

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. How do teachers find time to plan?

ANSWER: Teachers usually make time to plan. Here are some suggestions to get you started.

- a. Allow students time to work on their self selected projects for a fifteen minute time frame during scheduled cooperative teaching.
- b. Develop weekly cross-age tutoring programs so that educators are freed to work collaboratively.
- c. Adopt a year-round calendar with three-week intercessions between the quarters. The intercessions permit concentrated two or three day meetings for teacher planning for which participants receive compensatory time.
- d. Use the partnership concept where university students design follow-up activities. Paraeducators may be able to handle monitoring, thus freeing teachers for collaborative efforts.
- e. Obtain videotape that enhances the learning of the concept. Design an activity to wrap around the use of the video thus allowing time for planning.
- f. Assign groups of students time to work on independent projects while co-teachers plan.
- g. Create an agenda for the planning time so you accomplish tasks in a timely manner.

2. What should the ratio of students with an IEP be in a co-taught class? What are some ideas that schools have used to be sure that the ratio of students with disabilities to typical students does not become too high?

ANSWER:

Ideally, no more than 1/3 of the class should consist of students with special needs.

Many times, when a program is being developed, more students get placed in co-taught classroom. The placement of students should not change the natural make-up of the class. In elementary school, teachers need to monitor this closely because the class will only be co-taught for part of the day, but the students will be in the classroom all day long. Programs will differ based on the make-up of the school. Use the information above to guide your program, but develop a system of placing students based on the student needs at your

building.

Your school counselor is your best friend when it comes to scheduling. It is important to educate counselors on special education needs. So many things have to be considered when scheduling students - student's exceptionality, student's ability, support needed, subject area, comfort level of the teacher, class size, etc. Successful schools plan together. Successful programs have the general education teachers, special education teachers, and counselors sitting down together and deciding the make up of the classes. This usually happens in the spring before the students go on to the next grade.

3. Is it fair to grade students with IEP's differently than other students?

ANSWER: Yes. There are many diverse ways to grade individual students in each classroom setting. Some alternative grading options are: curriculum-based measurement, performance, portfolios, and performance evaluated by a rubric.

4. How can teachers be assured that they will be compatible?

ANSWER: Student needs should be considered first when determining teacher placements. Pre-planning should consist of discussion of teaching philosophies, expectations, role division, etc. Once this has been discussed, teachers need to remember that this is a professional relationship. Experienced co-teachers say that the relationships are different with every teacher.

5. Do I have to become a content expert in order to co-teach?

ANSWER: While it is important to become familiar with the content area, you are not expected to master all subjects. Many teachers learn a lot just being in the general education classroom.

6. How can teachers who travel among different schools establish collaborative relationships?

ANSWER: Successful collaboration is built on trusting, collegial relationships among professionals. Concentrate on one building, and on one or two teachers in that building. Begin with a teacher you know well, trust, and respect. Your collaborative successes with that teacher can create openings with others in that building.

7. How do I provide appropriate follow-up for problem-solving sessions with my itinerant schedule?

ANSWER: Itinerant schedules can be a problem. (See number six, above) Follow-up is essential for maintenance of collaborative relationships. Consider your itinerant schedule as follow-up and monitoring activities are planned and set a follow-up date. If you won't be back in the building for a week, schedule a phone conference.

8. When I try collaborative consultation, won't people expect me to be an expert?

ANSWER: Present yourself as a collaborative teacher, not as a consultant. The word "consultant" conjures up visions of an expert who can offer quick fixes, and that's not what collaborative teachers do. Collaborative teaching means that educational professionals work together to find appropriate solutions. No individual participants are expected to provide all of the answers.

9. How can I be assured that I will be able to co-teach in a general classroom?

ANSWER: As general and special educators work together, all participants must realize that differences often exist between them - differences that can be traced to various professional training. General educators are prepared to deliver a body of content to large groups of students. Special educators are prepared to deliver modified instruction to small groups of students or to individual students. The important thing to remember is that both types of professional backgrounds result in expertise that can be combined to improve learning for all students. Don't pretend to be a content expert if you are not. Don't presume to offer advice about large-group instruction and large-group management if you are not experienced in these areas. Depend on general educators to provide this expertise, as you offer expertise from your own professional background.

10. Do I have to be involved in collaborative teaching if I'd prefer to maintain my resource room role?

ANSWER: Some people don't feel comfortable in a collaborative role. Most students with handicaps spend most of their day in general education settings. This means that effective resource room instruction often must be planned within the context of general education and that interaction between general and special education must occur. However, some special educators prefer to remain entirely in direct instruction roles. Collaborative teaching is not for everyone, but collaborative skills are a good addition to educational repertoires, regardless of job role.

