Exceptional Teachers Teaching Exceptional Children

NASET

SPECIAL EDUCATOR

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Special Education Legal Alert

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This month's update identifies two recent court decisions that respectively address (a) various FAPE issues and (b) the less frequent but ongoing issue of LRE under the IDEA. For related articles, special supplements, and earlier monthly updates, see **perryzirkel.com**.

In *Beebe School District v. Does*, an unpublished decision on March 30, 2022, a federal district court in Arkansas reviewed a hearing officer's decision that was in favor of the parents. The school district screened the student in grade 1 for dyslexia per the state's strong dyslexia law. In grade 2, the district determined, based on a comprehensive evaluation, that the student qualified for special education under the IDEA category of specific learning disability. The resulting IEP provided direct multi-sensory instruction, including dyslexia-specific interventions. The parents agreed that the student made good progress under the IEP in grade 2. However, they perceived a change in her school attitude and performance in grade 3 (2019–20), although her teachers maintained that she continued to make progress. During the last few months of that year, upon the pandemic transition to virtual instruction, the student experienced regression despite the teachers' erstwhile efforts. As a result, the parents unilaterally placed her in a private school that specialized in dyslexia and filed for a due process hearing to seek tuition reimbursement. The hearing officer ruled that the district failed to provide FAPE, ordering tuition reimbursement for one year and, if the parents decide to reenroll her in the district, a dyslexia-specific evaluation and a revised IEP including a state education agency-approved dyslexia program. The district appealed this decision, and the parents counter-claimed for the private school transportation expenses and their attorneys' fees under the IDEA and money damages under Sec. 504/ADA.

The parents argued that the district's dyslexia program per the child's IEP was not on the state education agency's approved list, which the state's 2019 Ready to Read Act requires for new purchases of dyslexia programs.	The court rejected this argument, finding that legislation to have limited applicability here, because (a) it only covered new purchases and was not exclusively limited to the approved list, (b) the child received supplemental dyslexia interventions beyond the challenged program, and (c) the district's justification for not immediately switching to a program on the approved list was reasonable.
The parents claimed that the child's lack of progress during the pandemic period was a clear violation of the substantive standard for FAPE under *Endrew F*.	Again disagreeing, the court cited the district's significant and responsive efforts during grade 3 before and during the pandemic period, concluding that the district met the reasonable-calculation standard under the particular circumstances regardless of the extent of actual progress.
Losing their requested relief under the IDEA, the parents pointed to their alternative claim under Sec. 504/ADA.	The court rejected this claim based on the prevailing requirement, at least for money damages under Sec. 504/ADA, for proof of a proxy for intentional discrimination, which in this jurisdiction amounts to gross misjudgment or bad faith.
This case is another illustration of increasing role of dyslexia, the latitude in the *Endrew F.* decision, and the limited litigation effect of not only the pandemic but also, at least for money damages, Sec. 504/ADA.	

In *H.W. v. Comal Independent School District*, an officially published decision on April 27, 2022, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed the FAPE and LRE issues for a third grader who was first identified in kindergarten as eligible for special education in kindergarten based on Down Syndrome and various other learning and health impairments. Based on inadequate progress, her IEP for grade 1 provided for more inclusion support along with resource instruction in reading and math and a revised BIP. For grade 2, the district proposed an alternative rather than modified curriculum and increased separate special education services in light of the child's continuing academic and behavioral difficulties, but relented to the parents' adamant insistence on further inclusion support along with ESY. In November of grade 2, the parents reluctantly agreed to amend the IEP for more resource-room instruction. However, at the IEP meeting in the spring semester, the district proposed changing the placement to the majority of the school day in a self-contained special education classroom due to the child's failing grades in all subjects and related behavioral difficulties. This "blended" placement included 150 minutes per day in the general education classroom for nonacademic and other such activities. The parents disagreed and requested an IEE at public expense. The district initiated IEEs by a speech-language therapist and a private psychologist, but before their completion the parent filed for a due process hearing. Both IEEs recommended continued inclusion, but the hearing officer ultimately decided that the proposed blended placement provided FAPE in the LRE. Upon the parents' appeal, the federal district court affirmed the hearing officer's decision. The parents appealed to the Fifth Circuit (which covers Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi), focusing their challenge on the jurisdiction's long-standing multi-factor analysis under *Daniel R.R.* (5th Cir. 1989).

The first factor is whether the school district has taken steps to accommodate the child in general education. The court's answer was "yes."	The court concluded that the district met this factor via its repeated revisions of the IEP, which included successive increases in inclusion support and amounted to the opposite of prohibited "mere token gestures."

The second factor is whether the child received meaningful academic and non-academic benefits in general education. The court's answer was "no."	Rejecting an IEP-centric test in favor of a holistic approach to "meaningful," the court concluded: "Even though [the child] ultimately mastered many of her goals, she was still regressing and falling behind in other areas, such as test scores and percentile rankings."
The overlapping third factor is whether the child's balance of benefits was in favor of general education. The court's answer was "no."	Although recognizing the potential benefits of language models in general education, the court concluded that her academic and behavioral benefits were much more notable than her increasing stagnation in the inclusive placement.
The final factor is whether the child had a disruptive effect on her nondisabled peers. The court's answer was "yes."	The court found that she engaged in various disruptive behaviors, including hitting, biting, and kicking staff and peers; screaming and moaning; and swiping materials off desks.
This case illustrates the application of the multi-factor test that prevails in most jurisdictions and that yields varying judicial outcomes.	

Buzz from the Hub

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-2022-may/

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-april2022-issue1/

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-march2022-issue1/

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-feb2022-issue2/

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-feb2022-issue1/

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-jan2022-issue2/

Babies and Toddlers Indeed!

This landing page serves as a Table of Contents and offers families and others many options to explore, including an overview of early intervention, how to find services in their state for their wee one, parent rights (including parents' right to participate), the IFSP, transition to preschool, and much more.

Just want an quick step-by-step overview of early intervention?

To give families the "big picture," share the 2022 update *Basic Steps of the Early Intervention Process* with families.

For Spanish-speaking families

CPIR offers a landing page called *Ayuda para los Bebés Hasta Su Tercer Cumpleaños*. Beginning there, families can read about early intervention, the evaluation process for their little one, writing the IFSP, and the value of parent groups and suggestions for where to find them.

10 Basics of the Special Education Process under IDEA

*In Spanish (**Sobre el proceso de educación especial**)*

Your Child's Evaluation (4 pages, family-friendly)

*In Spanish (**La evalución de su niño**)*

Parent Rights

*In Spanish (**Derechos de los padres**)*

Landing page, again, this time to a simple list of each of the parental rights under IDEA, with branching to a description about that right. Surely a bread-and-butter topic for parents!

All about the IEP Suite

(***Similar info about the IEP in Spanish***) The landing page gives you and families numerous branches to explore, beginning with a short-and-sweet overview of the IEP, a summary of who's on the IEP team (with ever-deepening information below and branching off), the content of the IEP (brief summary first, then in-depth discussion thereafter), and what happens with the IEP team meets.

Placement Issues

(***Basic info about placement in Spanish***) Again, start with the main landing page for this bread-and-butter topic. Take the various branches, depending on what type of info the family is seeking at the moment. Branches include: a short-and-sweet overview to placement, considering LRE in placement decisions, school inclusion, and placement and school discipline.

CPIR Resource Collections and Info Suites

The resources listed above cover just a few of the topics that Parent Centers often address. For a more robust index of key topics, try the *Resource Collections and Info Suites* resource, which will point you to where other resources on key topics are located on the Parent Center Hub.

Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities

In keeping with President Biden's Executive Order, signed on his first day in office, federal agencies have now issued Equity Action Plans for addressing equity issues in their individual agency scope and mission. These plans are quite relevant to family-led and family-serving

organizations, especially plans from the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services.

Fast Facts: Students with disabilities who are English learners (ELs) served under IDEA Part B

OSEP's *Fast Facts* series summarizes key facts related to specific aspects of the data collection authorized by IDEA. This newest *Fast Facts* gives you data details about students with disabilities who are also English learners. (Want to see what **other *Fast Facts*** are available?)

Asian Americans with Disabilities Resource Guide

The *Asian Americans With Disabilities Resource Guide* was designed for Asian American youth with disabilities, allies, and the disability community in mind, in response to the significant information gap about Asian Americans with disabilities. Chapters include Advocacy 101, Accessibility, Culture, Allyship, and Resources.

Strategies for Partnering on Culturally Safe Research with Native American Communities

To identify strategies for promoting cultural safety, accountability, and sustainability in research with Native American communities, Child Trends assessed peer-reviewed and grey literature (e.g., policy documents and guidelines). Findings? To rebuild trust and improve health outcomes, research collaborations with Native American communities must be community-based or community-engaged, culturally appropriate, and recognize tribal sovereignty in the collection and use of data.

Understanding Screening

This toolkit helps educators and parents learn about screening and how screening can help determine which students may be at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia. From the National Center on Improving Literacy.

Inside an Evaluation for Learning Disorders

*(Also available in Spanish: **Un vistazo a una evaluación para los trastornos del aprendizaje**)*

If a child is struggling in school, the first step to getting help is an evaluation. A learning evaluation can give parents and the child's teachers valuable information about the child's

strengths and weaknesses. It can also reveal what kind of support would be helpful. A full evaluation is necessary for a child to be diagnosed with a learning disorder. To help parents understand the process, the Child Mind Institute and Understood.org teamed up to create this 20-minute video that walks us through the evaluation process.

