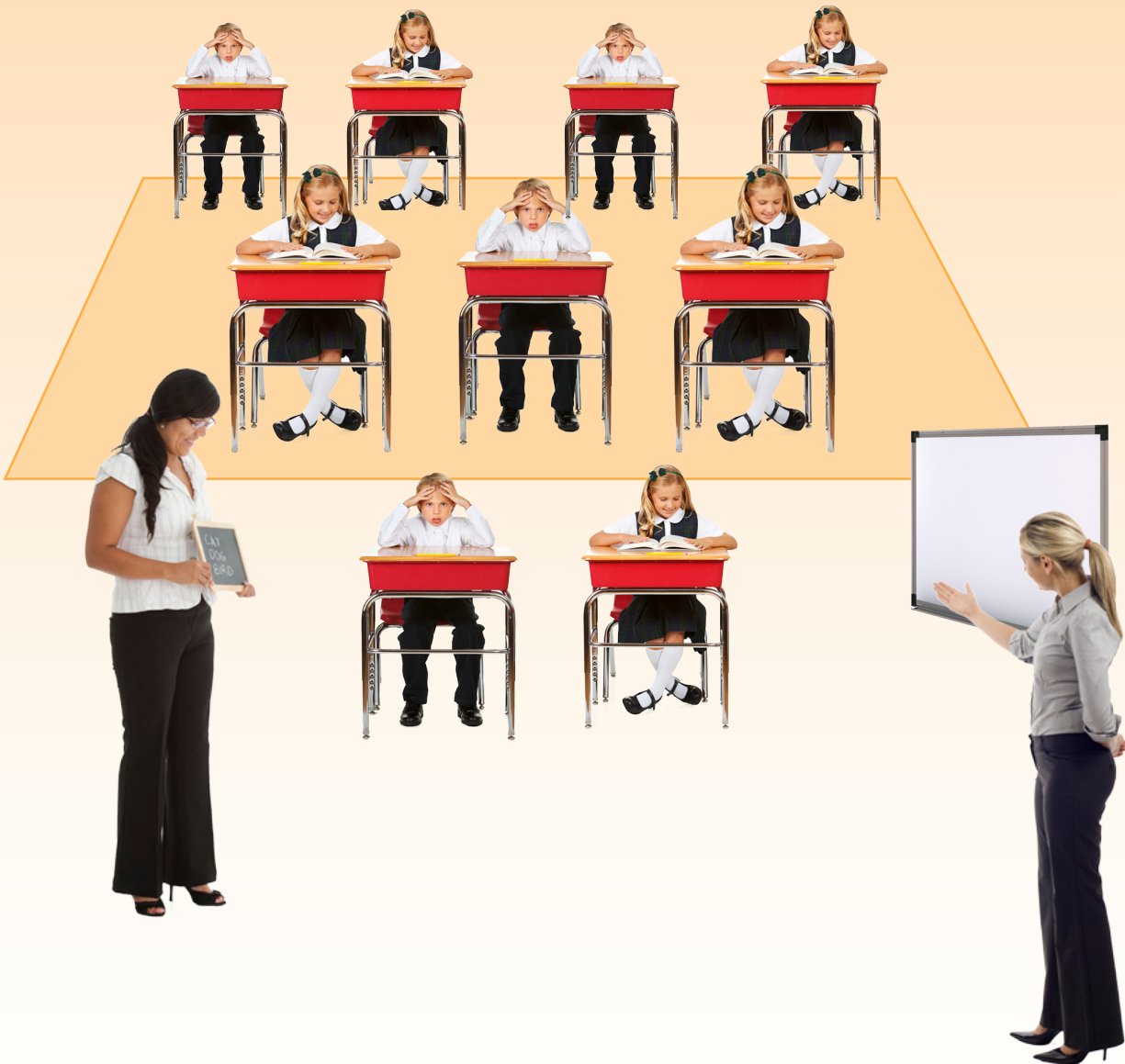
**Parallel Teaching** provides opportunities for teachers to maximize participation and minimize behavior problems. When teachers use this approach, they divide the class in half and lead instruction with both groups. In this approach, teachers form groups to maximize learning. Student grouping should be flexible and based on students' needs in relation to expectation(s) being taught. Students benefit from working in smaller groups and receiving instruction from only one of the teachers.

## 4. Alternative Teaching



**Alternative Teaching** allows teachers to target the unique needs of a specific group of students by using student data to create an alternative lesson. During instruction, one teacher manages the large group while the other teacher delivers an alternate lesson, or the same lesson with alternate materials or approaches, to a small group of students for a specific instructional purpose.

## 5. Teaming



Teachers using **Teaming** share the responsibility of leading instruction. While their roles may shift throughout the lesson, the key characteristic is that “both teachers are fully engaged in the delivery of the core instruction” (Friend, 2008).

## 6. One Teaching, One Assisting



**One Teaching, One Assisting** places one teacher in the lead role while the other functions as a support in the classroom. The teacher in the supportive role monitors student work, addresses behavior issues, manages materials, and assists with student questions. *Teachers must use caution when using this approach to avoid a learning environment in which the general educator provides all instruction and the special educator serves as an assistant.* According to Friend (2008, p. 17), “professionals should be actively involved in all aspects of the instructional process . . . they should *not* be functioning like paraprofessionals.” While there may be instances in which this approach may meet an immediate student need, over-use can negatively affect the collaborative benefits that co-teaching provides.

***As teachers begin to establish co-teaching relationships, they tend to start with approaches that involve less coordination between team members (i.e., parallel, one assist). Gradually, as co-teaching skills and relationships strengthen, teachers begin to incorporate more approaches based on students’ needs and instructional content requirements. The successful implementation of co-teaching requires time, coordination, and trust.***

# Guidelines for Administrators: Considerations for Beginning a District-Wide Co-Teach Program

*Many districts have elected to implement co-teaching district-wide to maintain a consistent program across campuses. This is helpful when a student moves from one campus attendance zone to another or when a student changes campuses based on promotion. Some districts include co-teaching in their district improvement plans. When beginning or refining a district-wide co-teach program, there are several key components that must be considered.*

## The Target Population

While co-teaching is one service delivery option for providing in-class support as required in IEPs of students receiving special education services, research shows it is beneficial for many other groups of students. Before beginning a district-wide co-teach program, districts will need to consider whether their co-teach program will be exclusively focused on meeting the needs of students who receive special education services or if the co-teach program will also be targeting other “at-risk” populations and/or struggling learners such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), Migrant, or 504 students. The program could be designed to include the general population, students with behavioral challenges, students with severe cognitive impairments who qualify for a state alternate assessment, and/or students who are identified as Gifted/Talented. Co-teaching is appropriate for many different populations, not just for students who have disabilities or who are identified as learning disabled (LD).

## Initial Program Development

Professional development in co-teaching for participating teachers and all stakeholders prior to the implementation of the program is essential. Professional development should include co-teaching “non-negotiables” and information specific to how your district has decided to implement co-teaching, such as modifications for teacher evaluations that address co-teaching. As with any new program, a full implementation of a mature district-wide co-teaching program may take three to five years.

## Professional Development for Campus Administrators

Campus administrators must have a strong understanding of the co-teaching model because they are responsible for overseeing day-to-day implementation, addressing program challenges, and evaluating co-teach partners. Principals need to know what questions to ask in interviews in order to identify teachers who understand and support the model. They also need training on creating a campus schedule that supports co-teaching, and evaluating effective classroom implementation.

Professional development for administrators should include information on conducting [walk-throughs](#) and formal appraisals in a co-teaching model. For example, issues that need to be addressed include (a) what do evaluations look like with two professionals in the classroom, especially if the two professionals have two different appraisers and (b) what options are available for evaluation in a co-teach environment. (For example, is it acceptable for two different appraisers to observe two teachers and one lesson?) To provide meaningful data, the evaluation must take place in an authentic co-teaching environment. Campus

administrators need to have an understanding of what good co-teaching looks like (not “one model,” but what structures should be in place) in order to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the program in the classroom. Additionally, districts must have a remediation plan for co-teaching. If the authentic co-teaching appraisal determines that one or both professionals are struggling with implementation of co-teaching, what remediation and/or professional development will be available to them?

Effective training for administrators should be sustained and consistent to ensure accountability not only in successfully leading a campus to implementation of a quality co-teaching program but also in refining their skills so that they are equipped to maintain the program. To ensure consistency and structure, professional development on the co-teaching model must be included in new administrator orientation, leadership academies, or administrative retreats.

