

# BRIEF

## A PRIMER FOR INCORPORATING PRE-SERVICE CO-TEACHING INTO TEACHER RESIDENCIES

### About This Brief on Pre-Service Co-Teaching Residencies

Pre-Service co-teaching – where teacher candidates engage as co-teachers during student teaching – is a strong instructional model.<sup>1</sup> When combined with high-quality, yearlong teacher residencies, pre-service co-teaching has the potential to greatly enhance P-12 instruction while also preparing future teachers using the promising residency approach to teacher preparation.<sup>2</sup> Just as co-teachers work together seamlessly in their classrooms, residencies, by [definition](#), integrate pre-service teachers into instructional efforts.<sup>3</sup> A year of pre-service co-teaching provides P-12 students with the full range of positive benefits that effective co-teaching provides and gives aspiring teachers access to great preparation through teacher residencies.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, co-teaching is not new, and many established residency partnerships already use co-teaching models. Over the past year, St. Cloud State University worked with *Prepared To Teach* to support several newer residency partnerships as they explored how pre-service co-teaching could enhance their residency designs. Many found the idea of pre-service co-teaching quite different from their prior approaches for organizing student teachers' instructional experiences. As a result, we decided to collect and share some of what these new partnerships found helpful as they designed their co-teaching residencies, in hopes the lessons might be supportive for others exploring these pre-service instructional models.

The document begins focused on classroom teachers, since they are most affected by the adoption of pre-service co-teaching. We offer approaches to help build their understanding of the model itself and its instructional value. Next, because true co-teaching does not happen without co-planning, we share ideas for how partnerships can create space for co-planning in the context of already busy school days. Finally, we discuss approaches for building a common language and vision for co-teaching so that pre-service co-teaching across schools and classrooms, from year to year, exhibits the features that partnerships value.

We hope the combination of resources, ideas, and activities in this brief are helpful. Trainings and technical assistance that go deeper are available for districts, preparation programs, and partnerships through the Academy for Co-Teaching and Collaboration; contact Teresa Washut Heck at [twheck@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:twheck@stcloudstate.edu) for more information. For more information on residency development, visit *Prepared To Teach's* [reports](#) and [resources](#) hubs.

*We always welcome improvements to our guidance documents. Email us with any suggestions at [PreparedToTeach@bankstreet.edu](mailto:PreparedToTeach@bankstreet.edu)*

## First Steps: Understanding Pre-Service Co-Teaching

Giving classroom teachers the space to build their understanding of pre-service co-teaching is key to successful co-teaching residency development. Cooperating teachers need the opportunity to explore how co-teaching residencies might differ from other models where multiple adults are in the classroom and to explore what kinds of shifts pre-service co-teaching might entail for them.