Education Data 101

*(Also available in Spanish: **Datos educacionales: Nociones básicas**)*

This FAQ on data shares resources you need to understand why education data is a critical tool for supporting individuals, families, educators, and communities. From the Data Quality Campaign.

Parents Are Getting Access to Student Data, But How Can We Support Them to Use It?

With the right supports, parents can be savvy data consumers who actively engage with their students' data. In many places around the country, school leaders are already taking creative measures to bridge this gap between simple communication and engagement. This article highlights examples.

Sharing Info about State Assessments with Families of Children with Disabilities

(Also available in Spanish)

In February, CPIR teamed with NCEO to spotlight NCEO's amazing new resource, the *Participation Communications Toolkit*. The highly customizable toolkit is designed for stakeholders to use in discussing and making decisions about how children with disabilities will participate in state assessments.

Q&A on Serving Children with Disabilities Placed by Their Parents in Private Schools

(Also available in Spanish)

This OSEP webinar for Parent Centers answers questions about states' obligations to provide equitable services (versus FAPE) to children with disabilities who are placed in private schools by their parents. Simultaneous Spanish interpretation was also provided. Find the 2 YouTube videos, a PDF of the presentation slides, the guidance document, and more at the link above.

The Importance of Community in Indigenous Peoples' Healing

In this March 2022 blog post, the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) reflects on the power of community in Native American life, saying "Being an active part of a community that allows us to feel seen is truly an invaluable feeling. When we feel seen and connected as humans, our healing expands."

The Incredible Power of Purpose

*(Also available in Spanish: **Cómo ayudar a un nino a encontrar su propósito**)*

Having a clear sense of purpose in life has unlimited benefits for a child. This Great Schools resource includes a worksheet/activity designed to help teens explore and define their unique purpose in life.

Mental Wellness in the Black Community

From the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Sharing Hope is a 3-part video series that explores the journey of mental wellness in Black communities through dialogue, storytelling, and guided discussions.

Compartiendo Esperanza: Mental Wellness in the Latinx Community

Also from NAMI comes *Compartiendo Esperanza*. It, too, is a 3-part video series, this one focusing on mental wellness in Hispanic/Latino communities, through dialogue, storytelling, and guided discussions

Native Hope: Reflecting on Our Foundations

Understanding Native American culture is critical when conducting outreach to tribes, communities, and Native families with children who have disabilities. **Native Hope** is a resource that helps Native communities meet their needs. It also offers candid and poignant articles on its website that can enrich Parent Center understanding of Native American history, culture, and values, both historically and in the present.

Sharing Info about State Assessments with Families

(Also available in Spanish) Riches, indeed, are shared in this Febrary 11th CPIR webinar, which focuses on NCEO's new (and quite amazing!) resource, the *Participation Communications Toolkit*. You'll love the toolkit; it's designed for stakeholders of all stripes to use in discussing

and making decisions about how children with disabilities will participate in state assessments. The webinar highlights the role that Parent Centers in particular can play in supporting the family's role as one of the primary decision makers about their child's participation.

Return to School | Child Find and Early Intervention Services

(Also available in Spanish) This February 2nd webinar features presenters from OSEP as they elaborate on two of OSEP's recent *Return to School Roadmaps*, both focused on Part C: (1) Child Find, Referral, and Eligibility; and (2) Provision of Early Intervention Services. Both roadmaps are also available in Spanish, as is this webinar.

Introduction to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program

(Also available in Spanish) Want to learn more about the services available from the vocational rehabilitation system for people with disabilities? Check out this January 24th webinar from the RAISE Center. It covers eligibility, developing the Individualized Plan for Employment, available services, and financial factors to consider. Links to the captioned English and Spanish versions are given at the bottom of the page linked above.

Honoring Black History Month: Unsung Heroes of the Disability Rights Movement

The month of February is dedicated to honoring the long history of Black Americans and their many contributions to society. In this article, NCLD (National Center for Learning Disabilities) highlights the stories of Black heroes whose vision, commitment, and activism helped advance progress for people with disabilities.

Plain Language Made It Easy

(Also available in Spanish) | The RAISE Center and PEATC (Virginia's PTI) collaborated to develop this resource guide and video in English and Spanish to assist people in making their documents accessible to everyone.

Federal Funding Support Specifics

In March 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act was signed into law. It included $122 billion for states and school districts to help safely reopen and operate schools and address the impact of the pandemic on students. Want to know more about ARP funding for your state? How

about what your state proposed to do with those funds? Find out at the link above, posted by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education.

The Department's January 2022 press release on the approval of all state plans and the distribution of funds to states highlights what SEAs and school districts are doing to address the urgent needs of their schools with ventilation improvements, staff hiring and retention, mental health services, high-dosage tutoring programs, after-school and summer learning partnerships, and more.

Support for COVID-19 Screening Testing in Schools

Heard of the ELC at the CDC? In April 2021, it awarded $10 billion from the ARP on behalf of CDC to 62 recipients to support COVID-19 screening testing and other mitigation activities in K–12 schools for teachers, staff, and students. Use the USA map to find out about the screening programs and plans in your state. Funding is available through July 31, 2022.

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) Toolkit

This toolkit is a resource for educational and vocational rehabilitation agencies in improving post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities. It's meant to facilitate the collaboration necessary to implement secondary transition services across agencies at the state, community, and student levels and increase the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs). From NTACT, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.

Pros and Cons of Disclosing a Disability to Employers

*(Also available in Spanish: **Ventajas y desventajas de revelar a los empleadores que tiene una discapacidad**)*

Starting a new job can make teens and young adults feel excited, independent, and maybe nervous. They're expected to learn new skills and routines, interact with new people, and make decisions. One of the biggest decisions is whether to tell their employer about any learning and thinking differences.

The U.S. Department of Education Releases Proposed Changes to Title IX Regulations, Invites Public Comment

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of Title IX – the landmark civil rights law that has opened doors for generations of women and girls – the U.S. Department of Education released for public comment proposed changes to the regulations that help elementary and secondary schools and colleges and universities implement this vital legislation. The proposed amendments will restore crucial protections for students who are victims of sexual harassment, assault, and sex-based discrimination – a critical safety net for survivors that was weakened under previous regulations. The proposed regulations will advance educational equity and opportunity for women and girls across the country to ensure that every student in America, from kindergarten through a doctorate degree, can achieve her dreams.

"Over the last 50 years, Title IX has paved the way for millions of girls and women to access equal opportunity in our nation's schools and has been instrumental in combating sexual assault and sexual violence in educational settings," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. "As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of this landmark law, our proposed changes will allow us to continue that progress and ensure all our nation's students – no matter where they live, who they are, or whom they love – can learn, grow, and thrive in school. We welcome public comment on these critical regulations so we can further the Biden-Harris Administration's mission of creating educational environments free from sex discrimination and sexual violence."

The proposed regulations will advance Title IX's goal of ensuring that no person experiences sex discrimination, sex-based harassment, or sexual violence in education. As the Supreme Court wrote in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 140 S. Ct. 1731 (2020), it is "impossible to discriminate against a person" on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity without "discriminating against that individual based on sex." The regulations will require that all students receive appropriate supports in accessing all aspects of education. They will strengthen protections for LGBTQI+ students who face discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. And they will require that school procedures for complaints of sex discrimination, including sexual

violence and other sex-based harassment, are fair to all involved. The proposed regulations also reaffirm the Department's core commitment to fundamental fairness for all parties, respect for freedom of speech and academic freedom, respect for complainants' autonomy, and clear legal obligations that enable robust enforcement of Title IX.

The proposed regulations would:

- Clearly protect students and employees from all forms of sex discrimination.
- Provide full protection from sex-based harassment.
- Protect the right of parents and guardians to support their elementary and secondary school children.
- Require schools to take prompt and effective action to end any sex discrimination in their education programs or activities – and to prevent its recurrence and remedy its effects.
- Protect students and employees who are pregnant or have pregnancy-related conditions.
- Require schools to respond promptly to all complaints of sex discrimination with a fair and reliable process that includes trained, unbiased decisionmakers to evaluate the evidence.
- Require schools to provide supportive measures to students and employees affected by conduct that may constitute sex discrimination, including students who have brought complaints or been accused of sex-based harassment.
- Protect LGBTQI+ students from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics.
- Clarify and confirm protection from retaliation for students, employees, and others who exercise their Title IX rights.
- Improve the adaptability of the regulations' grievance procedure requirements so that all recipients can implement Title IX's promise of nondiscrimination fully and fairly in their educational environments.
- Ensure that schools share their nondiscrimination policies with all students, employees, and other participants in their education programs or activities.

The Department will engage in a separate rulemaking to address Title IX's application to athletics.

