Co-Teaching As a Vehicle To Inclusion In a Diverse Suburban Middle School: A Case Study

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CO-TEACHING AS A VEHICLE TO INCLUSION IN A DIVERSE SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

June 2019
CO-TEACHING AS A VEHICLE TO INCLUSION IN A DIVERSE SUBURBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Many school districts across the United States have adopted, or are considering adopting, full inclusion to meet academic and social-emotional needs of increasingly diverse student populations. Co-teaching has become a popular approach for districts committed to inclusion. This study is about a Midwestern school district which more than 10 years ago committed itself to inclusion and co-teaching. The primary research question was: How do we make co-teaching more effective in the Fairview School District? A survey was sent to 120 co-teachers from three middle schools about their experiences with co-teaching in the areas of sharing responsibilities, co-teaching relationships, planning time, administrative support, and professional development. Seventeen teachers from across the three schools volunteered to be interviewed in small groups to discuss the results of the survey. Themes which emerged from the survey and interview data were: allocation and use of planning time, the importance of co-teacher relationships, and a concern about parity in roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching partnership. Recommendations to address the primary research question include: a) performance of a needs assessment of co-teaching practices to design professional development tailored to the needs of teachers; b) creation of a co-teaching reference and resource guide, clearly outlining co-teaching expectations commitments, roles and responsibilities, best co-teaching practices, scheduling, honoring planning time, and administrative support; and c) formation of a co-teaching taskforce made up of representative stakeholders to assemble the resource guide, conduct and analyze the needs assessment, mentor co-teaching teams, and drive future improvement in co-teaching practices.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my beautiful family - my wife Emilie, my son Luis, and my daughter Evelyn: thank you for your unconditional love, support, and gentle reminders for me to continue to complete this degree. My journey in life would not be the same without you. I finally did it! To my mom, Lupita, and my siblings, Karen and Chris: although we are 800 miles apart, your continued love and encouragement are felt in everything I do. To the best in-laws in the world- Jim and Gretta: from the day I met you, you were nothing but loving and kind. The steps that led to the completion of this degree and advancement of my career, would not have been possible without your support. Cheers!

A special thanks to my mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Norm Weston. Your perspective, guidance, and input on completing this case study have resulted not only in the completion of the degree, but also in having a practical guide to help move educators forward and ultimately impact students. Thanks for not giving up on me; you were always willing to pick up where we left off no matter what.

To all the educators in Fairview School District who contributed to this case study by completing the survey and participating in small group interviews. Thank you for being sincere and open to sharing the successes and challenges related to co-teaching practices. Your commitment to serving our students and willingness to improve your practice is admirable. Lastly, to the Musketeers (you know who you are): thanks for your support and guidance throughout the years, especially with this case study. I could not ask for a better group of individuals to collaborate with in serving our students across all three middle schools. Once a Musketeer, always a Musketeer!
DEDICATION

This case study is dedicated to three of the most amazing human beings who have most influenced the person I have become: my abuelita Inés, my mamá Lupita, and my wife Emilie. Their modeling of perseverance and passion has ultimately impacted my purpose and perspective in life.

To my papá, Chuy: you were the main catalyst for the biggest change in my life. I will forever be grateful to have had such a hard-working role model who gave his all to support his family. I wish you were here, but I know you are proudly smiling and celebrating my accomplishment. ¡Salud!
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine co-teaching as a vehicle for inclusion. It was important to understand the context for the purpose of this study by sharing my personal journey in education and the experiences leading to sparking interest and passion in inclusion and co-teaching. I began my career in education more than a decade ago. I have served in schools ranging from high-needs, low-socio economic, and underperforming to affluent schools performing beyond what would be expected in most schools. These experiences have allowed me to obtain a variety of perspectives on student needs, instructional practices, leadership styles, and the overarching values of a school district.

My career began as a middle school bilingual teacher in a high-needs district. At that point, like any other inexperienced teacher, my focus was on establishing effective classroom management routines and finding a balance between teaching and life. The student population was predominantly Hispanic and, due to the structure of the district’s bilingual program, the number of students I taught was limited to a small number. Despite the challenges accompanying this position, my experience in this school allowed me to move on to other ventures.

After a few years, I reached a position as a Spanish teacher in a quite different middle school. The community and student population were predominantly Caucasian, affluent, and well-educated. The demand and expectations for student and teacher performance increased drastically in comparison to my previous position. I was not only teaching different content, but was teaching a dramatically different student population.
The principal at this school took me under his wing and began mentoring me by providing me leadership opportunities within the school. One year later, I enrolled in administration certification courses and began seriously considering becoming an administrator. This marked the phase of my career which led me out of the classroom and into school administration.

A few years later, I became an assistant principal in one of the largest high schools in Illinois. Ironically, this meant going back to the district in which I began my teaching career. This was an advantage in that I was familiar with the needs, population, and overall culture of the district. Just like any new administrator, I began with enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to helping students, teachers, and families. However, during my five-year tenure in this position, the role became increasingly more difficult due to changes in upper-administration, vision, and mission of the district. However, the challenges faced by the district, and the district’s responses, allowed me to learn strategies which, in similar situations, the lesson of “what not to do” would apply. By the end of my tenure in this district, I felt my contributions to the growth of others and my professional growth were limited, so I began searching for a new path.

In the spring of 2013, I learned about a K-8 district in a Northwest Chicago suburb, Fairview School District (Fairview SD), with demographics meeting the criteria for me to best serve the education community. I joined this district as the assistant principal of a middle school. Although this was a lateral move professionally, the culture and direction of the district was promising and aligned with my core beliefs for educating children.
Setting: Chestnut Middle School

Chestnut Middle School is reflective of the diversity and demographics of the Fairview SD. We serve students from a wide range of socio-economic statuses, languages, ethnicities, and needs. Figure 1 and 2 show demographics for Chestnut Middle School.

![Racial/Ethnic Diversity](chart1.png)

*Figure 1. Racial/Ethnic Diversity.*

![Low Income / English Learners](chart2.png)

*Figure 2. Low Income / English Learners.*

An example of how diverse our population is that we have students who get driven to school in the latest model of high-end cars and we have students who are
homeless. We have students taking advanced courses in cooperation with the feeder high-school district and students whose reading and math abilities are falling in the 3rd- to 4th-grade levels.

**Authentic Learning and Inclusionary Practices at Fairview School District**

In addition to the learning curve that comes with being part of a new organization, upon my arrival at the Fairview SD, I was introduced to the district’s philosophical and curricular focus: Authentic Learning and Inclusionary Practices. The philosophy adopted by the district behind Authentic Learning can be considered another version of project-based learning, which is something I became familiar with through my experience in the classroom and observing teachers during my early years as administrator. However, I had to quickly learn more about Inclusionary Practices, which has a great emphasis on co-planning and co-teaching.

In 2015 I became principal at the same school which formerly hired me as the assistant principal. Throughout my experiences as an administrator, the lens through which I view students’ needs has become wider and now, as principal, I must look at the entire organization. I am no longer just thinking of one or two classrooms; now I must think about the different sub-groups within the school and support teachers in finding ways to meet their needs. I can no longer just focus on the needs of English Language Learner (ELL) students or students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs); my focus has shifted to a wider range of needs within the entire school. Exploring the basic concepts of inclusion as it relates to co-planning and co-teaching has brought me to the realization that all students have a right, regardless of ability, to be instructed with their peers as much as possible. I have become a believer in inclusive education and its
practices to provide and create environments in which all students have access to learning that is challenging, based on their abilities. Developing this realization has ignited a sense of urgency within me leading to the purpose of this study.

**Statement of the Problem**

Fairview SD has focused on Inclusionary Practices for the past ten years. Within that time, there have been transition points critical to the support and implementation of inclusion. First, the district shared the vision and rationale for having inclusion as part its vision and mission of embracing every student. The district committed to provide each student in the community with a welcoming and inclusive environment where all students live and learn together, no matter the differences in learning challenges and abilities. To realize this commitment, the district shifted to environments in which children of all abilities learn together. The shift of human resources began almost as soon as the vision was shared. Many self-contained special education classes were dissolved and the new “normal” for special education teachers became being in the classrooms collaborating on developing instruction with general education teachers for students with a wide range of needs.

As with every new initiative in an organization, there are challenges accompanying the pursuit of a vision. In theory, inclusion supported by co-planning and co-teaching is a concept which should provide every student with the right to belong and learn in an environment with his or her peers. We are at a point with inclusion such that anyone visiting one of our classrooms would be unable to identify which students have moderate learning challenges based on how they are grouped, the work they are doing.
and their sense of belonging. However, there are still challenges in co-planning and co-teaching to support a higher level of inclusion in middle school.

Fairview SD’s approach to implementing Inclusionary Practices has focused on five variables which contribute to successful implementation of complex change. The five variables of vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action planning can predict the success or failure of any organization attempting to implement significant and complex changes (Knoster, Villa, & Thousand, 2000). Knoster et al. (2010) suggest that if any one of the variables is not addressed, the desired change will be much more challenging to accomplish, or may not be accomplished at all. During my brief tenure in the district, I have noticed a strong sense of vision and commitment to build an inclusive setting within our school and community. I have also experienced the reorganization of resources, particularly to teach to the diverse needs of students. Through the development of school improvement plans, in my roles as both principal and assistant principal, I have engaged in detailed action planning with embedded strategies to support the overarching vision toward inclusion.

That being said, the two variables which have been only partially addressed by the district are skills and incentives. As a school, we are constantly working on incentives to support the positive behavior program for students. Incentives for adults come in the form of thank-you notes, mentorship opportunities, or professional learning about a topic of interest. However, when I ask teachers for the number one incentive they believe would yield improvement on inclusion, their response is always "more time." Whether it is time for planning or time to try new instructional strategies, it seems that time continues to be a challenge for teachers engaged in developing their co-planning and co-teaching skills.
Building skills for inclusion also continues to be a challenge for our school. As a district, we have the vision, the resources, and action plans, but I have noticed a lack of confidence in teachers believing they have the skills to respond to students’ needs, especially as those needs continue to grow. Nationwide, students in our schools are becoming more diverse, and the more diversity we have, the more skilled the educators must be (Knoster et al., 2000). As I spend more time observing in the classrooms and dig deeper into inclusionary instructional practices in my school, I find that teachers who consider themselves “co-teaching” are simply going through the motions of the model. At best, they appear to be teaching separately in parallel; at worst they are teaching alone together. In most instances, teachers’ skills vary and limit the number of opportunities to share their skills across students and classrooms. The structure of their day allows for planning time in which they can access each other and co-plan lessons, assessments, activities, and engage in reflection. However, skills need to be constantly renewed and the development of staff never ends. The major concern is to support teachers and develop their skills so they can adapt their instruction to meet the rapid growing needs of our student population.

Rationale

Having been in several school settings in my career and being passionate about serving diverse student populations, I find Inclusion to embody aspects of supporting students that I had never considered before. Including students in after-school activities, providing opportunities for students of all abilities to work on a project, have elective courses in which students of all abilities are participating are just a few ways in which I have come to realize the role inclusion plays in a school setting. With the exception of
my current district, all other school settings had self-contained classrooms for students with learning or emotional disabilities as well as students requiring individual instruction plans to address their language needs. As student diversity becomes increasingly prevalent across the country, these differences are often seen as a problem rather than a challenging call to expand on instructional skills, authentic learning opportunities, and experiences for all students. Grant Wiggins (1992) wrote the following about diversity:

> We will not successfully restructure schools to be effective until we stop seeing diversity in students as a problem. Our challenge is not one of getting “special” student to better adjust to the usual schoolwork, the usual teacher pace, or the usual tests. The challenge of schooling remains what it has been since the modern era began two centuries ago: ensuring that all students receive their entitlement. They have the right to thought-provoking and enabling schoolwork, so they might use their minds well and discover the joy therein to willingly push themselves farther. They have the right to instruction that obligates the teacher, like the doctor, to change tactics when progress fails to occur. They have the right to assessment that provides students and teachers with insight into real-world standards, useable feedback, and the opportunity to self-assess, and the chance to have a dialogue with, or even to challenge, the assessor- also a right in a democratic culture. Until such a time, we will have no insight into human potential. Until the challenge is met, schools will continue to reward the lucky or the already-equipped and weed out the poor performers. (pp. xv-xvi)

I have seen countless number of scenarios in multiple educational settings in which students of diverse backgrounds and abilities have been separated, as if they have done something wrong, something so intractable that would merit them to be separated from their peers so “learning” can happen. I have often asked myself: How would I feel if I were separated from my peers if I had a learning challenge? As an educator, a parent, and a person, I would not want that for myself, my own children, or the children I serve.
Therefore, as a believer in full inclusion, it is important to identify and develop professional learning, and evaluate progress of co-teaching in my school. The more these practices are developed, the better students can be integrated in a setting while being challenged according to their needs.

Notwithstanding the legal mandate driving inclusive education in the United States, Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), I believe that it is our moral responsibility as educators to provide all students with the least restrictive and most productive learning environment. Since the inception of IDEA (P.L. 94-142), there have been court cases that have clarified for school districts placement in general education for all students with disabilities, regardless of the severity or degree of the disability. Districts must also consider the academic and social benefits of placement in general education, and the necessary supports, services, and supplementary aids that will provide any student with disabilities the tools to have a successful experience in the general education setting. (Knoster et al., 2000). The right of every child to belong is inalienable and must be considered at every leadership position in public education.

My interest in researching inclusion, with co-teaching methods as a vehicle to include students, has grown since my tenure in this district. As I think back to my days in the classroom, I would have done things differently for the Bilingual students I taught at that time. My approach to meeting their needs would be different, as I might have considered ways and opportunities for those students to be integrated into the classroom.


Research Questions

*Primary Research Question:* How do we make co-teaching more effective in Fairview School District?

Related Research Questions:

How do teacher relationships and collaboration affect co-teaching practices?

What structures need to be in place to enhance co-teaching practices?
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

This literature review is focused on exploring the following topics as they pertain to the primary and related research questions:

1. A Brief History of Inclusion as it Relates to this Study
2. Defining Co-Teaching and Its Three Overarching Components
3. Essential Elements of Effective Co-Teaching
4. Co-Teaching Models
5. Administrative Support For Co-Teaching
6. Co-Teaching Challenges

Fairview SD has adopted the inclusion education belief since 2011. The current superintendent believes in creating an educational system mirroring the best practices noted above. The beginning of this belief system at the Fairview SD was the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within its staff, a rationale for inclusion, and professional development on co-teaching. Based on the best practices list, inclusion encompasses a community effort, a systemic change in the entire school community and collaboration between teachers to include all students in the learning process. As Villa and Thousand (2016) point out, inclusion is a journey supported by research with the goal of having students of all abilities given the best educational experience that meets their needs. The following sections of this literature review will explore a brief history of inclusion, the meaning of co-teaching and the overarching components, elements
necessary to make co-teaching work, best practices of effective co-teaching teams, and what systems and supports create effective co-teaching teams in a school system.

**A Brief History of Inclusion as it Relates to this Study**

The United States has experienced a significant transformation as it relates to educating children considered disabled learners over the last two centuries. Up until the year 1800, students with disabilities were not considered worthy of receiving an education (Stainback & Stainback, 1985). Systematic, segregated education for children with disabilities became the norm during the 19th century and a portion of the 20th century. The Civil Rights movement in the ‘50s and ‘60s led to a shift from segregated educational options for minority students. In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Chief Justice Warren ruled that “separate is not equal.” This ruling had a critical effect in exclusionary policies for African-Americans and other racial minorities while providing a path to further exploration of exclusionary policies for students with disabilities in decades to come (Stainback & Stainback, 1985).

It was not long after *Brown v. Board of Education* for advocacy groups to surface and support educational reform for mainstream education policies for students with disabilities. By the early 1980s, students with mild to moderate disabilities were attending regular classes for a portion of their school day. During the same decade, an increased number of students who were considered to have severe or profound disabilities began receiving services in neighborhood schools and more efforts were made to include them in the regular school environment (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). In the late 1980s and early ‘90s, schools began experimenting with the part-time and full-time integration of
students with severe and profound disabilities as a result of the formation of strong inclusion advocacy groups led by parents and educators (Villa & Thousand, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind Act and the reauthorization of federal special education legislation have resulted in increased demands for educators (Cook & Friend, 2004). The legal mandate influencing inclusive education in the United States is Public Law 94-142, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Villa & Thousand, 2005). Despite the term inclusion not being found within the language of the law, the definition of least restrictive environment (LRE) is embedded in the law and was initial catalyst for the development of inclusive education (Villa & Thousand, 2005). The law states:

> to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including those in public and private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or removal of handicapped children from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that the education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (P.L. 94-142, Section 1412 (5)(B)).

The recent support of the concept for inclusive education has gained strength based on the legal, ethical, and educational benefits to stakeholders (Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 2003). The ethical considerations are based on equity and individual rights considering access to quality education for all students. The heightened emphasis on schools demonstrating success for all students has resulted in a sharper focus on meeting individual needs of students, regardless of learning differences (Bradley et al.,
The legal support for inclusion has been manifested in the modifications of public laws focusing on least restrictive environments for students, as aforementioned. In addition to legal and ethical considerations, there are several educational reasons for developing inclusive schools. The Disability Rights, Education and Defense Fund of 1982 stated that “regardless of race, class, gender, type of disability, or its onset, the more time spent integrated public school classes as children, the more people achieved educationally and occupationally as adults” (Ferguson & Asch, 1989, p. 124). With this statement in mind, inclusive education implies a commitment to educate all students in their community schools with preparation for the future being the most important reason for students with disabilities to be educated in their neighborhood schools (Bradley et al., 2003).

Although inclusion is implied within the language of the law, the definition of inclusive education as Villa and Thousand (2005) explain it, is an attitude. As a result of the evolution on the philosophy of LRE, there continues to be a growing trend to combine general and special education students in the form of developing inclusive schools. An inclusive school adapts an open-door policy to all students regardless of abilities and instruction is designed with individual students’ strengths and needs in mind. Inclusionary practices derive from a district adopting this attitude as opposed to an action or set of actions. Inclusion is an attitude of acceptance of all students as members of the classroom environment and school, regardless of needs and abilities (Bradley et al., 2003).

The term inclusion has been interpreted as mainstreaming, integration, and grouping students with similar needs in homogenous groups (Villa & Thousand, 2016).
While these interpretations had a role in the evolution of inclusive schools, Villa and Thousand (2016) recently provide terms to help define essential elements of inclusive education which are: a vision and practice, differentiating instruction, and presumed competence and holding high expectations for students. In addition to inclusion being a belief that everyone belongs regardless of perceived or labeled ability, the vision and practice of inclusion is defined as embracing and accepting the diverse academic, social/emotional, language and communication learning of students with the purpose of reaching the desired goals in education (Villa & Thousand, 2016). Furthermore, inclusive education requires differentiation of instruction through the collaboration of planning, teaching, and the involvement of students and families (Villa & Thousand, 2016). While differentiating instruction is an essential component for inclusive schools, presuming student competence by creating meaningful learning opportunities to further their academic and functional knowledge is also essential. Jorgensen, Schuh, and Nisbet (2005) suggest assuming students with disabilities are competent may avoid the harm of educators providing less educational opportunities, segregated educational settings, and less rigorous curricular opportunities. Failure to presume competence can also result in a different perception in students’ intelligence and potential for growth (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

The adoption of inclusive schools must begin with leadership. District leadership as well as building principals must have a clear understanding, support, and be able to articulate the benefits for the school community on the establishment of inclusive schools. Adopting an inclusive school attitude comes with the adoption of several identified best practices and must be implemented for inclusion to serve its best purpose.
Villa and Thousand (2016) describe and provide 15 best practices which have evolved as essential components found in quality inclusive settings. These components are: understanding the definition of inclusion, home-school-community partnerships, administrative support, redefined roles of school personnel, collaborative planning and creative problem solving, co-teaching, student-centered and strength-based assessment, facilitating access to the general education curriculum, differentiated instruction, natural supports to foster student empowerment, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)/Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2), positive behavioral supports, integrated delivery of related services, transition planning, and continuous planning for sustaining inclusive education best practices. In addition to benefitting students with special needs, these practices also support the overall experience of general education students (p. 13).

**Defining Co-Teaching and Its Three Overarching Components**

A significant amount of attention continues to be given to general and special education teachers, and other service providers, to create inclusive classrooms for students with a wide range of abilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Snell & Janney, 2000). As a result of the recent changes in legislation and increased pressure on educators to set high standards to ensure students’ needs are met, the implementation of co-teaching has increased as a service delivery option to meet new diverse challenges (Cook & Friend, 2004). Co-teaching is a way to deliver services to students with disabilities as part of a school’s inclusive philosophy. Co-teaching shares many benefits with other inclusion strategies which include a different perspective on students with special education needs, increased understanding for students with special needs on the part of other students, and
a better sense of classroom community given the nature of heterogeneous groupings in a co-taught classroom (Cook & Friend, 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005).

Terminology can become an issue in the continuous evolution in the realm of special services and supports. Before delving into the definition of co-teaching and its elements, let us look at three terms that are often confused with co-teaching: collaboration, team teaching, and inclusion (Cook & Friend, 2004). Collaboration- while the general preference is for co-teaching practices to be collaborative in nature (Cook & Friend, 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005), collaboration generally refers to how individuals interact, not necessarily an activity they do. Team teaching- this term has been used interchangeably with a co-teaching approach (Cook & Friend, 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005); however, it describes instances in which two general education teachers combine classes to share instruction. Cook and Friend (2004) argues there are differences in co-teaching and team teaching that include an impact on teacher-student ratio, different orientations toward how instruction is delivered, and planning for instruction. The third term is inclusion. Co-teaching has emerged because of inclusive practices, but as aforementioned, inclusion refers to an attitude and philosophy adopted by schools embracing all students, regardless of their differences in abilities, as members of a learning community (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

The definition of co-teaching has evolved since its initial appearance in the 1980s, but it continues to be an approach to support inclusive education (Pugach & Winn, 2011). As more research has emerged on co-teaching, the impact on its definition has changed from team teaching to co-teaching as these terms have been used interchangeably (Reinbiller, 1996). Most of the literature related to co-teaching provides a correlation in
the collaboration of regular education teachers and special education teachers (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). Cushman (2004) refers to co-teaching as a way for students to learn from two or more educators with different approaches to teaching and learning. Pugach and Winn (2011) define co-teaching as shared responsibility to teach within the same classroom by a general and special education teacher. Conderman (2011) refers to co-teaching as two or more educators collaborating to deliver instruction to a group of heterogeneous students in a shared space. Friend (2014) defines co-teaching as two or more educators who share instructional responsibility for a single group of students to meet specific content objectives. For the purpose of this study, co-teaching is defined as two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching all students assigned to a classroom (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

**Overarching Components of Co-Teaching**

While co-teaching may seem to be a rather simple strategy to meet the needs of diverse learners, it is a complex practice involving multiple essential components and systemic supports (Friend, 2008). The overarching components of co-teaching are co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing (Murawski & Boyer, 2008). The definition of co-teaching as two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching all students assigned to a classroom (Villa & Thousand, 2016) can be further dissected into different elements that include: coordination of work to achieve a common goal, a belief system that each member of the co-teaching team contributes with needed skills, demonstration of parity in roles and responsibilities, distributive leadership and collaboration (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). These elements have been found to be the basic structure for
creating a collaborative relationship to deliver effective instruction through co-teaching (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, & Hartman, 2009).

