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State-level Approaches to Co-Teaching

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Although co-teaching has been a topic of interest for more than two decades among professionals advocating inclusive practices (e.g., Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Garvar & Papania, 1982), the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates for curriculum access, high expectations for achievement and accountability for outcomes for students with disabilities have broadened its appeal. The purpose of this document is to describe how state education agencies (SEAs) are supporting co-teaching in schools, including through policies and guidance and co-teaching initiatives. This document represents a collaboration between Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and was prepared as part of Project Forum at NASDSE's cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

Co-teaching refers to the instructional arrangement in which a general educator and an equivalently licensed special educator (i.e., not a paraprofessional) partner to teach a diverse group of learners in a general education classroom for the purpose of ensuring that students with disabilities receive specially designed instruction and supplementary aids and services while accessing general curriculum in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Friend, 2008; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008). Although the word *co-teaching* is used throughout this document, alternative terms such as consultative teaching, collaborative teaching or cooperative teaching also are frequently used interchangeably to refer to the same type of instructional arrangement. A variety of conceptual, implementation and research reports over the past several years have demonstrated that co-teaching is an increasingly popular option for providing special education services in the context of the general education setting (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). However, these reports also have documented that the intuitive appeal of co-teaching does not necessarily translate into model practice (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). What seems clearest from existing information is that too little is known about co-teaching to draw conclusions about its efficacy.

DATA COLLECTION

Project Forum collaborated with UNCG to develop a co-teaching survey instrument. A survey of all 61 SEAs was conducted during the months of February and March 2009 using Zarca Interactive[®] (an online survey program) and 40 responses were received. Survey responses were analyzed and findings are reported in the following section of this document.¹

SURVEY FINDINGS

States' Use of Terminology and Definitions

Seventeen SEAs reported adopting specific terminology and/or definitions related to the practice of co-teaching. Most use the term "co-teaching," but states also mentioned using terms such as "collaborative teaching," "consultative content teaching," "shared instructional responsibility," "collaborative special education," "instructional consultation" and "team teaching." As with the terminology, definitions varied among SEAs. Although several SEAs mentioned having adopted Dr. Marilyn Friend's definition of co-teaching (see definition provided at the beginning of this document), other examples of SEA definitions included the following:

- *Virginia*—"Co-teaching means a service delivery option with two or more professionals sharing responsibility for a group of students for some or all of the school day in order to combine their expertise to meet student needs."
- *Iowa*—"Co-teaching is defined as two teachers physically present in a heterogeneous classroom with joint and equal responsibility for classroom instruction."
- *Oklahoma*—"Co-teaching implies a partnership in the classroom of a teacher with general education credentials and a special education teacher with special education and/or content credentials. This partnership creates a qualitatively different classroom than one with only a single teacher. A change of instructional intensity is also often noted in descriptions of this type of classroom that is operated by two teachers and meets the instructional needs of all students in the classroom."
- *New York*—"Integrated co-teaching services means the provision of specially designed instruction and academic instruction provided to a group of students with disabilities and nondisabled students."

Written Guidance

Ten SEAs reported having produced written guidance pertaining to the practice of co-teaching. Examples of written guidance include the following:

- *New York* regulations and field memo guidance include definitions, clarification regarding where co-teaching falls within the continuum of services and rules regarding the composition of a co-taught class.
- *Oklahoma* sent clarification memos to all local superintendents and special education directors regarding co-teaching, and included definitions in a state-level policies and procedures document for special education.

¹ The University of North Carolina at Greensboro is also conducting follow-up interviews with states in order to gather more detailed information about state-level approaches to co-teaching. Interview findings will be published separately. For more information on the follow-up study, please contact Marilyn Friend directly at marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com.

- *Michigan* provides guidance that includes a definition of team teaching and describes the circumstances where teachers may team teach.
- *Maryland* is currently developing and piloting its Co-Teaching Framework and Co-Teaching Reflection Tool that assists co-teachers in determining their team's status of implementation (i.e., initiating, developing or sustaining stages).
- *Pennsylvania* offers specific technical assistance (TA) resources pertaining to co-teaching via PaTTAN, an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education.
- *West Virginia* set forth detailed guidelines for effective co-teaching in its Office of Special Education Achievement May 2006 newsletter, *Exceptional News*.