The Department's comprehensive review of its Title IX regulations began in March 2021, as directed by Executive Order 14021 – *Guaranteeing an Educational Environment Free From Discrimination on the Basis of Sex, Including Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity.* The Department has sought public input throughout that process. Over the last year, the Department has heard from a wide variety of stakeholders, including students, parents, and educators in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools, state government representatives, advocates, lawyers, researchers, and other stakeholders through the Title IX nationwide virtual public hearing in June 2021 convened by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and in numerous listening sessions and meetings. This input, together with careful review of federal case law and OCR's enforcement work under Title IX, highlighted the need to revise the current regulations to protect more fully against sex discrimination in all education programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

"The proposed regulations reflect the Department's commitment to give full effect to Title IX, ensuring that no person experiences sex discrimination in education, and that school procedures for addressing complaints of sex discrimination, including sexual violence and other forms of sex-based harassment, are clear, effective, and fair to all involved," said Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.

The Department's proposed Title IX regulations will be open for public comment for 60 days from the date of publication in the Federal Register.

Secretary Cardona Lays Out Vision to Support and Elevate the Teaching Profession

U.S Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona will lay out his vision for how the nation can support teachers across the country and elevate the teaching profession. During an address and fireside chat at the Bank Street College of New York, Secretary Cardona will discuss how the Department, states and districts, and higher education institutions can recruit, prepare, and retain great teachers and, in turn, improve our education system across the country. He also will highlight the work the Department has done to support teachers since the beginning of the Biden-Harris Administration and share his own experience and perspective as a former teacher, principal, and school administrator. In addition to Secretary Cardona's visit, the Department is releasing a fact sheet on how American Rescue Plan (ARP) fund investments in our nation's educators can be sustained for the long-term using other existing sources of federal funds.

"A great teacher in every classroom is one of the most important resources we can give our children to recover from this pandemic and thrive," said Secretary Cardona. "Yet, even before the pandemic, many states and communities experienced shortages in qualified teachers, including in critical areas such as special education, bilingual education, career and technical education, and science, technology, engineering, and math education. The pandemic has only served to make these shortages worse—falling hardest on students in underserved communities. It's not only our responsibility but our commitment at the Department of Education to encourage, invest in, and lift up teachers across America. The future of our country and our children's futures depend on it."

Secretary Cardona's vision will focus on three areas:

- Recruiting diverse, high-qualified teachers into the profession and investing in high-quality teacher pipeline programs
- Supporting educators' professional development to ensure our nation's students are receiving high-quality education to meet the demands of today's economy

- Investing in strategies to retain high-quality educators and keep them in the profession long-term.

The fact that in many states teachers do not earn a livable and competitive wage is a significant contributor to a weak pipeline and high attrition. In many states, teachers earn less than other professionals with similar qualifications. On average, teachers make about 20 percent less than other college-educated workers and make even less than that average in 25 states. In 38 states, the average teacher salary is so low that mid-career teachers who are the head of household for a family of four qualify for two or more government benefits based on income. President Biden and Secretary Cardona have called on states and districts to increase teacher salaries to help address teacher recruitment and retention. But in addition to increasing teacher salaries, our nation's students are depending on federal, state, and local leaders to take bold actions to make sure they have access to diverse and talented educators who join, grow, and stay in the profession.

Secretary Cardona laid out the following strategies that will continue to guide the Department of Education's work to recruit, develop, and retain high-qualified teachers in the coming months and years:

- Investing in a strong and diverse teacher pipeline, including increasing access to affordable, comprehensive, evidence-based preparation programs, such as teacher residencies, Grow Your Own programs, including those that begin in high school, and apprenticeship programs
- Supporting teachers in earning initial or additional certification in high-demand areas such as special education and bilingual education or advanced certifications to better meet the needs of their students
- Helping teachers pay off their student loans, including through loan forgiveness and service scholarship programs
- Supporting teachers by providing them and students with the resources they need to succeed, including mentoring for early career teachers, high-quality curricular materials, and providing students with access to school counselors, social workers, nurses, mental health professionals, and other specialists

- Creating opportunities for teacher advancement and leadership, including participating in distributive leadership models, and serving as instructional coaches and mentors.

To advance these efforts, the Department's fiscal year 2023 budget request includes nearly $600 million in new funds—over funds included in the FY22 Omnibus—for a total of almost $3 billion—to recruit, support, and retain a talented, diverse workforce. These investments include $350 million to focus the Education Innovation and Research program on a new charge to improve teacher recruitment and retention; $132 million for Teacher Quality Partnerships to improve preparation for teachers (an additional $73 million); $20 million for the Hawkins Centers of Excellence to increase the number of diverse and talented teachers prepared at our Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Minority Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities (an additional $12 million); and $250 million for IDEA Part D to better prepare and support our special education teachers (an additional $155 million).

Today's announcement is part of an ongoing effort by the Department and the Biden-Harris Administration to invest in our nation's teachers. Some of the Biden-Harris Administration's first actions were to prioritize educators' access to vaccinations and deliver unprecedented resources to our nation's schools through the American Rescue Plan to help accelerate the reopening of schools for in-person learning and to support students' academic recovery and mental health. As part of that effort, the Department has released guidance and fact sheets, hosted webinars for states and school districts, and partnered with the Departments of Treasury and Labor to encourage states and districts to use American Rescue Plan funds to support educator recruitment, retention, and well-being as part of a number of priorities ARP funds should be directed towards.

Transition to Preschool

Kids grow fast, don't they? And **early intervention is designed for children from birth up to age three**. At that point, services under EI end. If the child will need continued support once he or she moves on to preschool, it's very important to plan ahead so that the transition is smooth. The resources below will help you do just that.

Be sure to see what's available at ECTA.

Come to ECTA's landing page where you'll find a wealth of information about the transition from Part C to preschool, including federal requirements, national centers, state examples, eligibility differences to note, and more.

https://ectacenter.org/topics/transition/transition.asp

Transition of young children out of early intervention | Online module.

(Available in English and Spanish)

Project CONNECT offers numerous free online modules where early childhood specialists and practitioners can learn about effective evidence-based practices. Module 2 focuses on transition for young children and their families from the early care and education system.

https://connectmodules.dec-sped.org/connect-modules/learners/

Out of EI and into preschool: What's it all about?

Here's a decent explanation, including why it's important to plan for this transition; the benefits to children, families, and teachers of such planning; and the chief differences between the EI system and preschool service system in terms of child find, referral, evaluation, eligibility, family involvement, the type of plan that's written and the services that are delivered.

https://handsandvoices.org/articles/education/law/transition.html

Who's in charge of preschool services, and what are they doing?

Find out at the ECTA Center, which provides annual information on state policies, programs, and practices under the Preschool Grants Program (Section 619 of Part B) of IDEA.

https://ectacenter.org/sec619/sec619.asp

What do IDEA's regulations say about transition planning?

When, by whom, what, where, steps, writing the IEP… IDEA has a lot to say! And its regulations provide guidance to how every state implements Part C and how planning must occur when children transition out of early intervention. This handout gives you the verbatin regulations of IDEA.

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo_items/legacy/partc/handout9.pdf

Training modules on transition.

IDEA's Part C regulations were substantially revised in 2011. Need training materials to let people know what's new and different, what's the same, and what's involved in planning for transition? Try CPIR's Modules 8 and 9, which include slideshows, trainer guides, and handouts for participants.

Module 8 | **The Transition Process and Lead Agency Notification to the LEA and SEA**

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/partc-module8/

Module 9 | **The Development of the Transition Plan**

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/partc-module9/

Helping military families receive early intervention services.

Here's a page of resources for military families about early intervention, including the military's early intervention directory, suggestions for relocating with an IFSP, the DOD's handbook on early intervention and special education, and more.

https://branchta.org/helping-military-families-receive-early-intervention-services/

Special education services for preschoolers with disabilities.

This page discusses what services are available for preschoolers who are experiencing developmental delays. Learn more about where families, childcare providers, and educators find help and support.

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/preschoolers/

Providing Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments

Early intervention services are to be provided in natural environments to the maximum extent appropriate for the child and for the EI service itself.

So–what's considered a "natural environment"? What isn't? This webpage focuses upon answering these questions and on connecting you with resources of additional information and best practice.

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities receive needed early intervention services in natural environments to the maximum extent appropriate. The 2011 regulations for Part C define the term as follows:

§303.26 Natural environments.

Natural environments means settings that are natural or typical for a same-aged infant or toddler without a disability, may include the home or community settings, and must be consistent with the provisions of §303.126.

That's a straightforward, easily understood definition–with the exception of how it ends ("…must be consistent with the provisions of §303.126"). What might the provisions of §303.126 require?

Let's have a look. Here they are:

§303.126 Early intervention services in natural environments.

Each system must include policies and procedures to ensure, consistent with §§303.13(a)(8) (early intervention services), 303.26 (natural environments), and 303.344(d)(1)(ii) (content of an IFSP), that early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities are provided—

(a) To the maximum extent appropriate, in natural environments; and

(b) In settings other than the natural environment that are most appropriate, as determined by the parent and the IFSP Team, only when early intervention services cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment.

Combining these two sets of provisions makes it clear that early intervention services:

- ***must*** be provided in settings that are **natural or typical** for a same-aged infant or toddler without a disability to the maximum extent appropriate;
- ***may*** be provided in **other settings only** when the services cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment.

Who Decides Where Services Will Be Provided?

The Part C regulations also make it clear that the **IFSP team** determines the appropriate setting for providing early intervention services to a child or toddler. The IFSP team may determine that a service will ***not*** be provided in a natural environment ***only*** "when early intervention services cannot be achieved satisfactorily in a natural environment."

