



# Keys to Effective Co-teaching Models: Needs Assessment and Program Planning

Developed for the Arkansas Department of Education  
Co-teaching Professional Development Team  
University of Central Florida

## Introduction

The [Arkansas Department of Education \(ADE\), Special Education State Program Development staff](#) is committed to an ongoing professional development program supporting positive outcomes for all students in co-taught classrooms. This is the first of three modules developed by the Florida Co-teaching Professional Development Team in collaboration with the ADE.

This module is designed to guide key stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, support personnel, and family partners, as they work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive plan for co-teaching implementation. It provides guidance and resources to supplement the Building Leadership Team Training sponsored by the Arkansas Department of Education. The PowerPoint presentation, [Implementing Effective Co-teaching Models: Phase One: Needs Assessment and Program Planning](#) for that training is also available for viewing on the [Arkansas Collaborative Educators' \(ACE\) Network](#). The linked websites in this module have been carefully selected to introduce you to the best online resources available to support comprehensive program planning for co-teaching implementation.

## Objectives

In completing this module, building level teams will:

1. Articulate a [common vision](#) for co-teaching implementation.
2. Identify [incentives](#) for teachers and students related to co-teaching implementation.
3. Assess the current [knowledge and skills](#) of key staff related to co-teaching.
4. Identify and allocate available [resources](#) for co-teaching implementation.
5. Develop an [action plan](#) that outlines positive actions to move toward the results they want.

## Key Considerations

In the article, [\*The Future of Special Education: Co-teaching, Instructional Delivery Seen as Key\*](#), Julie Tollefson quotes Floyd Hudson, professor of special education at the University of Kansas, who said, "I am convinced that the future for us is in instructional delivery, not curriculum content...The other direction we're going to see much more of is co-teaching." Unfortunately, research shows that, in many cases, swift implementation of co-teaching models has led to less than satisfactory results. Co-teaching implementation requires significant changes in the way educators use facilities, allocate resources, schedule students and deliver and evaluate instruction.

In the article, [\*Tips and Strategies for Co-teaching at the Secondary Level\*](#), Dieker and Murawski (2004) discuss roles of administrators and co-teachers in preparation for co-teaching. Building leadership teams should recognize that significant school change occurs over time and, in even the most progressive environments, real change may take from three to five years.

However, change may be facilitated when strengths are built upon and barriers are recognized. Knosler (1991) identified essential elements that must be present if significant change is to occur. These five elements and the potential reactions of school staff, depending upon whether or not those elements are present, are represented in the table below.

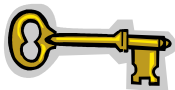
Common Vision	Incentives	Knowledge and Skills	Resources	Action Plan	Result
?	X	X	X	X	Confusion
X	?	X	X	X	Resistance
X	X	?	X	X	Anxiety
X	X	X	?	X	Frustration
X	X	X	X	?	Treadmill
X	X	X	X	X	Change



## Common Vision

It is important that key stakeholders share a philosophy or system of principles guiding co-teaching implementation that is compatible with existing values and beliefs. Personnel involved must be clear on the basic goals for co-teaching and committed to a common vision for how it can be best implemented in their school and their classrooms. The article, [\*What Matters Most in Inclusive Education: A Practical Guide for Moving Forward\*](#), by Deborah L. Voltz, Netty Brazil and Alison Ford (2001), “describes defining principles of inclusive education and highlights important questions to ask in determining whether inclusive environments demonstrate these principles. This article also includes practical strategies for assisting educators in creating educational environments that manifest the defining principles of inclusion” (p. 1).

The Access Center hosted a webinar, [\*Supervising Co-Teaching Teams: Whose Line is it Anyway?\*](#), presented by Dr. Stacia Rush on January 25, 2006 that explored how general educators and special educators view co-teaching and how general and special education supervisors can develop a common lens for supporting and evaluating performance.



## Incentives

School personnel at all levels must have a vested interest in the implementation of effective co-teaching models. Stakeholders must perceive that co-teaching offers benefits to teachers and students with and without disabilities. The [\*Advantages of Co-teaching\*](#) are concisely summarized in a table adapted by Helen Barrier from the work of Wendy Dover.

Teachers are most likely to see these benefits in school environments where key personnel promoting co-teaching are respected and trusted, expectations for co-teaching are realistic, and faculty and staff have a voice in implementation of co-teaching models. The March/April 1999 Harvard Education Newsletter has an interesting article, [\*Co-Teaching: Are Two Heads Better Than One in an Inclusion Classroom?\*](#), by Millicent Lawton, focusing on the benefits of co-teaching.