**Co-planning.** In the co-planning stage, both educators are expected to contribute by proposing instructional methods, materials, accommodations and modifications, and assessments (Conderman, 2011). Over the years, co-planning checklists have been developed to help guide co-teaching teams. Items on checklists may vary; however, they emphasize the importance of educators identifying standards, discussing assessment to measure students’ ability to meet those standards, and agree on logistics to deliver instruction (Conderman, 2011). The differentiation of learning outcomes and learning materials should be considered by co-teaching teams in the co-planning stage. According to Cook and Friend (2004), most teachers have reservations about the time needed to create collaborative relationships and setting aside time to engage in collaboration and some may need additional guidance in developing such structures. However, the planning process with a co-teaching team yields for more meaningful feedback and a higher level of individualization for all students (Conderman, 2011).

Co-teaching teams are challenged with the effective use of their common plan time (Villa et al., 2008). Once teams identify common plan time, they must use the time efficiently by having structured agendas and have the cooperative process in mind to guide their conversations (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). Co-teaching teams can make the most of their co-planning time by creating an agenda in which they discuss curricular topics prepared by the general educator, decide how content will be addressed and accessed by all students in the class, decide which co-teaching approach will be utilized,
and discuss individual students and their needs (Friend & Cook, 2010). Figure 3 can serve as a guide for teachers to make the best use of their common planning time.
### Members in Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not in Attendance</th>
<th>Others Who Need Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith, math teacher</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Johnson, special education teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Calderon, paraprofessional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Today</th>
<th>Next Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note-taker</td>
<td>Ms. Smith</td>
<td>Ms. Calderon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper</td>
<td>Ms. Calderon</td>
<td>Ms. Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizer</td>
<td>Ms. Johnson</td>
<td>Ms. Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda Items</th>
<th>Time Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review agenda and celebrations</td>
<td>4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify outcomes and standards</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify learning styles and supports needed</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm co-teaching approach</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for materials to support learning</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine student assessment</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalize co-teaching model and plan</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review tasks and relationships</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outcomes and Follow Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Items</th>
<th>Person(s) Responsible</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow up with absent members on information missed</td>
<td>Ms. Smith</td>
<td>By tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of planning</td>
<td>See lesson plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Agenda Items for Next Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: This Friday</th>
<th>Time: 8:00am</th>
<th>Location: Team room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expected agenda items:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and reflect on past lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make adjustments based on reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Sample Planning Agenda for Co-Teaching Teams. Adapted from Villa et al., 2008.*
**Co-instructing.** Following the co-planning stage, co-instructing plays a critical role in how the content is delivered based on the agreed upon plans (Friend & Cook, 2010). The choice of a co-teaching approach can determine the effectiveness of a co-teaching team. Educators should consider the following factors when selecting a co-teaching approach: student characteristics and needs, teacher characteristics and needs, instructional strategies related to the curriculum, and practical considerations (Cook & Friend, 2004). Student characteristics and needs account for any academic or behavioral factors which might affect how both teachers work with an individual student or the whole class. Teacher characteristics and needs are factors given variations in teaching styles and their compatibility as a team. Instructional strategies related to the content can also dictate which co-teaching approach will be used. Content requiring high structures and support may call for one approach, while less structured content would suggest a different approach. Crowded learning spaces and noise in an open school are important considerations for educators when selecting a co-teaching approach as these factors may affect the overall outcome of their lessons (Cook & Friend, 2004). Co-teachers must select the approach to best match the learning outcomes and their area of expertise (Conderman, 2011). Definitions and characteristics of co-teaching models are further examined in another section of this literature review.

**Co-assessing.** Co-teachers can meet often to reflect on lessons, assess their practices, gather and analyze student academic and behavioral data, and seek input from each other as part of the co-assessing process (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). In the co-assessing phase, teachers are not only assessing student progress, they are also reflecting and assessing their professional practice (Conderman, 2011). The reflection of co-
teaching teams on their professional practices can result in identifying items to celebrate, components for future improvement, next steps in content and curriculum, identification of students who may need more assistance, and other factors in the sharing of responsibilities for future lessons (Conderman, Bresnahan, & Pedersen, 2008). One important characteristic of an effective co-teaching team is the continuous discussion on student work and the collaboration in assessing student performance, which takes place in the co-assessing phase of co-teaching (Conderman, 2011).

**Essential Elements of Effective Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching may seem like a clear approach to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities through the education they are entitled to receive. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010) state “Working from the assumption that most professional educators are in the field because they want to help their students succeed, it would seem a simple matter of two teachers to blend their expertise so that a shared and diverse group of students would learn more than might be possible if either teacher had sole responsibility. Such is not the case” (p.18). As simple as it may seem, co-teaching is complex and has a number of requirements professionals must meet for it to be considered effective.

**Relationships and professional roles.** Co-teaching relationships are often seen as a marriage which requires professionals to depend on commitment, negotiation, and flexibility (Friend, 2008, p. 13). “To be successful, co-teaching relies on two committed educators who care deeply about reaching their students and work diligently to achieve that goal” (p.13). In essence, the co-teaching relationship must be mutually beneficial and foster each other’s growth. The relationships effective co-teaching teams develop are
known to include respecting and trusting each other, working well as partners, accepting each other’s personality and teaching styles, making changes as they go along (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008, p.46).

Effective co-teaching eases their working relationships by having a presence of genuine trust and respect for each other. The relationships developed between the co-teachers needs to be nurtured to sustain the work it takes to make co-teaching successful (Sileo, 2011). Typically, co-teachers begin by working together to achieve one instructional event and, if successful, they can further explore ways in how their unique skills and expertise can lead to more formal co-teaching practices (Villa et al., 2008). Additionally, co-teachers share the belief that co-teaching leads to more effective instruction which can benefit student learning (Villa et al., 2008).

Among the many actions co-teaching teams do before, during, and after they deliver a lesson, effective co-teaching teams establish well-defined professional roles. In addition to identifying resources and strengths each member brings to the lesson, they define how content areas will be taught, identify how students’ needs will be met, and how student learning will be assessed (Villa et al., 2008). In addition to defining their roles in the classroom, co-teaching teams also decide on how each member will be accountable for their arrangement to administration and parents (p. 25). Establishing classroom roles and responsibilities is connected to the co-teaching relationship and can be a determining factor in how a lesson or unit is delivered. Research suggests that, too often, general education teachers take the lead role while special educators take the “back seat” as opposed to truly partnering in the delivery of instruction (Friend, 2008, p. 15).
Therefore, it is important for co-teaching teams to constantly revisit their professional roles and have an equal say in how instruction will be delivered.

**Demonstrating parity.** Parity takes place when co-teachers see their contributions and presence on the team being valued, resulting in their ability and comfort level to share ideas and concerns freely (Villa et al., 2008). Conderman et al. (2008) highlight the importance on co-teaching teams demonstrating parity as an essential component of co-teaching. Co-teaching teams can maintain parity in the following ways as explained by Conderman et al. (2008, p. 26):

- Using language such as “our students” instead of “your students” or “students who are included”
- Include both teachers’ names on anything applicable where the school community can see the co-teachers as partners, for example, newsletters, school website, handbooks, report cards, etc.
- Drafting a response to a student, parent, or administrator together, before sending such communication
- Setting up the classroom with equal work spaces for both teachers
- Sharing equal responsibility for teaching, grading, and designing content materials
- Having the classroom community refer to both teachers as teachers, not have different titles for each professional
- Supporting each other’s decisions in front of students

Friend and Cook (2007) have a different perspective from the lens of the collaboration requirements that connect to parity. Each person in the team needs to feel
valued with equal power in the decision-making process. “If one or several individuals are perceived by others as having significantly greater decision-making power or more valuable knowledge of information, collaboration cannot occur” (Friend & Cook, 2007, p. 9). Friend further argued that parity is an equal contribution by both, or more, members of the team and it is the basis for an effective co-teaching relationship (Friend, 2014). Parity is maintained by co-teachers having clear lines of communication and taking time to discuss their approaches to a wide range of topics which involve classroom rules, routines, grading, and resolutions to disagreements (Friend, 2014). However, co-teachers may have parity as they work together on specific activities but may not have parity in other situations.

**Collaboration.** Co-teaching involves a commitment to collaboration which requires open communication, interactions, mutual recognition, and compromise (Conderman, 2011). The shared responsibilities and leadership must be agreed upon by the co-teaching team and as a result of teacher delegating and redefining their roles, they are more likely to experience success in co-teaching (Villa et al., 2008).

While all elements play a role in how co-teaching teams develop and function, the collaboration process adds layers of complexity to the art of co-teaching. Villa et al. (2008) describe five elements impacting teacher collaboration: face-to-face interactions, positive interdependence, interpersonal skills, monitoring co-teaching progress, and individual accountability (p. 7). Furthermore, they argue that effective collaborative teams need to know what the five collaborative elements look like when planning or reflecting on instruction, curriculum, and assessment (Thousand et al., 2006). These elements are further examined in this section of the literature review.
Face-to-face interactions are a critical component for co-teaching teams to make decisions that may have an impact on their collaboration, planning, and delivery of instruction (Villa et al., 2008). Face-to-face interactions provide co-teaching teams with opportunities to discuss a wide range of items including concepts, standards, student behavior, challenges with upcoming instruction, co-teaching options, reflection on previous lessons, and continuation on the work of improved communication to further nurture their collaborative relationships (Friend, 2014). Face-to-face interactions are driven by the co-planning phase of co-teaching. Teams must agree on when, where, and how often you will meet to plan to address all logistical questions related to meeting the needs of students (Villa et al., 2008).

Villa et al. (2008) consider positive interdependence to be the heart of co-teaching (p. 7). Through positive interdependence, co-teaching teams can establish a feeling of equal responsibility for meeting the needs of all students assigned to them. Positive interdependence is supported by parity. To develop positive interdependence, co-teachers can agree on a common goal, set celebrations for their successes, and have an equal responsibility in the work it takes to deliver instruction (Villa et al., 2008).

One of the many challenges co-teaching teams face is finding and creating common planning time that support the needed face-to-face interactions. “Time often defines the possibilities and limitations of co-teachers’ ability to successfully perform and deliver in the classroom” (Villa et al., 2008, p. 133). Thousand et al. (2006) suggest co-teaching teams dedicate at least 45-60 minutes of face-to-face common plan time weekly. However, Conderman et al. (2008) suggest that most effective co-teaching teams find that 40-45 minutes weekly is insufficient time and establish a daily plan time instead. Time is
a resource that can be structured by administrators to support co-teaching teams, which is further examined in a latter section.

Friend and Cook (2007) suggested a three-part co-planning process to utilize face-to-face interactions more efficiently. The first phase consists of the general education teacher providing an outline of classroom content and activities. During the second phase, the co-teaching team reviews the materials and decides how to best reach the learning outcomes. The third phase is led by the special educator who proposes and designs modifications and accommodations for the range of learners in the class. This process coupled with a structured agenda during common planning time can serve as tools for co-teaching teams to make the most of their face-to-face interactions.

Teachers aiming to build a co-teaching relationship need to consider discussing their beliefs and expectations on teaching and learning and consider their expertise, responsibilities, and pedagogy (Conderman, 2011). Co-teaching is often referenced as a professional marriage with the purpose of improving student outcomes which requires co-teachers to have strong professional partnerships (Friend & Cook, 2007). The essential components begin with contributions each teacher can bring to the partnership. General education teachers should contribute in the areas of curriculum knowledge, classroom management, understanding of student behavior patterns, and pacing of instruction so learning goals can be accomplished (Friend, 2008). Special educators should contribute with in-depth knowledge for the process of learning, understanding of students’ individual needs, ability to reflect needs on IEPs, and an emphasis on mastery learning (Friend, 2008). Common co-teaching partnerships involve a general educator who is considered a master of content and a special educator who is considered a master of
access, but other educational roles can be part of a co-teaching partnership such as reading specialists, math coaches, and licensed support services personnel (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

**Co-Teaching Models**

As aforementioned, during the planning stage of co-teaching, teams must select a co-teaching model that best fits their delivery of instruction. The selection of co-teaching models should be driven by students’ needs, subject matter, and learning outcomes (Hang & Rabren, 2009). The concept of co-teaching has been seen in U.S. schools since the 1960s; however, different models have been defined and developed over time to guide co-teaching teams in the selection of the optimal model to achieve the intended learning outcomes (Santamaria & Thousand, 2004). Friend and Cook (1992) defined six co-teaching approaches, which Perl, Maughmer and McQueen (1999, pp. 10-12) further define as follows:

1. *One Teach, One Support.* One teacher has the primary responsibility for planning and teaching, while the other teacher moves around the classroom helping individuals.

2. *Parallel Teaching.* In parallel teaching, both teachers plan jointly but split the classroom in half to teach the same information at the same time.

3. *Alternative Teaching.* In this approach, one teacher manages most of the class while the other teacher works with a small group inside or outside of the classroom. The small group does not have to integrate with the current lesson.

4. *Station Teaching.* Both teachers divide the instructional content, and each takes responsibility for planning and teaching each part of it. In this approach,
the classroom is divided into various teaching centers. Both teachers are at particular stations and some stations may function independently or by another support staff in the classroom.

5. *One Teach, One Observe.* In this approach, one teacher is responsible for whole group instruction, while the other teacher observes different behaviors and gathers the agreed upon data for individual or small groups of students.

6. *Team Teaching.* Both teachers are responsible for planning, and they share the instruction of all students. The lessons are delivered by both teachers and they actively engage in conversation, not lecture, to encourage discussion by students. Both teachers share the responsibility and are involved in the management of the lesson and discipline.

While the approaches above have been widely accepted, other researchers have provided alternative definitions with overlapping characteristics. According to Thousand et al. (2006), a comprehensive national survey, conducted by the Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion in 1995, revealed that teachers predominantly used four co-teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of students in a classroom. For the purpose of this study, four co-teaching approaches were utilized based on the definitions from Villa et al. (2008): supportive, parallel, complementary, and team teaching. The Fairview SD has provided a framework for co-teaching based on these four approaches since adopting its philosophy for creating inclusive schools in 2011. The following section of this literature review will include the definition of each approach based on Villa et al. (2008, pp. 20-21), overlapping characteristics with alternative definitions, when to utilize each approach, and benefits and challenges of each approach.
Supportive co-teaching. Supportive co-teaching occurs when one teacher takes the lead instructional role and the other circulates among students to provide support. The teacher taking the supportive role is attentive to student interactions and steps in to provide individual assistance when necessary, while the lead teacher continues to direct the lesson (Villa et al., 2008, p. 20). Friend and Cook (1992) refer to this approach as one teach, one support and in recent years Friend (2014) has defined it as one teach, one assist. Villa et al. (2008) note the instructional lead with this approach can be shared by the co-teaching team, depending on the purpose of the instructional outcome.

This approach is best utilized when co-teachers are looking to give specific feedback to individual students about the use of social and communications skills, test-taking strategies, or teaching a student how to utilize a communication device in the general education classroom (Villa et al., 2008). An example of this approach in action is when a teacher models a written language pattern orally and in writing, while the other co-teacher monitors students’ understanding of the pattern and the connection to the writing assignment (Villa et al., 2008). Perl et al. (1999) suggest additional advantages of this approach include students receiving help in a timely manner, students being more engaged in the task due to teacher proximity, reduction in loss of instructional time due to smoother transitions and distribution of materials, and the teacher in the supportive role can observe different teaching practices. This approach can be beneficial for teachers new to co-teaching, if paired with a veteran teacher, as they can learn content delivery and management strategies while they provide support for a small number of students (Villa et al., 2008). “An important component of successful supportive co-teaching is ensuring
that students perceive each member of the co-teaching team (special educator, regular educator, or paraprofessional) as their teacher” (Villa et al., 2008, p. 39).

The use of the supportive co-teaching approach has its limitations. Thousand et al. (2006) caution co-teaching teams of the supporting teacher becoming “velcroed” to individual students, which can change the classroom dynamics and interactions with other students. “This can be stigmatizing for students and the support persons, leading students to perceive that the student and support teacher are not genuine members of the classroom” (Thousand et al., 2006, p.243). Other disadvantages when using the supportive approach include distractions created by the supporting teacher, students’ perception of which teacher has more control, and the possible development of dependent behavior by students to receive immediate individual assistance (Perl et al., 1999; Friend, 2014). The seldom use of this approach, as recommended by Friend (2014), should be for teachers who are just beginning their co-teaching relationships as they attempt to become familiar with each other. Friend (2014) points to studies by co-teaching coaches suggesting this is the least effective and most utilized approach. The frequent use of supportive co-teaching can create doubts on whether the team is aiming to achieve the learning outcomes for the class, and it can be an indication of the amount of plan time dedicated by the team, as the approach requires minimal common planning (Conderman et al., 2008; Friend, 2014). Table 1 outlines advantages and disadvantages of this approach as presented by Murawski (2010).
Table 1. 
Advantages and Disadvantages of the Supportive Co-Teaching Approach, Adapted from Murawski, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Supportive Co-teaching</th>
<th>Disadvantages of Supportive Co-teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similar to traditional teaching</td>
<td>Very similar to traditional teaching, which does not always work for many students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of teacher comfort</td>
<td>The comfort level may result in teachers falling into the same routine, causing them to not try new strategies and just sharing the instructional lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least amount of co-planning required</td>
<td>Can result in lack of meaningful collaboration as teachers may choose not to co-plan and divide components of the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students may benefit from having one person deliver the content</td>
<td>Teachers may feel they are not “on” and can result in them focusing on things other than supporting students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting co-teacher can contribute to class management</td>
<td>Different approaches to class management used by co-teachers can result in distractions for students during the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can lead to increased instructional time as basic classroom procedures, such as attendance and distribution of materials, can be done by supporting co-teacher</td>
<td>The role of the co-teacher, often the special educator, can become that of an assistant, especially if he/she is not familiar with the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting co-teacher can make sure students get assistance with accommodations and access to learning as needed</td>
<td>Students can begin to feel stigmatized if the special educator is the person always providing the support and accommodations, which is why the role needs to be shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers can share the lead parts of the lesson in which they feel most comfortable</td>
<td>Co-teachers may fall into a practice of “your turn to speak, my turn to speak” instead of developing collaborative skills to take advantage of each other’s expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The supporting co-teacher can assess student progress and understanding of concepts being delivered and share the information with the lead teacher</td>
<td>Depending on the co-teachers’ relationship, the supporting teacher may not share any feedback with the lead teacher and take other avenues to support students outside the classroom, which may not be the best method of addressing students’ needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Parallel co-teaching.** Parallel co-teaching is when two or more people work with separate groups of students in different sections of the classroom. Co-teachers may rotate among the groups, and sometimes there may be one group of students that works without a co-teacher for at least part of the time (Villa et al., 2008, p. 20). Variations of this approach are identified by Villa et al. (2008, p. 42) as follows:

- **Split Class**- Each co-teacher is responsible for a particular group of students, monitoring understanding of a lesson, providing guided instruction, or reteaching the group when necessary.

- **Station Teaching or Learning Centers**- Each co-teacher is responsible for assembling, guiding, and monitoring one or more learning centers or stations.

- **Co-teachers Rotate**- The co-teachers rotate among two or more groups of students, with each co-teacher teaching a different component of the lesson. This is similar to station teaching or learning centers, except the teachers rotate to different groups as opposed to students rotating to different stations.

- **Cooperative Group Monitoring**- Each co-teacher takes responsibility for monitoring and providing feedback and assistance to a given number of cooperative student groups.

- **Experiment or Lab Monitoring**- Each co-teacher monitors and assists a given number of laboratory groups, providing support to student groups needing guided instruction.

- **Learning Style Focus**- One co-teacher works with a group of students using primarily visual strategies, another co-teacher works with a group using primarily
auditory strategies, and another may work with a group using kinesthetic strategies.

- **Supplementary Instruction**- One co-teacher works with the rest of the class on a concept, skill, or learning strategy. The other co-teacher can (a) provide extra guidance on the concept to those students who are teacher-identified or self-identified as needing extra support, (b) instruct students to apply or generalize the concept to a relevant community environment, (c) provide a selected group of students with guided practice on the application of the learning strategy as it relates to the content being presented, or (d) provide activities for enrichment.

Friend’s (2014) definition of parallel co-teaching is similar to that of Villa et al. (2008), but it offers two variations: a) two groups cover the same content and learning outcomes but the level of complexity for each group may be different, and b) teachers may teach their groups with different approaches and points of view. For example, one teacher might utilize different ways of solving math equations, or present historical perspectives from opposing sides in a landmark battle (Friend, 2014). The variations of the supportive approach outlined by Villa et al. (2008) overlap with *station teaching* as defined by Friend and Cook (1992), the difference is that students do not rotate stations or teachers as they do in station teaching (Friend, 2014). Murawski (2010) identifies three ways in which parallel teaching can be used: teaching the content to two groups in the same way, teaching the content to two groups in different ways, and for co-teachers to teach different content (p. 199). Traces of *alternative teaching*, as defined by Friend (2014), can be found in this approach.
Parallel co-teaching can yield benefits for students and teachers. The advantages of this approach and the result of co-planning can lead to improved teaching practices, developed confidence by teachers of working separately to teach the same lesson, teachers can work with smaller groups leading to a better student-teacher ratio, and the formation of student groups can be strategic to address learning styles (Perl et al., 1999). Additionally, students can benefit from different teaching approaches and styles by being exposed to two or more educators in the co-teaching team. “By interacting with multiple instructors, students stretch their thinking and learning approaches as they experience the differing content expertise and instructional approaches of each co-teacher” (Villa et al., 2008, p. 50-51). Friend (2014) recommends the frequent use of this approach with the caveat that students are constantly exposed to different teachers in heterogeneous groups. Teachers using this approach can also focus on reinforcement or enrichment of skills, they have the flexibility to design different lessons based on students’ needs, and at times may find a benefit in placing groups in different rooms (Perl et al., 1999, p. 39).