Note | *IFSP team* refers broadly to the group of people who write the child's individualized family service plan (IFSP). More specifically, as described in the Part C regulations:

- The child's parents are members of the IFSP team. They may invite other family members to participate on the team as well (if it's feasible to do so). They may also request an advocate or person from outside the family to participate on the team.
- The IFSP team must include two or more individuals from separate disciplines or professions, one of which must be the family's service coordinator.
- The IFSP team must also include a person or persons directly involved in conducting the evaluations and assessments of the child and family.
- As appropriate, people who will be providing early intervention services to the child may also serve on the IFSP team. (§303.343)

This, then, is the group of well-informed individuals that makes the decision as to where early intervention services will be provided to the baby or toddler.

On What Basis Does the Team Decide the Setting?

The short answer | The IFSP team decides where each EI service will be provided *based on the measurable results or measurable outcomes expected to be achieved by the child*. Those results or outcomes have been identified by the IFSP team and listed in the IFSP.

The longer answer | Again, the Part C regulations provide the necessary guidance. At §303.344(d)(1)(ii)(B), the regulations state:

(B) The determination of the appropriate setting for providing early intervention services to an infant or toddler with a disability, including any justification for not providing a particular early intervention service in the natural environment for that infant or toddler with a disability and service, must be—

(1) Made by the IFSP Team (which includes the parent and other team members);

(2) Consistent with the provisions in §§303.13(a)(8), 303.26, and 303.126; and

(3) **Based on the child's outcomes** that are identified by the IFSP Team in paragraph (c) of this section… *[emphasis added]*

An example | The Department of Education provides an example of how it may not always be practicable or appropriate for an infant or toddler with a disability to receive an early intervention service in the natural environment based either on the nature of the service or the child's specific outcomes. The Department states:

For example, the IFSP Team may determine that an eligible child needs to receive speech services in a clinical setting that serves only children with disabilities in order to meet a specific IFSP outcome. When the natural environment is not chosen with regard to an early intervention service, the IFSP Team must provide, in the IFSP, an appropriate justification for that decision. (76 Fed. Reg. at 60205)

What Must Be Included about Natural Environments in the Child's IFSP?

The Part C regulations indicate that the IFSP must include:

…A statement that each early intervention service is provided in the natural environment for that child or service to the maximum extent appropriate …

or…

a justification as to why an early intervention service will not be provided in the natural environment. [§303.344(d)(1)(ii)(A)]

If the IFSP team determines that an early intervention service will not be provided in the natural environment, it must document in the IFSP the justification for why not–in other words, "why the alternative service setting is needed for the child to meet the developmental outcomes

Two Points from the Department of Education

When the Department of Education released the 2011 Part C implementing regulations, it included the often fascinating ***Analysis of Comments and Changes***. The Department's discussion of "natural environments" includes two very interesting and illuminating observations we'd like to share with you.

Why not include a list of settings considered "natural environments" and those *not* considered "natural environments"? | The Department declined to add a fuller list of settings that may be considered (or would not be considered) "natural environments." The current regulations only mention that natural environments "may include home and community settings." Why did the Department decline including a fuller list? According to the Department: "It would not be appropriate or practicable to include a list of every setting that may be the natural environment for a particular child or those settings that may not be natural environments in these regulations.

In some circumstances, a setting that is natural for one eligible child based on that child's outcomes, family routines, or the nature of the service may not be natural for another child….

[T]he decision about whether an environment is the natural environment is an individualized decision made by an infant's or toddler's IFSP Team, which includes the parent…" (**76 Fed. Reg. at 60157-60158**)

Are clinics, hospitals, or a service provider's office considered "natural environments"? | A very good question, you must admit! Here's the Department's response:

We appreciate the commenters' requests for clarification as to whether clinics, hospitals, or a service provider's office may be considered the natural environment in cases when specialized instrumentation or equipment that cannot be transported to the home is needed.

Natural environments mean settings that are natural or typical for an infant or toddler without a disability….**We do not believe that a clinic, hospital or service provider's office is a natural environment for an infant or toddler without a disability; therefore, such a setting would not be natural for an infant or toddler with a disability.**

However, §303.344(d)(1) requires that the identification of the early intervention service needed, as well as the appropriate setting for providing each service to an infant or toddler with a disability, be individualized decisions made by the IFSP Team based on that child's unique needs, family routines, and developmental outcomes. If a determination is made by the IFSP Team that, based on a review of all relevant information regarding the unique needs of the child, the child cannot satisfactorily achieve the identified early intervention outcomes in natural environments, then services could be provided in another environment (e.g. clinic, hospital, service provider's office). In such cases, a justification must be included in the IFSP… (**76 Fed. Reg. at 60158**)

Resources of More Information on Natural Environments

Natural environments.

From the IFSP Web module. Gives examples, what the law says, and principles and beliefs about natural environments.

http://www.ifspweb.org/module3/natural-environments.php

7 key principles: Looks like/Doesn't look like.

https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/families/Principles_LooksLike_DoesntLookLike3_11_08.pdf

Early intervention in natural environments: A 5-component model.

http://cms-kids.com/providers/early_steps/Training/documents/early_intervention.pdf

Tele-intervention and the routines-based model.

Note: The Routines-Based Model of Early Intervention (Birth to Five Years) is a method of providing supports to children with disabilities and their families that focuses on functioning in

children and on meeting families' needs. Numerous countries, states, and programs are implementing this evidence-based model.

http://naturalenvironments.blogspot.com/2020/03/tele-intervention-and-routines-based.html

From selected National Professional Associations.

Natural environments in early intervention services.

A fact sheet from the Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy.

https://pediatricapta.org/includes/fact-sheets/pdfs/Natural%20Env%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf

Natural environments for infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

From ASHA, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

https://www.asha.org/aud/Natural-Environments-for-Infants-and-Toddlers/

Occupational therapy in early intervention: Helping children succeed.

From the American Occupational Therapy Association.

https://www.aota.org/About-Occupational-Therapy/Professionals/CY/Articles/Early-Intervention.aspx

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Examining General Education and Special Education Teacher Preparedness for Co-Teaching Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

It is imperative to understand how teachers are prepared for their role as co-teacher. The purpose of this study was to investigate how general education and special education teachers in one elementary school in Georgia are trained in the instructional practice of co-teaching and their perceptions on how prepared they feel to implement the method. A mixed methods approach was used and included a qualitatively-oriented survey and semi-structured interviews. Data collected in this study revealed that over half of all co-teachers at the elementary school had received some type of training on co-teaching and also felt adequately prepared to serve in the co-teaching role. Overall, participants reported positive perspectives on co-teaching despite there being challenges. The benefits of co-teaching noted a supportive and safe environment, instructional support for students and teachers, and confidence builder due to collaboration. The challenges reported included insufficient time for collaboration, inconsistent teaching schedules, and student behavior problems.

Keywords: co-teaching, teacher preparation, students with disabilities

Examining General Education and Special Education Teacher Preparedness for Co-Teaching Students with Disabilities

Early on in the history of the United States, laws were made so that children with disabilities were often excluded from public education (Yell, 2016). As early as 1893 in Massachusetts, it was found that a child who was "weak in mind" could be considered a distraction to other children in the class and could, therefore, be expelled from the school. This view continued for decades and, even as recently as 1969, courts in North Carolina upheld this legislation that excluded students with disabilities from public education (Yell, 2016). In 1974, congressional findings revealed that "more than 1.75 million students with disabilities did not receive educational services" (Yell, 2016, p. 42). A pivotal change occurred in 1975 as President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142). With this law, children with disabilities were guaranteed a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Public Law 94-142 has been amended over the years and is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). Under the IDEA (2004), students with disabilities have the right to be educated in the LRE. This means that they are to be taught in the general education classroom alongside their peers to the greatest extent possible (Giuliani, 2012). Due to IDEA (2004), the trend of inclusion has become very prevalent in public education throughout our nation. In a report to Congress, The U.S. Department of Education (2018) noted that 63.1% of students with disabilities spent at least 80% of their school day in a regular education classroom. Because of this need to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, many public schools have turned to the model of co-teaching to fulfill this requirement (Murawski & Lohner, 2010).

Today's classroom teachers are faced with educating a more diverse population of students than in previous decades (Friend et al., 2010). With the prevalence of inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom, new models of teaching need to be considered (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). One of these models is co-teaching. Co-teaching is a coordinated instructional practice that involves two teachers simultaneously providing instruction in a general education classroom to a group of students with diverse learning needs (Beninghof, 2012; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008). Co-teaching is not a new idea. However, the increase in the use of this model is on the rise across our nation (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). With this increase

in use comes the need for an increase in understanding how to successfully implement a co-teaching model.

One of the essential factors for successful co-teaching is teacher preparedness (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). Co-teaching teams need training, guidance, and time for planning. They need to understand how to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess. If teachers are not well-prepared for co-teaching, then numerous problems can occur in the implementation process, such as complications in classroom management styles between co-teachers or one teacher becoming the leader and the other acting merely as an assistant (Ploessl & Rock, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative to understand how teachers are prepared for their role as co-teacher.