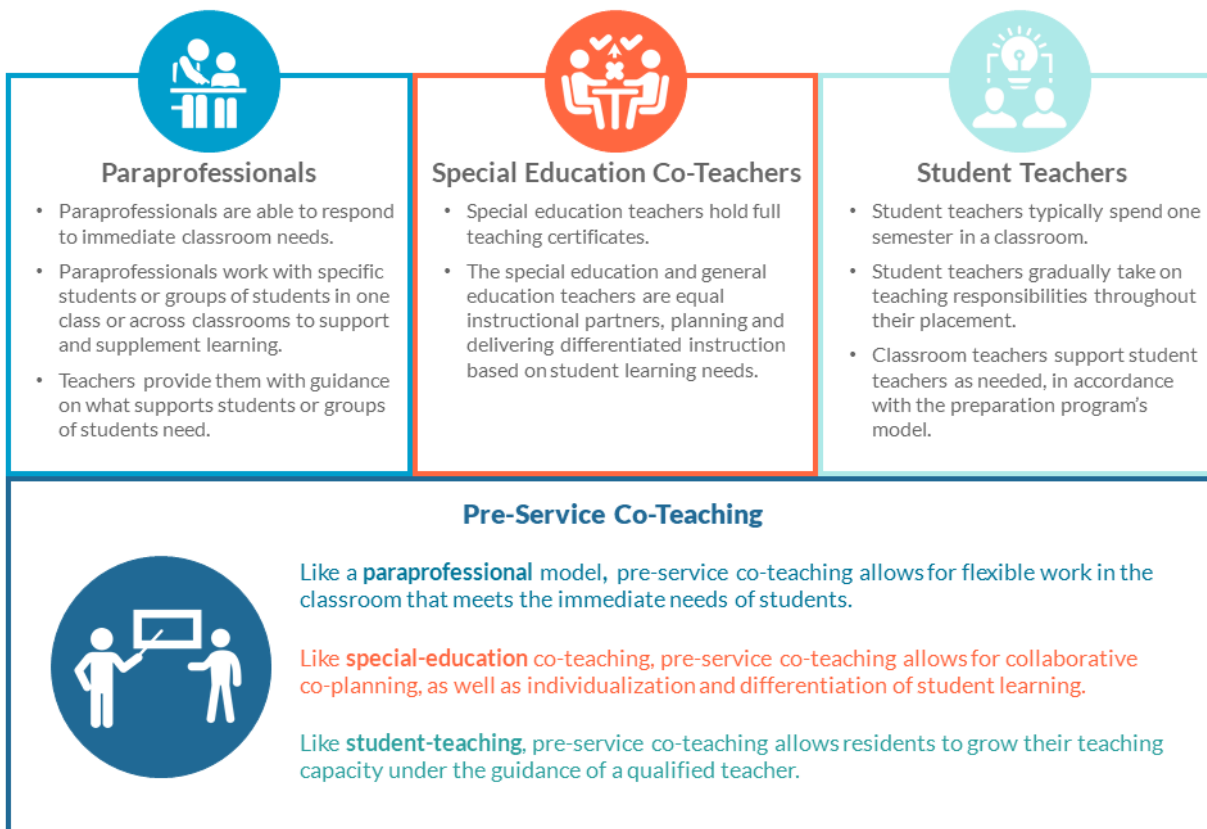
### Starting from What Exists: Common Supports in the Classroom

Three common roles bring additional adults to classrooms across the nation: paraprofessionals/assistant teachers, special education co-teachers, and student teachers. The classroom teacher-of-record has a different relationship to each of the three:

- **Paraprofessionals** help address immediate and ongoing student needs in the classroom. They may have a regular presence in a particular class or work across several classrooms. Teachers provide the direction for what paraprofessionals do with identified students or groups of students to support their learning.
- **Special education co-teachers** hold full teaching certificates and are hired to be equal instructional partners with the teacher-of-record in the classroom, co-planning and delivering differentiated instruction in tandem based on learning needs of all students. Special education researchers brought this original model of co-teaching to the field to meet the needs of special education students who are educated alongside their peers in inclusive classrooms.<sup>5</sup>
- **Student teachers** typically spend a semester in a classroom, first observing the teacher and students, progressing to teaching lesson plans they write, and culminating in complete ownership of content delivery for a week or more so they can experience what it is like to teach. Teachers' roles within the student teacher experience vary depending on the preparation program's model. A central purpose of the student teaching placement is to allow aspiring teachers to complete certification requirements as they gain an initial sense of what their future jobs will entail.

Teachers, of course, are familiar with all these roles. Linking discussions of co-teaching to these three roles can provide a useful starting point when developing co-teaching residencies because the strengths of each model exist in pre-service co-teaching. Residents can and should provide additional instructional supports for P-12 students. Their presence helps create inclusive environments. And through the yearlong co-teaching experience, they gain experience as classroom teachers (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Comparing Pre-Service Co-Teaching with Paraprofessionals, Special Education Co-Teachers, and Student Teachers