As with each approach, there are cautions teachers should consider when utilizing parallel teaching. With this approach, teachers should consider their own competence in the content so students receive the same quality instruction, the pacing of the lesson needs to be coordinated so groups finish at the same time, and the physical space needs to have the flexibility to provide the two groups with equal if not similar learning atmospheres (Perl et al., 1999). This approach can also lead to stigmatization if the student groups are not continuously mixed or if the same co-teacher, typically the special educator, instructs the same group most of the time (Thousand et al., 2006). Another factor that considered a disadvantage with this approach is that teachers are not able to
monitor each other for instructional accountability as they are with their own groups and, at times, may not share the same space for mutual interactions, which can prevent students from getting the same level of quality instruction (Villa et al., 2008; Perl et al., 1999). Table 2 summarizes advantages and disadvantages of parallel teaching as articulated by Murawski (2010).
Table 2.  
Advantages and Disadvantages of the Parallel Co-Teaching Approach. Adapted from Murawski, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Parallel Co-teaching</th>
<th>Disadvantages of Parallel Co-teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both teachers engage in delivering instruction with students</td>
<td>Teachers may deviate from their plan and take a different direction as opposed to maintaining consistent instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both teachers get to interact with students</td>
<td>Teachers may struggle with this approach as they may have the same level of content knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This approach leads to smaller student-teacher ratio and support individualized instruction</td>
<td>The physical space, if not purposefully arranged with students in mind, may not be conducive to learning for either group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With smaller student groups, teachers may tailor instructional strategies to address different learning styles within their group</td>
<td>Teachers with a limited repertoire of instructional strategies may need to do more research as they may lack familiarity with engaging various learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers can divide the lesson in different parts, so students focus on a specific topic with each teacher</td>
<td>Teachers need to co-plan to define roles and need to be familiar with the content being taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups can be exposed to both teachers by switching or stay with the same teacher for consistency</td>
<td>Pacing and timing are critical to avoid one group being done before the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have flexibility to select content which they are comfortable delivering</td>
<td>Teachers may find it difficult to split the content and may want to select the same topic to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-planning can be minimized by having teachers planning for their own group</td>
<td>This can lead to lack of collaboration and teachers may develop a “I’m on my own” mentality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers can be flexible with student groups by considering learning styles, abilities, and interests.</td>
<td>It may be easier for teachers to always group students by ability instead of working with and creating heterogeneous</td>
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</table>
**Complementary co-teaching.** Complementary co-teaching is when a co-teacher does something to enhance the instruction provided by the other co-teacher (Villa et al., 2008, p. 54). In this approach, the responsibility for the lesson design and introducing new academic content is assumed by one co-teacher. The lesson delivery and presenting information is often shared by the co-teachers using a variety of approaches and strategies to reach all learners (Villa et al., 2008).

In the complementary co-teaching approach, one teacher can provide direct instruction while the other supplements the information being presented with visual representations or paraphrases information, so all students have access to it (Malian & McRae, 2010). There may be instances with this approach in which one co-teacher pre-teaches desired social skills or collaborative skills to a small group and then makes observations of students practicing those skills while the other co-teacher leads the lesson (Thousand et al., 2006). The complementary co-teaching approach has a limited overlap of characteristics with other approaches defined by various researchers in the field. Given the definition of complementary co-teaching above, some similarities can be linked to Friend’s (2014) *one teach, one assist* approach as one teacher takes the lead and the other assists with instructional supplements. Baeten and Simons (2014) suggest this approach is closely related to the *one teach, one support* model.

One of the major benefits of this approach is that learning can be made accessible to all students by providing more visuals and teachers summarizing the content as they introduce it (Villa et al., 2008). Additionally, both teachers are seen as interacting with all learners, and can act as facilitators of access for students despite their comfort level with the content (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). This approach also provides the co-
teaching team the opportunity to learn from one another as they may have different areas of expertise which they must share and communicate in the planning process to effectively complement each other’s instruction (Thousand et al., 2006).

The cautions suggested by Villa et al. (2008) with this approach include teachers forgetting to monitor students. They elaborate that “sometimes co-teachers get so excited to ‘perform on the stage’ with their colleague that they forget to monitor the learners as closely as they did when they employed the supportive or parallel co-teaching approaches” (Villa et al., 2008, p. 54). Another consideration with this approach is for co-teachers to be mindful of the amount of teacher talk during a lesson. Too much talk as a result of the complementing co-teacher can result in students not having any input or interaction during the lesson (Villa et al., 2008). As with the supportive approach, teachers need to share the leading role to avoid students developing a perception in which they view one member as the “real” teacher (Villa et al., 2008). To counteract this development, Villa et al. (2008) suggest for co-teaching teams to plan for role release, which they define as the exchange of content and complementary roles, to ultimately benefit the co-teaching relationship and students’ perspective of the team.

**Team teaching.** Villa et al. (2008) describe team teaching as two or more people doing what the traditional teacher would do. They share responsibility for planning, teaching, and assessing progress of students in classes they co-teach together (p. 64). This approach allows co-teachers to plan and deliver the lesson in segments that highlight each other’s areas of expertise so students’ experience and view both teachers as equal (Thousand et al., 2006). Friend’s (2014) definition is similar and suggests this approach to be the most complex as it requires teachers to have a relationship that allows a fluid
contribution to the delivery of instruction. Murawski (2010) highlights the mutual trust and respect that must exist in the co-teacher partnership when utilizing this approach as teachers must have a high comfort level with each other to share leading all aspects of a lesson. Team teaching can result in both teachers being actively engaged in the content topic and help promote student discussion, depending on the lesson’s goal (Perl et al., 1999). The marriage analogy often used to describe co-teaching partnerships can truly be seen if this approach is implemented effectively by co-teaching teams (Villa et al., 2008), and many teachers also refer to this approach as “one brain, two bodies” (Friend, 2014).

Recent research has suggested team teaching to be the ultimate goal of co-teaching (Conderman et al., 2008). The advantages of this approach include both teachers having an active role, not only in the delivery of the lesson, but also in the classroom organization and management, and students tend to view teachers as equal partners in the relationship (Perl et al., 1999). Students can benefit from this approach when the outcome of instruction is to model interactions to support other learning structures such as cooperative learning (Cook & Friend, 2004). Teachers, regardless of experience, can develop more confidence with the content as they are required to share ideas, strategies, and approaches during the planning process (Cook & Friend, 2004). Additional advantages of this approach include the differentiation as a result of combined ideas during the planning process, exposing students to different teaching styles, and increased accountability for both teachers when it comes to student learning (Perl et al., 1999).

As with the rest of the approaches, team teaching comes with its set of challenges. Friend (2014) recommends the occasional use of this approach because typically students are taught in a whole-group format, which can lead to less individualized instruction as
seen in other approaches. One of the major requirements of this approach that can be a challenge for co-teaching teams is the amount of planning to cover all aspects of the learning outcomes (Perl et al., 1999). Time constraints and the lack of commitment by the co-teaching team to establish common planning time are typical challenges with this approach (Murawski, 2010). Given the complexity of team teaching, the personalities of each member of the team can be a factor in the collaboration practice to achieve the successful implementation of this approach (Cook & Friend, 2004). Co-teachers must make a compromise and be open-minded regarding strategies and approaches to instruction (Murawski, 2010). Additional advantages and disadvantages of this approach are summarized in Table 3, as outlined by Murawski (2010).
Table 3.
Advantages and Disadvantages of Team Teaching. Adapted from Murawski, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Team Teaching</th>
<th>Disadvantages of Team Teaching</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates parity between co-teachers since they both share delivery of instruction</td>
<td>Teachers can find this approach to be the most difficult to use if their comfort and trust level is not developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach can lead to improved planning and instruction as both teachers share the</td>
<td>This requires teachers to establish planning time, which can be difficult to time constraints. Teachers also have to consider being open-minded to each other’s ideas when designing instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility of all aspects of the lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers can implement different strategies and approaches (model discussion, facilitate games, etc.) that would normally be challenging to do individually</td>
<td>Co-teachers need to be open to trying multiple approaches and strategies. This may cause teachers with “traditional” styles to feel nervous or anxious about trying this approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students may benefit from both teachers being engaged in the lesson as they may be</td>
<td>Co-teachers need to consider time and pacing. They may also run into “taking turns” as opposed to having the desired fluidity of their interactions when using this approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>able to understand the explanation of the content better from either teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students benefit from both teachers facilitating activities as they can get assistance or clarification when teachers actively monitor the classroom</td>
<td>A disadvantage reported by students is that they “cannot get away with much.” This is considered an advantage of co-teaching when the planning for the behavior management is well established by the team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The goal when selecting a co-teaching approach should be to best meet the needs of students in a given class. Co-teachers should consider the four approaches and there may be instances in which multiple approaches are utilized within a single lesson, depending on the desired instructional outcomes (Villa et al., 2008). The complexity and purpose of each approach can yield a variety of benefits and challenges for both students and teachers. Behind any co-teaching approach, the elements discussed in the previous section is what make this “marriage” work.

**Administrative Support for Co-Teaching**

Administrative support is key to the success of co-teaching implementation. In addition to adopting the belief that all students can learn with their peers, there are systems and structures that need to be in place to support the implementation of co-teaching. Administrative support to support co-teaching includes developing and sharing a vision, fostering co-teaching partnerships, and ongoing professional development.

**Developing and sharing a vision.** Principals play a critical role in developing a vision for co-teaching. The vision and rationale for co-teaching must be shared with teachers, paraprofessionals, other staff members, parents, and students (Friend, 2008, p.16).

School leaders involved in co-teaching stress the importance of clarifying for themselves, school personnel, and the community a vision based on the assumption that (1) all children are capable of learning, (2) all children have a right to an education with their peers in their community’s schools, (3) everyone who provides instruction shares responsibility for the learning of every child in the school, and (4) co-teaching is an organizational and instructional strategy that benefits students and educators alike (Villa et al., 2008, p. 112).
In addition to establishing a vision with assumptions outlined above, principals need to foster, monitor, and evaluate how this vision translates into practice that directly impacts student learning.

Before implementing co-teaching, principals need to consider the fears and reservations from all stakeholders. The shift to co-teaching for students, teachers, parents, and community members, can be difficult if the vision and rationale have not been shared or given enough time to process. Principals must make the time to listen to all concerns and prioritize addressing them to gain support for co-teaching or at least create consensus within the learning community. (Villa et al., 2008, p.113). Once consensus is built, principals can also help provide encouragement and recognition to help stakeholders navigate the challenging stages of the implementation process. The support and understanding of principals as instructional leaders play a major role in addressing issues that may arise in the implementation of co-teaching (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996, p. 258).

In addition to developing and sharing a vision, principals have a responsibility of developing a school culture where collaboration is valued and expected. Schools and districts that have adopted the method of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a way to approach teaching and learning may already developed a collaborative culture. However, Villa et al. (2008) suggest that administrators can also offer incentives to engage people in co-teaching. They argue that “Without incentives that are meaningful to each person affected by the change toward co-teaching, the outcome may be passive or active resistance rather than excited engagement” (p. 116). The support for collaborative
planning can be provided by principals through common plan time, encouraging co-teaching teams to attend conferences, and providing opportunities to observe other co-teaching teams.

**Fostering Co-teaching partnerships.** A meta-synthesis conducted by Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) found that teachers identified several needs for successful co-teaching to be implemented. One of the needs is administrative support in the form of having structures that facilitate collaboration, scheduling, and planning time (p. 403).

A poor relationship and lack of collaborative efforts can hinder co-teaching efforts. Co-teaching is built around personal and professional relationships that support student inclusion and success. As aforementioned, collaboration is a key component for co-teaching to make the most impact for students. When it comes to fostering appropriate collaboration, the principal’s primary responsibility is to partner the right teachers. Most prominent researchers in co-teaching suggest the best way for the co-teaching relationship to work is for teachers to volunteer and select their partners. However, principals must establish the structures by setting parameters as the “match makers” to have teachers volunteer, select their partners, and make teacher assignments when necessary. Scruggs et al. (2007) reported teachers to have increased value for the team if the relationship is initiated by the two individuals rather than the relationship being forced by administration (p. 403). Furthermore, if the co-teaching arrangement is forced when teachers have no input in their co-teaching relationship it can have a negative impact on the level of collaboration. In support of this argument, teachers in the Scruggs
et al. (2007) study reported collaboration to be positive when teachers’ commitment to co-teaching is voluntary.

Although there is no recipe to partnering the “right” teachers, research has provided suggestions on how chances can be improved that can lead to better co-teaching relationships. Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) point out that school leaders should not throw teachers together and hope for the best if they want to create successful co-teaching partnerships (p. 32). They support the concept of administrators asking teachers to consider finding their co-teaching partners and volunteering. Additionally, they suggest to “be sure to give them the parameters of what classes, grades, or subjects will need to be co-taught and ask them to work within those parameters” (p. 33). Providing resources and making teachers part of forming the relationship will increase their chances of success.

What happens when administrators are forced to form co-teaching teams? There are times when administrators need to assign staff to co-teach. It is important to note that despite the team not being voluntary, the expectation for collaboration cannot be seen as a voluntary activity. Villa et al. (2008) emphasize that “For educators to think that they have a choice as to whether or not to collaborate is similar to a team of health care professionals perceiving that they have a choice as to whether or not to collaborate in performing an operation, following the patient’s progress, and providing follow-up care.” They add that “students and families have a right to expect educators to collaborate in planning and teaching, and educators have a professional, legal, and ethical responsibility to do so” (p. 124). It is important for administrators to support teachers, especially in
situations in which teachers feel forced to co-teach, in developing the necessary skills and relationships to feel successful.

To begin fostering the assigned co-teaching relationships, administrators can also have staff members complete surveys on learning styles, relationship preferences, multiple intelligences, and educational philosophies. Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) suggest administrators should gather as much information as possible to find connections between the team members. A helpful tool for teachers to use in the beginning stages of their co-teaching relationship was developed by Murawski and Dieker in which teachers can share their hopes, attitudes, responsibilities, and expectations, now known as the acronym SHARE (2004, p. 55). When teachers SHARE, they are expected to:

S – Share and be honest

H – Share their Hopes on the co-teaching situation

A – Share their Attitudes and philosophies regarding students with disabilities

R – Share Responsibilities for both team members

E – Share Expected obstacles and outline ways to overcome them

Administrators can use the information from this tool to identify individuals who would be compatible for co-teaching, address concerns co-teaching teams may have, and identify resources and supports needed for co-teaching teams to further develop their partnership.

Scheduling and common planning time were also identified by teachers as essential components for co-teaching to be successful (Scruggs et al., 2007). Building a master schedule that allows for common planning time is key to administrative support for co-teaching. The best way to support co-teaching partnerships is to create common
planning periods in which teams can meet. If the schedule structure does not allow for common plan time, administrators can also provide opportunities for co-teaching teams to meet such as having substitutes come in periodically, assigning co-planning time instead of another duty, and organizing meetings that provide opportunities for collaboration (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, collaboration is not as effective if co-teaching partners do not spend a certain amount of time planning face-to-face. Adequate planning time must be a priority given to co-teaching teams along with guided supports for effective collaboration (Friend, 2008, p. 12). Administrators leading the scheduling process need to have a solid understanding of key co-teaching components to create the right environment (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015). Administrators need to prioritize scheduling students receiving special education and avoid having a ratio higher than 30% of students with special needs in a class.

Students with special needs can include students with disabilities, English Learners, students with 504 plans, and students who may be considered high achieving. While the concept of inclusion supports having students with a wide-range of abilities in a classroom, students with unique needs require more attention which can result in their needs overtaking planned instruction, resulting in less inclusive environment for all (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015). While creating schedules, administrators must also be cognizant of the number of partnerships they create for general and special educators. The more partners general educators have, chances decrease of them establishing a solid co-planning process. As for special educators, while they can collaborate with multiple
partners, it is suggested they begin with a couple to fully engage in the co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing required to co-teach (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015).

Administrators play a critical role in providing systems and structures for successful co-teaching to take place. Focused leadership is essential to build a foundation to yield the sharing of a vision, productive co-teaching partnerships, and collaborative structures. Friend et al. (2010) share the critical role of administrators in the implementation of co-teaching by stating “Principals and other site administrators cannot be expected to lead staff members through this fundamental change or to integrate it with other school improvement efforts without increasing their understanding of it. These leaders have the responsibility to partner teachers, arrange schedules and common planning time, and resolve dilemmas that arise” (p.20). Additionally, administrators are responsible for communicating the vision of co-teaching programs to parents and community members while holding a level of program accountability and sustainability.

**Ongoing professional development.** Similar to other school initiatives, the implementation of co-teaching requires administrators to provide ongoing professional development opportunities to develop and sustain effective co-teaching practices. Research suggests an increased number of special educators have received courses in collaborative teaching during their preparation programs in comparison to their general education colleagues (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). Studies have also found reports of general and special education teachers lacking preparation and knowledge of inclusive practices, which include collaboration and co-teaching (Cramer & Nevin, 2006). The demands for co-teaching go beyond collaboration, they require constant communication,
reflection, and compromise, which need to be nurtured and supported through constant learning opportunities for co-teaching teams.

While teacher preparation programs are aiming to include courses on co-teaching and collaboration, a sizeable number of experienced and novice teachers lack proper preparation to successfully implement co-teaching. As Friend et al. (2010) state, “The problem of teacher education extends beyond the initial preparation. Much of the current teaching workforce has had little preparation for co-teaching roles” (p.20). For a considerable number of teachers, the first exposure to co-teaching elements is through their current districts. Therefore, the initial professional development sessions provided in schools should address skills in effective co-planning, co-teaching models, cooperative learning, instructional considerations, and collaboration (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996).

The initial training for special and general educators on co-teaching needs to support their understanding of how their skills and expertise play a role in providing effective instruction. Special education teachers need to further develop collaboration skills that can allow them to arrange roles and responsibilities to best serve students with disabilities in the co-taught classroom (Friend et al., 2010). General educators can initially focus on relinquishing control of their classroom, develop parity, and ways to collaborate (Pugach & Winn, 2011). Through the initial professional development sessions, special and general educators can begin adopting the foundational practices needed to begin implementing co-teaching.

Once the initial instruction of the co-teaching elements and practices has been completed, the ongoing support and skill development need to be present. Walther-Thomas et al. (1996) suggest a design of a long-term plan of support based on current
skills, training that has been provided, and areas of needs identified by co-teaching teams. Friend and Cook (2007) emphasize the importance of needs assessments to support the design and delivery of effective professional development that meets desired objectives, provides a focus on topics, and selects formats of sharing information relevant to the staff.

Recently, additional models outside the traditional delivery of professional development have been explored and found to have some success with co-teaching teams. Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015) conducted a study on embedded professional development with a focus on co-teaching. They support the importance of job-embedded professional development with co-teaching as traditional models do not differentiate for staff and have limited opportunities for staff to seek clarification on the topic or its implementation. Through their research, different formats of job-embedded professional development were identified, which include action research, case discussions, coaching, data teams/assessment development, implementing individual professional growth and learning plans, lesson study, mentoring, and portfolios. “Each of these formats requires teachers to be open to critical feedback and willing to share lesson plans, and tests, etc. in order to improve their teaching and ultimately improve the educational environment for all students” (p. 118).

Given the limited number of hours in a school day and the scope of traditional delivery of professional development, Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015) suggest the Co-Teaching Professional Development Model as a way to meet the needs of groups of teachers while promoting collaborative practices. They propose that “In the Co-Teaching Professional Development Model (CoPD), embedded professional development is
facilitated through the process of co-teaching which allows the special education teacher to share knowledge and skills with the general education teacher in the “how to” of accommodating students with disabilities and the general education teacher sharing knowledge of the specific content begin taught and strategies to help students learn the content” (p. 119).

While the results of their study suggested this model to be an effective approach to meeting the needs of co-teaching teams and provide constant learning opportunities for teachers, there is still a need for differentiating professional development based on the needs of co-teaching teams. Administrators continue to have a key role in the advocacy, design, and implementation of professional development to support co-teaching practices. Additionally, administrators should also be active participants in ongoing professional development to support a common understanding of expectations, reinforce the co-teaching vision, and gain a better understanding of co-teaching practices (Friend et al., 2010).

Co-Teaching Challenges

Despite the number of benefits and advantages of co-teaching for students and staff, there are challenges school personnel must overcome to implement effective co-teaching practices. Co-teaching requires a change in mindset from both, general and special educators, as this instructional delivery option goes beyond the traditional “each teacher gets their class” mentality. Co-teaching teams may perceive the demands of co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing as excessive and taxing responsibilities, which can impact their enthusiasm and commitment to co-teaching practices (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989). Conderman et al. (2008) added that “sharing classroom
space, materials, and ideas, as well as negotiating instructional methods and management styles, are challenges for beginner and experienced co-teachers” (p.20). Furthermore, they also highlight other pressures co-teaching teams face which include meeting the goals and objectives of IEPs, making sure they meet their co-teacher’s expectations, and sustaining a level of parity with their co-teaching partner (Conderman et al., 2008).

All essential components of co-teaching mentioned earlier are key to making co-teaching work; however, the same components that make co-teaching work can also become obstacles that can lead to ineffective implementation. The complexity of skills and structures required to effectively implement co-teaching face challenges such as the lack of common planning time, lack of administrative support, teacher working relationships, and undefined classroom roles and responsibilities, which can lead to interfering with the implementation of effective co-teaching practices (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Friend, 2008; Keefe & Moore, 2004).