Based on consensus from the field of experts that a lack of teacher preparation can be a hindrance to successful co-teaching (Brendle et al., 2017; Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012; Chitiyo, 2017), we, one special education teacher and three university professors, focused our attention on one case of 11 teachers who had experience with the co-teaching model. As a result, the purpose of this mixed method study was to investigate how general education and special education teachers in one elementary school in Georgia are trained in the instructional practice of co-teaching and their perceptions on how prepared they feel to implement the method. In this focus school, co-teaching occurs at every grade level (K-5) and every year the school struggles to answer the question of which teachers will serve as the inclusion teacher. Some general education teachers are hesitant to take on this role; thus, the school finds it hard to get volunteers. Because the first author is also an employee at the research school and served in a co-teaching capacity, the first author held a vested interest in understanding how to improve co-teachers' experiences in order to establish and maintain effective co-teaching relationships. These relationships not only impact the teachers but also impact the students at the school. As a result, the study was both needed and significant in order to better understand the gaps that existed in teachers' training on co-teaching in this specific school context. The questions that guided this research project were:

1. What training do teachers receive on co-teaching?
2. How prepared do teachers feel in the use of co-teaching as an instructional model?
3. What do teachers see as the benefits and challenges to co-teaching?

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the theoretical framework that teachers need to be trained in the practice of co-teaching in order for them to feel confident in their abilities to successfully execute the role of co-teacher and meet the needs of all students within a co-taught setting. This study draws on the Theory of Self-Efficacy by Albert Bandura (1977). As the practice of co-teaching varies, the self-efficacy to co-teach and implement effective instruction may also vary.

Theory of Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), "an efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 193). Bandura (1977) argued the level of a person's belief in their own effectiveness directly correlates to how hard they will work to cope with any given situation. When a person has perceived self-efficacy, they tend to set higher goals for themselves and work harder to achieve those goals (Zimmerman, et al., 1992). In this study, researchers identified how teachers were trained for co-teaching and their confidence in their ability to serve in the co-teaching role. When a teacher takes on a role such as co-teaching, there is an ever-evolving relationship between both the co-teaching partners and the teachers and students. In order to navigate these relationships and feel successful, one needs to have confidence in themselves to work through challenges that are encountered.

Review of Literature

With the purpose to examine the training that special education and general education teachers receive regarding co-teaching and their perceptions on how prepared they feel to implement the teaching strategy, the literature review first examines the models of co-teaching, followed by a discussion on the benefits and obstacles found with this often-used method of teaching. The literature review then addresses teachers' perceptions on their ability to implement co-teaching and their sense of preparedness.

Understanding Co-Teaching as an Instructional Model

Co-teaching offers a way for schools to meet inclusion mandates for LRE, as well as provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum, making it an often-used model (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). Co-teaching for this study is defined as a coordinated

instructional practice that involves two teachers simultaneously providing instruction in a general education classroom to a group of students with diverse learning needs (Beninghof, 2012; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend 2008).

There are six approaches to co-teaching: one teach-one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, team teaching, and one teach-one observe (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2007/2008; Friend & Bursuck, 2009). In the one teach-one assist model, two teachers are present during instruction, but one takes on the instructional responsibility while the other assists individual students as needed (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2007/2008). Station teaching involves co-teachers planning learning stations for students to rotate through, with the teachers providing instruction at two stations and the students independently completing the other stations (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2007/2008). In parallel teaching, lessons are co-planned by teachers and then each teacher delivers the same content to half the class (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2007/2008). Alternative teaching involves one teacher working with a small group of students while the other teaches the rest of the class. The small group may be used for pre-teaching or re-teaching a skill, assessments, special interests, or to challenge students. Team teaching allows teachers to co-lead the class. This might be by holding a discussion where each teacher takes an opposing view, modeling how to ask questions, illustrating different approaches to solving a problem, or one teacher lecturing while the other demonstrates the concept (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2007/2008). The one-teach, one-observe model has one teacher leading instruction while the other takes data on a specific student or the whole class (Friend, 2007/2008; Friend & Bursuck, 2009). By utilizing these six strategies, co-teachers can meet the needs of those students with Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals while also tailoring lessons to meet the needs of the other students in the class (Friend et al., 2010).

Benefits of Co-Teaching for Teachers and Students

In addition to providing students with the Least Restrictive Environment, other potential benefits have been shown to exist in co-teaching for both teachers and students. Students and teachers have reported positive perspectives on co-teaching and feel the practice contributes positively to student behaviors (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017; Hang & Rabren, 2009). Students with disabilities stated that their self-confidence increased, and they learned more in the co-taught classroom (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Keeley et al., 2017). Moreover, research has shown that the

co-taught classroom offers an environment where students with special needs reported they felt connected (Friend, et al., 2010), accepted (Kohler-Evans, 2006), and they felt safe in an environment supported by two teachers (Gately & Gately, 2001). Fenty and McDuffie-Landrum (2011) found that teachers in co-taught classrooms develop a sense of comfort and confidence because they build upon both of their levels of expertise.

There are numerous benefits of co-teaching for the teachers and students (Brendle et al., 2017; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). Teachers like being able to individualize lessons more for students when co-teaching, and in turn, they are better able to meet their students' needs. Co-teaching offers more opportunities for small group work and re-teaching when two teachers are available. Students have a choice as to which teacher to go to for help, permitting students to connect to the teaching style of one teacher more than another. Hurd and Weilbacher (2017) have offered that an unanticipated benefit of co-teaching they found in their research was that the students who were initially shy at first came out of their shell and become more engaged in the classroom.

Obstacles to Successful Co-Teaching for Teachers

One of the biggest obstacles to successful co-teaching is the lack of teacher preparation for the practice (Brendle, et al., 2017; Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012; Chitiyo, 2017). Teachers often indicate that they feel they lack the skills necessary for successful co-teaching and many were not given any training in co-teaching practices (Chitiyo, 2017). They believe that initial, and on-going, training is necessary. Finding ways to best train co-teachers, however, can be a hurdle. One study found a potential solution to this issue. Ploessl and Rock (2014) utilized an online bug-in-ear technology to deliver eCoaching to co-teachers as they planned and taught co-teaching lessons. The eCoaching provided immediate feedback that included questioning, encouragement, instruction and corrections. Results indicated that all participants successfully planned and implemented more lessons using a variety of co-teaching models. Additionally, student-specific accommodations increased in planning and usage throughout the study, indicating eCoaching provided effective training for teachers (Friend & Cook, 2010; Ploessl & Rock, 2014).

Co-planning is a key task in creating successful co-teaching teams which means that teachers need time to plan together. This can be an obstacle if co-teaching teams do not share a common planning time (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). For co-teachers that lack a common planning time,

web-based documents (such as Google docs) can be used so that both teachers can add notes to the plans, and read their partners' notes, as well as access them at any time (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). However, even when teachers do share a common planning time, Brendle et al. (2017) found the time is not effectively utilized because they lack the training in how to co-plan. Therefore, not only do co-teachers need a common planning time, but they also need training in how to effectively use that planning time.

Another roadblock to successful co-teaching can be the classroom composition. Isherwood et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study on one school district in Pennsylvania that included fifteen co-teaching teams that had implemented co-teaching. The results from content analysis found that the secondary teachers were not only dissatisfied with the lack of poor co-planning time, but the classroom composition further created dissatisfaction. The high school co-teaching teams found it difficult to effectively teach as students with disabilities comprised 40%-85% of the class in each team. At the elementary level, Isherwood et al. (2013) found similar dissatisfaction due to classroom composition. At the elementary level, only one classroom per elementary school was designated as the inclusion class. All students with an IEP were placed in that class and were supported by a co-teacher. Throughout the year, however, students in other classes qualified for special education services and they would have to be uprooted from their homeroom and moved into the inclusion class to receive services (Isherwood et al., 2013). As a result, the number of students to be served made it difficult for the co-teachers to meet the needs of all students.

One final obstacle is that co-teaching must be well-supported by the administration (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). The master schedule needs to be created to include common planning time for co-teaching teams. Administrators should also take into account the number of general education teachers the special education teacher is assigned to and keep the number to a minimum. This will allow time for co-planning and the building of a working relationship between co-teaching partners (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017).

Teachers' Perceptions and Preparedness for Co-Teaching

Preparing teachers for instructing students with disabilities has become an area of focus for current teacher preparation programs (Gottfried, et al., 2019). In the past, studies have found that large percentages of teachers did not learn about co-teaching through university coursework (Brinkman & Twiford, 2012; Chitiyo, 2017). In more recent years, however, special education teacher preparation programs have begun to focus on aspects of co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010). Now, with new teacher licensure requirements, such as edTPA that are used in many states, general education teacher programs are also beginning to focus on best practices for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, including co-teaching practices (Gottfried et al., 2019). Because initial preparation for co-teaching in teacher certification programs is still in the early stages and a large number of current teachers did not have university coursework for preparation, it is imperative that teachers are provided with high quality professional development programs regarding co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010).

Despite there often being a lack of teacher training for the role of co-teacher, teacher perceptions of co-teaching are often positive (Campbell & Jeter-Isles, 2017; Hang & Rabren, 2009). Teachers report that they have positive relationships with their co-teaching partners and feel the experience is valuable (Campbell & Jeter-Isles, 2017; King-Sears et al., 2014).