## **Professional Development for District Staff**

Effective professional development for teachers who will be implementing co-teaching is critical to a quality program. Professional development topics should begin with an awareness that co-teaching is a district expectation and that all teachers will likely participate at some point, even if not immediately and even if not every year. It also needs to include information on relationship-building for those in a co-teaching partnership, and plans for addressing teacher needs, such as including a forum for sharing concerns and successes. Districts might consider including a mentoring program for new co-teachers.

Professional development for teachers also should include training on multiple approaches to co-teaching and the process for individualizing and blending various models to fit student needs and staffing configurations.

In an exemplary co-teaching program, co-teachers attend training together to provide opportunities for shared learning and team-building. Appropriate co-teaching professional development focuses on co-teaching strategies, relationships, curriculum, accommodations, modifications, differentiated instruction, and universal design for learning.

It is imperative that other relevant district staff (Curriculum Director, Special Education Supervisors/ Coordinators, Related Services Personnel, Supervisors, etc.) receive an orientation to co-teaching and its components, especially if they will be involved in supervising staff participating in co-teaching.

Curriculum development within the district should include co-teaching and should follow the universal design model to provide differentiated instruction and access to tools/accommodations for all learners, regardless of the presence or absence of a disability. Curriculum design should include supplementary aids and services available to assist students with different learning needs in accessing this curriculum.

In summary, the professional development for staff should be consistent across the district and include all professional staff members, regardless of their direct involvement with co-teaching implementation. If possible, paraprofessionals working in co-teaching settings should also be included. Effective professional development serves to develop a common vocabulary for and understanding of co-teaching with common expectations for each person’s role in co-teaching. Many of these pieces can be imbedded into other district/ campus trainings throughout the school year.

## **Integration of Co-Teaching into District Documents**

To be successfully implemented, co-teaching must be integrated into district documents such as district and campus improvement plans; teacher evaluation tools, such as walk-through and formal observation forms; and substitute teacher information for co-teach classrooms (See Figure 1).



## Figure 1: Substitute Teachers and Co-Teaching

### ***Have you thought about the role of a substitute teacher in a co-taught classroom?***

If you're fortunate enough to work in a locale where the same individuals substitute in a school on a regular basis and are familiar with school programs and services, preparing for substitutes may not be a serious issue. However, if you are usually not sure who might be the substitute teacher, you should clarify what occurs in the co-taught class and what the substitute teacher should expect.

#### ***For general education teachers...***

- How do your plans for substitute teachers clearly explain that co-teaching occurs in your classroom?
- What would you expect a substitute teacher to do during the co-taught class? Should the substitute have primary responsibility for the class or step back and have the special education teacher take the lead?
- Should the substitute teacher work on other preparation tasks or grading instead of trying to actively contribute during a lesson when a special education teacher is available to teach the class? How is this information communicated to the substitute teacher?

#### ***For special education teachers...***

- Do your plans for substitute teachers clearly explain that co-teaching occurs as part of the services you provide to students?
- Is it clear from your plans where in the school the substitute teacher should be for each instructional period or segment of the school day? Which classes or parts of the day are co-taught versus instruction in a separate setting?
- What is the expectation for the substitute teacher in the co-taught classes? What arrangement have you made in advance with the general education teacher concerning the role of a special education substitute teacher?

#### ***For your school....***

- Is co-teaching addressed in the packet of information substitute teachers receive about the school? What information should be included?
- How could your school develop standard policies for addressing the topic of substitute teachers and the co-teaching program?

The district needs to ensure that information about co-teaching exists on its website in multiple locations or is linked to a central area from multiple locations on the website. Co-teaching should not be listed solely under “Special Education,” even if students who receive special education services are the target population identified by the district. The belief that all students have the ability to learn is the core of co-teaching. Co-teaching creates a setting that facilitates learning for all and could be reflected in the district’s value/mission statement.

## Remediation for Struggling Teachers

With implementation of a district-wide co-teaching model, the district needs to consider how it will handle teachers who are struggling both in and outside of a co-teach setting. While struggling teachers could certainly benefit from working with a quality veteran teacher, using co-teaching as remediation generally will not help build a culture that supports the value of co-teaching.

For struggling teachers in a co-teach setting, the district needs to consider how to provide remediation if formal observation shows the teacher is not successfully implementing co-teaching. Will these teachers be given additional professional development? If so, what type of professional development will be required and who will provide it? What exactly is the remediation plan? How will accountability be built into this plan?

## Evaluation of Co-Teaching

For districts electing to adopt co-teaching district-wide, evaluation must be addressed at several different layers. In addition to formal evaluations and walk-throughs of teachers implementing co-teaching, the district must determine how co-teaching will be integrated into the evaluation of current campus administrators and into the interview process for new administrators. For co-teaching to reach its full potential, principals must understand that effective co-teaching involves more than sending teachers to a one-time training and expecting successful implementation without the necessary resources and supports. Administrators must be held accountable for the effectiveness of co-teaching on their campuses, including how successful they have been in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating co-teaching.

Evaluation of student outcomes as demonstrated through traditional data and student-based evidence of progress is important in determining the success of the co-teaching program. In addition to traditional grades, IEP progress reports, and state assessment results, student-based evidence of progress includes data such as:

- instructional settings (looking at whether students are in less restrictive settings than before co-teaching was implemented);
- results of formative assessments, such as benchmark tests (not just analyzing traditional grades, IEP progress reports, and state assessment results);
- parent responses to co-teaching;
- community responses to co-teaching; and
- Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results and data.

## Figure 2: Evaluating a Co-Teaching Program



### Students

- Formative and summative assessments of achievement
- Behavior and attendance
- Perceptions



### Professional and Other Staff Members

- Classroom observations
- Perceptions



### Parents and Community Members

- Perceptions

## Figure 3: District Considerations for Co-Teaching

***Co-teaching is most successful when it is implemented with fidelity, integrated into school and district long-term plans, and supported through professional development and accountability strategies. Here are questions regarding co-teaching to consider at the district level.***

1. How have expectations for co-teaching been articulated at the district level? What formal policies and procedures exist related to co-teaching? What policies and procedures should be approved to foster sustainability for co-teaching?
2. To what extent have district-level personnel received professional development about co-teaching? (Note: This question pertains to general education as well as special education leaders.)
3. What supports has the district offered to create a viable infrastructure for co-teaching (e.g., assistance in scheduling; clarification of service delivery options)?
4. How has co-teaching been integrated into options related to strategic and school improvement planning?
5. How are resources allocated to support co-teaching (e.g. funding for professional development, periodic common planning time for co-teachers, data collection and aggregation, and so on)?
6. How is co-teaching presented in district materials and media (e.g., district website, student handbooks, parent communication)?
7. How is co-teaching part of the interview and hiring practices of the district?
8. How are site administrators accountable for co-teaching implementation integrity?
9. How is co-teaching incorporated into teacher evaluation protocols and procedures?
10. How is co-teaching incorporated into principal and other site administrator evaluation protocols and procedures?
11. How is essential information about co-teaching disseminated to site administrators, teachers, and others?
12. What data are reported to the district in order to determine the impact of co-teaching on key student outcomes?

**Figure 4: Phases for District Implementation of Co-Teaching**

## Preparation for Co-Teaching

### Phase 1

- Identify target population
- Consider populations which may benefit from co-teaching (i.e. students with disabilities, English language learners, Gifted/Talented, etc.)

### Phase 2

- Recruit schools and participants for early implementation
- Provide supports for early implementors

### Phase 3

- Provide professional development for district and site administrators
- Provide professional development for teachers and other staff

## Implementation of Co-Teaching

### Phase 4

- Continue supports for early implementors
- Check fidelity of implementation
- Continue needed professional development

### Phase 5

- Provide assistance for struggling co-teaching
- Gradually expand co-teaching within schools and across the district

### Phase 6

- Evaluate co-teaching program effectiveness using student achievement outcomes and plan revisions
- Gather additional evaluation data, including other measures related to students and perceptions of stakeholders

## Guidelines for Campus Administrators:

# Considerations for Beginning a Campus Co-Teach Program

***While many of the considerations for beginning a campus co-teaching program are the same as the considerations for a district-wide program, it is here that issues specific to a campus are discussed. Therefore, the campus considerations are inclusive of the pieces in the district-wide considerations, and are extended here.***

## Personnel Pairings

In initial implementation of a co-teaching program, as a standard of practice, campus administrators often begin with volunteers and work toward including additional staff. From the onset, it is very important to exercise prudence when pairing personnel in a co-teaching relationship. For co-teaching to be successful, staff members must be willing to plan and work together regularly to meet the needs of their students; therefore, it is essential that careful consideration be given to the pairing of personnel. For long-term success, it is important that all staff members understand that co-teaching is the expected standard practice.