**Lack of common plan time.** Prominent researchers have found co-teaching teams often reporting not having sufficient planning time to fully engage in co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing. With the increasing demands from either state or federal legislations to provide evidence of student achievement, the amount of planning time teachers have is frequently interrupted or is dedicated to different initiatives resulting in minimal focus on co-teaching practices (Friend, 2008). Finding time to plan has been frequently mentioned as a major concern for co-teaching teams (Ashton, 2003). Pugach and Winn (2011) raised the point on the importance of plan time, especially for those who are new to teaching as they stated “The concern about time raised across the studies emphasizes how critical it is to have predictable, sustained time for team members to
work together. If veteran teachers are feeling constrained by insufficient planning time, novices may experience even greater constraints” (p. 45). Friend (2008) further argued, “Whether co-teaching is implemented in elementary schools, middle schools or high schools and whether those schools are in urban, suburban or rural communities and well-funded or under-funded, professionals universally find that co-teachers do not have adequate planning time, and this affects the quality of their practice” (p. 12). Common plan time is a necessity for co-teaching teams to form and develop their partnerships.

Many schools find it difficult to provide common planning time to co-teaching teams within the school day (Walther-Thomas, 1997). While finding common planning time is more challenging at the elementary level, the organizational structure and day schedules of middle and high schools are found to be conducive to facilitating the process for collaboration and teamwork (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Research suggests co-teaching teams need to devote 45-60 minutes per week to co-planning (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). While some schools may be able to provide the suggested time, Scruggs et al. (2007) noted that “teachers reported having an average of 45.5 minutes per week (often interrupted by other factors), but felt they needed three times that amount” (p. 404). Even if co-teaching teams have the weekly recommended plan time, teachers need to meet beyond their scheduled time to share updates, lesson details, any last minute changes, and maintain ongoing communication (Friend, 2008).

The lack of adequate common plan time can have serious implications on the quality of co-teaching implementation. Conderman et al. (2008) argued that “Without an opportunity for daily reflection and co-planning, co-teaching is often relegated to the one-lead, one follow format. Such format often designates one teacher as the primary teacher
and the other as ‘helper’ teacher” (p. 25). The lack of common planning time leaves teachers with limited options to provide instruction as Murawski (2010) explained, “While some teachers find ways to make time to plan and collaborate, others lament the lack of time and resort simply to providing in-class support or other options” (p. 31). Additionally, the lack of common plan time can lead to creating a limited scope of an instructional delivery model, resulting in limited teacher collaboration, and lack of parity within the co-teaching team (Conderman et al., 2008).

**Lack of administrative support.** Although teachers have a key role in making co-teaching successful, administrators are responsible for sharing the vision with all stakeholders, support teachers, and provide planning time for co-teaching to become part of a school system (Friend, 2008). The lack of administrative support can stem from multiple factors. Studies have reported teachers noting administrators having a lack of understanding of the components essential in the development and sustenance of co-teaching teams and practices, and often rely on teachers to work on many of the required logistics (Scruggs et al., 2007; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Friend (2008) further suggests that “They believe that principals are the individuals who have the power to put in place conditions that are necessary for co-teaching to have a positive impact on student learning” (p. 16). Due to the demands principals face nowadays, the required focus to create the right co-teaching environments may not be present, which may lead to important details being missed.

Administrators must ensure they provide an avenue for all components for co-teaching practices to take place. Murawski (2010) points out administrators set the tone for co-teaching success by providing components which include professional
development, creating co-teaching partnerships, allocating resources, scheduling and logistics, and finding time for teachers to plan. Murawski further states “Obviously, the support of administrative staff at a school is critical. When administrators support in name only, teachers know it. This will translate to minimum time and effort on the faculty’s part as well” (p. 31).

Many of the issues teachers face in co-teaching partnerships such as, finding common plan time, creating student schedules, engage in professional development, and setting other logistics are components administrators should address (Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008). Most of the issues discussed in the research relate to administrative support (Friend, 2008). The lack of administrative support in any of the essential co-teaching components can create additional issues (Scruggs et al., 2007). In essence, the lack of administrative support can cause large issues that impede the effective co-teaching implementation and teachers’ notice when their principals support co-teaching in theory but lack an active role in creating structures (Friend, 2008).

**Teacher working relationships.** Collaborative practices are a major contributing factor to making co-teaching work. Researchers and practitioners have identified positive teacher working relationships as one of the top co-teaching requirements. In a survey conducted by Kohler-Evans (2006), teachers identified working relationships as the second most important feature of effective co-teaching practices. Kohler-Evans (2006) stated “The number one response was common planning time followed by having a positive working relationship with one’s co-teaching partner” (p. 261). Mastropieri et al. (2005) argue students and teachers benefit the most from the inclusive experience when teachers have established a positive relationship. However, they also point out that “when
co-teachers experience conflict with their co-teaching relationship due to any number of issues, then the inclusive experience for students with disabilities is more challenging” (p. 268).

Factors such as different philosophies, negative co-teaching perceptions, clash of personalities, and familiarity with content knowledge found in literature point to having an adverse impact on teacher working relationships (Friend, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski, 2010). Philosophical differences in co-teaching teams can be a significant challenge if teachers are not willing to find common ground in order to collaborate (Murawski, 2010). According to Mastropieri et al. (2005), difference in philosophies and beliefs on approaches to planning, classroom management, and instructional methods can impede the development of positive relationships (p. 269). Philosophies can be different based on teaching and personal experience. Pairing a veteran teacher with a novice teacher can have its own set of challenges as their views and experiences with education may be different. Scruggs et al. (2007) found negative opinions about co-teaching with a teacher stating, “If I had known that I would have to defend the way I have always believed in teaching, I would not have agreed to co-teach…” (p. 405). Other reports in the same study supported the concept of finding common ground in philosophy as it can be the foundation for the co-teaching “marriage” (Scruggs et al., 2007).

Teachers’ previous co-teaching experiences may influence their commitment to a new co-teaching relationship and their overall perception of co-teaching. Friend (2008) supports the argument of teachers expressing concern with an arranged co-teaching assignment. Friend et al. (2010) suggest teacher perceptions can stem from their
assignment being voluntary and whether teachers feel it has an impact on student achievement. Friend et al. (2010) stated “Co-teachers generally believe their practices were beneficial to students, but the educators indicated that co-teaching should only be voluntary, not an assignment forced on those who do not want to participate” (p. 16). The arranged assignment can result in a negative perception of practices before educators even begin to engage in co-teaching.

Studies have found involuntary co-teaching assignments to have an impact on working relationships and teacher perception. While every effort should be made to arrange voluntary partnerships, it may not always be an option. The results of the Kohler-Evans (2006) study indicate that “The majority of the teachers surveyed did not participate voluntarily and most had no prior planning before engaging in the co-teaching process” (p. 261). The arranged partnerships can lead to less collaborative practices, unresolved conflict and lack of commitment to co-teaching, which can be seen in practice as one teacher becoming the lead and the other taking on an “assistant” role (Friend et al., 2010).

Whether co-teaching arrangements are voluntary or assigned, educators need compatibility in personalities. Personalities, as Murawski (2010) suggests, matter for co-teaching relationships, just like the rest of relationships a person develops. “If their personalities are so different that they struggle to connect with one another and genuinely do not enjoy being together, the students pick up on negative vibes and the results are generally not positive, for students or for teachers” (Murawski, 2010, p. 30). Different personalities may have an impact on developing communication, parity, and how each adult interacts with students.
Mastropieri et al. (2005) point out that while not one factor stands alone as the single indicator of effective co-teaching, the overall relationship of co-teachers can be an essential component for co-teaching to be a successful vehicle for inclusion. They further argue that “in healthy co-teaching situations, the relationship between the general and special education teachers appeared to be built upon mutual trust and respect for one another’s expertise in each respective field” (p. 268). Content knowledge can have an influence on the co-teaching partnership. Friend et al. (2010) reported educators indicated lack of content knowledge can result in the special educator taking the role of an assistant as opposed to co-teacher (p.16).

Content knowledge also plays a role in how teachers view themselves in the relationship. Reinbiller (1996) found that general educators perceive their role as content experts who must deliver instruction regardless of students’ level of readiness, while special educators were more focused on individualizing instruction (p.42). Mastropieri et al. (2005) did not observe this perception in the results of their study, but added that “the level of content knowledge was likely to determine who the dominant teacher would be” (p. 268). The lack of content knowledge strategies to modify and accommodate may result in the co-teaching team to default to the one-teach, one-assist model until they develop a deeper understanding of those components.

Additionally, the lack of content knowledge can lead to lack of trust and respect for each other, which can translate to control of the classroom. Murawski (2010) states “Control is hard to give up…Sharing that control with another individual, particularly someone who has a different area of expertise, is difficult at best” (p. 30). The lack of shared control in the classroom promotes the disparity in the relationship and impacts
student learning. Both co-teachers need to contribute with their best set of skills to make the partnership fair and efficient (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996).

Undefined roles and responsibilities. Defining roles and responsibilities is a component contributing to successful co-teaching. In addition to roles in the classroom, teachers must also consider an equitable share of responsibilities. “Parity between educators is critical in establishing a shared classroom” (Murawski, 2010, p. 32). If one teacher has more “power” over the other, they are less likely to share responsibilities for co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing. Working relationships are directly correlated to the definition of roles and responsibilities in the classroom (Friend et al., 2010, p. 15).

There is substantial evidence in the literature suggesting general education teachers having a dominant role in the relationship as opposed to partnering with special educators to provide instruction, “In many instances the special education teacher assumed, or was seen to assume, a subordinate role” (Scruggs et al., 2007, p. 407). Observations in the same study provided evidence of the lack of special educators teaching to the whole class and disparity in partnership resulting in taking the role of an assistant. A special educator reported to be confused about the role in the classroom given the various tasks, from translating for students to teaching, that are asked to be completed (Scruggs et al., 2007, p. 407). On the other hand, when both teachers do not share equal roles and responsibilities for all students, either teacher can be more focused on supporting one group of students as opposed to the entire class (Friend et al., 2010).

Co-teachers’ personalities are also connected to establishing roles and responsibilities. Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) found that teachers rather
receive defined roles and responsibilities from administration. In this study, both special and general educators, reported to have limitations on what they can ask of each other.

Regular education teachers consistently indicated they did not feel comfortable delegating roles to the special education teacher and considered doing so as professionally disrespectful. Special educators struggled with assuming instructional roles in the classroom because they did not want to infringe on the content teacher’s expertise (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008, pp.125-126).

In essence, teachers do not want to get into each other’s territory, which can cause limited approaches to instruction.

Bouck (2007) identified eight roles and responsibilities which include instructor to large class, instructor to individuals, disciplinarian to class, disciplinarian to individuals, classroom manager, supporter, gatekeeper or authority, and confidant or friend (p. 48). Having not only these roles, but all the other components of managing a classroom, it is important for co-teaching teams to define how all roles are addressed.

Bouck (2007) states,

Given the multiple roles teachers need to play in today's classrooms, co-teaching can create situations in which teachers can potentially assume fewer roles in general or moment to moment because they know their partner can take on the others, thus becoming better in the roles they do play (p. 49).

Although having two adults in the classroom assume fewer roles, this can become an issue, especially if an adult is mostly taking on certain responsibilities that make them the disciplinarian or the authority in eyes of the students.

Lack of defined roles can have implications on collaboration and eventually result in a negative experience as either teacher may see an uneven amount of responsibilities. Murawski (2010) suggests that if the burden of all roles and responsibilities falls on only
one person in the relationship the result can be jealousy, bitterness, and resentment (p. 37). Understanding of each other’s basic responsibilities is an essential part of the relationship. As the demands for general and special educators have changed over the years, it is important for both to share in order for their partners to understand the elements they can collaborate on. “Co-teachers need to clarify to one another what their current job responsibilities entail and what they are reasonably able to contribute when dividing the tasks of planning, instructing, and assessing the co-taught class” (Murawski, 2010, p. 37).

The traditional thinking of roles and responsibilities in which the general educator is seen as the content master, and the special educator seen as the modifications and accommodations expert, is no longer working for co-teaching partnerships. While there is a place and a time for each educator to use their area of expertise, the sharing of roles and responsibilities needs to be a practice embedded in co-teaching practices.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Introduction

The term inclusion has been interpreted as mainstreaming, integration, and grouping students with similar needs in homogenous groups (Villa & Thousand, 2016). While these interpretations had a role in the evolution of inclusive schools, Villa and Thousand (2016) recently provide terms to help define essential elements of inclusive education which are: a vision and practice, differentiating instruction, and presumed competence and holding high expectations for students. In addition to inclusion being a belief that everyone belongs regardless of perceived ability, the vision and practice of inclusion is defined as embracing the diverse academic, social/emotional, language and communication learning of students with the purpose of reaching the desired goals in education (Villa & Thousand, 2016). Furthermore, inclusive education requires differentiation of instruction through the collaboration of planning, teaching, and the involvement of students and families (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

A significant amount of attention continues to be given to general and special education teachers, and other service providers, to create inclusive classrooms for students with a wide range of abilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Snell & Janney, 2000). As a result of the recent changes in legislation and increased pressure on educators to set high standards to ensure students’ needs are met, the implementation of co-teaching has increased as a service delivery option to meet new diverse challenges (Cook & Friend, 2004). Co-teaching is a way to deliver services to students with disabilities as part of a school’s inclusive philosophy. Co-teaching shares many benefits with other inclusion
strategies which include a different perspective on students with special education needs, increased understanding for students with special needs on the part of other students, and a better sense of classroom community given the nature of heterogeneous groupings in a co-taught classroom (Cook & Friend, 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005).

Having been in several school settings in my career and being passionate about serving diverse student populations, I find Inclusion to embody aspects of supporting students that I had never considered before. Including students in after-school activities, providing opportunities for students of all abilities to work on a project, have elective courses in which students of all abilities are participating are just a few ways in which I have come to realize the role inclusion plays in a school setting.

I have seen countless number of scenarios in multiple educational settings in which students of diverse backgrounds and abilities have been separated, as if they have done something wrong, something so intractable that would merit them to be separated from their peers so “learning” can happen. I have often asked myself: How would I feel if I was separated from my peers if I had a learning challenge? As an educator, a parent, and a person, I would not want that for myself, my own children, or the children I serve.

The purpose of this case study was to examine the implementation of co-teaching to promote inclusion across three middle schools in a diverse suburban school district. As principal of one of the middle schools, my goal was to try to gain a better understanding of how, why, and where the co-teaching model as implemented had best impacted inclusion throughout the district. In this chapter, I will explain case study methodology, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study.
Research Questions

By conducting this research, I intended to explore information regarding the following question: How do we make co-teaching more effective in the Fairview School District? Related questions which flow from the question include:

- How do teacher relationships and collaboration affect co-teaching practices?
- What structures need to be in place to enhance co-teaching practices?

Case Study Methodology

Case study methodology as described by Yin (2002) is a research method intending to address the how, what, or why of a phenomenon within its real-life context. Echoing Yin, Stake (1995) emphasizes the value of the contextual and qualitative aspects of case study methodology defining it as “a study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). In a comparative study of the Yin and Stake approaches to case study, citing strong affinities in the areas of design, data gathering, and data analysis, Yazan (2015) posits an approach that merges components of the two. Because of the added perspectives offered, and the embedded position of the researcher, this “merged” approach was used in this study.

Creswell (1998) and Stake (1995) refer to this type of case study as being an intrinsic case study. As Yin (2006) points out, the case study approach allows the researcher to collect data in natural settings rather than relying on “derived” data typically maintained by agencies outside the researcher’s control. Thus, as Flick (2009) explains the subjectivity of the researcher and what is being studied becomes part of the research process, which can include actions, impressions, and observations in the field.
becoming a portion of the data in the interpretation process. In this case, being in a leadership position, the researcher is vested in determining which characteristics of co-teaching teams were having the most impact on promoting inclusion in the district’s middle schools, which also impact the overall student educational experience.

Case study methodology was best suited for this study because it attempted to uncover in order to better understand multiple interrelated issues including: the why of inclusion in the Fairview SD, the how of co-teaching supporting inclusion at three district middle schools, and the where and what – identifying those structures and supports that have been the most and least effective in supporting co-teaching teams to promote inclusion.

**Setting**

The setting for this study included three middle schools in the Fairview SD: Austin Middle School, Chestnut Middle School, and Stewart Middle School. Below are Illinois Interactive Report Card data demographics for each school.

**Austin Middle School.** Student demographics of Austin Middle School as of 2017 are: 16.5% White, 2.2% Black, 73.9% Hispanic, 4.9% Asian, and 2.5% other races. The demographic information also shows 78.0% low-income, 24.4% of students considered Limited English Proficient (LEP), and 13% of students have Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The most recent school report data shows Austin having 100% parent communication with a total enrollment of 759 students.

**Chestnut Middle School.** Student demographics of Chestnut Middle School as of 2017 are: 34.3% White, 2.1% Black, 54.5% Hispanic, 5.9% Asian, and 3.2% other races. The demographic information also shows 58.7% low-income, 15.9% of students
considered Limited English Proficient (LEP), and 14.7% have Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The most recent school report data shows the school having 100% parent communication and an attendance rate of 97% with a total enrollment of 661 students.

**Stewart Middle School.** Student demographics of Stewart Middle School as of 2017 are as follows: 59.7% White, 1.3% Black, 26.1% Hispanic, 9.6% Asian, and 3.3% other races. The demographic information also shows 34.8% low-income, 11.6% of students considered Limited English Proficient (LEP), and 10.4% of students have Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The most recent school report data shows Stewart having 100% parent communication and an attendance rate of 94.2 with a total enrollment of 709 students.

The three middle schools in the Fairview SD reflect similar demographics with differences in enrollment and percent of low-income families. This is noted here because data was collected from all three middle schools in attempt to gain a broader study sample.

**Data Collection**

A combination of surveys, group interviews, observations, and document analysis served as points to create evidence in addressing the research questions. Data triangulation, as Yin (2006) suggests, is a major benefit of case studies as multiple sources of data and evidence can be consolidated into common theme and findings as they emerge from the study. The evidence of data collected for this case study was presented through tables, charts, figures, and interview quotations pertinent to the research questions and aside from the narrative.
Survey. A survey (Appendix A, p. 144) was utilized to gain a better understanding of the co-teaching methods being implemented by co-teaching teams, how their relationships and collaborative skills impact their delivery of co-teaching methods, what structures do they see as support for co-teaching, and their perception on the attributes of what makes co-teaching teams effective in their fluidity to implement different methods.

The survey was administered electronically using Google Forms to approximately 120 teachers from all three middle schools in the district who are currently co-teaching, or who have co-taught since inclusion became an initiative as a part of the district’s Area of Focus. The survey was anonymous for two reasons: 1) the researcher is part of the organization and a direct supervisor of a significant number of participants, which may have had an impact on their responses; and 2) the intent of the survey was to first get a broader perspective of co-teaching in the district, not to evaluate co-teaching teams and their ability or knowledge on the use of co-teaching methods. The survey included open-ended options for responses which helped the researcher determine the focus and interest for more in-depth small group interviews.

Small group interviews. Small group interviews were conducted once results from the survey had been aggregated and analyzed. Interview questions were developed based upon the researcher’s initial analysis of the data, and then presented as a “member check” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) to the small groups for their responses to and interpretations of the data. The purpose of the interviews was twofold: 1) to better interpret data obtained through the survey; and 2) to uncover and identify common
themes across all three schools on the participants’ perceptions of the implementation of co-teaching as a vehicle for inclusion in the district.

Interview participants consisted of teachers who were currently part of a co-teaching team or that had previously been part of a co-teaching team in 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade. Participants were selected based on their interest in participating as indicated in the survey. Interviews were conducted in groups of 2-3 participants and the number of interviews depended on the interested number of participants volunteering to be interviewed.

Interview structure, as Brenner (2006) points out, can range from casual conversation to highly structured protocols. The interview process for this study was based on Rubin and Rubin’s (2016) belief that interviews are vehicles for researchers to find out others’ views and on what information the researcher is seeking to obtain. In this case, a semi-structured protocol, one that incorporates having a core set of questions with the freedom to ask follow-up questions which can build on the topic based on the participants’ responses, was utilized.

Interviews took place in the school setting and at a time convenient to participants in a roundtable, conversation-like setting. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour, depending on the number of participants. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to explore common themes in participants’ responses.

Classroom observations. Classroom observations to see co-teaching teams and methods in action was also part of this research. In an effort to triangulate the data being collected, the observational data was compared to survey and interview data to arrive to a truer description of the understanding and implementation of co-teaching for inclusion in
the district’s middle schools. At least 6 informal observations were conducted at Chestnut Middle School as co-teaching teams were more accessible due to the researcher being the principal. Middle school classes are scheduled in 60-minute blocks, so conducting informal observations allowed the researcher to observe a beginning, middle, and an end of a lesson for any given team. Informal observations with volunteer co-teaching teams from the other schools were solicited during the interview process.

It is important to note the observations were voluntary and informal, meaning the researcher periodically visited and observed co-teaching classrooms separate from formal supervisory walk-throughs and protocols. Yin (2006) contends that scheduled observations as a means of collecting data can lead to teachers altering their instructional practices due to the “evaluative” nature of the visit. However, having the classroom observations be voluntary and informal in nature, allowed participating co-teaching teams to demonstrate their “best practices.”

**Recruitment**

The recruitment of participants in the online survey and focus groups was voluntary to avoid perceptions of pressure to participate or having staff feel this is evaluative in nature. I anticipated strong participation from teaching staff as they would be able to share their perspective and input about their co-teaching practices.

**Online Survey**

The online survey was introduced by each building principal to their respective staffs to complete electronically with an emphasis on the anonymity of the survey. Each building principal emailed their staff directly about the survey, its purpose, and shared the survey consent forms (Appendix B, p. 148) for those wishing to participate. Detailed
information about the survey was provided to principals by the researcher. Staff members were given the choice of participating and assured their responses were to be kept confidential. The researcher followed up twice with groups electronically to encourage participation. Every electronic communication included the consent form (Appendix B, p. 148).

**Group Interviews**

Invitations were sent electronically to teachers in each of the 3 school buildings who answered “Yes” to the last question of the survey. Informed consent was obtained before the group interviews are scheduled (Appendix C, p. 150). Participants were assured that their identities will remain anonymous. They were told the group interviews were to be recorded for the purpose of transcript analysis and given the option to decline participation. A focus group protocol with ground rules can be found in Appendix D, p. 152.

**Risks and Benefits**

The potential benefits of this data collection are significant. This case study provides a unique opportunity for teachers to express their views on how inclusion has evolved within the school district. They may be able to offer suggestions and ideas on how to improve their practice and opportunities which the district needs to offer in order to institutionalize co-teaching. However, it is important to note the minimal potential risks for the online survey and small group interviews.

