

Scheduling and Coordinating Services

Finding feasible scheduling options and creating services that complement rather than disrupt the student's day of learning often requires setting aside some assumptions about how students receive services and what professional role responsibilities should be.

Scheduling Issues for Special Educators

1. Scheduling teacher by teacher or collectively.

- Rather than going from teacher to teacher to establish meeting times, schedule by grade level or by team. For example, the special educator would meet with the third grade team once each week on Thursdays to discuss the general problems and concerns that arise about students as well as planning upcoming units and needed adaptations.

2. Arranging co-teaching schedules in a daily or less-than-daily basis.

- When resources and staff are readily available, daily co-teaching permits both teachers to have a higher sense of ownership in the co-taught class and assists in maintaining the continuity of instruction. However keeping less-than-daily co-teaching as a program option is one specific strategy for reaching more students and increasing service intensity. The extent to which this can occur depends on the nature and intensity of students' needs and the requirements for services outlined in their IEPs.

3. Creating flexibility in a special educator's daily schedule.

Many special educators have every minute of each day scheduled, and when an emergency meeting is called, a new student requires attention, or an assessment needs to be completed, some service has to be canceled, often to the understanding by annoyance of general education colleagues. It is important for special educators to keep a bit of flexibility so that if they have to cancel a service, another option might be available.

- Co-teaching may occur in one classroom two times per week during a specified period of time and in another classroom two other days of the week during the same specified period of time. The fifth day of the week can be available for alternative service delivery time.
- Special educators may schedule their lunch and preparation periods back-to-back so that they can flip-flop them as the need to meet with colleagues arises.
- Keep two blocks of time (for a total of 45 minutes to an hour) reserved each week for flexible use. The time is used for student observation, additional consultation, team meetings, adaptations of instructional materials, or "makeup" sessions if a regularly scheduled in-class service has to be canceled during the week.

School Scheduling Issues

- Most general education teachers prefer co-teaching during language arts instruction, but if all the teachers are teaching language arts at the same time, it is impossible for the special educator to deliver services in a timely manner in every place that it is needed. If teachers stagger the schedule for teaching language arts, it is far more likely that in-class services can be a feasible option.
- When specials classes (e.g., physical education, music) are scheduled at the same time for a grade level, it allows for a special educator to meet with a grade-level team.
- At the high-school level, assign shared preparation time for teachers and special educators first, before other preparation times are established. Another option is to assign a special educator to each department. In addition to solving a scheduling problem, doing this has the advantage of ensuring that any general education teacher may need to contact only one person regarding a student concern.

Coordinating Services for Collaboration

- When establishing a schedule that encourages collaboration, it is important to consider the schedules of other service providers in a school and the programs and services they are operating. Professionals delivering in-class services may need to coordinate their efforts and assist each other in meeting student needs. For example, if a speech and language therapist is co-teaching in a first-grade classroom and there is one student in the class with a learning disability, the therapist may be able to meet that student's needs instead of the special educator going into the classroom. If a Chapter I reading specialist or a bilingual educator is spending an hour each day in a fourth grade class, this specialist may be able to include students with IEPs who need reading instruction.
- High quality services often can be delivered and personnel resources used more efficiently if the professionals are flexible in their approaches and their willingness to share their responsibilities for service delivery with each other as appropriate. These ideas can be viewed as applicable only if the needs of students with IEPs or other specialized services are being met.