11. What are the components of creating a successful program?

ANSWER: a. Limits- Schools should be mindful that there are limits to the effectiveness of the collaborative model when resources are overtaxed. Therefore, there should be a limit on the number of special education students in a collaborative class. Limits, however, should not be necessarily set by percentage, ratio or disability category. The criteria of academically-able should be the chief consideration irrespective of disability. Numbers of special education students should be commensurate with individual classroom resources. Furthermore, collaborative classrooms should not be treated as dumping grounds for non-eligible special education students with special needs.

b. Multiple Service Delivery Options- Collaborative classes should be only one option available to students with disabilities. A continuum of services should exist including self-contained classes, resource rooms, and mainstreaming environments. In some special cases, special education students might be part of a collaborative classroom (primarily), but also attend a resource room for more intensive work. Moreover, this will allow for students with more severe disabilities to be educated in more restrictive educational settings.

c. Planning Time- Effective collaborative teaching is predicated on planning time for collaborative teachers. Planning times should be given priority for all schools- elementary, middle, and secondary. It is thought so important that administrators should consider allowing collaborative teachers to be free of various school-wide duties (i.e. lunchroom, bus duty) in order to have planning time.

d. Program Evaluation- Collaborative teaching programs should be evaluated formally and systematically by administrators and teachers on an annual basis. In addition, views about the program should be solicited from parents of general and special education students themselves.

e. Feedback on Success- The success of collaborative teaching programs should be reported formally to the general faculty, parents, and the public. In this way the entire school community becomes knowledgeable about this school-wide program, and it engenders interest, support, and concern for the program.

f. Program Continuation- Students and their parents should be assured that the collaborative teaching program will be continued at the next grade level and at the next educational level. Elementary, middle, and high schools should cooperatively plan for a well articulated collaborative teaching program through the grades. Furthermore, they should agree on curriculum that, at a minimum, will be offered in each grade level (i.e. math, English, civics) throughout the educational continuum. Individual schools should decide whether they want to offer collaborative classes beyond those subjects.

g. Define Collaboration- There should be a minimum amount of time and effort that collaborative teams spend collaborating in the classroom for a program to be truly a collaborative classroom. This criteria can be identified in hours, percentages, and meeting IEP goals. Absolute standards are difficult to establish. Therefore, at a minimum, criteria for true collaboration should be set by schools and/or collaborative teams on a priority basis and be judged according to that standard.

h. Parent Informing- Parents whose children are in collaborative classes should have the program thoroughly explained to them prior to or at the beginning of the school year. Special education parents should have opportunities to know more about the program than information provided at the IEP conferences. General education parents need information about all aspects of the program as well. Printed material should be available about the collaborative teaching system. Scheduling is crucial to the success of the collaborative teaching model. Putting the student first should drive the process. This precept is necessary to protect the integrity of the program. Scheduling should be done after a thorough identification of individual student profiles and needs are developed. Only then can issues such as student mix, reasonable numbers, and number of collaborative teams (to name some) be planned for adequately.

i. Voluntary Participation- It is important that teachers collaborate on a voluntary basis. When teachers are forced into collaborative roles, it undermines the basis for the collaborative program in general and the collaborative relationship of the teacher in particular. It is imperative that teachers participate in the collaborative program voluntarily. Furthermore, it is important for teachers to be matched as teams with a sense of compatibility, including teaching philosophy and teaching styles.

12. How do I deal with teachers/administrators who absolutely refuse to collaborate with me?

ANSWER: As you begin to create collaborative structures, it is important to begin where you have the best chance for success. This may mean that you seek out those teachers with whom you already share a trusting relationship. When you have some initial successes behind you, the word will spread, and other teachers will be more willing to collaborate. You may want to have a newsletter or bulletin board in the staff lounge promoting your collaborative activities.

Administrators are another matter. Support of your building principal is critically important. You can build that support by planning ahead. What is it that you hope to accomplish? What support will you need? What benefits can accrue to students and staff in your building/district? Take this information to your building administrator and seek her/his support.

Once your program is initiated, communication is vital. Keep teachers and administrators informed of your activities. Consider a newsletter. Monitor child-change and show resulting data to teachers and administrators. The key is to begin with realistic objectives and plans, then share news of mutual successes.

REMEMBER – Most of your interactions will be positive. That is, you will be working with people who want assistance and who care about children. The few resistant ones will create dissonance for you, but they will not represent the majority of people with whom you will work.

13. How can teachers get feedback/coaching when developing collaborative skills?

ANSWER: Change is *always* a difficult process, but it is facilitated by communication with others who are also experiencing the same changes. Successful collaborative structures are much easier to implement and maintain if you can share your successes and frustrations with others who have similar experiences. If you know other collaborative teachers, give them a call and get together once in a while. Develop a support network. Also, refer to online training, the co-teaching and teaming sections.

14. Who is responsible for assigning grades and taking attendance?

ANSWER: Both teachers are responsible for assigning grades. Grading should be a shared responsibility where teachers grade the work of any/all students. Attendance can be taken by either teacher.