Summary

In order to meet the federal mandates of IDEA (2004), co-teaching is a widely used instructional strategy for students with disabilities. Although research has reported benefits to co-teaching, obstacles have also been identified. One clear challenge to effective co-teaching is a lack of teacher training. Many schools all over the United States are implementing this model; yet, it is not clear if teachers are trained in the practice before becoming a part of a co-teaching team. The literature has reported that teachers need time to plan together and if individuals' schedules do not allow for common planning time, then co-teaching teams may not be effective. Finally, a review of the literature has shown it is important to identify within co-teaching teams what is working well and what needs to be improved in an attempt to improve the co-teaching experience for both teachers and students.

Methods

This study employed a sequential mixed methods design using a qualitatively oriented survey followed by semi-structured interviews (quan→QUAL) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Mixed methods approaches are best suited for studying complex phenomena where each unique data source contributes greater nuance to the project as a whole (Greene, 2015; Poth, 2018; Shannon-Baker & Edwards, 2018). The purpose for mixing methods permitted data triangulation (Bryman, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Johnson et al. 2007; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). A qualitatively-oriented survey provided a diversity of responses on the topic of co-teaching (Jansen, 2010). Participants for the interviews were then recruited from the survey responses. Individual interviews provided space for teachers to freely discuss their feelings toward their level of preparation for, and confidence in, employing co-teaching strategies (Creswell, 2002). This study was approved through ethics board reviews by the university and the local school district.

School Context and Participants

This study took place at Endeavour Elementary School (pseudonym) located in a suburban county in north Georgia. This school has an enrollment of approximately 750 students. 15% of the student population at the school is students with disabilities as compared to 12% of other schools in the county as a whole. The percentage of students with disabilities at the school has increased from 7.9% since 2010. Inclusion is prevalent throughout the school.

The focus of this study was on elementary school teachers in order to gather information from participants with similar schedules and co-teaching partner situations. A typical case sampling strategy was utilized to survey and conduct interviews with participants who were currently co-teaching at the same elementary school. This provided the researchers with participants who had similar experiences in terms of training opportunities available to them and further allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences (Patton, 2002).

The population included seven general education teachers and four inter-related, special education teachers who worked on co-teaching teams in kindergarten through fifth grades. The survey was sent via email to all co-teachers in the school and a 100% response rate (n = 11) was obtained. Three of the participants had co-taught zero to one year; four had co-taught two to four years; three had co-taught five to seven years; and one had co-taught more than eight years (see Figure 1). The follow-up interviews were optional for all co-teachers and five teachers

participated in the interview process; three were general education teachers and two were special education teachers. In order to ensure confidentiality, all district, school, and participants' names were changed to pseudonyms.

Instruments

Survey

The survey (see Appendix A) was developed by the researchers based on questions from Howerter's (2013) Co-Teaching Questionnaire. In the development of the questionnaire, Howerter (2013) identified, through a review of literature, six common pillars in co-teaching: "co-teaching models, co-communication, co-planning and co-preparation, co-instruction, co-conflict resolution, and co-teaching strategies" (p. 107). These pillars guided her development of the 45- item questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked by the team to ensure the paper was formatted correctly into Qualtrics and reliability was set at 100%. It was also pilot tested to ensure the online format worked properly.

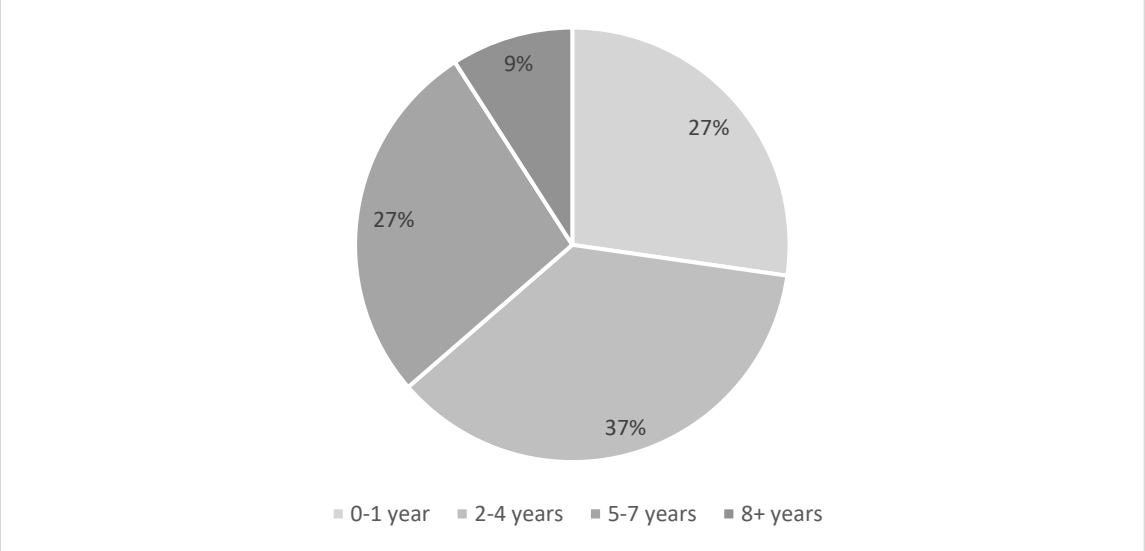

Figure 1: Distribution by the Number of Years for Co-teaching

For this study, the questions from Howerter's (2013) questionnaire were modified from a pre-structured answer format to an open-ended format. This enabled participants to give deeper insights into their perspectives regarding the subject of co-teaching and their training for implementation. The number of questions was pared down in order to focus on certain aspects, such as training, that addressed this study's research questions. Questions were also developed based on the literature review conducted by the researcher. The revised questionnaire was submitted for expert feedback from a research methodologist. The survey was provided to participants in an online format using SurveyMonkey. It was available to participants for 10 days.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants after the survey data were collected. Interview questions (see Appendix B) were designed to gather deeper information about the benefits and challenges individual teachers perceive in their co-teaching experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview also provided participants the opportunity to elaborate further on their survey responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), such as on their training related to co-teaching and how adequate they felt that training was. Interview questions were developed by the researchers based on the literature review conducted and the benefits and challenges to co-teaching identified in the literature. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes and were audio-recorded. The first author also kept field notes using a field journal. In the field journal, she noted markers to come back to at a later point in the interview. For this study, the definition of *markers* is a word or phrase mentioned by the interviewee about a separate topic from the given interview question (Leavy, 2017). These markers lead us to ask further questions which provided deeper insight and important information for the study.

Data Analysis

Survey questions 1a, 1b and 1c (demographic questions on grade level, years teaching, and months/years co-teaching) and Questions 2a and 2b (type of training on co-teaching the participants had received) were analyzed descriptively: ranges reported, mean years taught and co-taught, and amount of each type of training. The open-ended survey questions were then uploaded to the research software MAXQDA. All audio-recordings of interviews were transcribed and uploaded to MAXQDA.

Data from both the survey and interviews were integrated during the analyses. The open-ended data from the survey and interviews were first coded with attribute coding for data management, followed by descriptive coding to identify commonalities between both data sources (Saldaña, 2016). Next, in vivo coding was used to maintain the exact language used by the participants in both the surveys and interviews (Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2016). Emotion coding was done during the initial coding phase to identify teachers' underlying feelings towards co-teaching (Saldaña, 2016). In conjunction, the initial stage of analysis also included memo writing by the first author. "Memo writing involves thinking and systematically writing about data you have coded and categorized" (Leavy, 2017, p. 152). Memos were used to organize ideas and document coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All memos were written and kept within the MAXQDA program.

When initial coding was complete, a second cycle of coding focused on developing major themes based on how the codes from the data as a whole could be grouped together in order to best address the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). The themes were used to create meaning from the data and were compared to those found within the existing literature (Leavy, 2017). A copy of the completed research paper was given to Queen County Schools (pseudonym) and the building principal at Endeavour Elementary School to share the needs of co-teachers in the building.

Results

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how general education and special education teachers in one elementary school in Georgia are trained in the instructional practice of co-teaching and their perceptions on how prepared they feel to implement the method. The results section presents the integrated findings from both data sets.

RQ1

Research question one asked: What training do teachers receive on co-teaching? In response to this question, 63.64%, or seven out of eleven, participants in the survey indicated that they had received training on co-teaching, while 36.36%, or four out of eleven, responded that they had not received any type of training on co-teaching. Of the seven participants who had received co-

teaching training, the topics and breakdowns for those trainings were as follows: Models of co-teaching (85.71%), How to build a successful relationship with your co-teacher (100%), How to develop classroom rules and expectations with your co-teacher (57.14%), and Co-planning (71.43%) (See Figure 2).