## Knowledge and Skills

Professional development has been identified as a critical component of effective co-teaching models (Freytag, 2003). Co-teaching implementation requires specialized knowledge and skills for both general and special educators. Co-teachers should be confident in their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities through co-teaching service delivery. General educators must also appreciate the need for accommodations and modifications to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Special educators should be familiar with general education curriculum and methods. They must also have the knowledge and skills to suggest instructional strategies to meet unique student needs. Finally, because co-teaching is a partnership, teachers should possess effective interpersonal communication skills. Open, positive communication between general and special educators is critical.

The article, [Understanding Co-teaching Components](#) by Susan E. Gately and Frank J. Gately, Jr. in *Teaching Exceptional Children* provides an excellent summary of the important knowledge and skills for co-teaching. Fully realized models incorporate meaningful roles for the general and the special educator and provide a wider range of instructional alternatives than would be possible with just one teacher.

The University of Kansas's website, *Special Connections*, provides descriptions of five [Types of Co-teaching](#) with video examples. Deer Lakes Middle School developed an excellent [Collaborative Teaching Rubric](#) to assist teams in identifying the skills they possess in collaboration and those that will need to be improved. Co-teaching partners are encouraged to visit the [Power of 2](#) website hosted by the University of Kansas which provides a wealth of information to assist in planning and delivering effective co-taught lessons.

To see what effective teachers do in co-taught classrooms, visit the ACE Network [Video Library](#) and check out *The Power of 2*. In this video, Dr. Marilyn Friend provides an overview of co-teaching with video clips of five different instructional formats illustrating how the general and special educator can both be actively engaged in teaching students in co-taught settings.



## Resources

Educational resources are always in limited supply. Sufficient time for planning and preparation between awareness and implementation of co-teaching models should be allocated for careful consideration of how to make the best use of the resources that are available. An investment in ongoing training and staff development for novice and veteran co-teachers is key.

Building level teams must make difficult decisions in selecting what classes will be co-taught and which students will be served in co-taught settings. It is important to guard against trying to do too much with limited resources, particularly when considering teacher assignments. Clearly the ideal is natural proportions of students with disabilities in heterogeneous groupings. However, this can be challenging with limited numbers of special education teachers available for co-teaching. Sindelar (1995) found that, when the special educator is stretched over too many co-taught classes, "Logistics are nightmarish. The special education teachers had more teachers with whom to collaborate, more interpersonal dynamics with which to contend, more rooms to visit, more halls to walk, and less time for each student" (p. 236).

Full realization of co-teaching models requires that co-teachers engage in co-planning. Lisa Dieker's [\*Co-teaching Lesson Planning Book\*](#) provides an excellent format for shared planning by general and special educators.

Unfortunately, lack of common planning time is a frequent concern for co-teaching partners. The Training and Technical Assistance Center at the College of William and Mary has developed an extensive list of creative ideas for [\*Finding Time to Collaborate\*](#).

For resources to further develop knowledge and understanding of co-teaching, the [ACE Network](#) has been specifically developed for Arkansas building level teams and co-teaching partners with links to the [video library](#) and numerous helpful co-teaching sites.



## Action Plan

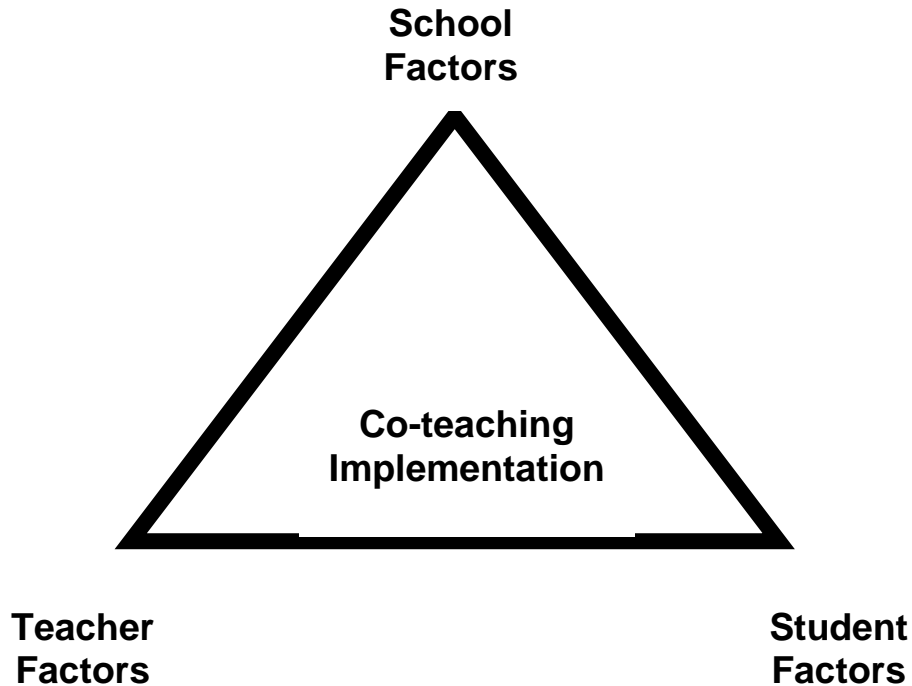
Freytag (2003) identified nine research-based factors associated with effective co-teaching programs including:

