

Building Capacity in Your School

Key Concepts for Understanding Co-Teaching

1. At a faculty, team, or department meeting, ask teachers to jot down their understandings of each of the terms presented regarding co-teaching. Use their responses as the basis for a conversation about current practices in the school and actions that could be taken to improve those practices.
2. Make a commitment to eliminate the division language of “my kids” and “your kids.”. For example, professionals could decide to assess a 25-cent fine against anyone who speaks in this way; the money could be given to charity at the end of the school year. Another idea is to encourage all staff members to say, “no, OUR kids” whenever the “my/your” language is used. Remember, when the language divides students the practices are likely to do the same.
3. In secondary schools, start now to get both teachers’ names listed on class schedules and grade reports. It’s not a two-teacher classroom unless both teachers’ names are included. This is critical for establishing parity. If the concern is related to accountability and highly qualified teacher status, simply list the person who is highly qualified in the content area first (and note that practice in a policy manual). If the concern relates to putting two names in the electronic field, talk to a programmer for creative solutions. While solutions are explored, be sure that both teachers’ names are prominently posted somewhere in the classroom.
4. With your colleagues, design a study that you could complete related to co-teaching at your school. You might use one of the studies reviewed as a model, or you could design another type of action research project. Base your research on a critical question for which you believe an answer would improve co-teaching practices.
5. Have all the professionals in your school or at least those participating in co-teaching select articles to read on the topic of coteaching. Over several sessions or at a department or faculty meetings, have individuals summarize what they have read and offer ideas about the implications of the information for their own classrooms and the school’s program.

Co-Teaching Approaches

1. Conduct an anonymous survey of all the co-teaching partners in your school using the form attached. What do the results tell you about use of the co-teaching approaches in your school? Have a co-teaching brainstorming session to generate new ideas for expanding the use of the co-teaching approaches that can have the greatest impact on student learning.
2. Plan for exchange visits among co-teachers. If your school has an extensive co-teaching program, arrange for novices to observe in veteran’s classrooms. If your program is relatively new, perhaps you could arrange to visit co-taught classrooms in a neighboring school district.

Essential Components

1. Consider using professional development opportunities at your school to refine professionals’ collaboration skills. Through book study, speakers, video, or other means, learn more about how to raise and discuss difficult or awkward matters, ask questions and make statements in ways that enhance communication, be aware of nonverbal communication, respond to resistance, and negotiate. Skills for collaboration will enhance co-teaching partnerships, a specialized application of collaboration.

2. Request that co-teaching be a topic for discussion at a staff meeting. Plan an agenda that includes items such as the level of school commitment to co-teaching, resources allocated, and co-teaching as related to school strategic planning. This may also be done at a district level at an administrative/principals' meeting.
3. Review your school's website. What programs and services are listed on it? How could co-teaching be added to this listing? Prepare a webpage that captures the key details of your school's co-teaching program.
4. Plan a presentation about co-teaching for your parent organization. Consider including a summary of data demonstrating the impact co-teaching has on student outcomes, testimonials from current co-teachers, and stories about students – told by teachers, told by students, or (for older students) written by students.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Using the issues raised in this workshop and others that may be concerns in your school, create a brief survey to distribute to staff members. Use the information you gather to make recommendations about refining your co-teaching program.
2. With a committee or task force, discuss issues that have arisen or may arise regarding co-teaching services. Then identify ways to directly address them. For those anticipated, identify and implement proactive strategies for sharing information that could prevent them from ever becoming a concern.
3. If your school has several concerns regarding co-teaching, see if it would be possible for several professionals to visit a school that has addressed similar matters. It is suggested that a set of goals be identified for this visit and questions be prepared to ask teachers and administrators at the school. After the visit, professionals should meet to ensure that the information they obtained as a part of the visit is applied to the situation at their school.

Co-Teaching Program Evaluation

1. If your school has not started or just begun a co-teaching program, review the items in the handout, "Preparing to Co-Teach". Identify those items that have been completed and those that have not received much attention. Make a plan with specific steps so that coteaching is implemented in an effective way.
2. If your co-teaching service has been in place for more than a year, complete an evaluation of it. Gather information on teacher, paraprofessional, administrator, student, and parent perceptions of co-teaching, and collect and analyze student data. Use the results of your evaluation to make a plan for refining or expanding it.
3. If you are still working to firmly establish a co-teaching program that is underway but not yet integral to school services, consider using data to prepare a brief presentation for your school board, a summary of co-teaching for your school's website, or a press release to be shared with local media.