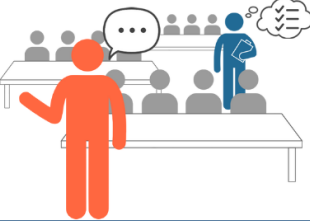
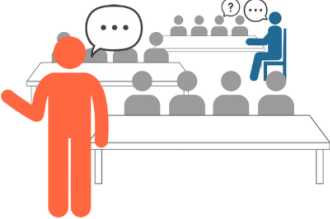
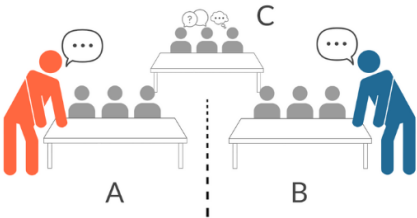
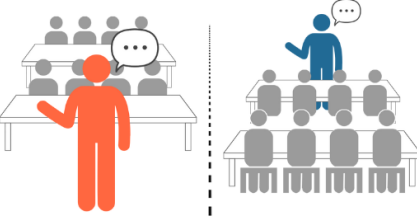
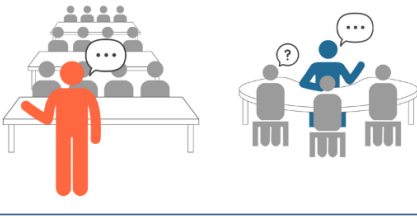
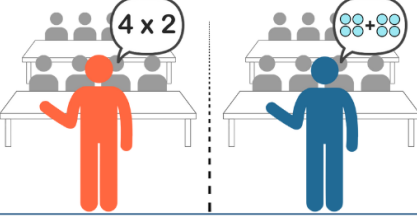

## Exploring the Pre-Service Co-Teaching Model

Pre-service residency co-teaching does fulfill student teaching and other clinical practice requirements that programs must adhere to, but the model differs significantly from student teaching. Pre-service co-teaching does not generally switch primary control of the classroom between the resident and the classroom teacher (though residents do have opportunities to lead instruction on their own). Rather, residents share responsibilities with the classroom teacher—often called the “mentor”—as one member of the co-teaching pair.

Pre-service co-teaching involves co-planning and co-facilitating lessons for the length of the yearlong clinical placement. It leverages the benefit of having both a mentor teacher and a resident in the classroom to foster strong student relationships, manage students’ personal and interpersonal development, and meet demands of students’ learning. All the while, residents reflect under the direct mentorship of the teacher to grow in their teaching practice.

Pre-service co-teaching includes seven classroom instructional models: One Teach, One Observe; One Teach, One Assist; **Station Teaching**; **Parallel Teaching**; **Supplemental Teaching**; **Alternative Teaching**; and **Team Teaching** (Figure 2). The last five models in bold are the ones that research indicates may offer the largest achievement gains for students.<sup>6</sup> The specifics of each model are flexible, and strategies can be combined as appropriate for the situation to best meet student and resident needs.

Figure 2: Co-Teaching Models Chart

Co-Teaching Models	
	<p><b>One Teach, One Observe</b> – One teacher has primary instructional responsibility while the other captures observational data on students, classroom dynamics, or teacher behaviors in order to support the co-teaching pair's future reflections and planning. Either member of the co-teaching pair can serve either role.</p>
	<p><b>One Teach, One Assist</b> – One teacher has primary instructional responsibility while the other assists students with their work, monitors behaviors, or corrects assignments. The assisting teacher often focuses on lifting the voices of students or groups who might otherwise hesitate to participate in class.</p>
	<p><b>Station Teaching</b> – The co-teaching pair divides instructional content into parts with "stations" to engage the content. Groups of students spend a designated amount of time at each station. Often, an independent station will be used along with the teacher-led stations.</p>
	<p><b>Parallel Teaching</b> – Each teacher instructs half the students. The two teachers address the same instructional material and present the lesson using the same teaching strategies. The greatest benefit to this approach is the reduction of student-to-teacher ratio. Also, residents can mirror the cooperating teacher, striving to keep the same pace and picking up specific teaching moves.</p>
	<p><b>Supplemental Teaching</b> – This strategy allows one teacher to work with students at their expected grade level, while the other teacher works with students who would benefit from having additional learning opportunities for enrichment and/or support.</p>
	<p><b>Alternative Teaching</b> – Alternative teaching strategies provide two different approaches to teaching the same information. The learning outcome is the same for all students; the instructional methodology, however, is different.</p>
	<p><b>Team Teaching</b> – Well planned, team taught lessons, exhibit an invisible flow of instruction with no prescribed division of roles. Using a team teaching strategy, both teachers are actively involved in the lesson. From a students' perspective, there is no clearly defined leader. Both teachers share the instruction, are free to interject information, and are available to assist students and answer questions.</p>