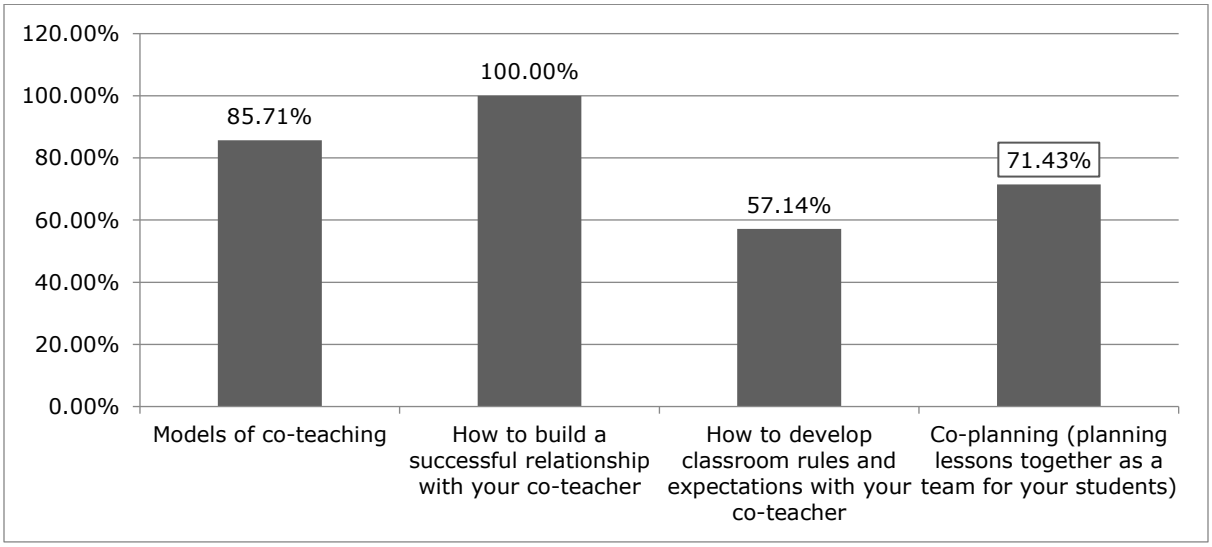

Figure 2: Percent of Participants Who Received Training Relevant to Co-teaching

RQ2

Research question two asked: How prepared do teachers feel in the use of co-teaching as an instructional model? Survey data indicated 63.64% of participants felt adequately trained to serve in a co-teaching role while 36.36% of participants did not feel they had been adequately trained. However, the findings did indicate that while some of the participants felt adequately and some did not, all participants (100%) had received co-teaching training via professional development provided by their school district and two of the teachers had also received co-teaching training in their undergraduate and graduate studies.

RQ3

Research question three asked: What do teachers see as the benefits and challenges of co-teaching? After careful analysis of the coding, the survey and interview data indicate there are several benefits of co-teaching for both students and teachers. The following themes emerged regarding the benefits of co-teaching: 1) supportive and safe environment, 2) instructional support for students and teachers, and 3) confidence builder due to collaboration. Based on the survey and interview data, participants' responses predominantly focused on the challenges for teachers in a co-teaching model. The following themes emerged regarding the challenges of co-teaching: 1) insufficient time for collaboration, 2) inconsistent teaching schedule, and 3) student behavior problems.

Benefits

Supportive and Safe Environment. Consistently named as a benefit of the co-teaching model was that two teachers in the room means more support for all students, both students with disabilities and without disabilities. Participants' responses noted that when students with disabilities are included in the large group and have access to the general education curriculum, they benefit from a safe environment provided by the support of two teachers. One survey respondent wrote, "The students are able to feel safe with a great learning environment to support all of the children's needs. This allows not just special education students to receive extra assistance, but all students in the classroom."

Another participant noted that by having two teachers in a classroom, students with special needs feel secure and have a sense of belonging because they have the support of two teachers. This finding was echoed by another participant who recorded, "Co-teaching enables students with special needs to feel accepted because they have the support of two teachers."

The participants also expressed that a benefit of a co-taught classroom was the extra support they received by working with an additional teacher. One participant wrote, "I have to admit I feel

relieved by having the support of another teacher in the room to bounce ideas off regarding lessons or to just give me a break when I feel overwhelmed by a student's immediate needs."

Instructional Support for Students and Teachers. From data analysis, participants' responses provided further evidence to show that co-teaching is a benefit to students with disabilities due to the additional support they receive on instruction from two teachers in the classroom. The findings showed that co-teachers play on each other's strengths by having one teach a subject the other may not feel as comfortable teaching. Participants' responses indicated that students with disabilities hear different approaches to teaching the same topic which can help fill in gaps in their understanding. Chelsea, a co-teacher said, "I may do something one way, somebody may do something another way and if the kids just constantly hear it my way, and they're not getting the other way, then I don't think they benefit as much."

Another teacher noted in her survey response, "The students' greatest benefit of having two teachers is how they may deliver content differently. This helps reach all types of learners." This statement highlights the benefit of co-teaching due to the diversity of students in every classroom. Having co-teachers teaching about the same topic can help meet the wide range of needs that exist in a classroom.

Participants in the study also noted that it is easier to run small instructional groups when there are two teachers in the room. Brynn, a co-teacher stated, "My center times are more controlled and focused because there's two adults, two sets of eyes, lots more opportunities for conferencing." This statement reinforces the premise that each teacher can run a different group, or one teacher can float between groups to give students assistance while the other teaches the lesson to a small group of students during co-teaching. Participants' responses noted that co-teaching was especially helpful in classrooms with a larger number of students or in primary classrooms (kindergarten-second grade) where the students are less independent.

Confidence Builder due to Collaboration. For the special education teacher who works with multiple grade-levels, it can be a daunting task to know all the standards that exist in a particular grade level. This is where the collaboration between the general education teacher and special

education teacher can provide support and tips on how to teach a specific skill. Findings from data analysis showed that the co-teacher relationship can boost a special educator's confidence in teaching a subject or skill they do not feel strong in teaching, as well as boost the confidence level for regular education teachers who are unsure on how to reach all students' needs. Responses indicated the collaborative nature of co-teaching allowed them the opportunity to bounce ideas off each other and feel more confident on how best to approach a new lesson. One survey respondent wrote,

> *It is great to have someone who can offer me advice on how to best support the students in my class who have learning differences. It is also great to have someone else who can notice other students who might need help. We also are able to share resources and ideas for lessons and feel more confident in what we were teaching.*

Another general education teacher noted that her special education co-teacher is able to break things down into smaller pieces for the kids to be able to understand. [She felt that this was not a strength for her as a teacher, and therefore, she appreciated that her co-teacher was able to assist with this.]

Challenges

Insufficient Time for Planning. Regarding the challenges co-teachers face, insufficient time for planning and collaboration together was a theme that emerged from data analysis of the survey and interviews. Participants' responses indicated that the lack of time leads to unequal sharing of responsibilities and lesson planning. These expressions highlighted how one teacher, usually the general education teacher, will plan the lessons to be taught and the special education teacher will make a separate plan for the students with disabilities based on that lesson or modify the assignments in real time in the classroom. In the survey, one teacher wrote,

> *One of the challenges of my co-teaching position is that we never have time to plan together. We do not have time to collaborate on lessons or to discuss next steps for students. It would be very helpful if teachers who were participating in co-teaching had a*

> *dedicated time on a regular basis, even if it was just a couple of times a month, to collaborate.*

Participants in the study noted that if they had more planning time together, they could further discuss students' needs and better plan the next instructional steps to take. Participants also noted that more time to plan would permit them to differentiate lessons to a greater degree and as one participant stated in the interview, "We need more time to collaborate and to talk about the lessons to a greater extent."

Inconsistent Teaching Schedule. From data analysis, one theme that emerged was the inconsistent teaching schedule. One participant shared that her schedule had been changed at least four times during the academic year because a student in a different grade level needed more support. As a result, the special education co-teacher's schedule had to change which in turn, meant that the special education co-teacher then had to come to her class at a different time of day for their co-teaching segments. This schedule change required the regular education teacher to shift her teaching times of various subjects to be in compliance with the student's IEP support segments.

Student Behavior Problems. Participants expressed frustration with the difficult behaviors they have had to deal with because of students in the co-taught setting. Several participants shared that "some days are easier than others," and one participant shared in the interview that some teachers are reluctant to participate in co-teaching because they know they will get the "low kids." Other participants noted that learning time is often lost due to behavior issues which impact the other students in the class. Candace stated,

> *Our children with emotional needs need to be pulled out or we have to evacuate the other students in the classroom which hinders everyone's learning at that point….We have all faced this this year in the class and it not only affects us and my class, but it affects my teammates too because they have to bring 30 more kids into their class and then it's one teacher with 60 kids. And there's not any learning that can take place at that point.*

Discussion of Findings

The major themes found in this study reflect the current literature on co-teaching. This study found that over half of all co-teachers at the elementary school had received some type of training on co-teaching. All co-teachers shared that their school district had provided them optional training during the academic year and most of them felt well-prepared to serve in the co-teaching role. Overall, participants' comments reflected Hang and Rabren's (2009) study which reported positive teacher perspectives on co-teaching. These comments included quotes such as "It's been a really great experience for me" and "I love it. It works beautifully for us." Campbell and Jeter-Iles (2017) stated that educators in their study viewed the co-teaching model as valuable but believed certain practices such as common planning time were needed. Participants in this study mentioned that the positives of co-teaching outweigh the negatives and although they would like more time for collaboration, many expressed that they desire to continue working in a co-teaching role. When examining these findings through the lens of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, the teachers in this study felt well-prepared to serve in the co-teaching role and therefore persevered through the challenges encountered to find the positives of co-teaching. This high perceived self-efficacy potentially pushes them forward to continue serving as a co-teacher and strive to better themselves each year.