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

Eleven SEAs reported that co-teaching is specifically included as a service delivery option on the state's IEP.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Eleven SEAs reported requiring that special educators who co-teach be highly qualified in the core academic area(s) in which co-teaching occurs.

Teaching Credentials

Only one SEA, *Alabama*, reported offering a credential for inclusive practices in co-teaching, a Collaborative Teacher Certificate for grades K-6 or 6-12.

Personnel Preparation

Twenty-three SEAs reported personnel preparation efforts in the area of co-teaching. Most commonly, SEAs reported offering local education agency (LEA) and/or school-level trainings and several respondents noted that local-level administrators are included in these trainings. Also, SEAs frequently mentioned seminars, workshops or keynote addresses at state or regional conferences on the topic of co-teaching and personnel preparation efforts involving institutions of higher education (IHEs). Less commonly, respondents reported offering technical assistance (TA) to local teams or developing and disseminating co-teaching resources including training modules, webinars and other web-based resources. Examples of SEA-level personnel preparation efforts include the following:

- *Iowa* has supported two "Collaborative Conversations" workshops in which all IHE faculty (both general and special education) were invited to learn about that state's co-teaching model and exchange information with SEA staff. The SEA also offers Title II personnel preparation grants to IHEs throughout the state in support of their co-teaching efforts.
- *West Virginia* initially focused on training and supporting administrators to develop and implement local co-teaching programs. Trainings were then conducted regionally and locally.
- *Arkansas'* special education unit received a grant for the Dean's Symposium from the Arkansas Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council that is being used to offer mini-grants to IHEs throughout the state to promote co-teaching efforts in schools within their geographical regions. In addition, the special education unit created the

Arkansas Co-Teaching Project to provide professional development to LEAs and developed a module on co-teaching.

- *Oklahoma* supports a master teacher who provides training at the local level on co-teaching.
- *Maryland* IHEs receive grants to develop dual certification programs in special education and general education. Co-teaching is taught within the special education teaching preparation programs and some IHEs provide instruction using co-teaching approaches with their general education counterpart.
- *California* is currently revising its special education credentialing requirements to include co-teaching practicum experiences.
- *Nebraska* is currently providing free professional development for teams focusing on inclusive schooling including effective co-teaching strategies. Teams attending must include a minimum of one administrator, one general education teacher and one special education teacher.

Additional Initiatives

Thirteen SEAs reported implementing additional initiatives relating to co-teaching. Examples of additional initiatives include:

- *Vermont* regulations currently prohibit co-teaching, but waivers have been granted for two LEAs to pilot co-teaching during the 2008-2009 academic year.
- *Arkansas* provides monetary assistance to support the development of model co-taught classrooms in various Educational Renewal Zones (ERZs).
- *Pennsylvania's* inclusive practices project funds specific LEAs with mini-grants that can be used for research-based practices, including co-teaching.
- *Hawaii* selected 20 pilot schools to receive additional special education teacher and educational assistant positions to encourage co-teaching.
- *Maryland's* State Improvement Grant (SIG) focuses on developing a co-teaching network site with resources and professional development to support effective co-teaching practices. Schools identified by the Statewide System of Support will receive SEA support for co-teaching initiatives.
- *Missouri*, as part of its school improvement grant program, funded 17 projects in 2008 related to co-teaching.

Data Collection

Ten SEAs reported collecting data regarding co-teaching outcomes. SEAs are using a variety of methods to collect data, including the following:

- *West Virginia* contracted to conduct two research studies, the first an in-depth look at current co-teaching practices throughout the state in order to determine fidelity of implementation and the second to determine how co-teaching affects student achievement.
- *Iowa* collects qualitative data from teachers in a statewide survey regarding implementation of co-teaching and collaborative consultation and their impact on student outcomes.
- *Maryland* plans to gather district-, school- and student-level data to determine if students' outcomes have improved and if there was an increase in access to the LRE and the general education curriculum. Perception surveys were also developed for teachers and students as were tools for monitoring implementation of co-teaching.