It is also essential to consider the individual skills of the personnel who are initially assigned to co-teaching. Teachers assigned to this environment should have the necessary instructional skills because students who need co-teaching are often those with the most diverse needs. Teachers with limited experience may not be the best match for a co-teaching program.

Personnel selected for co-teaching should attend specific professional development together. Joint training of co-teaching partners should include professional relationship building with imbedded negotiation skills and core concepts related to vocabulary and co-teaching approaches. To facilitate efficient professional development, pre-planning packets with discussion points can be prepared to supplement the formal training. Campuses may also choose to provide training on building a collaborative campus culture. When one or both teachers are new to co-teaching, both should attend training together in order to have a shared understanding of co-teaching and build their collaborative relationship.

Other important aspects of co-teaching training are how to resolve disagreements in the co-teaching setting and what steps to take when agreement cannot be reached. Campus-specific procedures regarding conflict management and follow-up resources/personnel must be available to co-teaching partners. Campus staff should also consider at what point continuous or serious disagreements are a supervisory issue and how unresolved conflicts will be handled.

## Figure 5: Pairing of Co-Teaching Personnel Using Strengths

*It is important to understand that while each person has a unique contribution, there also is overlap. The goal in co-teaching is to blend the strengths, draw on the overlap, learn from each other, and as a result, raise student achievement.*

### General Educator

- Curriculum expertise
- Group/classroom management
- Knowledge of typical student characteristics
- Pacing

### Special Educator

- Learning process expertise
- Individual and specialized needs of students
- Paperwork and required legal procedures
- Teaching to mastery



Friend, M. (2008). Co-Teaching: Principles, practices and pragmatics. Greensboro, NC: Marilyn Friend, Inc.

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## Figure 6: When Co-Teachers Disagree

***Principals and other site administrators have an important responsibility to be sure that co-teachers begin the year in a positive way and grow their practice so that student success increases.***

### **They can do this by:**

- Visiting co-taught classes several times during the first month of school, noting whether both teachers are teaching, how students are responding to both teachers, and what teaching strengths and weakness are displayed;
- Meeting with all co-teachers early in the school year to discuss exemplary practice and to encourage continued growth; and/or
- Meeting with specific sets of partners if it seems a problem exists in the instruction, behavior/classroom management, or partnership.

### **If a conflict arises and persists, one or more of these strategies may be helpful:**

- Speak to each teacher individually and then together to identify issue(s), air them, and problem-solve to identify compromises or solutions;
- Ask a school professional who does not supervise the teachers (e.g., counselor, psychologist) to have the problem-solving conversations with the teachers who disagree; and/or
- Observe the co-teaching to identify how the conflict may be affecting student learning. Frame the conversation around that topic.

### **These strategies are NOT recommended:**

- Relying on the perspective of just one teacher regarding the conflict;
- Deciding to halt the co-teaching; this is a problem because students must receive their services, and they must occur in the least restrictive environment; and/or
- Deciding to move the students and special educator to a different general education class; this may send a message that if there is disagreement, co-teaching will be abandoned. Sending this unfavorable message may, over time, encourage reluctant teachers to resist co-teaching.



## Considerations for Scheduling

*There are three major scheduling considerations in planning a campus co-teaching environment:*

- 1) campus master schedule,*
- 2) teacher planning time, and*
- 3) student schedules.*

### 1 Campus Master Schedule

For successful co-teaching implementation, there are several things that the campus master scheduler needs to take into account. Co-teaching classes must be on equal footing as other courses in development of the master schedule, with thoughtful placement of co-teaching classes within the master schedule to meet both teachers' and students' needs.

The campus master schedule must consider scheduling of teachers and not just classes. If co-teachers move from one room to another to work in multiple classrooms, proximity of the co-teaching classrooms must allow timely navigation, especially if the co-teacher has materials to transport from one classroom to another. Also, the level of support needed for each individual student, including varied amounts of time and flexibility of changing needs during the year, must be considered when preparing the schedule. If students receiving support have IEPs that require specific contact time, the times noted on the IEP must be honored.

At different grade levels, teacher teams are organized differently. For example, at elementary school, teams are often organized by grade level; at the secondary level, it is often by content area. One simple and effective co-teaching model assigns the special education co-teacher to a team the same way general educators are assigned to teams. This method of team assignment assists in scheduling planning time and coordinating teachers' work. It also permits flexibility for the special education co-teacher who will, most likely, be collaborating with more than one general educator. Another consideration for team assignments is the content area strengths of each co-teacher.

Scheduling ARDs and substitute teachers is an additional issue for campus master schedulers to consider. Neither general nor special education co-teachers should be pulled from their co-teaching settings in order to attend ARDs or to act as substitute teachers in other classrooms. This is especially true when a student's IEP requires inclusive services and these services are delivered through a co-teaching model; failure to provide the IEP-required inclusive services could result in a student's IEP not being implemented as written, a non-compliance issue. For co-teaching to be truly successful, co-teachers must have time actually to be in the classroom and work with students.

## 2 Teacher Planning Time

Scheduling common planning time for co-teaching partners presents another challenge when developing the master schedule. It is imperative that co-teachers have an opportunity to plan together regularly, either face-to-face or in another collaborative approach.

Face-to-face planning time can be difficult because it is not always possible for co-teachers to have the same conference period, particularly when a special education co-teacher is working with more than one general educator. If feasible, scheduling the special educator's conference period on a rotating basis will allow planning time with multiple teachers who have different conference periods. Regardless of the strategies used, collaborative planning time needs to be arranged on a regular basis. Some strategies that campuses might consider in order to accomplish are as follows:

- planning time for co-teachers during advisory periods--class sizes may be larger than normal and co-teachers could meet on a rotating basis;
- meeting while counselors or librarians are in classrooms delivering lessons;
- collaborating during an instructional movie, in which multiple classrooms are combined;
- planning time during programs that are being presented by parent organizations or other assemblies;
- bringing in substitutes for a day during the semester to allow for common planning time;
- housing a notebook in a secure location in the classroom with student specific information for regular communication and updating purposes (i.e. documenting student progress on IEP goals, instructional strategies, accommodations used, etc.); and
- organizing planning time before the school year begins.

It is also possible to add additional planning time by using electronic planning means, such as:

- emailing lesson plans and communicating via email;
- exchanging personal contact information and texting/calling each other;
- communicating in passing (such as in hallways, lunchrooms, etc.) regarding instructional content, lesson planning, instructional strategies, etc. (while maintaining student confidentiality in public settings); and
- communicating via other formal technology means such as:
  - Pbworks (<http://pbworks.com/>);
  - Wikispaces (<http://www.wikispaces.com/>);
  - Google groups (<groups.google.com/>); and
  - Skype (<http://www.skype.com/>).

## Planning for Instruction

When common planning time cannot be arranged, or when circumstances prevent teachers from using common planning time, classroom instruction can still be differentiated. These strategies, which are useful even when teachers plan together, should not be routinely used in place of common planning time. Some examples of pre-planned ways of differentiating instruction are as follows:

- visual and non-verbal cues for assistance with a process;
- transition cues between teachers to indicate it is time to move to the next step or switch roles (for example, one teacher tells the students, “Work on this for 30 seconds.”);
- questioning each other about content in order to prod student higher-order thinking;
- dialoguing between teachers to model question/answer or thought process as well as clarifying objectives; or
- varying teacher roles.
  - While one teacher is instructing, the other teacher can:
    - model notetaking skills;
    - list/bullet items;
    - solve problems;
    - write instructions;
    - observe students to identify which students need additional assistance and/or need extension activities;
    - repeat directions;
    - check for understanding; and/or
    - ask clarifying questions.
  - One teacher can pull a small group for 5-10 minutes for:
    - providing re-teach/explanation to clarify instruction/understanding; and/or
    - providing extension activities to students who have mastered the skill/objective.
  - For a short period of time, teachers could have assigned structured roles such as Teacher A will conduct the:
    - warm-up activity;
    - closing/exit activity; and/or
    - vocabulary activity.