A supportive and safe environment, instructional support for both students and teachers, and confidence builder were found to be themes in this study. The participants expressed they felt students with disabilities learned more in a co-taught classroom because they had the opportunity for additional support. The participants also felt relieved by having another teacher in the room to bounce ideas off regarding lessons or just give them a break when they felt overwhelmed by a student's immediate needs. Subsequently, the findings of the current study align to studies conducted by Brendle et al. (2017), as well as Hurd and Weilbacher (2017). Both studies found the theme of extra support for both teachers and students were prevalent in co-teaching classrooms. The participants also stated that students with special needs felt safe in a co-taught classroom with the assistance of two teachers and they developed a sense of belonging which aligns to the findings of Gately and Gately (2001) who found that students with special needs felt safe in an environment supported by two teachers.

The participants also expressed they felt students with disabilities learned more by being in a co-taught classroom because of the opportunity for additional one-on-one help and the opportunity to receive instruction from different approaches with two adults available. The findings showed that co-teachers play on each other's strengths by having one teach a subject the other may not feel as comfortable teaching (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). The participants also felt it was a confidence builder to have another teacher in the room to collaborate on teaching ideas. This finding is supported by Fenty and McDuffie-Landrum (2011) who found that teachers in co-taught classrooms develop a sense of comfort and confidence because they build upon both of their levels of expertise.

In this study, a lack of time for collaboration was found to be a challenge for co-teachers which parallels Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) report that not having a common planning time for co-teachers can be a roadblock to success. In order for a co-teaching relationship to flourish, co-teachers need time together to plan and talk through lessons as well as identify how best to address students' needs. Brendle~~,~~ et al. (2017) noted that co-teachers in their study discussed how to present a lesson right before class began. Two co-teachers in this current study indicated they often modify lessons to accommodate students' varying needs "on the fly" during class time because they do not have time to plan together. Other teachers expressed that the general education teacher typically does the planning and the special education teacher modifies for her students as needed, but they do not co-plan together due to a lack of time which was also reported by Brendle et al. (2017).

From data analysis, one theme that emerged was the inconsistent co-teaching schedule. One participant noted that her schedule had changed multiple times to accommodate the special education teacher's schedule which was frequently changed to meet the needs of other special needs students in different grade levels. Campbell and Jeter-Iles (2017) have stressed that co-teaching must be well-supported by the administration and master schedules must permit common planning time for co-teaching teams. Inconsistent co-teaching schedules, not only leads to poor co-planning, but also limits the working relationship between co-teaching partners.

The theme of student behavior problems emerged as a challenge to co-teaching in this study which is similar to Isherwood et al. (2013) who found that class composition can pose difficulties

to co-teaching classrooms. One of the participants in this study discussed in her interview that some teachers do not want to take on a co-teaching role because they are afraid they will get the "low kids" or the ones with difficult behaviors. She also expressed that often students who do not have an IEP, but are academically low, are placed in a co-taught classroom because there are two teachers. This can lead to a high number of students in a class who are academically low performing. Considering teachers are faced with high stakes testing, this can create an extra roadblock to getting teachers to want to serve in a co-taught role.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study took place in only one elementary school, the study is limited in its findings. Although the results have the potential to benefit the co-teachers at the school where the study was conducted, the results cannot be generalized across other schools because they potentially have different co-teaching schedules and dynamics of co-teaching teams. Given more time to complete the study, the researchers could widen the participant group to include general education and special education teachers throughout the county in order to illuminate the perceptions of co-teachers across the district. This would allow the researchers to analyze if the identified themes persist across the county. Moreover, the participants had the option of participating in the follow-up interview. Therefore, it is possible that only those teachers with a positive view of co-teaching volunteered to be interviewed.

Implications for Practice

The results of the study provide an opportunity for principals to reflect on how to better support the teachers in the building who serve in a co-teaching capacity. This might include making common planning times a priority for co-teachers or adding some incentives such as extra planning time for those teachers that serve in a co-teaching role. The findings of this study further imply that the distribution of students with disabilities could be equally distributed across classes in a grade level, rather than having only one co-taught classroom per grade. Moreover,

the results of this study imply that co-teachers lack skills on behavior management and administrators need to provide co-management training to address student behavior issues.

This study also provides school systems beneficial feedback regarding co-teaching training that has recently been incorporated into professional development days. Teachers in the study felt positively about the trainings they had attended. This will potentially encourage schools to continue and expand the trainings available to teachers on this subject. Finally, the findings of the current study suggest that teacher education programs should consider the merits of co-teaching for certification-seeking students. Integrating co-teaching into field experiences would be advantageous for preservice teachers as part of their training in order to be better prepared for their own inclusive classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

In future qualitative studies regarding co-teaching, the researcher should consider making participation dependent upon both completion of the survey as well as a follow-up interview. This would ensure a deeper understanding of all participants' views as it was found in this study that the interviews yielded more in-depth answers to questions than the survey. More emotions could also be analyzed based on the answers given verbally by the subjects in the interviews.

Future studies could also be expanded to include elementary level co-teachers from across the entire county. This would allow comparison between schools to see if the major themes found in this study hold true across the district. It would also provide further insight into if the district level co-teaching training has been attended, and found beneficial, by teachers throughout the county.

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APPENDIX A

The following survey is designed to gather information about how you were trained for your co-teaching position, and your perceptions on how prepared and successful you feel in the use of co-teaching as an instructional model for students with disabilities. There is no right or wrong

answer. Please provide any details that might help explain your thinking. Note that any identifying information will be removed to protect your confidentiality.

Please provide your email address in order to be entered into a random drawing to win a $20 Amazon gift card (free response).

1. Demographics:
    a. What grade level(s) do you currently teach?
    b. How many years have you been teaching?
    c. How many months/years have you been co-teaching?
2. Training related to co-teaching:
    a. Have you received training on co-teaching? [If they respond yes, they will be given the next questions in this section. If they respond no, then they will be taken to the next section.]
    b. Have you received training on any of the following? (Check all that apply)
        i. Models of co-teaching
        ii. How to build a successful relationship with your co-teacher
        iii. How to develop classroom rules and expectations with your co-teacher
        iv. Co-planning (planning lessons together as a team for your students)
        v. Other [please identify the focus of the training you received]
    c. Where did you receive the above-mentioned co-teaching training (e.g. undergraduate program, graduate program, professional development from school or conference)?
    d. Do you feel you are adequately trained to serve in a co-teaching role? Please describe your feelings on this.
3. Benefits of co-teaching:
    a. What benefits do you gain from working in a co-teaching position?
    b. How do the students in the classroom benefit from being in a co-taught classroom?
4. Challenges of co-teaching:
    a. What challenges do you face working in a co-teaching position?
    b. What challenges do the students have being in a co-taught classroom?

5. Needed training and support for co-teaching
    a. What would help you be a better co-teacher?
    b. What further training, if any, would you like to have on co-teaching?
    c. Are there any areas regarding co-teaching that you would like more support? If so, who can give you that support?
    d. You are encouraged to take a few moments and offer insights or reflections on this survey that you would like to expand on or that were not addressed.

APPENDIX B

The purpose of the interview is to gather further information and clarification about how general education and special education teachers are trained in the instructional practice of co-teaching as well as their perceptions on how prepared and successful they feel in the use of co-teaching as an instructional model for students with disabilities. Below are the types of prompts that might be used during the interview, but the wording may be changed, or questions added, depending on the nature of our discussions.

- *Before recording, inform the participant that I would like to audio-record the interview. If they agree, do a test of the audio recording to make sure it is working properly. If they decline to be audio recorded, take only hand-written notes.*
- Before we get started, I would like to have you re-affirm your consent to participate in the interview stage.
    - The purpose of the interview is to gather further information and clarification about how general education and special education teachers are trained in the instructional practice of co-teaching as well as their perceptions on how prepared and successful they feel in the use of co-teaching as an instructional model for students with disabilities. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I would like you to have the opportunity to pick your own pseudonym for us to use to protect your privacy. What would you like to be referred to as in this study?
      _____ *(write pseudonym chosen here)*
      Once the interviews have been transcribed and transcriptions verified, audio files will be deleted.

- Do you consent to being interviewed today? *If yes, continue the interview. If no, stop the interview.*

Questions to ask:

1. Did you volunteer to be a co-teacher or were you assigned the position?
2. *Ask them a question about their response to the survey question on the formal training they received.*
3. *Ask them a question about their response to the survey question about how adequately trained they feel to co-teach. For example, I might ask them to elaborate on what they wrote there.* Is there further training/information you would like to receive about co-teaching?
4. Do you and your co-teaching partner have a common planning time?
    a. If so, how often, and how do you collaborate?
    b. If not, do you feel it would be beneficial? Why or why not?
5. What are some of the positive aspects you see about co-teaching?
6. What are some of the challenges you've faced as a co-teacher?
7. What are your overall feelings toward the experience of co-teaching? Please explain.
8. If someone was asked to serve in a co-teaching role and they weren't sure about doing it, what advice would you give them?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about co-teaching that would be helpful for my study?
10. Do you have any questions for me?

    Thank them for participating and discuss giving them their $10 Target gift card.

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