



EVALUATION BRIEF

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Special Education Co-Teacher Services Survey Results: What were the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the implementation of co-teacher services?

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Co-teacher services is an inclusive service delivery model in which general education and special education teachers work collaboratively to provide instruction to students with disabilities. The Office of Special Education Services provided training beginning in the spring of 2008 through the fall of 2009 to support campuses in the implementation of co-teacher services. This brief was designed to summarize the results from the Co-Teaching Principal Survey and the Co-Teaching Teacher Survey.

Background

Section 300.114 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires that public agencies educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). According to the most current Performance-based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS) report, HISD's placement rate in a LRE was seven percent for students ages 3-5, 30 percent for students ages 6-11, and 56.4 percent for students ages 12-21 (TEA, 2010). Co-teacher services address the federal regulation for allowing students with disabilities to receive educational services with their peers who do not have a disability in a LRE. Kloo and Zigmond (2008) defined co-teaching as, "a special education service-delivery model in which two certified teachers, one general educator and one special educator, share responsibility for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction for a diverse group of students, some of whom are students with disabilities" (p.13).

HISD's Office of Special Education Services recommended co-teacher services as an option for an inclusive instructional support model. Information and resources regarding how to effectively implement co-teaching services were provided in the *Handbook of Inclusive*

Instructional Support Models 2010–2011. Also, a total of nine training sessions to support campuses in the implementation of co-teacher services was offered between the spring of 2008 to the fall of 2009. However, a recent review of special education in HISD conducted by Thomas Hehir and Associates (2011) found that, "Segregated classes where children were doing low-level work, or 'co-taught' classes where special education teachers appeared to be serving the role of a Paraprofessional, do not comport with principles of best practice" (p. 29). One of the recommendations of the review was that HISD, "develop effective models of special education service delivery emphasizing universal design principles" (Hehir, p. 29). The purpose of this brief is to summarize the results of the principal and teacher surveys to assess the implementation of co-teacher services at HISD campuses.

Data and Methods

All HISD principals were asked to complete an electronic survey stored on-line using the survey tool, Survey Monkey. A total of 218 out of the 295 principals participated in the survey during May of 2011. This accounted for a 74 percent response rate. Participants included 137 elementary, 32 middle, and 35 high-school

principals. Additionally, eight principals described their campus as combined level and six principals did not provide a response.

Principals were also asked to forward the Co-Teaching Teacher Survey to their general and special education staff who were providing these services during the 2010–2011 school year. A total of 546 teachers participated in the survey. Participants included 163 elementary, 153 middle, and 215 high-school teachers. Also, three teachers from a combined-level campus participated in the survey and 12 teachers did not provide a response. About 63 percent of the participants were general education teachers and 37 percent were special education teachers.

Missing data were not included in the calculations. Both principals and teachers did not respond to all questions. Percentages were based on the total number of responses per survey item and may not equal 100 due to rounding. The surveys also included open-ended questions. A coding scheme was developed for each of the open-ended questions. Responses were then coded according to emergent categories.

How familiar were principals with co-teacher services?

Principals were asked how familiar they were with co-teacher services. About 40 percent of principals indicated that they were “extremely familiar” with co-teacher services and 38 percent were “moderately familiar.” Another 14 percent were “somewhat familiar” with co-teacher services, while six percent were “slightly familiar.” Only three percent of principals indicated that they were “not at all familiar” with co-teacher services.

Principals were then asked whether co-teacher services were provided at their campus. Approximately, 59 percent stated “yes,” while 41 percent stated “no.” These data were consistent with the professional development data. For instance, 65 percent of principals indicated that they attended professional development regarding co-teacher services compared to 35 percent who indicated that they did not.

How were co-teaching teams selected at participating campuses?

Principals were asked, “How were the co-teaching teams in your school selected?” The most common response given by principals was

that co-teaching teams were selected “based on the needs of students.” Principals also commented that they considered “teacher compatibility” when selecting co-teaching teams. For instance, a principal commented that he/she, “Selected teachers who have a track record of working well together and who want to co-teach.” Lastly, principals considered “content area” when selecting co-teaching teams. A principal explained, “Each special ed. teacher was matched with their specialty or highly-preferred subject-matter.”

About 76 percent of principals stated that co-teachers had to attend professional development related to co-teacher services prior to participating in a co-teaching classroom. However, a little more than half of the teachers who participated in the survey indicated that they did not attend any professional development related to the co-teaching model prior to participating in a co-teaching classroom (51 percent). About 49 percent of the teachers indicated that they did attend professional development regarding co-teacher services.

What percent of students with disabilities attended a co-taught classroom?