## Figure 7: Sample Meeting Agenda Form

***This is a sample agenda for a co-teach planning meeting. The intent is to ensure that the majority of the planning meeting is spent on curriculum and instruction.***

**Date:**

**Teachers:**

Upcoming Curriculum and Instruction (8 minutes)

Co-Teaching Arrangements (10 minutes)

Accommodations for Student Needs (10 minutes)

Specific Student Concerns (6 minutes)

Housekeeping (6 minutes)

Note: Laminate or reproduce this or a similar form and use it for each planning meeting.

## Figure 8: From Isolation to Partnership: Applying Co-Teaching Approaches

*This lesson plan is a tool that can be used to re-design a specific lesson to incorporate co-teaching. Complete each section for a one-teacher lesson and then note options for changing the lesson plan to take advantage of the talents of two teachers.*

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Topic/Lesson:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	
Competencies/Objectives:			
TEKS Student Expectation(s):			
Materials:			
	<b>One Teacher Lesson</b>	<b>Co-Taught Lesson—Teaching Approach</b>	
		<input type="checkbox"/> One Teach, One Observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Station Teach
		<input type="checkbox"/> Parallel Teach	<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Teach
		<input type="checkbox"/> Team Teach	<input type="checkbox"/> One Teach, One Assist
Anticipatory Set			
Procedures			
Independent Practice			
Closure			
Assessment			
Accommodations and Modifications for Specific Students			
Notes			

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***An effective co-teaching program requires collaborative lesson planning. If co-teachers do not share weekly planning time and need to collaborate in a more “non-traditional” manner, then the campus must consider how to make lesson plans accessible to the special education co-teacher. If lesson plans are due on the Friday before the next instructional week, this does not give the special educator who is co-teaching adequate time to collaborate with the general educator in reviewing the lesson plan, assisting in developing accommodations, etc. Adjusting lesson plan due dates and utilizing software that enables teachers to post lesson plans where they can be accessed by both teachers and the administrator are two suggestions to accommodate the planning dilemma.***

### 3 Student Schedules

The final scheduling consideration on campuses adopting a co-teaching model is student schedules. The number of students with special needs (with or without identified disabilities) should be limited in co-teaching classrooms. The co-teach classroom should not be double the size (or double the concentration of students with more intensive needs) of the traditional single teacher classroom simply because there are two teachers in the classroom. Co-teach classrooms should be the same size as traditional classrooms with a comparable ratio of higher need students. In setting up co-teach classrooms, it is recommended, if possible, to reserve a few (3-5) slots for students who transfer in during the school year needing to join the co-teach setting.

One possible way to balance classroom composition while developing the master schedule is to utilize software systems that can be programmed to set up two concurrent sections—one for general education students and one for students with higher needs who require more individualized attention and more intensive support. Each section is “capped” at an appropriate number so that the student ratios remain manageable and at recommended levels. Once students who need more support are organized by need into separate sections, the two sections are merged into one classroom roster to create one cohesive co-teach classroom with the correct size and student composition.

Another consideration for campuses is determining which students will be included in a co-teach setting and what process will be used to make those decisions. Not every student with a disability requires a co-teach classroom; placement should be based on students’ individual strengths and needs. For students with IEPs requiring a full class period of inclusive support daily, co-teaching may be the most appropriate service delivery model to use. In determining appropriate settings, campus staff should take into account additional supports available in traditional classrooms, content areas which would benefit most from a co-teach environment, and the needs of both general education and special education students.



## Figure 9: Steps for Scheduling Co-Teaching Classrooms

- 1** Using the students' IEPs, identify required special education support services by student and content area (i.e. mainstream with no special education support, inclusion support such as itinerant and/or co-teach support, content mastery, resource, self-contained, etc.). Sample Co-Teach Class Planners are provided in Figure 10 (Elementary) and Figure 11 (High School) as a tool for this.
- 2** Review current staff for various class arrangements to determine who is available to provide inclusion support services.
- 3** Decide a ratio for general education students to students with disabilities, based on the students' needs. This ratio may vary from classroom to classroom based on student composition and teacher scheduling in the classroom. There is no state-required ratio; this is a locally determined decision.
- 4** Build the master schedule for general education and special education teacher assignments, ensuring that student needs drive master schedule. This is especially important at the secondary level because your ratio may determine a need for special education support in multiple sections of the same course.
- 5** Schedule students with disabilities into classrooms prior to scheduling of non-disabled peers.
- 6** Proceed with traditional student scheduling process.



**Figures 10 and 11 are examples of tools to assist with class scheduling for students with disabilities. They are intended to help administrators plan for staffing needs to provide co-teach support and ensure that students receiving special education services are identified for scheduling prior to general master scheduling.**

**To use these documents, simply place the number of special education students within each column who will be receiving the identified support by content area.**

**Figure 10: Co-Teach Class Planner-Elementary Example**

Grade Level/ Content Area	Mainstream			Self-Contained Support
	No Special Education Support Needed	Itinerant Support	Co-Teach Support	
<b>Kindergarten</b>				
Reading				
Language				
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				
<b>1st Grade</b>				
Reading				
Language				
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				
<b>2nd Grade</b>				
Reading				
Language				
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				
<b>3rd Grade</b>				
Reading				
Language				
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				
<b>4th Grade</b>				
Reading				
Language				
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				
<b>5th Grade</b>				
Reading				
Language				
Math				
Science				
Social Studies				

Adapted with permission from North East ISD.

**Figure 11: Co-Teach Class Planner-High School Example**

Grade Level/ Content Area	Mainstream			Self-Contained Support
	No Special Education Support Needed	Itinerant Support	Co-Teach Support	
<b>English</b>				
English I				
English II				
English III				
English IV				
Other				
<b>Mathematics</b>				
Algebra I				
Geometry				
Algebra II				
Pre-calculus				
Other				
<b>Science</b>				
IPC				
Biology				
Chemistry				
Physics				
Other				
<b>Social Studies</b>				
U.S. History				
World History				
World Geography				
Government				
Economics				
<b>Other Co-Teach Courses</b>				

Adapted with permission from North East ISD.

## Lesson Plans [\(Figure 16\)](#)

In addition to lesson planning references in the scheduling and planning section, other considerations must be addressed with collaborative planning. As well as available commercial lesson plans, a district or campus may choose to adapt current lesson plans to include co-teaching approaches.

Regardless of campus-specific format or design, required student IEP accommodations and modifications must be incorporated into the teachers' planning. It is imperative, therefore, that general educators have copies of students' IEP documents, including the present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) statements, annual goals (including benchmarks/short-term objectives, if included), accommodations, Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), and all other relevant information. In addition to having a copy of the relevant portions of the IEP, 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §89.1075 (c) also requires that each teacher be informed of his/her specific responsibilities related to implementing and documenting the implementation of the student's IEP.

Lesson plans should be data-driven. Co-teachers should continually review student data to develop and revise lesson plans. The lesson plan should be used as a planning tool in order for the special educator half of the co-teaching team to make contributions to the lesson plan.

To plan effective lessons that include all students, educators need advance notice of students with special needs being assigned to their classrooms. While this is not always possible with transfer students, it is usually possible if a student is changing classes and is certainly possible when classes are set up at the beginning of the school year. Co-teachers cannot develop accommodations and modifications within the lesson plan to support students who are placed in the co-teach classroom without sufficient data during the planning process.

## Use of Personnel

It is important that co-teachers actually be given time to co-teach. Due to the nature of a co-teaching classroom, it is crucial that co-teachers be allowed to fulfill their assignments by providing instruction to students on a consistent basis. Not meeting a student's written IEP schedule of services can result in a finding of noncompliance for the LEA. Additionally, inconsistent implementation of the co-teaching program does not allow students opportunities to experience the benefits of the co-teaching environment, nor does it provide a true picture of how successful co-teaching can be.