## Understanding the Promise of Co-Teaching Residencies

St. Cloud State University conducted four years of rigorous research on pre-service co-teaching in traditional teacher preparation, finding that the model had a positive impact across nearly every grade and subject.<sup>7</sup> They compared outcomes in classrooms with pre-service co-teachers, regular student teachers, and no student teachers using scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). Pre-service co-teaching classrooms outperformed classrooms with only one teacher and far surpassed traditional student teaching situations, as Figure 3 shows. Students also overwhelmingly found the co-teaching model beneficial in terms of their lived experiences in the classroom. They reported having more help with questions, enjoying the varied perspectives and styles of teaching from having two teachers, and liking the creative lessons the pair created (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Reading and Math Proficiency Score Comparison

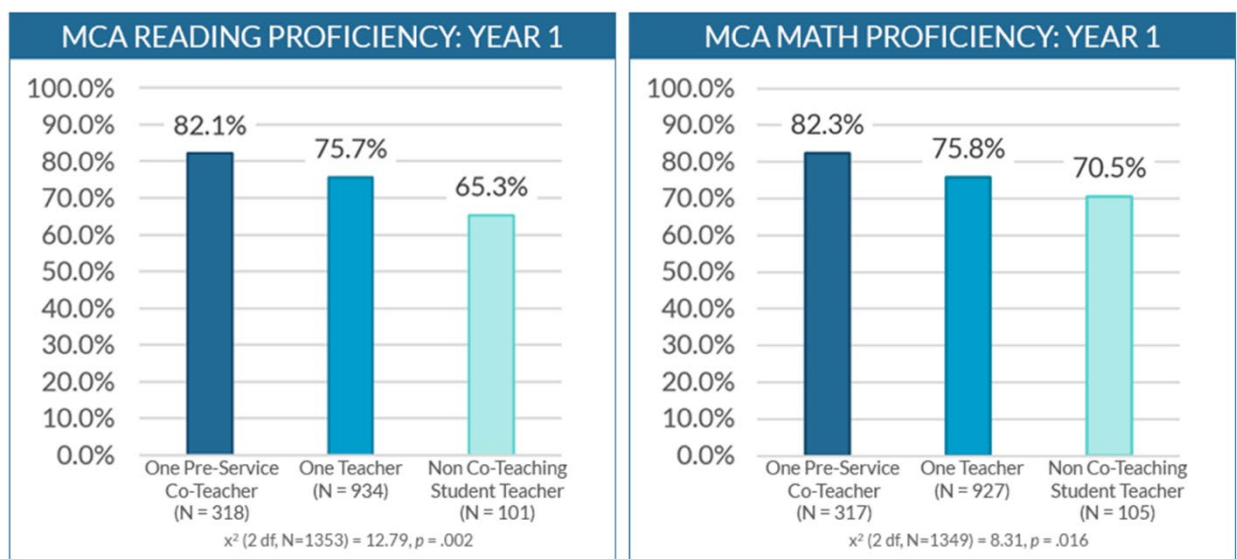


Figure 4: Students' Perceptions of Co-Teaching

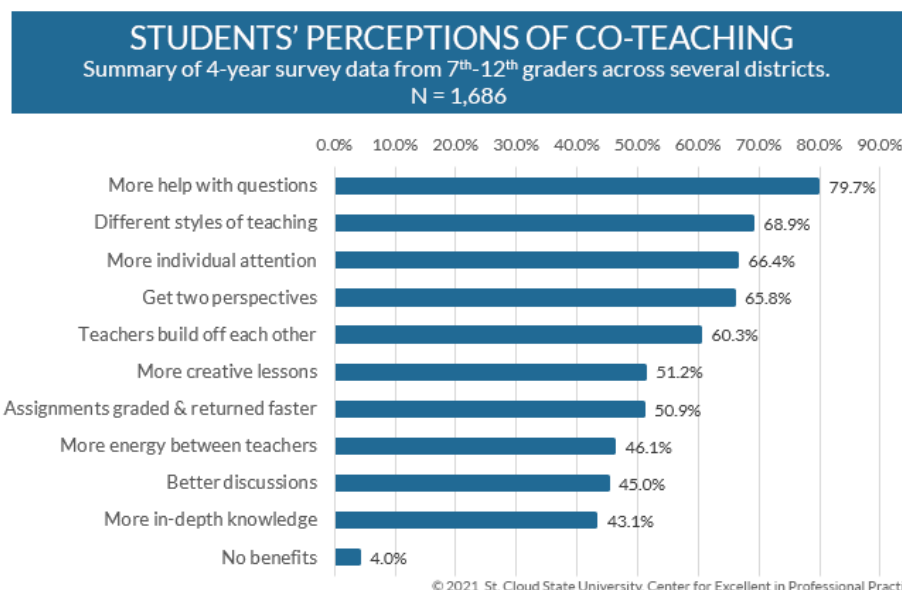
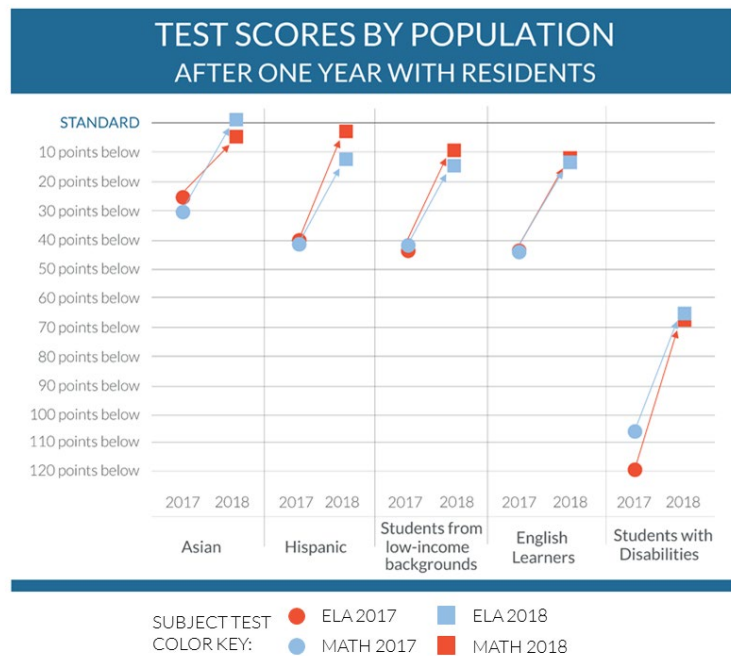


Figure 5: Test Scores by Population at Wishon Elementary

Schools using co-teaching in residency models have seen positive results, too, though rigorous research assessing their impact does not yet exist. Still, as Figure 5 shows, individual schools can benefit from co-teaching. At Wishon Elementary in California, the teacher preparation partner placed co-teaching residents in every classroom, and the school moved from being 40 points below state standards to only 10 points below, with gains across every demographic subgroup the school served—including seeing the largest gains in special education. Student disciplinary referrals also decreased from 1.9% to .9% after having residents for the year.<sup>8</sup>