- *Hawaii* collects student academic data and data related to the cost of staff needed to promote co-teaching.

Barriers

The majority of respondents identified one or more barriers to the effective implementation of co-teaching in their states. Examples of barriers include:

- existing regulations (e.g., class size regulations; legal obligation to offer a continuum of placements);
- lack of formal guidance and/or administrative leadership;
- the need for long-range planning at the district and school level in order to support an inclusive model;
- local control and/or lack of buy-in on the part of LEA staff;
- fiscal challenges related to the adoption of a more staff-intensive model (e.g., the need to maintain both student-teacher ratios and natural proportions of typical students to students with disabilities);
- personnel shortages;
- lack of fidelity of implementation and/or monitoring of co-teaching practices;
- lack of teacher preparation at preservice and inservice levels in terms of the co-teaching model (e.g., a common misconception that special educators are relegated to the status of teacher's assistant);
- lack of time and resources for ongoing personnel development;
- lack of time for collaborative planning;
- lack of clarity regarding highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements within a co-teaching context;
- confusion regarding reimbursement of personnel (e.g., lack of clarity as to whether both teachers are reimbursed as special education teachers when there is a pay differential involved); and
- lack of clarity regarding whether student instructional minutes count as general education or special education.

Recommendations

The majority of respondents shared one or more recommendations for more effective implementation of co-teaching. The recommendations include:

- regulatory reform that provides uniformity and needed clarity regarding language and definition of roles;
- statewide promotion of successful collaborative programs;
- opportunities for states to partner with a TA center;
- need to establish an initiative that is supported by the SEA and conducted in collaboration with higher education;
- team training opportunities that include representation from both general and special education teachers, as well as building and/or district-level administration;
- strategies to ensure that co-teaching is seen as a general education rather than special education initiative;

- establishment of funding systems that are neutral *vis-à-vis* placement and disability category²;
- statewide data collection and analysis of outcomes for students served in co-taught classrooms;
- structured forms/protocols for observation and evaluation of co-teaching practices;
- integration of the co-teaching model into LEA instructional improvement initiatives;
- increased networking opportunities for co-teachers and administrators;
- additional funding to hire more special education teachers; and
- mini-grants in support of inclusive practices.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Across the states, interest in co-teaching as a means for ensuring that students with disabilities have access to and are fully included in the general education curriculum is high. The most consistent finding from this survey is that professionals are seeking information about how co-teaching is being implemented and whether data exist that provide evidence of its efficacy. At least several states are planning or just beginning to undertake large-scale data collection initiatives, and it is likely that the results of those efforts, especially data related to student outcomes, will be eagerly awaited by others.

Also, evidence from this study shows that a number of unknowns exist related to co-teaching. For example, little systemic information is available regarding criteria for determining fidelity of implementation. That is, what is it beyond the presence of two teachers in a classroom that must occur for the arrangement to be considered co-teaching? Similarly, few models are in place for evaluating personnel participating in co-teaching or assessing overall program quality. Further, it is unclear how co-teaching is integrated with other state initiatives such as response to intervention (RTI), school improvement planning and so on. Such integration seems crucial, particularly in considering sustainability.

Ultimately, co-teaching success rests on collaboration, a fact reflected in many of the comments made in this survey regarding the promise of co-teaching and the barriers to implementing it. Thus, attention to the mechanics of co-teaching may be necessary but not sufficient for long-term success. Pre-service preparation, professional development and policies and procedures that foster a collaborative school culture must undergird co-teaching.

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² Note that IDEA section 612(a)(5)(B) and associated regulations preclude states from having anything other than a placement neutral funding system.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

K8 Access Center (co-teaching training modules)

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/co-teaching>

Co-Teaching Connection (information on co-teaching and links to related resources)

<http://coteach.com>

Power of 2 (Learning modules, strategies, and other materials for collaboration and co-teaching)

<http://www.powerof2.org/>

The IRIS Center (modules, activities, resources for inclusive schooling, including collaboration and co-teaching)

<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>

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