## Dually Certified Teachers

Per the 2011-2012 Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (p. 94) ([http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=7739&menu\\_id=645&menu\\_id2=789](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=7739&menu_id=645&menu_id2=789)), one dually certified teacher may not provide both general education and special education services at the same time. If the general education teacher is also special education certified, and the student's IEP requires special education support in a general education setting, the general educator cannot provide general education instruction to one group of students while providing specific IEP-directed special education supports/instruction to the student whose IEP requires it at the same time. If a student's IEP requires direct special education support/instruction in a general education setting, the direct special education support/instruction must be provided in addition to the general education instruction provided by the general education teacher. Having one teacher who is dually certified does not follow state policy, nor does it create a co-teaching situation. (See the Student Attendance Accounting Handbook for specific information/exceptions regarding 3- and 4-year old students.)

## Paraprofessionals

While paraprofessionals may or may not be present in a co-teaching (or other) classroom, pairing a paraprofessional and a teacher **does not** constitute a co-teaching environment. Use of paraprofessionals in any classroom, including a classroom that also has two teachers, requires that the campus define the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional while he or she is present in the classroom. Regardless of these roles and responsibilities, the teacher is responsible for ensuring that students' IEPs are implemented as written. While paraprofessionals are a tremendous support, they should not be functioning separately from or in lieu of the classroom activities/instruction. For example, paraprofessionals should not be providing direct instruction to one group of students while the teacher is in the front providing instruction to the rest of the students; likewise, paraprofessionals should not spend a majority of their time on clerical chores. This is not a co-teaching or an inclusive environment.

## Supports for Personnel

The campus administration must ensure that co-teaching staff have needed supports for the program. For example, are there two teacher desks and chairs in the co-teaching classrooms or does one of the teachers have to sit at a student desk or table in the back of the classroom? Do co-teachers who travel from one classroom to another have a way to transport materials easily from one room to another (such as a rolling cart) or do they have to make multiple trips to carry materials? Multiple trips would cut down on the amount of time the co-teacher is able to interact with and provide support to the students who need it. Attention to such details creates a positive context for co-teaching and improves the efficiency of the educators who co-teach.

## Student Progress Reporting

In co-teaching, it is important to discuss how the student's grades will be determined. Prior to instruction and assignment of grades, co-teachers should collaborate to determine the accommodations/modifications to be implemented as determined by a student's IEP. Both teachers' roles regarding parent communication should be clearly defined and shared. Both teachers should participate in parent conferences and conversations.

Generally, co-teachers work collaboratively to determine student grades (and this collaborative grading may even be required by a student's IEP). While taking into account students' disabilities or other special needs and the accommodations and modifications detailed in the IEPs, the co-teachers keep in mind the importance of holding students to high standards. Regardless of how the names end up on the rosters, report cards, etc., both co-teachers are accountable for student performance.

## Program Evaluations

Evaluation of professional staff has been described in the [District Considerations Section](#). A comprehensive program evaluation must be in place to examine the overall co-teaching program regarding fidelity of implementation, student outcomes, and stakeholder perceptions. This process should be data-driven, include an evaluation of student progress, and incorporate teacher/parent/community perceptions of the co-teaching program. In essence, an evaluation examines questions such as these: What is high quality co-teaching? When high quality co-teaching occurs, what are the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding its implementation? What data supports the impact of co-teaching on student learning? When high quality co-teaching is not occurring, what steps are needed to improve its quality? Some Quality Indicators of Co-Teaching can be seen in Figure 12.

## Communication of the Program to the Community

Co-teaching should be a natural part of what is happening on the campus and should be accessible on the district/campus website. To ensure answers to co-teaching questions are consistent and accurate and to avoid unnecessary concerns, district/campus personnel should adopt a common vocabulary and a thoughtful approach when communicating co-teaching principles and values to parents and community members. When a second teacher is in a classroom to assist with reading instruction, public meetings are not held to explain it to the community. The same should be true of co-teaching. The campus can explain the philosophy that some classes have two professionals in them as determined by the needs of the students in the classroom. The second professional may be a reading teacher, a special education teacher, a speech therapist, or another specialist.

***To ensure answers to co-teaching questions are consistent and accurate and to avoid unnecessary concerns, district/campus personnel should adopt a common vocabulary and a thoughtful approach when communicating co-teaching principles and values to parents and community members.***



## Figure 12: Quality Indicators of Co-Teaching

***Having the following pieces in place are indicators of a quality co-teaching program. These indicators could also be used as a pre- and post-assessment of a co-teaching program.***

- Co-teachers are provided adequate time to plan collaboratively.
- Administrators have defined and shared their expectations with co-teachers.
- Co-teachers have been provided joint training in co-teaching.
- A mission and vision have been established and communicated regarding co-teaching.
- Roles and responsibilities for co-teachers have been defined.
- Students are scheduled by need.
- A system is in place for co-teachers to access support.
- Resources (i.e., books, videos) have been provided for co-teachers.
- There is a method in place for measuring student success in co-taught classrooms.
- Co-teachers are provided tools with which to evaluate their co-teaching partnerships.
- There is evidence that accommodations/modifications are implemented in co-taught classrooms.
- Co-taught classrooms have a feeling of collaboration and community.
- Evaluators have received specialized training on evaluating co-teaching partners.
- A thoughtful process is in place for assigning co-teachers.
- Resources (personnel, materials, time) are committed to implementing and sustaining the co-teaching model.

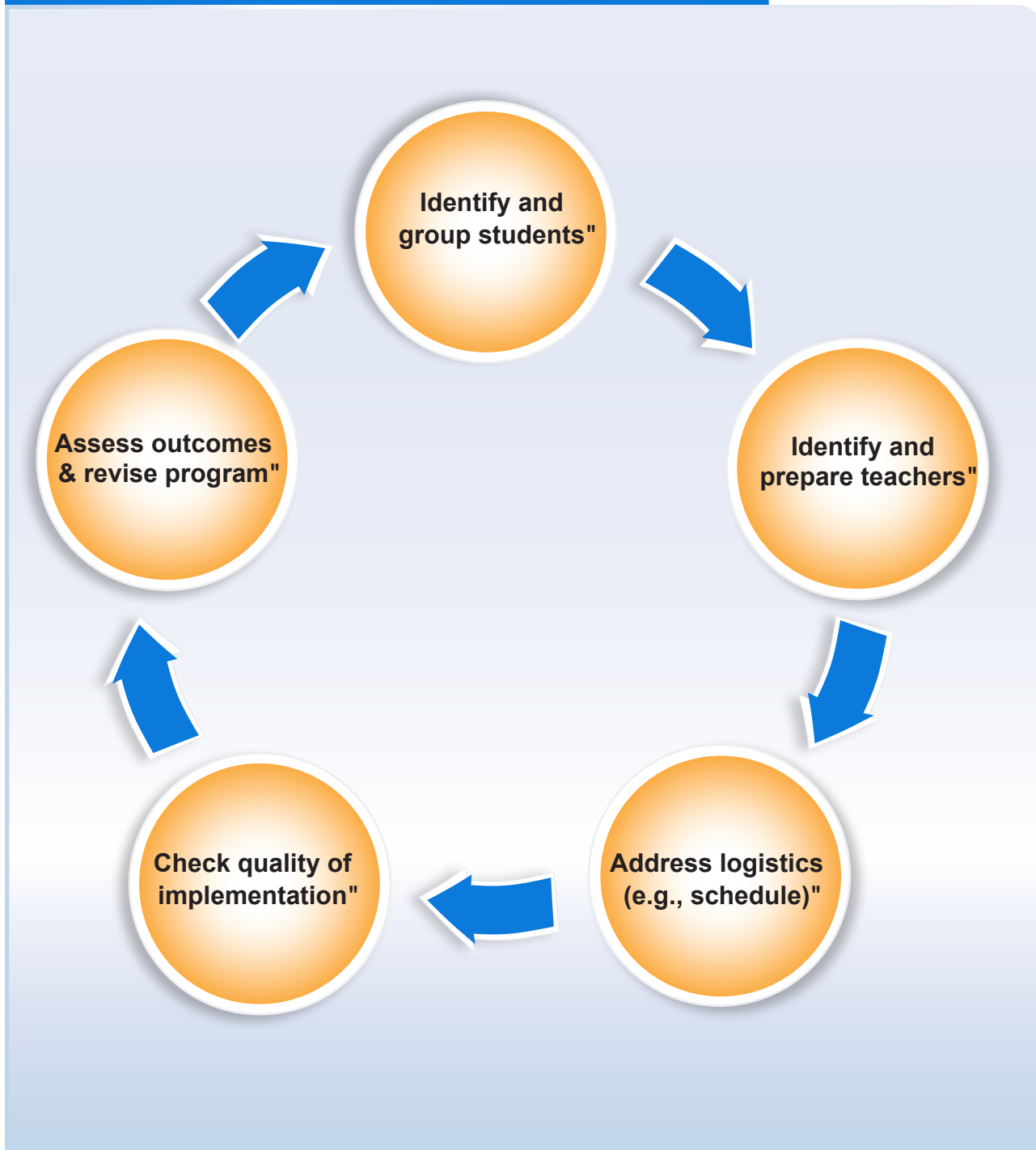
**Figure 13: Sample Walk-Through Form for a Co-Teaching Classroom**