Such results might seem surprising at first blush, but on reflection they make sense. Both the mentor teacher and the resident have the opportunity to build strong relationships with students, adjust and scaffold activities to meet individual needs, and offer varied perspectives and techniques that help the whole class thrive. Students essentially have twice as much access to an adult educator in a co-teaching model. When used across a whole school, co-teaching residencies can promote a collaborative culture because mentors and residents both exemplify and experience the teamwork that supports collegial and positive relationships, which are known to support school improvement.<sup>9</sup>

## Co-Planning: An Essential Ingredient for Successful Co-Teaching

Effective co-teaching does not just happen; it requires co-planning. Co-teaching pairs need a schedule that allows for regular co-planning time. Without time to co-plan and reflect, pairs are not able to discuss responsibilities, brainstorm lesson ideas and structures, and think critically about their work and how it is impacting their students.

Schools that use co-teaching—whether for special education, pre-service, or both—have found creative ways to build in co-planning time. Table 1 details the five major approaches schools have used to ensure pairs have co-planning time: Sharing responsibilities, shifting out-of-classroom duties, intentional use of substitute coverage, tapping into and creating “specials” blocks, and dedicating professional learning time before, during, and after the school year. These ideas are followed by tips from experienced co-teachers on how they approach co-planning with their residents.