Table 1 shows the ranges of the percent of students with disabilities who attended a co-taught classroom. Approximately, 29 percent of principals who responded to this item indicated 10 percent or less of students with disabilities attended a co-taught classroom, followed by 20 percent who indicated 90-100 percent. Also, 11 percent of principal respondents indicated that between 70-79 percent of students with disabilities attended a co-taught classroom.

Table 2 presents the primary disability of students who attended a co-taught class

Table 1. Percent of Students with Disabilities who Attended a Co-taught Classroom

Percent of Students	%
90-100	20
80-89	7
70-79	11
60-69	9
50-59	7
40-49	3
30-39	8
20-29	7
19-11	1
10 or less	29

Note: A total of 76 principals provided a response.

Table 2. Primary Disability of Students Participating in Co-Teacher Services

Primary Disability	N	%
Orthopedic Impairment	21	0.4
Other Health Impairment	260	5.5
Auditory Impairment	106	2.2
Visual Impairment	26	0.5
Deaf-Blind	3	0.1
Mental Retardation	270	5.7
Emotional Disturbance	182	3.8
Learning Disability	2,867	60.3
Speech Impairment	618	13.0
Autism	112	2.4
Traumatic Brain Injury	11	0.2
Multiple Disabilities	275	5.8
Total	4,751	100

Note: A total of 68 principals provided a response.

as reported by participating principals. Based on the principals' responses, the majority of students who attended a co-taught class had a learning disability (60 percent), followed by speech impairment (13 percent). Nearly, four percent of students who attended a co-taught class had a primary disability of emotional disturbance.

What were the practices of co-teaching teams at participating campuses?

Figure 1 shows the content areas in which teachers indicated they provided co-teacher services. The content area with the highest percent of co-teachers was reading/English Language Arts (47 percent), followed by mathematics (39 percent), science (35 percent), and social studies (29 percent). The number of classes that teachers co-taught included: one class (30 percent), two classes (22 percent), three classes (12 percent), four classes (10 percent), and five classes (26 percent).

Slightly more than half (51 percent) of teachers indicated that they had a preplanning session with their co-teaching team. Table 3 shows the percent of teachers who indicated whether or not they discussed certain practices during their preplanning session(s). The overwhelming majority of teachers indicated "yes," they had discussed all of the practices listed in Table 3. The two practices with the highest percent of teachers indicating that they had discussions during preplanning were "curricular expectations" and "acceptable curricular accommodations," (96 percent each). "Co-teacher service delivery models" had the lowest percent (77 percent). Figure 2 illustrates

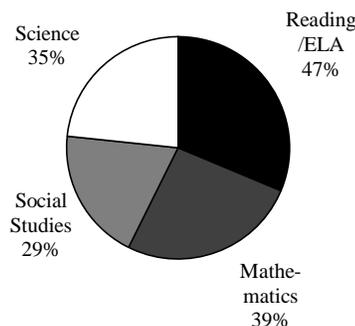


Figure 1. Percent of co-teachers by content area.

the co-teaching models typically used by co-teachers. The variations of teaching models were: (1) *one teaching, one assisting*, where one teacher led and another offered assistance and support to individual or small groups; (2) *station teaching*, where students were divided into heterogeneous groups and work at classroom stations with each teacher; (3) *parallel teaching*, where teachers jointly planned instruction, but each delivered it to half the class or small groups; (4) *alternative teaching*, where one teacher worked with a small group of students to preteach, reteach, supplement, or enrich, while the other teacher instructed the large group; and (5) *team teaching*, where both teachers shared the planning and instruction of students in a coordinated fashion (Dieker, 2001). The co-teaching model that the majority of teachers indicated using was "one teaching, one assisting" (59 percent), followed by "team teaching" (29 percent). A small percentage of teachers described their co-teaching team model as "parallel teaching," (5 percent), "alternative teaching" (4 percent), and "station teaching" (3 percent).

Table 3: Practices Discussed During Preplanning Session(s)

Practices	%	
	Yes	No
Philosophy related to including students in the general education setting	87	13
Role definition	87	13
Curricular expectations	96	4
Acceptable curricular accommodations	96	4
Co-teacher service delivery models	77	23

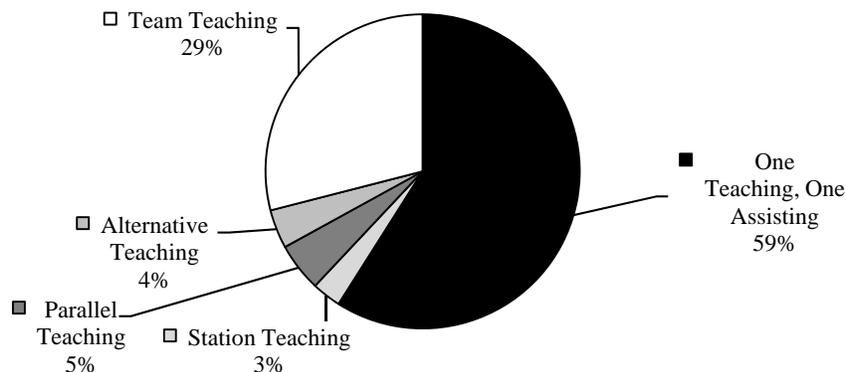


Figure 2. Co-teaching models used by co-teachers.