*This sample walk-through form has some co-teach elements embedded.*

General Information		Student Engagement	
Teacher Name (Sp Ed):		<input type="checkbox"/> Use of graphic organizers	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of visuals
		<input type="checkbox"/> Students moved around	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of technology
Teacher Name (Gen Ed):		<input type="checkbox"/> Independent work	<input type="checkbox"/> Partner work
		<input type="checkbox"/> Active response	<input type="checkbox"/> Group work
Date:		<input type="checkbox"/> State changes/transitions	<input type="checkbox"/> Games
Grade/Subject:		<input type="checkbox"/> Whole class instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of manipulatives
Number of students:	<b>Co-Teaching Approach</b>		
Observer:	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Teach/1 Observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Teaching	
<input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up observation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Teach/1 Assist	<input type="checkbox"/> Parallel Teaching	
<input type="checkbox"/> Video instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> Station Teaching	<input type="checkbox"/> Team Teaching	
<input type="checkbox"/> Video debrief	<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers are comfortable with the selected approach.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Video permission slips: <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers <input type="checkbox"/> Students	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-taught classrooms have a feeling of collaboration and community.		
Co-teacher Communication		Classroom Management	
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Rules/routines have been established (transitions, timing, materials).		
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior management is shared by both teachers.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Communication between students and teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> Students respond to management techniques.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive teacher to teacher rapport/respect	<input type="checkbox"/> Both teachers move freely around the room.		
<b>Lesson Development/Presentation</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> Students are seated heterogeneously.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Beginning (activate background knowledge, pre-assessment, hook, review, lesson obj.)		<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Behavior Support	
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle (guided practice, independent practice)		<b>Differentiation</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> End (closure, re-teach, assessment, preview, review)		<input type="checkbox"/> Language considerations	<input type="checkbox"/> Modifications
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers appear competent with curriculum and standards.		<input type="checkbox"/> Accommodations	<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson is presented in variety of ways.		<input type="checkbox"/> Check for understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Wait time
<input type="checkbox"/> Instructional responsibilities are shared.		<input type="checkbox"/> Supported background knowledge	
<b>Classroom Climate</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> Chunked content	
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher to student feedback	<input type="checkbox"/> Consideration for student readiness or interest		
<input type="checkbox"/> Student to student feedback	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructional strategies:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Error correction			
<input type="checkbox"/> Praise of effort/affirmation			
<input type="checkbox"/> Students are on task	<b>Comments:</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Humor			
<input type="checkbox"/> Class is comfortable with both teachers			
Goal(s) for refining co-teaching knowledge and skills:			

Adapted with permission from Education Service Center, Region XIII

**Figure 14: Annual Implementation of Co-Teaching**





## Guidelines for Teachers:

# Considerations for Implementing Co-Teaching in the Classroom

As with any relationship, building a co-teaching partnership takes time. As teachers work together, they build trust and establish a structure in which both teachers can work smoothly. According to Gately and Gately (1997), there are three stages that co-teachers experience as they develop their relationship.

1. In the **Beginning Stage**, teachers communicate about instructional issues, but remain somewhat guarded in their interactions. In the classroom setting, teachers continue to separate students and materials. Even though they are co-teaching, a “yours and mine” approach is usually evident. In the area of curriculum, the special educator may be unfamiliar with the content or methodology of general education. As a result, the general educator may initially take a lead role. Finding time to plan instruction may become a challenge because programs may be driven by standards, textbooks, and tests. The special education teacher may be viewed as a “helper.” As teachers work on planning instruction, they focus on preparing lessons for their own students. Initially, one individual is viewed as the “teacher” and the other as the “helper” or “behavior enforcer.”
2. In the **Compromise Stage**, teacher communication is more relaxed, open, and interactive. They begin to share the physical space and materials. As they begin to develop confidence in both curriculum and differentiated instruction, both teachers start to see more ways to modify and demonstrate “give and take” in planning and lesson delivery. In the area of instructional presentation, the teachers begin to incorporate mini-lessons to provide clarifications of strategies. Both teachers work together to develop rules and work together to implement behavior plans. Finally, co-teachers at this stage begin to explore a variety of evaluation measures.
3. In the **Collaborative Stage**, co-teachers begin using more nonverbal communication and nonverbal signals to coordinate their efforts in the classroom. Students move in and out of flexible grouping configurations, and whole-group instruction is more evident. Both teachers can be observed presenting, instructing, and structuring learning activities. Both teachers are involved in classroom rules and routines, and they use a variety of assessments to monitor student understanding.

In summary, during the Beginning Stage of co-teaching, one teacher interjecting to add to the content may feel uncomfortable or even invasive. However, as the partnership progresses and reaches the Collaborative Stage, these same interjections/additions feel like lesson enhancements to everyone involved.

## Establishing Co-Teaching Relationships

In order to begin building relationships and create a team, both teachers must have a common understanding of co-teaching and share a vision for student achievement and collaboration. Teachers often possess different teaching styles, aspirations, attitudes, expectations, and abilities to adapt to change. The first step to bring two professionals into a shared space should involve conversations about each teacher's preferences. There are many reflective inventories available that ask teachers to rate or describe various aspects of teaching, such as student expectations and classroom routines, and to identify any issue that they consider to be “non-negotiable.” The teachers generally complete the surveys separately, then come together to discuss their responses. When areas of disagreement arise, co-teachers can mutually decide how best to proceed. While some aspects may not be immediately addressed, being able to identify these areas can help teachers navigate through their new relationship. The critical components related to creating a successful co-teaching relationship are maintaining open communication and building trust. Most importantly, using inventories or other strategies to structure discussions enables differences to be raised and addressed before they become classroom problems or sources of conflict.

Some co-teaching and collaboration issues for discussion may include:

- Having a shared belief/vision regarding co-teaching;
- Finding a planning time and using it effectively;
- Deciding how to address specific student needs during co-teaching;
- Determining how to resolve conflicts with co-teaching partners;
- Exploring the six approaches of co-teaching (how/when to implement them);
- Establishing classroom routines and behavior management;
- Articulating student expectations (performance and procedures);
- Sharing teaching styles and preferences; and
- Determining grading procedures and accountability.

**Tip for Co-Teachers:** Make sure the world—and this includes the students—knows you are a team!

- Make sure both teachers are viewed as equal partners in the classroom;
- Make sure both teachers' names are on the door (or, at least, on the board);
- Ensure all parent correspondence and the class syllabus include the names of both teachers; and
- Introduce the teachers as a team.

Some teacher and administrator materials that include co-teaching inventories and other valuable planning documents may be downloaded from the co-teaching section of the K8 Access Center website, [www.k8accesscenter.org](http://www.k8accesscenter.org). Figure 15 provides co-teachers with some tips for starting off effectively.

