

# Inclusion Series

## Partnering for Greatness

### Introduction

This issue of NASET's Inclusion series was written by Sarieta Pollard, Ph.D. Maximizing a co-teaching partnership sounds great right! That's easier said than done. As teachers, we are often faced with changing trends. Keeping up with those trends sometimes makes it difficult to prioritize collaborative relationships. The drive for general educators and special educators to draw on each other's knowledge and skills to improve teaching and learning for ALL students while maximizing co-teaching partnerships is overdue. Developing and honing SPED partnerships in schools is imperative to a school's strategic plan for student achievement. This is imperative because it allows for collaborative relationships that enable educators to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The partnership also is important for strategic plans in the school for achievement because it promotes a supportive learning environment that improves school culture and professional development. This partnership sounds great in theory; however, there may be roadblocks in developing partnerships and consistently implementing a partnership.

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Maximizing a co-teaching partnership sounds great right! That's easier said than done. As teachers, we are often faced with changing trends. Keeping up with those trends sometimes makes it difficult to prioritize collaborative relationships. Some of the things educators are faced with are:

- Closing gaps in specific subjects such as reading and math
- Pulling up your low performing students
- Effective and collaborative co-teaching
- Implementing classroom instruction that is data driven
- Implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom
- Using a universal design for learning

The drive for general educators and special educators to draw on each other's knowledge and skills to improve teaching and learning for ALL students while maximizing co-teaching partnerships is overdue. Developing and honing SPED partnerships in schools is imperative to a school's strategic plan for student achievement. This is imperative because it allows for collaborative relationships that enable educators to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The partnership also is important for strategic plans in the school for achievement because it promotes a supportive learning environment that improves school culture and professional development. This partnership sounds great in theory; however, there may be roadblocks in developing partnerships and consistently implementing a partnership.

### Roadblocks on the way to Partnership

What would happen if co-teaching in EVERY classroom setting actually worked without too much planning! This is wishful thinking on my behalf. Roadblocks that impact co-teaching and maximum

partnerships are usually due to a lack of time to “co-plan, positive work relationships between the two educators, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and administrative support” (Friend, 2008). These areas impact how the partnerships positively impact academic success with. All students and improve the school culture and climate. Often, there is limited information, trust, and in some cases respect for the different types of educators. For this reason, it would be beneficial for school administrators to implement a “by any means necessary” concept as it pertains to general educator and special educator partnership opportunities.

## **Steps to Partnerships**

I believe that the first step to maximizing SPED partnerships is to acknowledge and address the fact that students who have an IEP are not just “those SPED kids”, but are students first who happen to have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that meets their unique needs at school. This may sound easy, but breaking a thought process is a hard thing to do. In my school we have adopted the idea of maximizing SPED partnerships through the following:

- professional learning community (PLC) meetings
- intentional lesson planning involving both teachers to develop differentiated instruction and modifications
- Increased small group professional development on accommodations and modifications, differentiated instruction, universal design for learning using the “access for all: concept, etc...
- Alternating the co-teaching models including small group and 1-on-1 (facetime) instruction with the SPED teacher
- SPED teachers leading tutoring sessions that help develop learning strategies. The students that participate in the sessions include all students identified by academic data who benefit from additional tutoring and not just students with an IEP
- SPED teachers be a part of the school leadership team and early warning system team

As a special educator, I have seen how great partnerships with a general educator can be awesome and awkward at times. When everyone is consistently communicating and understand the importance of each person’s role in the classroom and with the students, they are more likely able to maximize partnerships. Some evidence based practices that educators use when co-teaching and collaborating is using accommodations and modifications, incorporating differentiated learning, and using a Universal Design for Instruction. Ralabate and the American Speech- Language-Hearing Association provides examples of using [Universal Design for Instruction](#) in their article, “Universal Design for Learning: Meeting the Needs of All Students” (2019). Henry County School District in Georgia demonstrates strategies to Differentiated Instruction using a Tool Kit for D.I.(2019). This tool kit is helpful when developing ways to differentiate.

## **True Partnerships**

True partnerships combine accommodations and modifications identified on students’ IEPs as well as general modifications. I also use an Access For All approach to teaching and learning. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) in the [Access for All Guide](#), when providing balanced or equal chances to obtain high standards across varying students in our schools we must

“provide multiple means of engagement, provide multiple means of representation, and provide multiple means of action and expressions” (2019). Using these strategies help general educators and special educators collaborate and design differentiated instruction that not only meets the needs of students in the classroom with an IEP, but All of the students.

Combining these approaches allows the teachers to design unique instruction in which they are able to modify and/or differentiate “how information is presented, how students respond or demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and how students are engaged in learning” (Ralabate, 2019).

As suggested earlier, the learning practice not only helps to individualize instruction for students with and IEP, it builds on the skills of students who are gifted, students who may be the “bottom 25”, and students who learn and process information differently.

As you can see, special educators are experts at learning strategies, differentiation, and assessing students’ needs while building on their strengths. General educators are experts at content mastery and great at differentiated instruction. Being risk-takers and implementing teamwork allows maximized partnerships that improve student learning opportunities. There is much for special educators and general educators to learn from each other. When both groups of educators are able to understand the importance of working together to give every student what they need they will be able to take the first step to maximizing their partnership.

## References

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