**Online survey.** The potential risks to participation in this research study were minimal. The online survey was completely anonymous as the Google Form settings allow for users’ names not to be collected. Therefore, it was not possible to connect a
participant with his/her responses. Participants who decided to answer “Yes” to the last survey question were then be prompted to fill in their name with the sole purpose of having them to be invited to the group interviews in the future.

**Group interviews.** The potential risks to participation in the focus group interviews were also minimal. The identity of participants was kept confidential on all interview transcripts and coding sheets. Participant names were replaced with alphanumeric labels. I was the only person with access to the electronic transcripts, which were housed in a password protected drive. Recordings were destroyed following the analysis of results. However, the volunteer participants were entering into a group conversation about their perceptions and experiences with co-teaching. There were opportunities for disagreement or difference of opinion between colleagues within this interview format. There was also a chance that participants could violate the ground rules (see Appendix D, p. 152) and share responses of their colleagues with people outside of the focus group.

**Data Analysis**

Yin (2006) advises case study researchers to employ multiple methods of collecting data and offers different techniques for data analysis such as pattern matching, explanation building, time series analysis, program logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Creswell (1998) describes data analysis as identifying common themes in which evidence collected may provide broader insight into key points or issues. In this study, data was first collected and analyzed by casting a broad net using a survey to gather participant perceptions on the implementation of co-teaching in the district. Survey data was used to create small group interview questions. Data from the interviews was
coded and organized into themes common and representative of all three schools. Data from the classroom observations and document analysis was interwoven in the analyses to nuance, support or verify teachers’ survey responses and interview themes.

**Limitations**

In an intrinsic case study, where the researcher might also be called a “participant observer” (Creswell, 1998), it is important to consider the researcher’s background knowledge about and interpersonal relationships with the participants. As a middle school principal in the district, my day-to-day supervisory role can affect responses participants provide on surveys and in the small group interviews. Stake (1995) notes being both a participant and observer in a research study can be a limitation. For example, participants might feel obliged to provide “canned” responses in interviews to show they are doing what they are “expected to do,” especially in front of colleagues. To lessen this phenomenon, the district-wide survey was anonymous and all small group interviews and observations were voluntary.
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in this study to address the primary research question: How do co-teaching methods support the promotion of inclusion in a diverse middle school? Data include findings from a survey, small group follow-up interviews, and informal classroom observations. Quantitative data from the Co-Teaching Self-Assessment Survey (see Appendix A, p. 144) were analyzed including comments made by teachers in the comment boxes provided at the end of each survey item. Qualitative data were derived from small group interviews and notes made by the researcher during informal classroom observations. Data gathered during the group interviews and classroom observations were used to “dive deeper” to better understand and interpret the findings of the survey data, which are presented by themes following an analysis of the survey data.

Survey and Group Interview Participation

The Co-Teaching Self-Assessment Survey was sent electronically to three middle schools. The researcher elicited support from principal colleagues to send their staff an initial request to participate in the survey. The researcher sent two follow up e-mail requests to 120 participants identified as currently or previously being in a co-teaching partnership. The survey was open for ten school days and a total of 70 responses were collected. The survey was anonymous, and participants were asked to provide their name only if interested in participating in a small group interview. Survey results were shared through a Google Document with the three middle schools, along with school and district administration. Figure 4 shows responses with participants’ current or previous co-
teaching partnerships in all schools. The results displayed in Figure 5 also reflect how few staff members have moved schools throughout their tenure in our district with co-teaching experiences.

![Bar chart showing co-teaching experiences in different schools]

*Figure 4. Participants with Co-teaching Experiences in Different Schools.*

Out of the 70 survey participants, 26 responded “Yes” to partaking in small group interviews. Four different small group interviews were conducted in the weeks following the survey window, with 17 out of the 26 participants interested, representing the three middle schools and a couple of staff members who have been in multiple schools within our district. Three of the small group interviews were from Chestnut Middle School, the researcher’s home school, and the fourth small group had a mix of the other middle schools along with a staff member that has been in multiple schools over the years. An interview protocol (Appendix D, p. 152) was followed with small groups and each interview ranged from 40-45 minutes. Before the group interviews, the results of the survey were sent to all teachers, staff, and administrators in the district. Questions to be
discussed at the group interviews were also sent to all the teachers who agreed to be interviewed.

**Analysis of Survey Data**

The survey data is presented and analyzed following the sequential order of items 1-14 in the 16-item survey. Survey Item 1 is displayed in Figures 5 (p. 78) and 6 (p.79) showing the co-teaching approach utilized the most and the approach used the least based on survey responses. The rest of the items, 2-14, begin with a table showing the percentage distribution of responses in a Likert-type scale including Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The data is then discussed and analyzed incorporating information drawn from the comment boxes in the survey.

The first item of the survey asked participants to do a self-rating on a scale of 1-4, 1 being the co-teaching approach they used the most, and 4 being the approach they used the least or not at all. The survey item included the following descriptions on co-teaching approaches based on professional development provided by the district when co-teaching was introduced in 2010:

- **Supportive** - when one teacher takes the lead instructional role and the other rotates among the students to provide support.
- **Parallel** - when two or more people work with different groups of students in different sections of the classroom.
- **Complementary** – when co-teachers do something to enhance the instruction provided by the other co-teacher.
- **Team Teaching** - when two or more people do what the traditional teacher has done – plan, teach, assess, and assume responsibility for all the students in the classroom.
**Item 1:** Using the descriptions above, which best describes the co-teaching approach you most often use in your classroom? Rank order the approaches starting with 1 = the approach we most often use; and 4 = the approach we do less often or not at all.

Figure 5 shows the number of co-teachers rating the approach they used the most in their co-teaching partnership.

![Figure 5. Co-teaching Approach Used the Most.](image)

The results show the Supportive approach being rated by co-teachers as the most utilized. This affirms what research has found. While the Supportive, or one-teach one-assist approach, is the most utilized it is also the least effective of the co-teaching strategies as it has limited benefits to students and teachers (Friend, 2014). The use of this approach is typically for teachers who are just beginning their co-teaching relationships as they attempt to become familiar with one another. It can also be an indication of the amount of planning time spent by the team, as the approach requires minimal common planning (Conderman et al., 2008; Friend, 2014).

While the Supportive co-teaching was reported as the most used approach by teachers, Team Teaching came in a close second. One teacher wrote: “I rarely ever co-
taught with the supportive or parallel role. Co-teaching was a regular part of my team's instruction, usually following a team teaching or complementary teaching approach.”

Team Teaching is when both teachers assume equal responsibility for planning, teaching, and assessing a lesson. The fact that it placed second behind Supportive co-teaching suggests that the co-teaching model used by teachers depends upon having a certain level of trust and familiarity that long-standing teams have developed over the years. For example, one teacher wrote: “In previous years, I would rank all 4 approaches with a 1. This year my co-teaching experience has been different. I believe the personal relationship between the co-teachers plays a huge role in the strategies used.”

Figure 6 shows the number of responses for the co-teaching approach reported as least utilized by the survey participants.

![Figure 6. Co-teaching Approach Used the Least.](attachment:figure6.png)

In the research and literature on successful co-teaching, Team Teaching has been found to be the most effective co-teaching approach for full-immersion inclusive classrooms (Friend, 2014). However, the data from the survey respondents shows it to be the least utilized. Team Teaching means both teachers assume an equally active role not
only in the planning and delivery of the lesson, but also in matters of classroom organization and management. The negative stigma associated with being an “inclusion teacher” or “inclusion student” is removed or significantly lessened as students tend to view both teachers as equal partners in a team teaching relationship (Perl et al., 1999). However, as Friend (2014) notes, the team teaching approach is most challenging as it requires both teachers to step out of their traditionally defined teaching comfort zones and adopt a new professional co-working relationship. If the ultimate goal of co-teaching is to arrive at a seamlessly integrated approach to curriculum and instruction which meets the needs of all of the students in the classroom, Team Teaching also requires more planning time than the rest of the co-teaching approaches.

In addition to the need for more planning time, and teachers committing to shared teaching responsibilities, the desired goal of normalizing Team Teaching in inclusive classrooms can be hindered by other factors. Some of those factors include a lack of comfort and trust level between co-teachers, a lack of flexibility, inability to compromise when designing instruction, and traditional teaching philosophies getting in the way of trying a new approach. All negatively impact the effectiveness of the Team Teaching approach. As a result, the desired fluidity of the approach may not be achieved and along with it a lowering of student expectations may begin to creep in (Murawski, 2010). Shifts in teams and moving teachers to different buildings can impact comfort level, relationships, and the overall perception of a teacher when assigned to a co-teaching team can also play a role in determining which co-teaching approaches are utilized.

In summary, while research shows Team Teaching to be the most effective co-teaching model overall, deciding upon a particular approach, or blend of approaches, is
dependent on what best meets the needs of the students in any given class. In addition to deciding upon which co-teaching approach to use, at the same time they need to be developing a strong and workable personal and professional relationship, finding and establishing adequate time to co-plan, and be provided with professional development and support structures from administration to improve their co-teaching practices. Each approach yields a variety of benefits and challenges for both students and teachers. However, too much change implemented too quickly or without across-the-board fidelity, may be a contributing factor to having the Supportive and Team Teaching approaches be the most utilized in the district based on the survey results.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 2: Decide Co-Teaching Approach Based on Students’ Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80% of the teachers responded “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the statement the co-teaching approach they used was based on the needs of the students. The theme of the importance of co-teacher relationships emerged in the comments on this first item. Co-teaching is built around personal and professional relationships that support inclusion and academic success (Murawski, 2010). For example, as one teacher wrote, “In order for it to work, there must be an equal partnership. This is very rarely the case.” Another added, “Often it depends on your relationship with the co-teacher and how comfortable you are working together.”
Table 5.
Item 3: Identify Resources for the Lesson, Share Resources, Materials, and Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When combining “Strongly Agree” and “Agree,” 77.1% of teachers say they identify and share resources and information. While the responses overall were high, a sizeable number of teachers (22.9%) disagreed and felt that the responsibility of preparing and planning a lesson all-to-often fell on one person. In the comment box one teacher wrote “This is often the responsibility of one teacher. However, this is not always the case, I have experienced co-teaching that is a true team approach.” Another added: “It (planning) is basically done by one of the two teachers.” Another teacher wrote: I wish I could check ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree,’ but this has not been my experience in recent years. At the beginning of my career, I would have been able to ‘agree’ more.”

Comments like these and others like them suggest planning is often being done by one person in a co-teaching partnership, which is less than ideal. Several factors may account for this: an incompatible working relationship in the co-teaching team; a lack of time to co-plan; or a new teacher deferring to the wisdom and experience of a content area or special education veteran (Friend, 2014; Murawski, 2010).

Table 6.
Item 4: Share Responsibility for Deciding What Curriculum Standards to Teach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While a combined 62.8% of “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” in responses supports collaboration of co-teaching teams making curricular decision for students, some
respondents commented on curriculum not being their choice, but a district mandate. A teacher wrote: “Although there is some flexibility in materials to use, the standards are dictated by the district.” Another added: “The standards are pretty much already decided. All math standards are expected to be taught.”

However, a significant percentage of respondents (37.2%) disagree that co-teaching teams decide on what standards to teach. This response might be attributed to the fact that the district has set a curriculum scope and sequence for every core subject which all teachers are expected to follow. Teachers in co-taught classrooms must prioritize the skills students have to master based on their needs. How this is done can influence the co-teaching strategy used. One teacher shared: “The standards are based on the power standards. Neither teacher decides the standards, but together we decide how to help students master them.” Another wrote: “We teach the standards that are expected of us by the district, but vary how we present instruction and/or level of mastery we are looking for.” Having a clear sense of the desired learning outcomes for students in a co-taught classroom needs to be part of the co-teaching partnership as it can influence the approach selected for each lesson, which impacts its effectiveness (Friend, 2014; Murawski, 2010).

Table 7.
Item 5: Share Responsibility for Differentiating Instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72.8% of teachers responded “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to sharing responsibility for differentiating instruction in their co-taught classrooms. However, a considerable number (27.2%) of the teachers disagreed. Reflecting comments in survey
items 2, 3, and 4 wherein one member of the co-teaching team can assume most of the responsibility for planning is again evidenced. One teacher wrote: “Often in my experiences the general education teacher has come up with many of the differentiating plans and the special education teacher implemented them.” Another added “I am totally in charge. My co-teacher does not share this responsibility. In prior years/assignments, I would have said ‘yes’.” It would appear that “shared responsibility for differentiation” is often divided up following areas of teacher expertise. For example, one teacher wrote, “The majority of differentiation for instruction was done by the special education teacher, assessment differentiation (leveled tests) was completed by the core teacher.” Conderman (2011) asserts that differentiation of instruction should be part of the co-planning phase, in which both educators are expected to contribute by proposing instructional methods, materials, accommodations and modifications, and assessments. Whether the content area teacher or the special education teacher take the lead, the roles on differentiating instruction, as supported by the literature, found that general educators and special educators must work together to address the needs of all students (Reinbiller, 1996 p.42).

Table 8.
Item 6: Identify How Student Learning Will be Assessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

78.6 % of the teachers “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that assessment of student learning is decided in collaboration with their co-teaching partner. A comment by one teacher is reflective of the teachers’ responses to Item 5 regarding responsibility for differentiation of instruction, “The general education teacher decides for the general population, while the special education teacher decides for her caseload.” However,
21.4% of teachers disagreed that there is an equal split of assessment responsibility. One teacher wrote, “In my experiences, this (assessment of student learning) seems to fall more on the general education teacher.” Another observed, “Core team (general education) teachers across the grade level decide, there is very little involvement by the special education teacher.” The findings for this Item are mixed; both survey responses and comments suggest that all co-teachers are involved in assessment, but in varying ways and degrees. Much depends upon the co-teaching approach used, the specific needs of the students, co-teacher experience and expertise, and the depth, strength, and longevity of the relationship between the two teachers.

Table 9.  
*Item 7: Have Open Lines of Communication and Give Each Other Feedback.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85.7% of the teachers “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to having open lines of communication and give feedback to their co-teaching partners. Compared to other survey items, this relatively high positive response might be attributed in part to regularly scheduled time set aside each day by district administrators for teacher communication and co-planning at all three middle schools within the district. It is a huge plus for co-teachers to have time built-in daily to meet face-to-face to co-plan.

Only 14.3% of the teachers disagreed there were adequate opportunities to communicate and give one another feedback. Of these, some found scheduling a regular time to meet and communicate to be a challenge. One teacher wrote: “It is very difficult for me to find planning time in my current assignment. In prior years, this was a daily experience that I enjoyed.” Whether or not teachers used the opportunity to give feedback
to one another at these daily meetings was not mentioned. As part of the collaborative process, teachers need to set aside time to provide feedback and reflect on lesson effectiveness (Murawski & Spencer, 2011).

Table 10.  
*Item 8: Celebrate the Co-Teaching Process, Including Successes and Outcomes.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67.1% of teachers reported celebrating the co-teaching process in their partnerships. However, a considerable number, nearly 33%, reported that they would like to do so more often. One teacher wrote: “We sometimes do this, but not often.” Another added: “We do not always think to celebrate successes and what went well. We focus a lot more on what changes we need to make or reflect more on what we need to do.”

Murawski (2010) states that teachers’ reflections upon and celebration of the co-teaching process is just as important as the planning and the delivery of instruction. Concentrating mostly on what they could do or have done better, co-teaching teams need constant reminders from administrators and peers to celebrate their own and their students’ successes to encourage each other to continue to improve their practice.

Table 11.  
*Item 9: Meet at Least 45-60 Minutes per Week to Co-Plan.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than half of respondents (42.8%) reported meeting weekly to co-plan. This reflects a perception and concern expressed by teachers in previous survey items about
not having adequate time to co-plan. Thousand et al. (2006) and Conderman et al. (2008) recommend that co-teaching partners have 45-60 minutes weekly of face-to-face planning time to be the most effective. While most teachers, 57.2%, reported meeting less than 45-60 minutes weekly to plan, those who frequently meet, mentioned having worked with their co-teaching partner for several years. As one teacher wrote, “We meet daily, sometimes longer than the required time. I enjoy planning with my co-teaching partner because we’ve worked together for a long time, we understand each other well.”

Despite having a daily allotted time to meet and plan, 57.2% of the teachers checked “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” on this Item. It could be the district allotted time for daily co-planning was simply less than 45 - 60 minutes in some experiences. Or, it could be that individual co-teaching teams still found it difficult or impossible to meet for any regularly scheduled daily planning time due to a number of impediments. Varying barriers were given which prevented them from establishing adequate time to co-plan, ranging from the number of subjects being taught, to routinely being pulled away to attend to some other problems during their scheduled planning time. One teacher wrote: “That's our goal (to plan at least 45 minutes weekly), but honestly most of the time she (co-teaching partner) is pulled for an IEP meeting, a pre-IEP, a 504 meeting or something else so our planned 45-minute a week plan is bumped.” Another added: “In an ideal world, we would be able to do this, but we all seem to be pulled in many different directions during our planning time. We are able to co-plan through the use of shared documents and electronic communication.” Without a regularly scheduled and adequate time to meet, the co-planning process of determining essential skills and content to be taught, reviewing and identifying appropriate resource materials, agreeing on learning
outcomes and assessments, and preparing differentiated modifications for all learners, are
difficult tasks to accomplish, impacting the overall purpose of co-teaching (Friend &
Cook, 2007).

Table 12.
Item 10: Effectively Implement a Lesson, Even if We Did Not Co-Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A considerable percentage of teachers reported the ability to implement an
effective co-taught lesson without time to plan. As Table 12 shows, 91.4% of teachers
felt their lesson effectiveness was not impacted by not co-planning in advance. This item
may be faulty in that it lends itself to a wide range of interpretations on what is
considered to be an “effective” lesson. One teacher pointed this out by writing: “This is a
difficult statement to rate because the word ‘effective’ is subjective. I may think the
lesson was effective but an observer wanting to see a team-teaching approach would
think otherwise.” Without objective criteria, such as an end-of-lesson formative
assessment, any lesson that appears to have gone off without a hitch, from a teacher’s
perspective, ipso facto meets the minimal requirements for effectiveness: We came; we
taught; they learned (we think). On the other hand, it could be that many or most of the
respondents did regularly use an after-lesson-assessment to determine lesson
effectiveness; others may have been relying upon a teacher’s intuition and experience to
make such a judgment call. As written, the survey item was not particularly good one or
helpful. At face value, the responses directly contradict previous survey items where
teachers cited inadequate planning time as a major barrier to co-teaching effectiveness. A
teacher wrote: “This year I can say agree, because I am implementing the instruction and
behavior management on my own whether we talk about it or not.” Again, research has shown that a lack of adequate planning time can result in teachers defaulting to the Supportive co-teaching approach (one-teach, one-assist); the approach found to be most utilized in co-teaching partnerships (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Table 13.
*Item 11: Model Teamwork and Collaboration for Our Students.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An overwhelming majority of the teachers felt they modeled the value of teamwork and collaboration for their students. The co-teaching model, endorsed, utilized, and now over time firmly established within the district’s three middle schools can reasonably be cited as a major contributing factor to 90% of teachers selecting “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” on this item. Coordinated with co-teaching, the district has made steps toward adopting the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) model. As a result, the concept of collaborative teaming and teaching has evolved within teachers a “mindset” of “we are all in this together.” For example, one teacher wrote: “I do try to make this (model teamwork and collaboration) happen all the time. We (co-teaching team) use the word ‘we’ all the time, we are equal.” The small percentage reporting otherwise, suggests that the concept of a PLC, where teachers and students are collaborating within, between, and amongst themselves, has taken root. Experiencing co-taught classes by teachers plays a major role in modeling and normalizing a PLC for students.
Table 14.

Table 14. Item 12: Have Developed a Co-Dependable Relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost 73% of teachers reported having had a co-teaching relationship in which they equally shared responsibility for planning and completing tasks necessary to meet the demands for effective co-teaching. Research suggests that delineating roles and responsibilities is a critical component in successful co-teaching partnerships (Friend, 2014). However, these roles and responsibilities may vary from year to year, depending on the teaching assignment. One teacher commented on how each teacher’s role and responsibilities needed to be clearly outlined at the beginning of the school year: “After having different co-teachers through the years, I’ve learned to be clear about roles at the beginning of the year to make our lives easier.”

While a shared approach to responsibility may be the norm for most co-teachers, a considerable number, over 25%, felt that all responsibility and completing necessary tasks fell on one person. One teacher commented, “Again, with a special education teacher in my previous experiences, the general education teacher takes more of the lead. All planning and grading tend to fall on the core (general education) teacher.” According to Murawski (2010), defining roles and responsibilities is a major component contributing to successful co-teaching. In addition to roles in the classroom, teachers must also consider an equitable share of responsibilities.
While 45.5%, or nearly half, of the teachers agreed with this statement, 54.3% disagreed. Research has found that sustained, embedded professional learning for co-teachers is key to instilling a shared vision and understanding of how co-teaching in full inclusion classrooms can improve student learning for all (Friend et al., 2010). This a critical component for effective co-teaching, and necessary for those teachers who report not having had training on co-teaching concepts. As one teacher noted, “This is an area in which I feel that both me and my co-teacher could improve. I was not trained on how to be a co-teacher by the district or even in undergraduate school. It was an on-the-job type of training. I have not sought out professional learning to improve our co-teaching.” As teachers are often limited to the options provided to them for professional development, it is the administrator’s role to provide not only the collaborative structures, but further teachers’ learning on co-teaching practices (Pugach & Winn, 2011).

Table 16.
Item 14: Seek Support From Administrators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of note in this Item is that while less than half, 43.3%, responded that they do seek support from administrators for co-teaching support, another 55.7% of teachers reported their partnerships as not seeking administrative or logistical support. One teacher
wrote, “I don’t have a reason why, I just don’t think we’ve ever done this” (meaning seeking administrative support). Another teacher added: “we seek support if we need to, we typically do our own thing.” To be effective, in support of teachers tasked with making inclusive co-teaching successful, administrators need to be seen and heard supporting the vision and promise that all students achieve their academic goals (Friend, 2008). Once again, as reelected in previous items, the most important issues co-teachers encounter are having adequate time to plan; establishing workable, positive personal and professional relationship with one’s co-teaching partner; having at the ready sustained embedded professional development, and support from administrators in creating adequate time and space needed to advance and support a co-teaching model (Santoli et al., 2008).