## Figure 15: Co-Teaching: Tips for Starting Off on the Right Foot

***Effective co-teachers combine several elements: a shared, unwavering belief that a teacher's primary responsibility is to help every student succeed; knowledge and skills for effectively teaching diverse learners; recognition that two teachers, with different but respected points of view, can generate more ideas for reaching students than a teacher working alone; and a commitment to success that blends flexibility and a sense of humor with a strong allegiance to the partnership. Of course, it takes time to develop exemplary co-teaching, and the first step is beginning the school year on a positive note. Here are suggestions for doing just that:***

- As soon as you learn who your co-teaching partner will be, reach out to that individual, suggesting a meeting prior to the start of the school year, even if that option has not formally been arranged by your administrator.
- Before teaching, discuss what each of you considers non-negotiables—those beliefs that are most important to you as a teacher. If some of the items conflict (e.g., general educator believes she should deliver all curriculum but special educator disagrees; special educator believes he should work exclusively with students with disabilities but general educator disagrees), it is important to reach an agreement before facing students. Be sure to address instruction and behavior/classroom management.
- Discuss how introductions will be handled on the first day with students. How will it be communicated to students that you have parity in the classroom, even if one of you is not there at all times?
- Create a relatively detailed lesson plan for the first day with students, one that includes grouping students and has both teachers assuming an active teaching role.
- Plan out the first week of lessons, extending the conversation about the first day to grouping strategies and teaching responsibilities.
- Discuss several “what ifs:” What if one of us makes a mistake during teaching? What if one of us is concerned about something the other person says to students? What if one of us dislikes the way a particular instructional or behavioral issue was addressed during class?
- Begin a conversation on other important matters including grading student work, the system for evaluating the work of students with disabilities (e.g., avoiding a grade penalty when accommodations are made), report card grades, options both of you (or one or neither) are comfortable with for accommodating diverse student needs.
- Discuss teaching chores and how they will get done (e.g., duplicating, lab set-up).
- Set up several times during the first month of school when you will touch base regarding instruction, behavior, and your partnership.
- Spend a few minutes getting to know each other as professionals and people—it will help the process of becoming comfortable as teaching partners!

## Planning for Instruction ([Teacher Planning Time](#)) ([Figure 7](#))

All educators know that lesson planning is a critical part of instruction. Through the process of mapping out instruction, teachers are able to reflect on the instructional objectives and necessary supports to help students achieve. This process is even more critical for co-teachers because they need to discuss the roles and contributions of each member of the team during the delivery of instruction. Co-planning should be an ongoing activity, preferably with specific, designated planning times. The greatest benefit of the co-teaching planning process is the team's ability to orchestrate each lesson by tapping into each teacher's area of expertise and having thoughtful conversations about student needs (i.e., grouping, modifications, grading considerations). It also allows teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of co-teaching, celebrate successes, and address any questions or concerns.

Depending on the size of the school district, the special educator may use an itinerant model and co-teach with a variety of general educators in the same school or across several campuses. This may create additional difficulty finding time to co-plan. It is critical that the teachers come together periodically and include alternative forms of collaboration such as Google Documents, web-conferencing, phone, or email. Although sometimes challenging, co-teachers must find ways to have meaningful and effective planning conversations about the students and instruction.

Many co-teaching lesson plan templates are available, both commercially and without cost from the Internet. Many of the planning documents are designed to be filled in by both the general and special educator and include the following components (Dieker, 2006):

- Big ideas/goals;
- Lesson activities;
- Assessment (standard/modified);
- Co-teaching structure;
- Academic adaptations;
- Behavioral adaptations;
- Materials/supports needed; and
- Performance data/notes.

### Example of the Co-Teaching Planning Process

1. The teachers discuss what the students need to know and be able to do (enrolled grade level TEKS).
2. They both determine how the students will demonstrate understanding (evaluation).
3. They identify any developmental, linguistic, physical, or experiential challenges that could impact student learning (individualization).
4. They design learning activities with the necessary accommodations/modifications so the students can develop and demonstrate understanding of the grade-level expectations (differentiation).
5. They select the co-teaching approach and class arrangement that best supports the intended outcome and coordinate what each will do before, after, and during instruction.

A general educator and special educator plan a 5th grade science lesson in which students are expected to complete a graphic organizer that compares the physical properties of matter. The class has two students who use a sign language interpreter, five students with an intermediate English language proficiency level, and two students with specific learning disabilities. Knowing that the concepts of mass and density are difficult to describe in sign language and may pose a challenge to the English language learners in the class, the special educator decides to take the lead at the beginning of the lesson to build background knowledge and introduce icons and gestures that conceptualize the target vocabulary for the task. During this phase of the lesson, the general educator serves in a supportive role and interjects relevant examples as needed. For the guided practice activity, the general educator takes the lead while the special educator strategically uses gestures to visually reinforce the concepts and points to a flow chart showing each step of the process. Next, the students work in cooperative groups to compare the physical properties of matter, complete their graphic organizers, and share their work with the class. During this activity, both teachers monitor student groups and provide additional support as needed. At the end of the lesson, the teachers work with small groups to provide vocabulary assistance as students write reflections in their science journals.

***During the initial planning stage, co-teachers should include alternate plans in the event one of the team members is absent. These plans should include the role of the substitute teacher in the co-teach model, and how the substitute will know the needs of the students in the class.***



**Figure 16: Sample Co-Teach Lesson Plan**

*This sample co-teach lesson plan uses the 5E (engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation) planning model.*

Sample Co-Teach Lesson Plan				
Teachers:		Students with Special Needs:		
Subject Area/Course/Grade Level:				
Date:				
TEKS/SEs:				
Lesson objective(s):				
Lesson Activities	Materials/ Resources	Curriculum Modifications & Instructional Accommodations	Co-Teach Model*	Student Performance Notes
1. Engagement				
2. Exploration				
3. Explanation				
4. Elaboration				
5. Evaluation				

**\*Co-Teach Models**

<b>T-O</b>	One Teach, One Observe**	<b>A</b>	Alternative Teach
<b>S</b>	Station Teach	<b>T</b>	Team Teach
<b>P</b>	Parallel Teach	<b>T-A</b>	One Teach, One Assist**

\*\*Indicate which teacher is leading instruction

*The 5E model was developed by the Biological Science Curriculum Study.*

**Figure 17: Planning for Co-Teaching**



### **Prior to meeting**

General education teacher prepares to overview upcoming curriculum.

### **During the meeting**

- General education teacher explains upcoming curriculum;
- Educators plan co-teaching approaches;
- Educators discuss needed accommodations and modifications;
- Educators discuss individual student needs; and
- Educators touch base on their perceptions of co-teaching.

### **After the meeting**

Special education teacher prepares major accommodations and modifications for planned instruction.

## Identifying Student Needs [\(Figure 10\)](#) [\(Figure 11\)](#)

The culture of a co-teaching classroom should meet the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of all students. In order for this to occur, teachers need to be familiar with the unique needs of all students and should be familiar with each student's individual education program (IEP) before the first day of class. This allows time for teachers to identify any necessary supports or procedures and have them in place so students are successful the first day of class and feel a sense of community with their peers and teachers. The well-intentioned preference of some general educators to not know which students have IEPs in order to avoid bias causes a serious problem. Without knowing about students' special needs, appropriate supports cannot be put into place.

### ***Some questions co-teachers should consider to meet students' needs are:***

- Do students' IEPs include behavior plans? If so, what are the target behaviors and supports necessary to address them?
- Do any students have challenging physical or cognitive abilities that may require specialized supports or services? If so, what are they? What additional information is needed? Is additional training or support needed?
- Do students' IEPs include any accommodations or modifications? If so, how can instruction best be tailored for the students and efforts documented?
- Do any of the students need social or emotional support? If so, how can the co-teachers create nurturing, supportive learning environments?

## Role of the Paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals play an important role by supporting teachers in the delivery of instruction. Co-teaching is defined as two certified or licensed professionals who are equally responsible for instructional planning, delivery, and evaluation. Since these tasks fall outside the scope of a paraprofessional's responsibilities, a classroom with a teacher and paraprofessional is not considered a co-teaching arrangement.

Paraprofessionals work under the direction of a certified teacher and serve in a supporting role.

Paraprofessionals can be asked to "work with small groups of students, lead a review of concepts already taught, and assist a teacher in monitoring student attention, behavior, and work... and may even carry out some activities that can occur in co-teaching, but it is inappropriate to expect a paraprofessional to be a co-teacher" (Friend, 2008, p. 17).

In a co-teaching setting, the strategic use of a paraprofessional can help the team meet the unique needs of all students and execute all activities purposefully and seamlessly. It is extremely important to maintain open communication among co-teachers and paraprofessionals to assure the entire team understands the instructional objective and their individual responsibilities before, during, and after instruction.



## Monitoring Student Progress [\(Online resources for curriculum based measurement\)](#)

One benefit of a co-teaching relationship is the ability to share responsibility for collecting and documenting student progress. During the planning phase, teachers may decide to identify a skill that needs to be evaluated and then work together to determine the best way to capture student information. They also need to discuss which student-specific accommodations and modifications to use and which format is most appropriate to describe student abilities. Depending on the skill, one teacher may observe students by using a checklist, an observation log, or other system to record progress while the co-teaching partner leads the activity. Also, as teachers prepare to co-teach, they should discuss multiple forms of data used to evaluate student understanding and performance (i.e., daily grades, project grades, checklists, rubrics, work samples, observation/anecdotal records, benchmark tests, etc.) and how frequently they will collect progress monitoring data. The special educator should keep the team informed of the IEP data that need to be collected and assure the data provide sufficient information to document progress toward the annual goals.