Table 1: Common Approaches for Finding Co-Planning Time

Common Approaches for Finding Co-Planning Time	
Approach	Description
<b>Sharing Responsibilities</b>	<p>Mentors can share classroom responsibilities with residents. This approach both builds resident skills and saves time that can then be used to co-plan. Commonly shared responsibilities include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grading</li> <li>• Classroom set-up/breakdown</li> <li>• Materials preparation</li> </ul>
<b>Shifting out-of-classroom duties</b>	<p>Schools often find that supporting teachers' co-planning is a better use of teachers' time than assigning them to out-of-classroom tasks. Schools find ways to reassign out-of-classroom roles to others who are not co-teaching, including supervisors, paraprofessionals, volunteers, or other staff. Commonly reassigned duties include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus duty</li> <li>• Lunch/recess supervision</li> <li>• Hall monitoring</li> <li>• After-school programming</li> </ul>
<b>Intentional use of substitute coverage</b>	<p>Co-teaching schools sometimes shift their thinking about substitute teaching to include intentional instructional support for co-planning in addition to the usual emergency coverage substitutes provide. Here are two approaches to providing intentional coverage for co-planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When schools have floating substitutes or additional on-site instructional supports, those individuals' schedules can be designed to regularly fill in for the co-teaching pair for a period of co-planning.</li> <li>• With cohorts of residents in the same school building, co-teaching pairs can alternate covering each other's classes for a period or two a week. Each pair then has time to co-plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Especially early on in the year, residents can stay in their home classrooms to lead pre-planned lessons while the teacher-of-record covers for the other pair, allowing the resident to practice solo teaching in a familiar context that sets them up for success.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Tapping into and creating "specials" blocks</b>	<p>"Specials" often provide planning periods for teachers. In addition to using class periods such as PE, art, and music for co-planning time, some schools have found ways to build more specials into the curriculum. Here are some sample ideas for creating specials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a weekly community service component in the curriculum such as gardening or letter writing to homebound or otherwise immobile community members. When students are engaging with the community project, co-teachers can plan.</li> <li>• Reach out to parents and community members to facilitate exploratory lessons or experiences (e.g., cooking, photography, construction) to create more time for co-teachers to plan.</li> <li>• Coordinate with partnering colleges/universities to have their faculty teach lessons, provide demonstrations, or host campus visits with students while co-teachers plan.</li> <li>• In sites with multiple residents, designate one period a week where residents lead specials they have expertise in (e.g., guitar, foreign language, collage).</li> </ul>

## Common Approaches for Finding Co-Planning Time (cont'd)

Approach	Description
Dedicating professional learning time before, during, and after the school year	<p>Co-teaching is a valuable instructional model that merits dedicated professional learning time. Schools can integrate co-teaching into existing professional learning structures to benefit instruction in these ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start co-planning in the summer before students arrive so co-teaching pairs can strengthen their relationship and set up a solid foundation for the year to come.</li> <li>• Dedicate days to co-planning throughout the school year, tapping into existing staff development days or days that students have off.</li> <li>• Pay co-teachers to spend additional time co-planning.</li> <li>• Include co-planning in existing long-term professional development initiatives.</li> <li>• Use faculty meeting time to share promising practices and discuss any issues with co-teaching.</li> </ul>

### Tips from Experienced Co-Teaching Pairs for Co-Planning

In addition to having time to co-plan, when pairs intentionally explore how they want to engage co-planning, things run more smoothly. Experienced co-teachers suggest the following for working with residents:

#### Be flexible about how much of the lesson you co-plan together

- Plan lessons at a high level together (lesson topic, groupings, who is taking on what responsibilities, etc.). You can then plan parts of the lesson separately and come back together for a final review.

#### Choose working methods that work for you both

- Not everyone works in the same way, so discussing logistics can be helpful. Will you work together in long chunks of time or several smaller chunks? Are there times of day that work best to connect? Do you want to be in-person or virtual? Do you prefer to text, chat, or email?

#### Take advantage of collaborative technology

- Use Jamboard, Google Docs, or other online platforms to help you organize and map out your ideas in a space that allows for both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration.