1. Administrative support
2. Balanced classroom rosters
3. Common planning time
4. Training and staff development
5. Voluntary participation
6. Teacher voice
7. Effective communication
8. Parity in teacher roles and responsibilities
9. Teacher efficacy in the instruction of students with special needs

Planning teams must consider all of these factors in preparing to implement co-teaching. The action plan should address the following questions:

1. Who will participate in co-taught classrooms?
2. Which classrooms are appropriate for co-teaching?
3. Which subjects will be co-taught?
4. How will students be scheduled for co-taught classes?
5. How will student progress be monitored in co-taught classrooms?
6. How will co-teaching arrangements and implementation be evaluated?

School structure and scheduling must provide flexibility to accommodate co-teaching arrangements. Vaughn, Schumm and Arguelles (1997) discuss these issues in the article, [The ABCDEs of Co-teaching](#). There is no one size fits all plan. Co-teaching program planning must be tailored to meet the needs of **your school, your teachers**, and most importantly, **your students**. Ideally, all stake-holders, including district and building level administrators, general and special education teachers, families, and students with disabilities, are involved in planning for co-teaching. The Training and Technical Assistance Center at the College of William and Mary has many suggestions for [Preparing Parents for Inclusive Classrooms](#). District and school guidelines for implementation of co-teaching must be clearly communicated to everyone involved. Every school is a unique context for co-teaching implementation. The figure and table below depict unique factors that should be considered when implementing co-teaching school-wide.



<u><b>School Factors</b></u>	<u><b>Teacher Factors</b></u>	<u><b>Student Factors</b></u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commitment</li> <li>▪ Common Vision</li> <li>▪ Administrative Support</li> <li>▪ Faculty Support</li> <li>▪ Staff Support</li> <li>▪ School Structure</li> <li>▪ School Scheduling</li> <li>▪ Class Size</li> <li>▪ Curriculum Standards</li> <li>▪ Resources</li> <li>▪ Incentives</li> <li>▪ Action Plan</li> <li>▪ Other Initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commitment</li> <li>▪ Incentives</li> <li>▪ Vision</li> <li>▪ Attitudes</li> <li>▪ Teaching Philosophy</li> <li>▪ Teaching Style</li> <li>▪ Professional Development</li> <li>▪ Teaching Experience</li> <li>▪ Content Knowledge</li> <li>▪ Skills to Adapt Curriculum and Instruction</li> <li>▪ Professional Relationships</li> <li>▪ Interpersonal Skills</li> <li>▪ Communication Skills</li> <li>▪ Roles and Responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Time Demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Population</li> <li>▪ Disability</li> <li>▪ Diversity</li> <li>▪ Present Level of Performance</li> <li>▪ I.E.P.Goals</li> <li>▪ Accommodations</li> <li>▪ Learning Styles</li> <li>▪ Current Placement</li> <li>▪ Transition Goals</li> <li>▪ Parental Support</li> <li>▪ Behavioral Needs</li> <li>▪ Social Skills</li> </ul>

## Resources for Program Planning

Click here to download, [Strategies to Facilitate Co-teaching Implementation](#) and [Action Planning Checklist](#). These instruments are designed to help co-teaching planning teams assess their action plans for school-wide implementation of co-teaching.

Click here to download [Needs Assessment for Co-teaching Implementation](#) developed by the Co-teaching Professional Development Team at the University of Central Florida for the Arkansas Department of Education, February 2005.

NEIRTEC (The Northeast and the Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium) has developed a *Collaborative Evaluation Led by Local Educators: A Practical, Print- and Web-Based Guide* with a variety of downloadable "How To" web resources to assist in program evaluation is available at <http://www.neirtec.org/evaluation/>

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