Co-teachers must assure that grades accurately reflect student achievement as related to content standards (TEC §28.0216, (SB 2033, 81st Texas Legislature)). According to O'Connor (2007), teachers should avoid common pitfalls that distort the accuracy of grades, such as:

- Don't include student behaviors (effort, participation, adherence to class rules, etc.) in grades; include only achievement.
- Don't reduce marks on "work" submitted late; provide support to the learner.
- Don't organize information in grading records by assessment methods or simply summarize into a single grade; organize and report evidence by standards/learning goals.
- Don't assign grades based on student's achievement compared to other students; compare each student's performance to pre-set standards.
- Don't leave students out of the grading process. Involve students; they can—and should—play key roles in assessment and grading to promote achievement. The use of rubrics for students to assess their own work can be helpful in getting students involved in grading.

Student grades should always be determined using curriculum based measurements. When determining how to monitor progress and report grades, co-teachers must have a clear understanding of what is being evaluated, the unique needs of all students, and how evaluation data should be collected.

## Evaluating the Program: The Co-Teaching Relationship and Effectiveness [\(Figure 13\)](#)

On-going communication and program evaluation are critical keys to co-teaching relationships. Throughout the year during planning, co-teachers should talk about the "health" of the co-teach relationship, celebrate successes, and identify potential barriers and areas for improvement. At least annually, the campus may elect to use a reflective evaluation tool to determine the effectiveness of the co-teaching program.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. I hold dual certification in both general and special education. Can I serve in both roles in the classroom?

No. A teacher may not serve simultaneously as both general and special educator in grades K-12.

Excerpt from the 2010-2011 Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (p. 90): A student with disabilities receives specially designed instruction (as defined in **4.6.11 Code 40 – Special Education Mainstream**). The specially designed instruction documented in the IEP is provided by special education personnel. One teacher, even if dually certified, may not serve in both a general education and a special education role simultaneously when serving students in grades K–12. Students with disabilities who are ages 3 or 4 may have an instructional arrangement/setting code of 40, mainstream, if special education services are provided in classroom settings with nondisabled peers. The only context in which a dually certified teacher may serve in both a general education and a special education role is in an Early Childhood Program for students ages 3 or 4.

The Student Attendance Accounting Handbook can be found in its entirety at:  
[http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=7739&menu\\_id=645&menu\\_id2=789](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=7739&menu_id=645&menu_id2=789).

## 2. I am a certified deaf educator in a co-teaching setting. Is a sign language interpreter necessary when I am in the room?

Yes. To serve in the role of an interpreter, 19 TAC §89.1131 requires the individual to hold a valid interpreter certification through the Texas Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI), Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), or be a certified member of RID. Therefore, being a certified teacher of the deaf does not qualify the teacher to serve as an interpreter for students who are deaf or hard of hearing in a general education classroom.

In the event that a deaf educator is also a certified interpreter, the deaf educator should not be expected to serve in both roles simultaneously. Co-teaching requires that both teachers are actively engaged in planning, delivery, and evaluation of instruction. Serving in the role of an interpreter limits the deaf educator's ability to accommodate, modify (i.e., modified grammar or vocabulary), keep up with the lesson, and provide the necessary supplementary aids, services, and specially designed instruction to help students meet instructional objectives. If the deaf educator is serving as the interpreter, it should not be considered co-teaching and IEP teams may need to consider whether a teacher of the deaf or a certified interpreter would best meet the needs of the student.

## 3. If I am paid with special education funds, am I allowed to work with students who do not receive special education services?

Yes. In a co-teaching setting, general and special educators share the responsibility of teaching all students in the classroom; therefore, both teachers are expected to support all students. Since both teachers possess expertise in a variety of areas (i.e., curriculum, differentiation), they work as a team to determine the unique needs of all students and use flexible grouping configurations to assure that students with similar needs receive the support necessary to meet instructional objectives. This arrangement may require co-teachers to work with different groups that may or may not include students who are identified as having disabilities. Depending on the intensity of the necessary accommodations and modifications, the teachers decide who would be best to lead whole or small group activities.

#### 4. How are inclusion, least restrictive environment (LRE), and meaningful access to the general curriculum different?

Students with disabilities must have meaningful access to the general curriculum in a least restrictive environment.

**Inclusion** is a *belief* that every child is a vital part of the learning community and has a right to belong in a classroom with age appropriate peers. Inclusive schools provide whatever it takes to ensure that students access meaningful learning and do not require students to have certain prerequisite skills or abilities to belong. An inclusive belief system is based on a deep respect for diversity. Note that inclusive schools sometimes find that services in a separate setting are necessary in order to meet student needs.

**Least Restrictive Environment** (LRE) is a term used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (34 CFR §300.114) that refers to a setting where students with disabilities can be educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. The LRE for a student with disabilities may fall along a continuum of placement options from a general education classroom to a residential treatment facility.

**Meaningful access to the general curriculum** is a phrase that emphasizes the importance of aligning instructional expectations with the enrolled grade level content standards, the mandated for all students Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). In some instances, students with disabilities may need modifications or accommodations to demonstrate proficiency or to develop the foundation skills aligned with the grade-level standards.

#### 5. Is co-teaching similar to content mastery?

No. Content mastery programs generally provide supplemental tutoring/support to assist students in completing grade level work. Content mastery support is usually provided in a separate classroom. Generally, in content mastery situations, a student with a disability receives direct instruction in a general education setting from a general education teacher and then leaves that setting to receive more individual support (but not direct instruction) from a special education teacher in a special education setting.

#### 6. Is co-teaching the same as itinerant support?

No. Generally in itinerant support, planning of instruction, delivery of instruction, and evaluation of student learning is not collaborative in nature. Often, the special education teacher supports students in multiple classrooms during the same class period. For example, the special educator may spend 20 minutes in Classroom A and 30 minutes in Classroom B during the same class period. This is another type of inclusive practice, but is not considered a co-teaching model because both teachers are not equally responsible for the instruction of all students in the classroom.

#### 7. Can co-teaching be considered an intervention for Response to Intervention (RtI)?

No. Co-teaching is used as an inclusive service delivery model for students with disabilities in which a certified special education professional and a certified general education professional in the same classroom simultaneously provide differentiated instruction to all students within that classroom. RtI is a tiered intervention model in which teachers implement research-based interventions to support struggling learners and closely monitor the impact of the interventions on student learning. Co-teachers may use an RtI model in the classroom to meet individual student needs. Similarly, on some campuses in which a group of students is receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention, a decision could be made to co-teach to facilitate delivery of the intervention. Since co-teaching is a model that supports all students, it would not be considered an individualized intervention.

**8. What is the difference between an accommodation and a modification?**

While these terms have very distinct meanings, educators frequently use these terms interchangeably. Although there are no legal definitions of the terms modification and accommodation, the following definitions are used in Texas:

An **accommodation** does not change the content expectations for the student; it is intended to reduce or eliminate the effect of the student's disability.

A **modification** changes the nature of the task or skill.

Additionally, TEA's Division of Federal and State Education Policy has developed a chart titled, "Content Modifications vs. Instructional Accommodations: A Chart to Facilitate Communication." This chart, which includes explanations and examples of content modifications and instructional accommodations can be found on the Texas Project First website at: <http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/ModificationAccommodation.html>

**9. How does co-teaching relate to differentiated instruction (DI) and universal design for learning (UDL)?**

Co-teaching is a potential method of delivering differentiated instruction and infusing universal design for learning into the classroom. It does not contradict either one; instead, it compliments them and allows two professionals to work together in providing both DI and UDL.

**10. How should co-teaching be reflected in the IEP?**

The IEP must define the special education services the student needs, including the frequency, duration, and location of these services. Co-teaching is not a special education service; it is a delivery model for an inclusion support service. Therefore, the IEP of a student who needs inclusion support services would specify the frequency, duration, and location (which would be general education classroom for inclusion support services). The school administration would then determine how that service would be provided. For example, it could be an itinerant support model or a co-teach model of service delivery.

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