**Group Interview Data**

The group interview data presented here are from the teachers and interpretations they made or drew from the survey findings. (See Appendix E, p. 153). The interview protocol (Appendix D) and survey results were shared with teachers prior to interviews taking place. Having time to review the survey results, the teachers came prepared and relaxed, leading to discussions being open and lively. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Having the opportunity to freely discuss and interact with one another about the survey findings resulted in uncovering three themes which first began to emerge in the survey data and were later substantiated in the group interviews. The interview data is presented in the following themes: planning, relationships, and shared roles and responsibilities.
**Theme One: Planning.** Making productive use of the weekly co-planning time set-aside by the district to plan with their co-teaching partner was a concern mentioned often in the comment boxes throughout the survey. (All three middle schools provide teachers with 120 minutes of planning time daily.) At the core of co-teaching, adequate time to plan is integral in determining instructional approaches and for both professionals to use their strengths in order to support *all* students in learning (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). The importance of regular, sustained planning time for co-teachers cannot be overstated. Studies have shown planning time to be a critical component to successful co-teaching (Pugach & Winn, 2011). While adequate planning time is important for both co-teachers, it is especially so for new teachers.

The concern about time raised across the studies emphasizes how critical it is to have predictable, sustained time for team members to work together. If veteran teachers are feeling constrained by insufficient planning time, novices may experience even greater constraints. (Pugach & Winn, 2011, p. 45)

While the co-teachers welcomed, valued, and appreciated the time the district has set aside weekly for co-planning, many felt increased demands on both content area teachers and special educators over the past few years has had a negative impact on co-teaching partnership planning. These increased demands not only cut into teachers' time to plan but can also lead to a disparity in roles and responsibilities. One teacher wrote: “Due to the constraints on special education teachers this year. It seems that co-planning has become less of priority for some of the teachers, so the core teacher is responsible for the majority of the planning, teaching, and assessing.” Increased demands leave teachers feeling overwhelmed while at the same time more and more planning time is being
usurped by other “more urgent” issues. Two teachers shared the following in a group interview:

**Teacher 3:** …Often there is something. An IEP, then the planning for the domain, the month is gone by, and we have not met.

**Teacher 1:** Very similar to what she had mentioned… not only on my part but, on all teacher’s part. So, I feel like her level of extra meetings has gone up. Half the time it's like, oh I can't meet, I can't meet. So, that's been added to on what she mentioned.

Added responsibilities not directly related to those as inclusive classroom co-teachers not only infringe upon time to co-plan, but by default may lead to a co-teaching approach which may not be the most effective method for student learning. At worst, not being able to meet and co-plan can result in special education teachers walking into a classroom unprepared. During a small group interview, teachers shared:

**Teacher 3:** But I also had that experience where, as the special education person, I did not have common plan time and walked in and be in that support role and feel really uncomfortable or ill-prepared, and maybe chime in. And it may not have been the right time, or the teacher was trying to lead the students in one direction, and I derailed that.

**Teacher 2:** Right, I agree with you, and that's why it appears that the supportive role is the most popular within this building, if I'm reading the graph correctly. I think that totally reflects the fact that we don't have common plan time for that. Our co-teaching partners aren't part of the common plan time that happens within the grade level.

This exchange lends support to why the Supportive co-teaching approach (one-teach, one assist) is the most utilized by teachers in the district. (See Item 1 Survey Data.) While the least demanding on planning time, research has shown it to be the least
effective approach (Cook, 2004). In a group interview, one teacher enthusiastically proclaimed, “There are just so many benefits to co-teaching!” However, being increasingly pulled in other directions has gradually pared down co-teaching planning time. As a result, many teachers have defaulted to the Supportive approach. During a group interview, one teacher commented: “We’re comfortable to wing it, essentially, but we know that co-planning is an important piece. It just doesn't happen, maybe, as often as we would like it to.” That teachers report being comfortable “winging it”, which may be indicative of other variables such as: a poor relationship with their co-teaching partner, the need for more guidance in making their planning time more productive, or scheduling conflicts that prevent teachers from some or any time to plan. However, that over 90% of the teachers reported being able to “effectively” implement a lesson without having spent time co-planning (See Item 10 in survey) may indicate that more “winging” defaulting to a Supportive teaching approach may be going on more than in previous years.

Scheduling is a critical component of any school’s internal operating structure which allows teachers allotted time to co-plan. All three schools in this study are the same when it comes to allotted planning time, and yet teachers in each of the schools have reported it is oftentimes challenging to find time to regularly co-plan. Operating structures set by school leadership play a significant role in teachers’ ability to co-plan effectively (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). One issue reported by teachers during the small group interviews was not having the ability to meet with support teachers (learning coaches) at the same time they are meeting with their co-teaching partner. One teacher said this:

Teacher 2: … I don't know if it ever could work to make a schedule that special education teachers, math teachers, and our communications teachers could all
meet at the same time? And I think due to scheduling, I know the learning coach was saying yesterday that because of her schedule, that's why we had to have our meetings first, which doesn't include the special education teachers in our grade level.

A teacher in another group interview shared:

**Teacher 3:** Then on our curriculum days, we meet with the learning coach. Because, she is only free when my partner is teaching. So, what happens is we meet all the time with the learning coach, but not our co-teacher. Then I feel like I'm just sending my co-teacher emails telling her, here's what we're doing, here's what we're doing, here's what we're doing because we do a lot of planning at those meetings with the learning coach.

Having scheduled time with learning coaches at the three middle schools is highly valued and appreciated by teachers. Teachers view time to plan with their learning coaches an essential element to their co-teaching success. Better coordination between the co-teachers and learning coaches’ schedules would be the ideal. To provide teachers with time and resources to effectively co-plan, schools need to consider flexible scheduling options that prioritize plan time for co-teaching partnerships (Thousand et al., 2006).

In the small group interviews, teachers discussed having different scheduling formats during the day that would allow them to co-plan and be able to reflect on the delivery of their lessons. The reflection on delivery of instruction is often left out, especially in co-teaching partnerships where limited time is allotted to collaborate (Friend, 2008). Co-assessing of a lesson is just as important as the planning. One teacher commented:

**Teacher 3:** I think it can be scheduling too, I think years ago when I was co-
teaching with someone who I felt like we had a really good co-teaching model, we had plan time at the beginning of the day, and the end of the day, so one of the things that we always did, is we always planned in the morning, and we always reflected in the afternoon… I felt like that was really great.

Lack of time to plan and conflicts within scheduling support structures, can lead defaulting to a less desirable co-teaching approach, as previously noted. It can also lead to finding time outside the school day to plan, which often results in one teacher or the other carrying that responsibility on their own. And having meaningful reflection and discussion on lessons just taught is not feasible without providing teachers time to do so. One teacher commented: “But, it’s hard sometimes with people, sometimes after school is difficult, being able to stay after. I feel like, right now we do process at the end of our last class but, it’s like five ten minutes. How did it go? What do we want to do different? It's really a quick check in, it's not much.”

Studies have found that despite demographics and characteristics of schools, teachers do not have adequate time to plan, which ultimately impacts their practice (Friend, 2008). The findings of the survey coupled with the interviews show that teachers value and understand the importance of co-planning. Teachers are concerned about having uninterrupted planning time, or time being “taken away” by other demands. However, as well as having regular uninterrupted time to plan, who you are co-teaching with also can make a substantial difference. Beginning with deciding upon and selecting the best co-teaching approach to meet the needs of the students can be positively or adversely affected by one’s co-teaching partner. When asked about her experience with co-teaching, one teacher wrote:

It depends who I was co-teaching with. My best experience of co-teaching was
teaching accelerated math with another teacher. We were able to change the way we co-taught depending on the lesson and our students’ needs. Sometimes we used the parallel approach other times we used team teaching. It worked well because we had time to plan and discuss. When trying to co-teach or get assistance from an aid it is very hard because there is no time to plan.

A wider variety of teaching strategies is more likely to be utilized and teaching effectiveness maximized, if teachers have adequate time to plan and the right co-teaching partner.

**Theme Two: Relationships.** Interpersonal teacher relationships are a major contributing factor to the success of co-teaching teams. Effective co-teaching partnerships rely on the two educators having a high level of commitment and flexibility which nurtures their personal and professional relationships in an effort to improve learning outcomes for all students. These relationships might be posed as a professional “marriage” in which teachers find solutions to problems, look for alternative teaching strategies, and resolve differences of opinion (Friend, 2008). As noted in the survey findings and discussed in the small group interviews, teachers put a significant emphasis on interpersonal relationships as a contributing factor to effectively implementing multiple elements of co-teaching such as selecting approaches, establishing planning time, and sharing roles and responsibilities. However, several factors need to be considered upfront, or developed over time, to make all of the above happen fluidly, including: consistency over time in co-teaching partnerships, the assignment of co-teaching partners, and having or finding common ground on philosophical differences.

**Consistency in co-teaching partnerships.** Speaking to the importance of relationships, in the small group discussion teachers reported feeling better about, and
more successful with, co-teaching depending on the number of years they have worked with the same partner. For example, during one small group interview below, two teachers spoke to the advantages of a co-teaching team being together longer, and the challenges brought by the nuances of co-teaching that can vary based on relationships and familiarity:

**Teacher 2:** ... just want to add to that. A new experience, just like that being a newer teacher, or new to co-teaching with another teacher, it does take a little bit of time to get used to each other...

**Teacher 1:** I was going to say the same thing... one of the things myself is that, to really have a good team-teaching experience it takes time. So, even though let's say for example I'm with someone who I've never taught with, I might be in situation where we're new, so the first year it's going to be a struggle trying to figure things out.

These two teachers’ experience with and perceptions of co-teaching are representative of many others. Teachers believe they and their students benefit from working with the same co-teaching partner for a number of years not only to build a strong personal and professional relationship, but in planning and implementing the most effective co-teaching strategies. Lack of a consistent co-teaching partner, especially for those new to co-teaching, hinders their ability to establish strong relationships which, in turn, negatively impacts the team’s ability to deliver effective co-instruction as noted in the responses to survey items 1-3.

Conderman et al. (2008) identify three stages in co-teaching relationships, starting in the “getting to know you” phase to the ultimate goal of “thinking as one” stage. They further argue that teachers experience different degrees of comfort level with their partners and having consistent co-teaching teams adds to the level of trust and overall
collaboration. In addition to the number of years working together, having year-to-year consistent partnerships was discussed in another small group:

Teacher 1: …But then the next year it's different, and it's been different every year. I haven't had any consistency in the last 8 years, so it's hard to build that relationship with someone.

Teacher 2: …it does take a lot of time to build the relationship with someone to be comfortable enough with one another that I could open up and say: Hey, I need for this to happen, or I need for you to take over and do this, or I'm not going do this lesson, I need you to do it…. With someone in a longer partnership, I felt more comfortable being able to share any concerns…It's such a big thing to focus in on the relationships of the people that are co-teaching.

Teacher 1: … if we work together for two to three, to four years, it becomes easier to form those different levels of comfortableness. Where you're able to do more team teaching, parallel teaching, those different types.

With constant changes in district teaching and support personnel, different grade-level assignments year-to-year caused by fluctuations in enrollment, and staff members wanting to explore different schools, co-teaching teams are constantly working on developing relationships with their colleagues. During one of the group interviews, a teacher suggested: “Maybe committing to keeping co-teachers together for multiple years with the same curriculum would help them to build those relationships and to make the co-teaching more effective.” As seen in the interview data, teachers find it easier to build strong relationships if their partners are consistent year-to-year; others thought the lack of consistency over time with one co-teaching partner was partly due to shifts in their teaching assignments over the years. Another added:

… all those things they were mentioning how they've been working together for a
number of years, and it took time, and they developed this bond, which is great. I know years ago, there are certain co-teachers that I had been teaching with a number of years, and it was great but, then when every other year it switches because of your grade level assignment, it just makes it hard to build relationships... it takes time to develop those relationships.

Nevertheless, some teachers reported that despite an overall perception of a lack of consistency in co-teaching partnerships, having had a previous relationship with a colleague can facilitate the establishment of a comfortable and productive working relationship when assigned with that same person again. In one of the group interviews a teacher said:

…my co-teacher and I taught last year together, and it was really good because we had been together 10 years prior to working together again. I felt like it was one of the better co-teaching relationships I've had in a while, just because we worked together in the past.

Another teacher added: “…We had a nice back and forth. We hadn't worked together in quite a few years, but because we had that relationship it was a really good connection and it worked really well…” Conderman et al. (2008) argue that teachers with a previous working relationship tend to go through the different co-teaching stages faster than those without any previous connection to their partners. Research conducted on co-teaching across the country has found teacher working relationships to be a persistent problem (Friend, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). This seems to be holding true across all three schools in the district regardless of teachers’ years of experience.

Assignment of co-teaching partners. The extent to which strong co-teaching relationships are formed and fostered depends not only on consistency and adequate planning time, but also on how and why teachers are partnered. Making partnering
decisions and providing co-teaching teams with structures (e.g., a co-teaching-friendly schedule) that support and nurture relationship-building and collaboration within and across teams, is the principal’s primary responsibility (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015). School leaders need to avoid randomly assigning co-teaching teams and hope for the best if they want to create successful co-teaching partnerships. Studies have found that teachers are concerned about how and why they are assigned a co-teaching partner rather than being asked to volunteer to co-teach (Friend, 2008).

In a small group interview one veteran co-teacher shared how his own co-teaching experiences have differed from year to year because of the assignment and needs of students:

**Interviewer:** Tell me more about having seen different sides of co-teaching. What are some things that you’ve seen are different?

**Teacher 1:** Well, take this year, for instance. The person that I'm co-teaching with, when you look at her case load, there's very little academic needs on her case load. It's almost all socio-emotional needs. And we have one student who, we'll just say his case is complex and being this one student's case manager is a full-time job.

While the teacher does not identify the needs of students as having an impact on the relationship with his partner, he did share in another comment that “…as far as co-teaching in the traditional sense with the delivery of instruction, we're not spending very much time doing that (collaborating) this year…” Often teachers are assigned to a co-teaching partnership without first being consulted, or given some kind of reason, guidance, or purpose for doing so. However, sometimes even the most thoughtful planning and placement of co-teaching partners by the building principal can fall short
due to unforeseen needs of a particular group of students. For example, a concern related to considerations when assigning co-teaching partnerships was the looping of special education teachers with students in their caseloads. While this concern was unique to teachers in one of the middle schools only, it shows the complexity of addressing relationship-building and successful co-teaching. The teacher further offered:

Teacher 1: … in terms of relationships, it makes it a little bit harder is that our special education teachers are looping with the kids. So, I'm working with a new special education teacher every year and our curriculum changes so quickly that by the time that teacher comes back around to me in my classroom, we're doing something completely different than three years ago when that person was last in there.

In other comments, this teacher acknowledged that students might well benefit from looping as it provides consistency of service as they can maintain and build upon an already existing relationship with their special education teacher. However, for the content-area/special education co-teaching relationship, he added: “…it’s probably better (for kids) that they loop, but definitely makes it harder to have a relationship working with a different special education teacher every single year…” Competing or conflicting internal school structures like this can severely impede, if not altogether block, lasting productive partnerships to be formed or developed. While looping has advantages and challenges, to make co-teaching work in a looping school structure, both members of the co-teaching team would need to loop with students. Issues like looping cannot be ignored by administrators seeking to improve co-teaching practices, student social-emotional needs, and academic achievement. Teachers typically have limited input in making such determinations.
**Philosophical differences.** Co-teachers need to find common ground on their philosophical differences to allow for collaboration and increase their chances of success (Friend, 2008). In the small group interviews, the theme of teachers needing to find common ground in their personal and professional beliefs, values, teaching approaches and personal styles ultimately focused on what is best for students. One teacher stated: “...we might have very different opinions or beliefs about something, but if we can come together and work together to create a classroom environment that works for both of us and the kids...” In a different group discussion, a couple of teachers shared:

Teacher 2: …you also have to have the same philosophy. That's tough, too. You could have a difference in philosophy as long as you can have that discussion and trust one another to come to some kind of ground of what the classroom's going to look like when you're both in there.

Teacher 3: …I think that that makes it a better relationship. Whether you agree or disagree philosophically, the coming together to do what's best for kids is important.

Teachers expressed an understanding of the need and importance of finding common ground, making compromises, and committing to achieving an authentic co-teaching team and relationship. Conderman et al. (2008) state this typically happens at the beginning stage of a co-teaching relationship, and it plays a critical role in the overall success of the partnership. Given the wide range in years of experience, from two to 25 plus years, participants in the small group interviews were comfortable and had no trouble expressing how they felt about having these types of conversations with their colleagues in the room, and with their co-teaching partners. A lack of training in or exposure to a particular philosophy of teaching, and the set of attendant teaching
strategies that come with it *can* cause tension and dissonance in the co-teaching relationship leading to a lack of commitment on the part of one or eventually both teachers to the co-teaching model. When asked about relationships, being unable to compromise philosophically, or agree upon in approaches to instruction came up:

Teacher 2: … I found it very hard for us to be on the same page with what we (co-teaching partners) were trying to do instructionally for the kids because we didn't have the same training on the instructional approaches. So that made that really difficult and caused a lot of tension. We had a little bit of trouble co-teaching, I guess because of quite different backgrounds.

Teacher 3: If you're on the same page, it can be phenomenal. If not, it can be more of a struggle. There's a lot of things I could do differently to have solved those problems on my end… not finding common ground could be a roadblock…

When co-teachers are “stuck” and unable to get past the initial stage of talking honestly with one another, the result is ineffective learning for all, adults and students alike. Often times resolving issues which are minimal in nature can result in strengthening a co-teaching partnership and set off a continuing lessening of frustration within the partnership. Teachers, co-teachers especially, need to be reflectively self-aware of their teaching styles, communication preferences, and listening skills. However, they also need to be cognizant of their partners’ styles and be willing to compromise and modify their own philosophies to make co-teaching work (Conderman et al., 2008).

**Theme Three: Roles and responsibilities.** A key component contributing to successful co-teaching partnerships and practices is having defined roles and responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities are directly correlated to good or bad working relationships, which has an impact on what happens in a co-taught classroom (Friend et al., 2010). Having a strong, positive personal and professional relationship is key to
successful co-teaching. This includes having open and honest communications, and equitably sharing responsibilities. However, in partnerships where one teacher is perceived to have more “power” or authority than the other, less co-equitable sharing of responsibilities for planning, instructing, and assessing has a much greater chance to occur. Having clearly defined roles and responsibilities helps to ensure that each co-teaching partner has and plays a purposeful, balanced leadership role in the relationship and in the classroom (Friend, 2008).

In each of the survey items 3-6 about sharing responsibility, most of the teachers reported sharing responsibilities in their co-teaching partnerships including identifying resources and materials, deciding what and how curriculum standards to teach, differentiating instruction, and assessing student learning. However, teachers’ comments in the survey comment boxes, and later in the small group interviews, revealed the co-teaching ideal of an equitable sharing of roles and responsibilities could be adversely affected by unfamiliarity of content knowledge, particularly for special educators, and the increasing number of co-teaching partners special education teachers have been assigned to co-teach with in recent years.

Content knowledge. Friend (2008, p.15) posed the question: Who assumes which instructional role in a co-taught class? General education teachers are often seen as content experts while special educators’ responsibilities oftentimes fall to solely managing classroom activities. This division of roles and responsibilities can lead to the general educator holding a dominant role in the co-teaching relationship (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Sixty-one to seventy-eight percent of the teachers on survey items 3-6 on shared responsibility reported sharing instructional responsibilities. However, a teacher’s
comfort level teaching a particular content area was viewed as a significant factor affecting not only roles and responsibilities in instruction, but also those of co-planning, teaching approach, and ultimately relationships among co-teachers. In a small group interview, one teacher shared:

… I'm very well versed in my subject knowledge. So, I'm very comfortable teaching communications…. I think the same goes for a co-teacher, they have to feel very comfortable with the content. Sometimes there are certain individuals that don't, so it poses an additional challenge because they don't know what to do in that content area…this has an impact in the relationship because there can be frustration on both parts…

As seen from this comment and others made throughout the survey and interviews, general educators pointed to the importance of content knowledge and the impact on the relationship for the co-teaching team. Possessing more background knowledge in a content area will naturally result in general educators taking the lead teaching role (Mastropieri et al., 2005). One content area teacher remarked “… If the content is not something you're necessarily more familiar with, then it's more supportive (the co-teaching approach)...and then that can be challenging because it takes a while to figure out the curriculum, the person you're working with, building that relationship, and to do that equally, where you're both sharing the responsibilities, is hard.”

Lack of comfort with content knowledge in a co-teaching partnership can result in an inequitable distribution of responsibilities, foster an unequal balance of power and authority between the two teachers, negatively affect co-planning time, and subsequently the ability to effectively meet students’ needs. During an interview, one teacher shared: “…if there's a teacher that's not comfortable working in different subjects, or as comfortable, it makes it more of a challenge on the other teachers as well.” The results of
one partner dominating the relationship over the other, can be detrimental to the purpose of their co-teaching practices and overall student learning (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Being comfortable co-teaching a wide range of content knowledge was viewed as being especially challenging for special educators. One teacher said:

… back to the subject area comfortableness. I've been with some co-teachers who feel more comfortable with math, so reading's an after sight. So, they're very well invested with planning with the math co-teacher that they have kind of a seamless relationship… But, reading, they said, I don't feel comfortable much with reading so, it's more of an afterthought…

Finding and making effective use of the weekly allotted time for partnership co-planning was as a major concern expressed by the teachers. A lack of comfort level with content knowledge can be a contributing factor to a team not meeting regularly to co-plan. When a co-teacher does not feel comfortable with a content area, they are more likely to defer planning to their partner. They may avoid engaging in classroom instructional activities requiring knowledge and skills they don’t have, thus diminishing their role and contribution to the partnership. Mastropieri et al. (2005) contend this type of co-teaching scenario leads to defaulting to the Supportive approach (one-teach, one-assist), as over time more and more of the responsibility for planning falls on the content area teacher. As one teacher in a group interviewed stated, “…the relationship piece… that is important, but then also is knowledge of content. The principle piece of all of that is the shared planning, because if that doesn't happen, then you're always going have the more supportive role of one person.”

