Top Ten Ways for Administrators to Support Effective Co-Teaching

Lisa Combs
Combs Educational Consulting, Ltd.

Recognize that Co-Teaching is not a Panacea

- Avoid “all or nothing” thinking.
- Maintain a rich continuum of services.
- Don’t “shoe-horn” kids into co-taught model.
- Specialized instruction can and should occur in a variety of ways.
- Plan schedule and service delivery around student needs and not the other way around.
- Consider proactive “heat map” planning meeting each Spring.

Provide Proactive Training AND Coaching for Implementation

- Don’t jump in and then try and correct course later.
- Administrator(s) should attend training to communicate importance and also to support implementation.
- Include guidance counselors in training if they will be involved in scheduling.

Prioritize Co-Teaching in the Schedule

- Try to match students in co-taught classes on the caseload of the IS in that co-taught class.
- Schedule students who need co-taught courses first.
Pair the Right Partners

- Personality type
- Experience
- Special skills/training/certification

Support Parity

- Avoid pulling one of the co-teachers to sub in other classes frequently.
- Communicate with both teachers about student issues.
- Refer to both teachers as “second grade teachers” or “science teachers” to students and parents.
- Consider shared attribution model of accountability.

Create BALANCED Co-Taught Classrooms

- Avoid putting all at-risk students in the same class
- Avoid putting all behavior challenges in the same class
- Keep the co-taught class at roughly the same size as the traditional classes

Encourage INTENTIONAL use of all Co-Teaching Strategies

- There are no “right” and “wrong” co-teaching strategies: all should be used for different purposes.
- Ask what strategy is being used and for what purpose.
- Strategies can support various purposes, examples:
  - Academic differentiation
  - Student engagement
  - Formative assessment
  - Social connection
Supervise and Evaluate with Co-Teaching in Mind
- Consider dual observations and conferences, at least sometimes.
- Look for collaborative lesson planning.
- Look for equally active roles of both teachers.
- Ask how the lesson created a different experience for the learner than if there had only been one teacher.
- Look for genuine indicators of true, regular co-teaching (student interactions with both teachers, established roles, etc.)

Build a Solid Foundation and Scale Up
- Consider beginning with volunteer pairs.
- Consider beginning with one co-taught class in each grade or content area.
- Highlight successes regularly.
- Invite successful partners to share at staff meetings.
- Consider “trade” days to have teachers observe or even guest teach in successful co-taught classes.
- Have successful co-teachers train/mentor new partners or new staff members.

References and Resources
- An Administrator's Guide To Co-Teaching
  - Educational Leadership, Volume 73, No. 4, Wendy Murowski and Philip Bernhardt