#### Use a variety of co-teaching strategies

- Take advantage of the learning possibilities inherent in pre-service co-teaching by maximizing your use of different strategies. Which strategies might fit a lesson best? What strategies might benefit students most right now? How might either of you as teachers, in particular the resident, benefit from engaging a particular strategy?



## Building Shared Understandings Across the System

Building a shared language around what pre-service co-teaching means for a local partnership has many benefits. It provides clarity for individual co-teaching pairs as they embark on their new instructional journeys. It offers direction for partnerships as they plan their work. It focuses training efforts. In places where staff at every layer of the system understand pre-service co-teaching benefits and practices, the model influences more than just the residency classroom itself by highlighting benefits of collaborative efforts that can build trust and strengthen school culture. Below, we offer several variations of activities and discussion prompts across three steps for building a shared vision for pre-service co-teaching for residency partnerships: surfacing current thinking, exploring perspectives and possibilities, and establishing common language to describe co-teaching.

Whatever process your partnership uses to create a shared understanding of co-teaching residencies, be sure to include voices from different roles and perspectives, including preparation program leaders, district or school leaders, mentor teachers, residents, liaisons, and any other key stakeholders in the partnership. Revisiting and updating your co-teaching description periodically is also beneficial.

### *Step 1: Surface Current Thinking*

Conceptions of co-teaching can vary widely even within the same school, ranging from the deep understanding that special educators have about the model to thinking that co-teaching is a way to relieve the pressures of teaching by having two people split responsibilities for one classroom. Surfacing current thinking, as the following sample activities are designed to do, can help partnerships understand the professional learning opportunities that might be needed to begin to move stakeholders towards a shared understanding of pre-service co-teaching.

- For a low-tech activity, make a copy of [this mind-map activity](#) and have participants fill it out. Discussion questions around the activity might include:
  - What kinds of activities did participants associate with co-teaching? What kinds of activities were common? What kinds of activities were rarely noted?
  - What did participants think would be common? Were there surprises?
  - Did people from different roles and perspectives align or differ in their associations with co-teaching?
- For a more visual, technology-enhanced option, use a [Word Cloud app](#). Participants type in all the words that come to mind around the concept of “co-teaching,” resulting in a “cloud” of words where the most frequent words take center stage. You can give guidance on the total number of words people should enter and on whether or not phrases are discouraged or encouraged.

*Note: Using specific guidance like “When entering your words, try to use nouns and verbs first, adjectives and adverbs second, and phrases as a last resort” is likely to result in a more robust word cloud.*

- Once everyone finishes, ask the group what themes resonate and what surprised them in the word cloud.
- Compare what surfaced in the word cloud with sample definitions of co-teaching, such as those the St. Cloud researchers surfaced in their work:<sup>10</sup>

“As early as 1973 Miller and Trump define co-teaching ‘...as an arrangement in which two or more teachers...plan, instruct, and evaluate in one or more subject areas’ (p.354). Cook and Friend (1995) assert that co-teaching is, ‘two or more

professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space' (p. 14). Taking it further, other writers concur that co-teaching is two or more individuals working together '...for the outcome of achieving what none could have done alone' (Wenzlaff, Berak, Wieseman, Monroe-Baillargeon, Bacharach & Bradfield-Kreider, 2002, p. 14)."

- For teams ready for a more fluid, interactive approach, explore using a collaborative app like [Mural](#), where you can work from a mind map template that will allow individuals to interact directly with others' thinking. Use of apps like this can allow for a continuous process of developing shared understandings, with participants engaging and revising ideas on the mind map (Step 2) to inform the ultimate creation of a strong, shared description of your co-teaching residency (Step 3).

### *Step 2: Explore Perspectives and Possibilities*

Once initial ideas have been surfaced, explore more nuanced aspects of participants' responses by engaging questions such as the following, using sites like [MentiMeter](#) that offer real-time anonymous input, or by gathering thoughts asynchronously through online survey tools like [Google Forms](#):

- How might co-teaching expectations vary for different stakeholders—for example, programs, districts, teachers, residents? What concepts that have already been surfaced might be most attractive to specific groups?
- How might we bring the varied conceptions of co-teaching into alignment to enhance the residency experience?
- What other ideas might we need to include in our description of co-teaching to ensure residency co-teaching meets our goals?
- How can we tap into underutilized funds of knowledge from our community to strengthen our ultimate description of co-teaching?