Not being fully vested in the planning of a lesson can result in an undesired dichotomy of roles within the classroom. One teacher said “…because special education
teachers are focused on the needs and the progress, and really hone in on their students’ needs. They're not... needed to be as focused on the curriculum because they're focused on their individual students.” Defining roles and responsibilities is the first step toward achieving an authentic collaboration, without which it is more likely to be a negative experience for both teachers; one feels “put upon” with an unequal amount of responsibilities, while the other feels lessened in stature within the relationship. This unequal relationship does not go unnoticed by students as they soon recognize and view one teacher as the “main” teacher and another as the “aide” (Friend, 2014). As Murawski (2010) warns, if the burden of planning responsibilities and classroom roles falls primarily on one person in the relationship the result can be jealousy, bitterness, and resentment (p. 37).

**Number of co-teaching partnerships.** As the demands on both general and special educators have increased over the years, it is critical for co-teaching partners to be open and honest in their interpersonal communications about workload. This means addressing up front and negotiating roles and responsibilities, not only to better understand one another’s situation, but to be realistic about the level of commitment they can give and expect from one another. This is a bedrock part of the co-teaching relationship. Murawski (2010) asserts, “Co-teachers need to clarify to one another what their current job responsibilities entail and what they are reasonably able to contribute when dividing the tasks of planning, instructing, and assessing the co-taught class” (p. 37). The overall perception gleaned during the group interviews is that most co-teaching partners are understanding of one another’s workload. Statements from general educators such as “special educators are stretched too thin…” acknowledge they are aware of and
sympathize with demands and additional responsibilities their special education counterparts may have.

During the small group interviews teachers expressed concerns over special educators being assigned to multiple teachers or subjects, thus adversely affecting their ability to appropriately plan and differentiate for so many classes. When discussing the results of the survey data for item 5 on co-teaching partners sharing responsibility for differentiation, two teachers offered this interpretation:

Teacher 2: …when you're looking at the 24 percent that are disagreeing that we share responsibility for differentiated instruction, it seems to be because they're (special educators) stretched so thin, they're essentially having to differentiate for multiple classes instead of a focus on one.

Teacher 1: … I agree, I don't believe it's the intention of a co-teacher who doesn't have the time to plan and sit down with that particular teacher to be responsible only for differentiating…except it's hard to do that for multiple classes…

Several researchers hold that limiting special education teachers to one or two co-teaching partnerships yields the best results as these special educators can focus their efforts on a limited number of students and content areas (Friend, 2014; Conderman et al., 2008; Murawski & Dieker, 2008). One teacher spoke to the challenge associated with the level of work true differentiation takes for different subjects saying: “…though, it would be nice to have that common plan time so we are talking about what the differentiation looks like, because in a social science class it's going to look vastly different than a math class… there are subjects harder to differentiate than others…”

Although the general educators were understanding and sympathetic with their co-teaching special educators’ added responsibilities, some lamented the resultant lack of
time for planning left them feeling solely responsible to differentiate instruction. One teacher commented “I think that I have to differentiate whether or not there are students with IEPs in my class anyway. I differentiate all the time, so it's not necessarily always a shared thing.” However, a special educator offered this interpretation survey item 5 on equally sharing responsibility for differentiation saying: “… it could be read differently if answered by the special education person saying, ‘I'm the one differentiating, and my general education co-teacher is not.’” Limiting the number of partnerships and subject areas co-teachers are assigned seems like a simple solution. However, it is one which teachers have no control over. This is a role administrators can play by providing adequate and appropriate co-teaching collaborative structures, purposefully allocating time and resources, and strategically scheduling teachers and students.

Research suggests general education teachers often assume the dominant role in a co-teaching relationship when partnering with special educators due to a lack of defined roles and responsibilities. This, in turn, results in strained relationships and ineffective planning and implementation of co-teaching approaches (Scruggs et al., 2007). It also leads to confusion and frustration in the partnership as teachers are forced to improvise or perform tasks they perceive as added on and unfair responsibilities. When co-teaching partners do not share equal roles and responsibilities, one or both teachers tend to be focused more on supporting one group of students rather than the entire class as a whole, thus negating the overarching purpose and promise of co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010).
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The conclusions and implications of this case study are discussed in this chapter. The two related research questions are discussed first, followed by recommendations addressing the primary research question: How do we make co-teaching more effective in the Fairview School District? The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the experience of researching co-teaching practices in the Fairview SD.

Related research questions were:

- How do teacher relationships and collaboration affect co-teaching practices?
- What structures need to be in place to enhance co-teaching practices?

**Question 1: How do teacher relationships and collaboration affect co-teaching practices?**

There are significant implications as teacher relationships and collaboration are interwoven and play key roles in successful co-teaching practices. Relationships are addressed first followed by collaboration.

**Relationships.** The Fairview SD has a reputation for being a “hidden gem,” a place in which teachers and administrators build and develop their careers while constantly focusing on what’s best for all students. Naturally, the culture and climate of each of the three school varies. However, the perceptions of the teachers in each of the three schools who responded to the survey, and those who were later interviewed, was that teacher-to-teacher and administrator-to-teacher relationships in the district are positive. Over the last ten years, the district has taken steps to strengthen and further
develop personal and professional relationships amongst teachers, staff, and administration by adopting the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model. The PLC model is a move toward the creation of a more collaborative culture. Since adoption, the PLC model at the Fairview SD has been the philosophical and practical framework guiding the creation and implementation of multiple initiatives across the district, including co-teaching.

In concert with the PLC model, positive personal and professional teacher relationships are the second most essential element for effective co-teaching practices (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski, 2010). That teacher-to-teacher relationships were reported as being positive across all three schools may in part be attributed to connections teachers have made through their tenure in the district (a majority of the Fairview SD teaching staff has been in the district for more than ten years). Having positive personal and professional relationships among co-teaching partners goes a step further. It involves equitable sharing of responsibilities, finding common ground in teaching philosophies, and flexibility in teaching approaches and strategies. It means assuming equal responsibility for planning, classroom instruction, and taking and making time to regularly reflect upon the effectiveness of co-taught lessons. It means having a personal and professional relationship where both teachers are open to compromise, willing to take risks, and have a high level of trust and co-dependability. The value and desire to have this level of co-teaching partnership relations was affirmed by the Fairview SD teachers in the survey and interview data.

While the Fairview SD teachers see the value and importance of having a positive personal relationship with their partner, the co-teaching experience can also be affected
by the professional knowledge and contributions each brings to the partnership. Many teachers attributed successful co-teaching to having a consistent partnership, while others noted that level of comfort with content knowledge plays a key role in satisfaction with, and success of, a co-teaching partnership. The relationship must be strong both personally and professionally.

For example, if you walk into a team meeting at Chestnut Middle School, you will see positive teacher interactions and supportive personal relationships. However, strengthening professional relationships still needs attention. Unlike personal relationships, strong professional relationships take a certain level of trust and are developed over time (Conderman et al., 2009). Co-teachers need to develop a level of trust, not only in their expertise and content knowledge, but also in trusting each other to relinquish control of the classroom, take risks, give each other feedback, and face obstacles together that arise over time. Successful professional relationships are in evidence when you hear and see co-teachers “talking the talk” and “walking the walk.” Following through on commitments, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and supporting each other through challenges result not only in more successfully inclusive environments for students, but a more productive and satisfying working relationship between co-teachers. Teachers’ communication skills, ability to handle conflicts, social and listening skills, and even the use of humor are continually developed within a strong partnership. Levels of trust and openness are increased as partners come to share similar characteristics. However, unexpected changes in teaching assignments and lack of consistent co-teaching partners were concerns expressed by teachers with the co-teaching
model at the Fairview SD. This lack of consistency not only hindered the development of strong relationships, but also impacted their practices and attitudes toward co-teaching.

**Collaboration.** The foundation of collaborative relationships is strong interpersonal relationships. However, having good personal relationships does not necessarily translate into collaborative co-teaching teams where roles and responsibilities are equally distributed and agreed upon upfront. While a majority (ranging from 63-80% on survey items) of co-teachers at the Fairview SD rated themselves as being in collaborative partnerships, a considerable number expressed a need and desire for more collaboration in their co-teaching assignments. This dichotomy in perception is revealed in the survey comment boxes and later in the interviews where teachers expressed concern and frustration with partnerships where the responsibility for planning and assessing tended to fall on one person.

The results of survey Item 1 about which of the four co-teaching approaches teachers used the most and the least, is an indication of the level of collaboration taking place among co-teaching teams. The Supportive approach was rated being the most utilized, while Team Teaching came in a close second. From one end of the co-teaching effectiveness spectrum to the other! Either you are, or you aren’t collaborating all that much. With Team Teaching recognized as the most effective approach, and Supportive the least effective, one can argue that about half of the co-teaching teams throughout the district are effectively collaborating. At first glance, with 120 minutes of daily planning time and adoption of the PLC model, it would seem than more than enough internal structures for collaboration are in place for co-teaching teams at all three middle schools. However, while informally observing co-taught classrooms in my own school, I came
away believing that the teachers need more guidance and support collaborating, especially when it comes to co-teaching practices.

Effective collaborative practice goes beyond merely being physically present in the same room for a given period. In most of the classrooms I observed, the Supportive approach (or one-teach, one-assist) was indeed utilized the most. I was not entirely surprised as this finding, also confirmed in the survey results, mirrors research done on co-teaching approaches nationwide (Mastropieri et al., 2005)). While I did see examples of co-teaching behaviors that Conderman et al. (2008) found indicative of the collaborative stage in the development of a co-teaching relationship, there is a need to support teachers more in collaborative teaching practices. The goal is to help more teachers reach the collaborative stage in which they think as one, use humor, are interdependent, appreciate each other’s contributions to the partnership, and where both are recognized as the “main teacher” by students as they share equal responsibility for planning, delivery, and assessment of instruction.

In truly collaborative co-teaching partnerships, when two become one, there exists parity in how teachers feel about themselves, their role, and how they are perceived by their students and colleagues alike. While most of teachers on the survey said they felt part of a collaborative co-teaching team, the language utilized by some co-teachers such as “my kids,” “your kids,” or “the kids with IEPs” reveal a lack of true collaboration and a need to establish parity in the relationship. As Murawski (2010) argues, parity in the co-teaching relationship is essential in establishing a shared purpose in the classroom and cautions educators on the use of such language. Throughout the classroom visits, I observed the special educator was often seen by students as the “assistant teacher,”
playing a supportive role while the general educator delivered most of the instruction. Conderman et al. (2008) characterizes this as the “compromising stage” in a co-teaching partnership, where each teacher interacts mostly with their own group of students. Often the special education teacher can be observed gravitating toward students with IEPs, seeing her primary responsibility to serve and support “her” inclusion students while the general educator’s focus is on students who are higher performers. This is what the Supportive approach looks like in practice, and indicative of how each teacher views themselves and their role in the classroom. The depth and strength of personal and professional relationships among co-teachers has significant impact on teaching practices. When co-teachers are committed to sharing responsibility for all students, any visitor should not be able to identify who is the “main teacher” and who are the students with IEPs in the classroom.

**Question 2: What structures need to be in place to enhance co-teaching practices?**

Structures and supports need to be developed and sustained to maximize the benefits of co-teaching for students and teachers. District and building administrators, specifically building principals, play a key role in, not only in sharing the vision for co-teaching, but in providing the right environment for its success. The two structures which are discussed are scheduling as it relates to staff and students and sustained embedded professional development.

**Scheduling.** Most schools work within a parameter of allocated resources (mostly time and personnel), thus needing to get creative with their internal structures, particularly because co-teaching does not follow a traditional way of delivering special education services. Logistical issues reported by teachers on studies, including this one,
are related to scheduling and staff assignments (Friend et al., 2010). As aforementioned, structures are already in place at the three middle schools in the Fairview SD providing co-teaching teams with daily planning time to collaborate. However, even with a structure rich in planning time, challenges still exist in scheduling co-taught classes. In addition to considering keeping co-teaching teams together for multiple years, administrators at the Fairview SD need to incorporate a schedule allowing and honoring adequate plan time, and purposefully schedule students into co-taught classes.

As evidenced by the survey and interview data, teachers at the Fairview SD felt that they did not have adequate planning time due to scheduling constraints. A lack of consistency in their co-planning schedule, as noted by teachers, too often leads to defaulting to undesired co-teaching approaches, inadequate preparation for delivery of instruction, and hinders the development of their co-teaching working relationships. While most of the challenges with planning time were attributed to increased demands unrelated to co-teaching responsibilities, having and adhering to a consistent time for co-planning, honored by both partnering teachers and administrators, is critical when considering teaching assignments in a school. To enhance co-teaching practices at the Fairview SD, administrators need to ensure the planning time scheduled for co-teachers is consistent and respected. Co-teachers and administrators must make every effort to commit to the planning time agreed upon. Factors such as of being pulled for emergency meetings, substituting for other classes, or not wanting to meet need to be addressed by administrators. Supporting uninterrupted time for co-teachers to plan can result in practices that will increase the value and culture of collaboration (Conderman et al., 2008).
**IEP students.** Scheduling students with disabilities needs to be a priority when developing the master class schedule. Murawski and Dieker (2013) contend this is a critical step for administrators who reported successful experiences with inclusion and co-teaching. Creating an environment for successful co-teaching requires avoiding a common misconception and mistake about levels of staffing in both co-taught and regular classrooms that can result in a disproportionate ratio of teachers to students (e.g., 60 students in a class with two teachers) or the number of students with IEPs in a class (for maximum effectiveness there should be no more than 30% of students with IEPs). The ratio of students with disabilities in a co-taught class is extremely important as they require more attention than other students (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015).

**Responsibility for scheduling.** Scheduling strategies for co-taught classes at the Fairview SD need to be fine-tuned to enhance co-teaching best practices. At present, lists of students of all abilities, are provided to teachers by administration so teachers group and schedule students based on student learning profiles that include a range of student data. Teachers then create a list of their core classes (math, science, social studies, and communications) included those they expect to be co-teaching with a special educator. The ability to group students under this scheduling method is appreciated by teachers because of the level of flexibility it provides teachers if and when changes to class size and composition are necessitated. Thus, teachers are afforded a greater degree of autonomy and control to place students in different classes as needed. At times, placing a student into a different class can be beneficial for overall class dynamics, easing student interactions and better matching of learning styles, or in extreme cases, a lack of compatibility between one or both co-teachers and their students.
However, there are major challenges of having teachers create their own student groups, especially the co-taught inclusion classes. One challenge observed at my school, for example, has been the disparity in the number of students in co-taught classes versus the general education classes. I have seen co-taught classes (inclusion) with 29-30 students compared to classes of 20-21 within general education classrooms. This disparity might be attributed to “economy of resources” thinking among teachers where the number of students assigned to the class determines whether there needs to be two teachers in the classroom. This ignores the fact that it should be just the opposite given the increased amount of attention and support students with disabilities need… the co-taught classes should have smaller numbers to maximize the benefits of two teachers delivering co-planned collaborative instruction for all students. The larger co-taught classes I observed were far beyond the recommended number of no more than 30% of students with IEPs in a co-taught inclusion classroom. Going beyond the recommended ratio not only makes any classroom more difficult to manage, but defeats the intent and purpose of a co-taught class as it poses demands on teachers which they are not likely to meet.

**Teaching load.** Another challenge with this scheduling strategy is the increasing number of co-taught classes created by teams that has spread special educators to thin and thus put additional strain on co-teaching partnerships. The assumption that all students with IEPs need to be in co-taught classes is incorrect and can create another series of challenges. As an example, teachers will often schedule students with only an IEP math goal in co-taught communications and social studies classes, in addition to the math co-taught class. Not doubting good intentions or the fact that students may benefit from the
extra support in other co-taught classes, this scheduling strategy and mindset creates additional demands for co-teaching teams and essentially tracks students with IEPs. Due to the number of co-taught classes created, the number of co-teaching partnerships is higher than what is recommended by research. Both, general and special educators, are less likely to engage in co-teaching activities if they have more than one or two partners (Murawski & Dieker, 2013). To enhance co-teaching practices at the Fairview SD, scheduling strategies for co-taught classes should be guided and monitored by the building administration. Prior to scheduling, building administrators need to analyze the needs of all students with disabilities and assess the services required to meet those needs. In addition to purposeful scheduling strategies, guidelines need to be followed throughout the year to ensure everyone involved in co-teaching maintains parameters conducive to co-teaching best practices.

**Continuous professional development.** Fairview SD’s efforts to provide professional development on inclusion and co-teaching date back to 2010, when a renowned consultant was hired to work with a few schools. The consultant rotated around schools, working 3-4 full days throughout the school year, and eventually reaching all schools in the district over a period of 8 years. These efforts helped set the tone for adopting inclusion and increased the number of co-teaching teams, mainly at the three middle schools. However, even with all the training and support provided throughout the years, these sessions were seen as “one and done,” and the capacity for teachers to continue their learning and use of the most effective co-teaching strategies did not fully develop. Coupled with factors such as administrator and teacher turn over, staff transferring between buildings, and other ongoing district initiatives, the continuity that
can be achieved through job-embedded long-term sustained professional development on co-teaching practices has been put to the side.

**Respecting and honoring planning time.** Ongoing professional development is essential to develop and sustain effective co-teaching relationships and practices. Once again, the primary responsibility to ensure adequate and ongoing professional development is provided falls on district and building administrators. As evidenced by the survey data, about 53% of teachers reported not seeking any professional development to improve their co-teaching practice and, as teachers reported during small group interviews, some do not feel they’ve received enough preparation to effectively co-teach. Two areas of professional development that can enhance practices at the Fairview SD are making the most effective use of planning time, and obtaining and using the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for a better understanding of when and how to implement each of the four co-teaching approaches.

Creating and honoring planning time can be accomplished at the Fairview SD within the current middle school schedule structures. However, the real challenges lie in whether co-teaching teams utilize this time effectively. Murawski and Dieker (2013) have worked with many schools in which common planning time has been created, and yet administrators report a lack of efficiency by co-teachers with the use of this time. Co-planning can be difficult, especially when co-teachers have different levels of experience, expertise, philosophies, and expectations of one another. Administrators, through more and better professional development, need to provide teachers with tools and strategies to co-plan in the areas of communication, roles and responsibilities, establishing parity, assessing student learning, and reflecting on practices.
Roles and responsibilities and building internal capacity. Establishing roles and responsibilities and having time for co-teaching teams to collectively assess and reflect upon lessons taught are two partnership concerns from teachers that emerged from the survey and group interview data. Discussing and determining roles and responsibilities and committing to setting aside time to reflect upon their practice should take place the first time the teachers meet face-to-face. Sometimes, the best professional development available is in-house. The Fairview SD is fortunate to have pockets of co-teaching teams that are functioning effectively, so why not utilize them? Murawski and Dieker (2013) suggest having co-teaching teams observe one another, not only teaching, but planning and processing the delivery of a lesson. Co-teaching teams can benefit from sharing ideas and providing feedback to improve their practices. Teachers might prefer this kind of localized job embedded professional development over having administrators be responsible for providing teachers with additional structures, or a team meeting protocol to guide co-planning. Identifying and using instructional capacity from within the district, not only enhances professional practice but also builds and strengthens personal and professional relationships that contribute to the overall collaborative culture of the district’s PLC.

Increasing knowledge of co-teaching approaches. Each co-teaching approach has its place within the range of options for delivery of instruction at the Fairview SD. The district has provided a framework for co-teaching based on these four approaches (Supportive, Complementary, Parallel, Team Teaching) since embracing and adopting the philosophy for creating inclusive schools in 2010. However, as revealed in the survey, and later confirmed by the interview data, only two of the four approaches were reported
as being utilized the most, Supportive and Team Teaching. These approaches are on opposite ends of the co-teaching spectrum when it comes to overall effectiveness and time required for planning. This suggests teachers at the Fairview either go “all in” with the Team Teaching approach or, for a number of reasons, choose not to engage in the higher level of co-planning and collaboration required for a satisfying and successful co-teaching experience. The result is defaulting to the Supportive approach. It’s not that the two other approaches are unknown to teachers. If you ask any co-teacher at Chestnut Middle School to name co-teaching approaches, they are most likely to mention all four. However, can they articulate the purpose and appropriate use of each approach? This is where they need additional professional learning and support.

While Team Teaching might be the most effective approach used in successful co-teaching partnerships (Conderman et al., 2008), co-teachers still must first assess the needs of the particular group of students, and desired learning outcomes, when deciding what would be the most effective approach or blend of approaches to use for any given lesson. Increasing teachers’ understanding and utilization of each approach will enhance and expand their teaching practice, overall. Given the familiarity teachers at the Fairview SD already have with the framework of co-teaching approaches, explicitly considering what each approach brings to achieving the desired goal of the lesson could well be made part of a protocol incorporated as a component at forefront of every planning session. Acquiring more information and skills through professional development on the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, such as those referenced in the review of literature for this study, is one way to ensure that teachers carefully consider and select
the best approach, or mix of approaches, and avoiding making mistakes that result in little or no impact on student learning and teachers’ working relationships.

Providing more opportunities for continuous professional learning and development on the four co-teaching approaches and practices can help teachers decide and select which approach or approaches best meet the socio-emotional, developmental, and/or specific learning needs of students in a given class. There can be instances in which multiple approaches are considered and utilized within a single lesson, depending on the desired instructional outcomes (Villa et al., 2008). To increase and enhance the effectiveness of instruction, ongoing professional development on how and when to use each of the approaches needs to be in place. Selecting a particular approach can yield a variety of benefits and challenges for both students and teachers alike. That said, the chances of having a successful and satisfying co-teaching experience for both is greatly enhanced when structures offering ready access to continuous professional learning are in place to sharpen co-teaching practices.

**Recommendations**

Over the course of this research, I found that the belief in, and commitment to, inclusion was strong among teachers and staff at the three Fairview SD middle schools. With significant structures in place to support co-teaching, efforts spent on launching and supporting co-teaching inclusionary practices, and a number of activities and programs focused on creating a sense of belonging for all students and staff, the Fairview SD, over the last decade, now has most of the major components of an inclusive environment in place. Inclusion is now firmly embedded in the culture of the district. That being said, as evidenced by the survey, interview, and observational data, there is still much to be done,
especially in the area of co-teaching practices. The varied, often-changing, and inconsistent level of satisfaction among teachers year-to-year about their co-teaching experience signals that it is time for a re-assessment of current co-teaching norms and practices. Much has been done, but a next step needs to be taken to fully realize the benefits of inclusion co-teaching. The following recommendations and action steps are based on the findings from the survey, small group interviews, and informal classroom observations and address the primary research question of this study: How can we make co-teaching more effective in Fairview School District?