Many of the teachers indicated that the general education teacher developed the daily lesson plan (72 percent). In comparison, two percent of teachers indicated the special education teacher developed the daily lesson plan. Slightly more than a quarter of teachers (26 percent) indicated “both” the general and special education teachers developed the daily lesson plan.

Teachers were asked, “How do you evaluate the success of the co-teaching relationship?” The most popular comments were “student success,” and “open communication.” A teacher commented “I evaluate the success of our co-teaching relationship by the level of open and reflective communication regarding student success and our interpersonal ability to respectively focus on the needs of the students.” Several teachers also commented that they look at “student response.” For instance, a teacher explained, “We look at how well we interact with one another and whether the students see us as equals.” Teachers were also asked, “How do you evaluate the success of all students in your co-teaching class?” Teachers indicated they use “assessments,” “grades,” and “observations” to evaluate student success.

What were the practices of principals regarding co-teacher services?

Principals were asked, “What is your role in co-teaching services?” There were 74 comments that were grouped into eight categories. **Table 4**

shows the percent of comments by category. The category with the highest percent of comments was “provide support” (26 percent). Some of these comments included:

- To be supportive and make sure the teachers are servicing all students in that class,
- Support the teachers and keep the communication open in order to listen for needs, and
- I provide support to both teachers and ensure that the teachers work together in planning and implementing instruction.

About 21 percent of principal’s comments were categorized as “ensure services are provided.” Some of these comments included:

- To assign the appropriate co-teachers and then ensure that they are providing services to the students in the classrooms to which they are assigned,
- My role is to ensure that all guidelines are followed and that each student receives the appropriate services, and

Table 4: Principals’ Perceptions of their Role in Co-teacher Services

Categories	%
provide support	26
ensure services are provided	21
monitor services	15
ensure student success	15
facilitator	12
provide training	9
provide time	6
Non-categorical	7

- To make sure all students receive the appropriate services in the least restrictive environment.

Also, 15 percent of comments were each categorized as “monitor services” and “ensure student success.” In addition, principals indicated that their role in co-teacher services was that of a “facilitator” (12 percent). About nine percent of principals’ comments were categorized as “provide training,” followed by “provide time” (6 percent). The following comment by a principal exemplifies several of the categories discussed previously:

Ensure that students have access to the general curriculum. Ensure the staff is trained on the proper implementation of co-teacher services. Provide time and support for planning and implementation.

Lastly, seven percent of comments could not be categorized. One of the specific responses was:

As we look to expand our co-teacher program next year (science and social studies, grades pre K-6), I look towards a much more active role in helping the teachers work towards the common goal.

Principals were asked, “How often do you conduct walk-through/observation visits in co-teacher classrooms?” Approximately, 44 percent stated “once a week,” followed by “every other week” (36 percent), “once a month” (17 percent), and “never” (3 percent).

The majority of the principals did not utilize the “Co-Teacher Services Implementation Checklist for Campus Administrators and Special Education Support Staff” available on the Office of Special Education Services website (64 percent). These principals were asked, “What are some of the reasons why you have not utilized the checklist?” Approximately, 80 percent of the principals said that they were not aware of the checklist. For instance, one principal commented, “I was not aware of the checklist. I will use it in the future.” The remaining 20 percent of principals said they “used another checklist,” “need training on how to use the checklist,” or had “no time.” Of the principals who indicated they used the checklist, 42 percent believed it was “somewhat” helpful, 31 percent “very” helpful, 23 percent “extremely” helpful. Four percent of principals indicated that the checklist was “not at all” helpful.

Principals were also asked, “Have parents received information about co-teacher services?” About 83 percent stated “yes,” while 17 percent stated “no.”

What were the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the implementation of co-teacher services?

The majority of principals (64 percent) believed that co-teacher services had been implemented effectively at their campus, while 36 percent did not. Principals were asked to explain their response. A principal who believed that their campus had effectively implemented co-teacher services explained, “Our students that have been in co-teaching classes have shown very good progress in their basic skills and communication skills.” The main reason cited by principals who did not believe co-teacher services had been implemented effectively at their campus was a “lack of staff.” A principal explained, “It is challenging to figure out ways to support 150+ students spread across numerous classes with only 5 teachers available to accomplish successful co-teaching services.” “Scheduling” was another reason cited by principals as to why co-teacher services were not being implemented effectively. A principal commented, “There are more general education teachers than special education co-teachers so it can be complicated to schedule teachers together.”