### *Step 3: Build a Shared Description for the Co-Teaching Residency*

Your partnership will likely have an abundance of exciting ideas and perspectives at this point; creating a clear description that offers guiding operational principles for the residency may require establishing consensus around which elements are essential to your partnership's pre-service co-teaching residency and which elements are helpful, promising, or otherwise positive but not necessarily essential. Here are some ideas for helping groups reach consensus on those distinctions:

- Create a Jamboard with columns for participants to record their thoughts. For example, columns can be labeled "Essential", "Helpful/Promising", and "Other Thoughts" ([example](#)). Encourage people to "+" prior comments they agree with. Have a small group offer a first draft of a description for later discussion based on this information.
- Have individuals work separately, writing concepts on sticky notes that they then add to separate chart papers for "essential" and "helpful/promising" elements. Discuss common themes and surface areas lacking agreement. Assign a group to work through disagreements and to come up with draft language for later discussion.
- Break participants into groups of 3-4 and have each group develop possible text for your co-teaching description based on prior activities. Share those out and surface concepts

that should be part of the final version. Create a group to draft a possible description for later discussion.

As your residency partnerships engage discussions about co-teaching, we hope the ideas in this document can help partners see how residencies can accomplish even more for districts than meeting future hiring needs with well-prepared individuals who remain in the profession. When designed with strong instructional models like pre-service co-teaching, residencies can be integral to districts' instructional visions and schools' capacity to serve every child well. We invite you to share your experiences with us through social media (@Prepared To Teach on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)) or contact us at [PreparedToTeach@bankstreet.edu](mailto:PreparedToTeach@bankstreet.edu). We look forward to hearing about your work!

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Bacharach and Teresa Washut Heck, "Voices from the Field: Multiple Perspectives on a Co-Teaching in Student Teaching Model," *Educational Renaissance* 1, no. 1 (2012): 49–61; Nancy Bacharach, Teresa Washut Heck, and Kathryn Dahlberg, "Changing the Face of Student Teaching through Coteaching," *Action in Teacher Education* 32, no. 1 (2010): 3–14.

<sup>2</sup> Roneeta Guha and Tara Kini, "Teacher Residencies: Building a High-Quality, Sustainable Workforce" (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2016), <https://tinyurl.com/yrth7be9>; "NCTR Annual Report" (Chicago, IL: National Center for Teacher Residencies, 2022), <https://nctrresidencies.org/about-nctr/annual-report/>.

<sup>3</sup> Pathways Alliance Teacher Residency Working Group, "Towards a National Definition of Teacher Residencies" (New York, NY: InnovateEDU, August 11, 2022), <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/pt/38/>.

<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Villa, Jacqueline S. Thousand, and Ann I. Nevin, *A Guide to Co-Teaching: New Lessons and Strategies to Facilitate Student Learning*, Third edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Villa, Thousand, and Nevin.

<sup>6</sup> Bacharach and Heck, "Voices from the Field: Multiple Perspectives on a Co-Teaching in Student Teaching Model"; Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg, "Changing the Face of Student Teaching through Coteaching."

<sup>7</sup> Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg, "Changing the Face of Student Teaching through Coteaching."

<sup>8</sup> *Prepared To Teach* analyses of publicly available data in California, as reported in Karen DeMoss and Brigid Brennan, "Productive Policy for a Stronger, More Diverse Teaching Profession: Lessons from and for New York" (New York, NY: Bank Street College of Education, Prepared To Teach, April 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/yalq994h>.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002); Matthew Ronfeldt et al., "Teacher Collaboration in Instructional Teams and Student Achievement.," *American Educational Research Journal* 52, no. 3 (June 2015): 475–514; Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan, "The Power of Professional Capital: With an Investment in Collaboration, Teachers Become Nation Builders," *JSD/The Learning Professional* 34, no. 3 (June 2013): 36–39; Alan J. Daly et al., "Accessing Capital Resources: Investigating the Effects of Teacher Human and Social Capital on Student Achievement," *Teachers College Record* 116, no. 7 (2014): 1–42.

<sup>10</sup> Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg, "Changing the Face of Student Teaching through Coteaching."