**Conduct a co-teaching needs assessment.** The Fairview SD has spent a significant amount of time and resources over the years on the initial training of special and general educators to increase their understanding of inclusion in the co-teaching model. After years of investment, it is now time to conduct a needs assessment of the co-teaching model to create a long-term plan that incorporates additional supports, professional learning, and skill development identified by co-teaching teams in this study. Because of the wide range of co-teaching teams’ effectiveness and comfort level with co-teaching partners and practices, this step is critical in getting input from teachers on their perceived needs, but also is a means of gauging where co-teaching teams stand with their practices. Friend and Cook (2007) highlight the importance of conducting needs assessments to support the design and delivery of effective professional development that meets desired objectives, provides a focus on topics, and selects formats of sharing information relevant to the staff.

To begin, the needs assessment must cast a wide net at the district level by eliciting feedback from all teachers on how they might enhance co-teaching practices.
Since each of the three middle schools may be at a different place in co-teaching implementation, feedback from a needs assessment might be used to design professional learning tailored to the needs of each building. Using the needs assessment in this way not only identifies areas in need of growth for teachers and support staff who may be new to, or not comfortable with, co-teaching; it is also an impetus for those teachers desiring to take their practice to the next level where creativity, risk taking, and classroom action research are welcomed and encouraged. The seed-bed and parameters of the co-teaching garden at Fairview SD have been laid and tended; a needs assessment at this point in time will allow district and building-level administrators to shift their focus to continuous improvement based on teachers’ actual needs and avoid the “one-size-fits all” approach to co-teaching practices.

**Create a co-teaching taskforce.** Sometimes the best resources for building capacity are found within the school or the district. Before a needs assessment can be conducted, before a co-teaching reference and resource guide is created and disseminated, to create a heightened sense of awareness and urgency, the Fairview SD needs to consider creating a taskforce on co-teaching to pull together and study all the joys, challenges, and barriers to successful and satisfying co-teaching in the district. In the spirit of a true PLC, the taskforce would be drawn from and consist of members from a representative group of stakeholders including teachers, administrators, special support professionals and staff (community members and students might also be involved at some point). As evidenced by the survey and interview data, there are pockets of effective co-teaching teams throughout the district. These teams are already implementing most characteristics of effective co-teaching teams, so why not garner their expertise and use it
build upon next steps? Murawski and Dieker (2013) argue that the creation of co-teaching leadership teams, comprised of all those who are invested in co-teaching, can be a viable model for schools to assess successes, progress, challenges, and next steps for improving co-teaching practices.

The taskforce can be charged with tasks such as developing the co-teaching reference and resource guide and conducting the district-wide needs assessment of co-teaching practices. It could also serve as a go-to resource for individual schools or co-teaching teams seeking information or “know how” about specialized practices such as classroom formative and student self-assessment. In this way, taskforce members, and others, might be seen as in-house ambassadors promoting and demonstrating effective co-teaching practices for and with their colleagues. While exemplar co-teaching teams may not be the best at every aspect of co-teaching, they are respected by colleagues for the practical, experiential knowledge and expertise they have acquired and are willing to share as part of in-house professional development. For example, there may be a team that really practices and models collaborative learning for both adults and students in their co-taught classroom, or another known for its implementation prowess, or knowing when and how to use a particular instructional approach or teaching technique to meet the needs of their students.

The taskforce would also be involved in mentoring novice teachers and teams, recognizing and celebrating a team’s success, assembling and sharing student data, and keeping the district abreast of innovative teaching practices that have been found to be especially effective with students with diverse needs. When creating the taskforce, Murawski and Dieker (2013) strongly recommend having teams and members from a
variety of grade levels, having worked successfully with a variety of student groups, and who have a positive attitude toward co-teaching. A dynamic focused taskforce on co-teaching can be the catalyst for change and improvement that many teachers in this research expressed a hope and desire for.

**Create a co-teaching reference and resource guide.** The Fairview SD has worked hard to lay the foundation for inclusion and co-teaching that is now firmly established within the culture of the district and its schools. However, co-teaching best practices are not being evenly applied throughout the district. At the district level, this lack of uniformity in co-teaching implementation and practice can be addressed by creating a common co-teaching reference and resource guide that will provide continuous guidance in co-teaching best practices regardless of staff or administrative turn over. Such a guide will not only supply a uniform understanding of co-teaching best practices across the district, but will offer and outline specific options for action for co-teaching team professionals. Whether in the form of a handbook, or district intranet co-teaching website, regularly, periodically, or continuously updated, the guide might be roughly structured as follows:

**Introduction.** The introduction provides the rationale for co-teaching based on the mission and vision of the school district as it relates to inclusion. It is the “why” of co-teaching and how it supports an inclusive environment. The introduction would also have links to articles and research on co-teaching and a common definition of co-teaching agreed upon by district administration. An FAQ section on co-teaching and inclusion might also be included to dispel misconceptions about co-teaching (e.g., some educators think co-teaching *is* inclusion, which is why many researchers begin their research
articles by stating what co-teaching is not) (Murawski, 2010). The last section of the introduction would incorporate the four different co-teaching approaches used in the district, the different purposes they serve, and when to best utilize each approach.

**Effective co-teaching practices.** Providing teachers, especially new teachers, with an overview of the components involved in effective co-teaching is also critical. With a vision, goal, and expectations in mind, it gives teachers the confidence on where to go and what to do next. This part of the guide would outline major components of the co-teaching model, and the attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors teachers need to be willing to adopt in their co-teaching practice. Clear, tangible characteristics of effective co-teaching teams would be laid out such as: equally shared responsibility for planning, instructing, and assessment, a commitment to regular co-reflective assessment of lessons, and shared desire to improve their practice, and an openness to admit areas where they might be doing well, and those in which they could use extra support or professional development.

**Relationships.** In addition to outlining characteristics of effective co-teaching teams, emphasizing the importance of personal and professional relationships and providing ways in which teachers can work on those relationships would be provided on this section of the resource. This section might include stages co-teachers can expect to go through in the personal and professional relationship as they gradually open up and honestly share their teaching philosophies, expectations, doubts, and ambitions both for themselves and for their students. Positive personal and professional working relationships are characteristic of successful co-teaching partnerships. While administrators can provide encouragement and structures which foster strong relations
within co-teaching teams, such as a designated time to plan and interact, find common ground, and collaborate, it is ultimately up to the teachers themselves to risk opening up to new possibilities.

**Roles and responsibilities.** Following the section on relationship-building would be a section on the value and importance of having and maintaining an equal distribution of roles and responsibilities, and on how to effectively utilize co-planning time to design instruction. For example, it would include an outline of what needs to be agreed upon and discussed by co-teaching teams can be managed before, during, and after each lesson. The purpose is to identify, create, and establish a co-teaching cycle common to all teams across the district. It would not only provide guidance on when, where, and how to best plan and assess lessons taught, but would require that a certain timeframe be set aside and used by teachers to reflect upon the effectiveness of their co-practice regularly throughout the year. A reflection guide with questions and specific actions co-teaching partners would help teams regularly assess their practices. Providing teams with specific guidance on elements of planning an effective lesson would be included on this section as shown in Figure 3 in the literature review chapter.

**Reflection and assessment.** Teachers need guidance in critical self-reflection, not only of their practices, but on how they might be impacting students. By routinely incorporating examination of student achievement data, on-the-spot classroom formative assessments, and tracking students’ performance on designated learning outcomes, co-teachers can receive a measure on their teaching effectiveness and, as a result, improve their planning and instruction. An often overlooked, but valuable source of teaching effectiveness, is student and parent perceptions and voice. For example, two beneficial
methods include a) incorporating a brief survey after the completion of a unit to gauge student perceptions on the co-taught lessons, or, b) instituting a similar means of garnering feedback from parents twice a year.

**Administrative support and scheduling.** Building administrators play a vital role in the development, implementation, and monitoring the utilization of co-teaching best practices in their schools. This section would outline components which fall under administrative responsibility for creating and nurturing an environment conducive to creative co-teaching. First among the components would be creating a master schedule for the building which prioritizes co-taught classes, and for the pairing of teachers who are willing and eager to enter into a co-teaching partnership. Selecting the right teachers to take on co-taught classes needs to be carefully considered as the students they serve have the most diverse needs in any given school (Murawski & Dieker, 2013). Given that co-teaching in the Fairview SD is an expected standard practice, administrators need guidance on how to best initiate and continue to support co-teaching teams, and on how to recognize and what to do about co-teaching pairings which may not be working. Staff should be assigned to co-teaching teams based upon the needs of the students in the class who have disabilities, regardless of which class they attend.

**Special educators’ caseloads.** The impact special education teachers’ caseloads have on the harmony and effectiveness of a co-taught classroom increasingly needs to be taken into consideration when creating and building master schedule. Two major considerations involving caseloads and student classroom assignments are staying within the recommended less than 30% of students with IEPs ratio in any classroom and making sure students with IEPs are placed in needs-appropriate co-taught classes. When taking
caseloads into consideration, the aim is to provide IEP students with supports that address their actual needs. Whether assigned to a general education classroom, or to a co-taught classroom, the overarching goal is to ensure that all students, including IEP students, have equal access to the general curriculum. While co-taught classes should be scheduled to ensure appropriate student placement, there needs to be a level of flexibility, so changes can be made as the year progresses based on potential unforeseen circumstances. However, changes to student rosters for co-taught classes should only be made after a conversation between administrators and all teachers involved in the delivery of services with the ultimate goal of deciding upon what is best for the student.

**Honor co-planning time.** The last consideration for administrators would be, as much as possible, to establish and honor consistent planning time for co-teaching teams. As a plethora of research suggests, common planning time for co-teaching teams is imperative not only for their success in the classroom, but also for building and deepening collaboration among team members. Now that co-planning time is already in place in the scheduling structure at the three middle schools in the Fairview SD, making sure this scheduled time is uninterrupted by other duties unrelated to co-teaching needs to become more of a focus for administrators. Scheduling other meetings around the time when co-teaching teams are meeting can be a viable solution which acknowledges the importance and value given to co-teaching by the district. Providing co-teaching teams with a number of days dedicated solely to co-planning, whether paid or getting substitute teachers for those days, or half-days, can be explored as alternatives to co-teaching teams’ current daily planning time.
A common co-teaching reference and resource guide can dispel misconceptions about the model, reduce implementation inefficiencies, and enhance co-teaching practices at the Fairview SD. A common guide also helps the district ensure all staff members involved in co-teaching have access to a source of informed guidance about co-teaching, a variety of teaching resources, methods, and techniques, and what expectations are for co-teaching and co-teams within the district. Whether co-teachers are experts in content knowledge, veterans with many years of experience, or novices navigating the nuances of co-teaching, having clear guidelines will help align co-teaching instructional practices with district expectations across the three middle schools. Lastly, having staff members, teachers, administrators, and special support professionals know what is expected of them, and of one another, sets up and reinforces a professional atmosphere of mutual accountability. Holding themselves and one another accountable by following through on responsibilities and commitments not only increases the likelihood for increased high-quality support for students but can also strengthen teachers' professional relationships and reinforce the collaborative culture of the school and district.

**Final Reflection**

Looking back, reflecting upon researching co-teaching in the Fairview SD, I am optimistic about the future of the innovative co-teaching experiment first begun in the district over ten years ago. Despite the complexity and demands co-teaching requires educators to address, teachers, administrators, and support staff at the Fairview SD have embraced and retained a commitment to inclusive co-teaching, and a desire to improve their co-teaching practices. While each middle school has characteristics unique to its student population, a strong sense of a viable professional learning community open to
collaboration and continuous improvement can be felt in all three schools. During the six years I have spent as an administrator at Chestnut Middle School, I have participated in a number and variety of training sessions on co-teaching as an approach for school districts considering or already committed to full inclusion. The district has been courageous in ensuring that students attending any of the schools in the district learn with their peers to the maximum extent possible, and in so doing, students develop a sense of personal efficacy and belonging within their learning community.

I consider myself fortunate to have a number of successful and effective co-teaching partnerships at my school. As a result of this study, I have found the same holds true for the other middle schools. As justifiable and long overdue is acknowledging the accomplishments of co-teaching in the Fairview SD, being vigilant about identifying and addressing areas in need of improvement is just as important. The challenges and barriers of co-teaching at the Fairview SD, as expressed by the teachers in this research, can be used to create a sense of urgency needed to take the next step in the work begun almost a decade ago. The Fairview SD staff have internalized the belief that all students can and should learn with their peers. They have accepted the challenge of providing equal access to the general curriculum proscribed for all students. Unprecedented at the time, the Fairview SD’s initial, and now long-standing commitment to inclusion and co-teaching, has created a professional community of educators who are willing and desiring to improve inclusionary co-teaching practices. If this can happen in the Fairview SD, then where else?
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: Co-Teaching Self-Assessment

The purpose of this survey is to get a broader perspective of co-teaching practices in the district. It is anonymous as it has no evaluative value on current co-teaching teams’ practices. Open-ended options for responses are included in each question to determine the focus and interest for in-depth small group interviews.

In what school do you co-teach? Select one.

__________ Austin
__________ Chestnut
__________ Stewart

Four approaches to co-teaching were introduced during initial district professional development sessions on co-teaching. These included:

- **Supportive** - when one teacher takes the lead instructional role and the other rotates among the students to provide support

- **Parallel** - when two or more people work with different groups of students in different sections of the classroom

- **Complementary** – when co-teachers do something to enhance the instruction provided by the other co-teacher.

- **Team Teaching** - when two or more people do what the traditional teacher has done – plan, teach, assess, and assume responsibility for all of the students in the classroom.

1. Given the approaches above, which best describes the co-teaching approach you most often use in your classroom? Rank order the approaches starting with 1= the approach we most often use; and 4 = the approach we do less often or not at all.

   __________ Supportive Co-teaching

   __________ Parallel Co-teaching

   __________ Complementary Co-teaching

   __________ Team Teaching

Comment box:
2. In my co-teaching partnership we decide the co-teaching approach based on the needs of the students.

________ Strongly Agree ___________ Agree ________ Disagree

__________Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

3. In my co-teaching partnership, we identify resources for the lesson, share ideas, information, and materials.

________ Strongly Agree ___________ Agree ________ Disagree

__________Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

4. In my co-teaching partnership we share responsibility for deciding what curriculum standards to teach.

________ Strongly Agree ___________ Agree ________ Disagree

__________Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

5. In my co-teaching partnership, we share responsibility for differentiating instruction based on student strengths and needs.

________ Strongly Agree ___________ Agree ________ Disagree

__________Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

6. In my co-teaching partnership, we identify how student learning will be assessed.

________ Strongly Agree ___________ Agree ________ Disagree

__________Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

7. In my co-teaching partnership, we have open lines of communication and give each other feedback.

________ Strongly Agree ___________ Agree ________ Disagree

__________Strongly Disagree

Comment box:
8. In my co-teaching partnership, we celebrate our co-teaching process, including successes and outcomes.

________ Strongly Agree ___________Agree ___________Disagree
________ Strongly Disagree
Comment box:

9. In my co-teaching partnership, we meet at least 45-60 minutes per week to co-plan for instruction.

________ Strongly Agree ___________Agree ___________Disagree
________ Strongly Disagree
Comment box:

10. In my co-teaching partnership, we can effectively implement a lesson even if we didn’t have time to co-plan.

________ Strongly Agree ___________Agree ___________Disagree
________ Strongly Disagree
Comment box:

11. In my co-teaching partnership, we model teamwork and collaboration for our students.

________ Strongly Agree ___________Agree ___________Disagree
________ Strongly Disagree
Comment box:

12. In my co-teaching partnership, we have developed a relationship in which we depend on one another for completing tasks and responsibilities.

________ Strongly Agree ___________Agree ___________Disagree
________ Strongly Disagree
Comment box:
13. In my co-teaching partnership, we seek additional professional learning to improve on our co-teaching practices.

[ ] Strongly Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

14. In my co-teaching partnership, we seek support from our administrators for logistical support and resources.

[ ] Strongly Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree

Comment box:

15. Is there anything you would like to add about the co-teaching experience or model?

Comment box:

16. Would you be interested in participating in a small group interview on co-teaching?

[ ] Yes [ ] No

If yes, please write your name in the text box:

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B: Survey Informed Consent

My name is Luis Correa, and I am currently a doctoral student at National Louis University, North Shore. I am asking you to participate in this study, “Co-Teaching as a Vehicle to Inclusion in a Diverse Suburban Middle School: A Case Study,” occurring from January 2019 to May 2019. I intend to study how co-teaching methods support inclusion in a diverse middle school setting, the correlation of collaborative strategies and attributes that lead to an effective co-teaching partnerships, and the structures and supports needed for co-teaching. This form outlines the purpose of the evaluation and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant in this survey.

By signing below or filling out the survey electronically, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Luis Correa, doctoral student at National Louis University, North Shore.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore what makes co-teaching partnerships work in the district and not to evaluate teachers. Participation in this study includes a brief survey and, if interested, a small group interview. It is estimated that the survey will take 5-10 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain anonymous. Simple demographic information will be collected such as school name and, eventually your name if you agree to be part of the small group interview. Names or any other identifying information will not be connected to your survey results.

You can participate in the survey through the Google Form emailed to you. The results from this survey will be kept on a protected drive and only I will have access to aggregate data. Upon completion of the research, all survey results will be deleted or destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be used to inform professional learning practices at Community Consolidated School District 21, but participants’ identities will in no way be revealed. All survey results will be used to generate questions to conduct small group
interviews as part of this study. After those questions are generated, the results will be permanently deleted.

There are no anticipated risks, no greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to our school district and other districts looking to improve their inclusionary practices with the co-teaching approach.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this case study and copies of any publications that may occur. In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Luis Correa at luis.correa@ccsd21.org or 847-848-1029.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact:

- Dr. Norman Weston, Dissertation Chair, Emeritus Professor/NLU Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, by email nweston@nl.edu or by phone at 773-465-0601; or
- Shaunti Knauth, Co-Chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board, by email at shaunti.knauth@nl.edu; or by phone at 312-261-3526; or
- Dr. Carol Burg, Co-Chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board, by email at cburg@nl.edu or by phone at (813) 397-2109. The IRRB co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

_________________________  __________________________
Participant’s Signature     Date

_________________________  __________________________
Researcher’s Signature      Date
APPENDIX C: Group Interview Informed Consent

My name is Luis Correa, and I am currently a doctoral student at National Louis University, North Shore. I am asking you to participate in this study, “Co-Teaching as a Vehicle to Inclusion in a Diverse Suburban Middle School: A Case Study,” occurring from January to May 2019. I intend to study how co-teaching methods support inclusion in a diverse middle school setting, the correlation of collaborative strategies and attributes that lead to an effective co-teaching partnership, and the structures and supports needed for co-teaching. This form outlines the purpose of the evaluation and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant in this survey.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Luis Correa, doctoral student at National Louis University, North Shore.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore what makes co-teaching partnerships work in the district and not to evaluate teachers. Participation in this study will include a focus group interview of 4 to 6 teachers. The group interview will be conducted in a semi-structured format in the conference room of your school building. The interview consists of questions generated from survey results you took a few weeks ago. It is estimated that the interview will last approximately 45 minutes. While an audio-recording of the interview will be done to assist with the analysis of transcripts, your identity will remain anonymous. Your responses will be coded by T1, T2, etc. Any other identifying information will not be connected to your interview responses.

Only I will have access to the digital interview recordings and transcript notes. They will be physically safeguarded on a drive protected with a password. Upon completion of the research, I will delete/destroy all recordings and notes from these focus group interviews.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be used to inform professional learning practices at
Community Consolidated School District 21, but participants’ identities will in no way be revealed.

There are no anticipated risks, no greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to our school district and other districts looking to evaluate their professional learning practices.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this case study and copies of any publications that may occur. In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Luis Correa at luis.correa@ccsd21.org or 847-848-1029.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact:

- Dr. Norman Weston, Dissertation Chair, Emeritus Professor/NLU Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, by email nweston@nl.edu or by phone at 773-465-0601; or
- Shaunti Knauth, Co-Chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board, by email at shaunti.knauth@nl.edu; or by phone at 312-261-3526; or
- Dr. Carol Burg, Co-Chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board, by email at cburg@nl.edu or by phone at (813) 397-2109. The IRRB co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

________________________________________________________
Participant’s Signature ______________________________ Date

________________________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature ______________________________ Date
APPENDIX D: Group Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this small group interview. The purpose of this study is to further explore how co-teaching methods support inclusion in a diverse middle school setting, the correlation of collaborative strategies and attributes that lead to an effective co-teaching partnership, and the structures and supports needed for co-teaching. I hope to gain a better understanding of your interpretation of the responses to the survey sent a few weeks ago on co-teaching. Before we begin, I would like to review a few ground rules for the discussion.

a. I am going to ask you several questions; we do not have to go in any particular order, but I do want everyone to take part in the discussion. I ask that only one person speak at a time.

b. Feel free to treat this as a discussion and respond to what others are saying, whether you agree or disagree. I am interested in your perceptions and whatever you have to say is fine. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just asking for your opinions based on your own personal experience. I am here to learn from you.

c. Do not worry about having a different opinion than someone else.

d. Do not feel that you need to answer every question.

e. I am recording the discussion today and also taking notes because I do not want to miss any of your comments. I will treat your answers as confidential. I will not include your names or any other information that could identify you in any reports I write. I will destroy the notes and recordings after I complete my case study. In the meantime, the recordings and notes will be kept on a secure hard drive.

f. Finally, this discussion is going to take about 45 minutes. Does anyone have any questions before we start?
APPENDIX E: Small Group Interview Questions

1. Let us begin by sharing your thoughts on the survey results. Anything surprising? Anything that stood out to you?

2. Item 9 was about co-planning time. Time is given during the day to co-plan, why do you think 57% of the respondents reported not having enough time?

3. Strong relationships are essential to successful co-teaching partnerships. What has been your experience with relationships in co-teaching? What are the challenges with relationships in co-teaching?

4. Research suggests structures (such as common plan time, resources, and professional development) and administrative support are key to successful co-teaching. What structures and supports are working well for you? What can be improved?

5. Is there anything else you think I should know?