A lower percentage of teachers (51 percent) believed co-teaching services had been implemented effectively at their campus compared to principals (64 percent). The most common reasons mentioned by teachers who did not believe co-teacher services had been implemented effectively at their campus were “lack of staff,” “no planning time,” and “special educator has other responsibilities.” A teacher explained, “Effective co-teaching requires more staff than we have been allowed on our campus. We need more time to plan with one another, so that more effective accommodations can be implemented.” Another teacher commented, “My co-teacher is frequently absent due to the need to attend ARD conferences and other meetings. She is also called away to cover classes when teachers are absent.” A teacher who believed that their campus had effectively implemented co-teacher services stated, “Our constant reflections on what went well and what or how we can improve with instruction or communication has been a major asset on our co-teaching model being implemented effectively.”

Principals were asked, “What have been the challenges/barriers in implementing co-teaching services?” There were 59 comments that were

Table 5: Principals' Perceptions of Challenges or Barriers of Co-Teacher Services

Categories	%
Lack of staff	26
Adequate training	23
Teachers collaborating	19
No planning time	14
limited content knowledge of special educator	5
Non-categorical	16

grouped into six categories. **Table 5** shows the percent of comments by category. Principals reiterated that “lack of staff” was a challenge in implementing co-teacher services (26 percent). A principal explained:

The greatest barrier was losing 2 of our 3 special ed. teachers. We had an excellent program when we had three teachers. Now with just one teacher who is also the special ed. chair, I think we do the best we can, but it's not a good model of what inclusion should look like.

About 23 percent of comments were categorized as “adequate training,” followed by 19 percent categorized as “teachers collaborating.” Principals comments were also categorized as “no planning time” (14 percent) and “limited content knowledge of special educator” (5 percent). One of the principals commented, “The special education teacher does not have the content and is uncomfortable teaching the subject matter with the general ed. teacher.” The remaining 16 percent of comments could not be categorized.

What were the reasons for the lack of implementation of co-teacher services at campuses?

As stated previously, 41 percent of principals indicated that co-teacher services were not implemented at their campus. These principals were asked why their campus did not provide co-teaching services. **Table 6** shows the reasons

Table 6: Categories of Reasons Given by Principals for Lack of Co-teacher Services Implementation

Reasons	%
Do not have teachers trained in co-teacher services	58
Lack of district level support	15
Lack of funding	55
Need more information	33

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100, since multiple responses were allowed

given by principals. Principals had the opportunity to indicate multiple reasons. The majority of principals (58 percent) indicated they “do not have teachers trained in co-teaching services.” Also, the majority of principals (55 percent) indicated “lack of funding” was why co-teachers services were not provided on their campus. Approximately, 33 percent of principals specified they “need more information” regarding co-teacher services. Lastly, 15 percent of principals stated “lack of district level support” was a reason co-teacher services were not implemented. Principals were also given an opportunity to provide other reasons as to why they were not providing co-teacher services. Additional reasons included “not enough special education staff,” “low enrollment of students with disabilities,” “departmentalized teachers,” and “campus did not need this service.”

Teachers were asked whether they were currently participating in a co-teaching classroom. About 57 percent stated “yes,” while 43 percent stated “no.” **Table 7** shows the reasons given by teachers why co-teacher services were not provided. Similar to principals, the majority of teacher respondents indicated “do not have teachers trained in co-teaching services,” (50 percent) and “lack of funding” (51 percent). About 30 percent of teachers indicated “lack of administrator support” and 22 percent “lack of district level support” as reasons why co-teacher services were not provided on their campus. Some of the additional reasons given by teachers included “not enough special education staff,” “lack of interest,” and “co-teacher has other duties.”

Conclusion

The Co-Teaching Principal Survey and the Co-Teaching Teacher Survey highlighted challenges in implementing co-teacher services. Specifically, a lack of staff, funding, and training were major obstacles principals encountered. Co-teachers experienced challenges with finding

Table 7: Reasons Given by Teachers for Lack of Co-teacher Services Implementation

Reasons	%
Do not have teachers trained in co-teacher services	50
Lack of administrator support	30
Lack of district level support	22
Lack of funding	51

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100, since multiple responses were allowed

planning time and working with special education teachers who have other responsibilities that pulled them from co-teaching. Also, more than half of the co-teachers surveyed were not trained in co-teacher services. This is important to note since professional development is a critical part of effective co-teaching.

Knowledge gained from these surveys regarding the current condition of co-teacher services in HISD will assist decision makers in making improvements to the services. Full implementation of co-teacher services would address the recommendations in the Thomas Hehir report regarding special education services in HISD and allow for more students with disabilities to be placed in the least restrictive environment. Ultimately, co-teacher services may ensure the success of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

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