

CO-TEACHING FOR ALL: Using Two Educators in a Classroom to Individualize Learning

Promising Practices from Washington State

Sivan Tuchman

DATAILITY EDUCATION CONSULTING

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CO-TEACHING FOR ALL: Using Two Educators in a Classroom to Individualize Learning

The term co-teaching most often refers to one general education teacher and one special education teacher engaged collaboratively in classroom instruction. A co-teaching model that partners one lead and one apprentice teacher can support a school's broader teacher pipeline while also providing individualized instruction to all students.



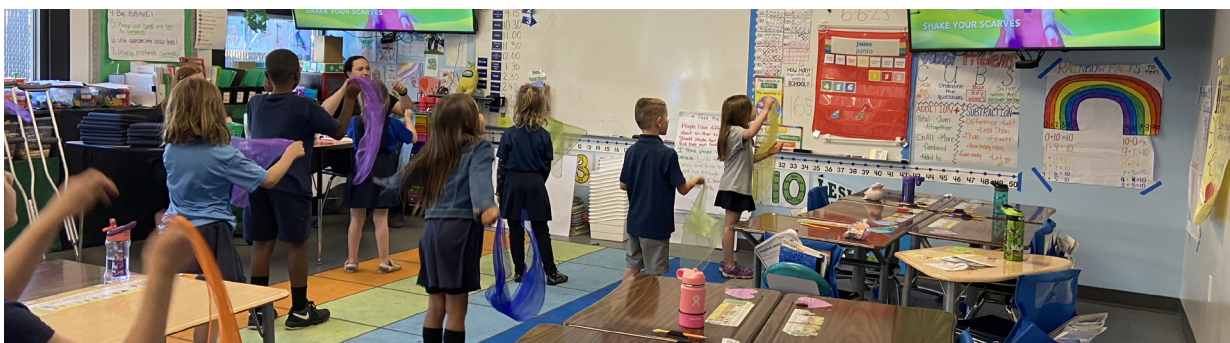
CASE STUDY SCHOOL

This guide describes a practice being implemented at Catalyst Public Schools (Catalyst). Catalyst is located in Bremerton, Washington and serves students in kindergarten to high school. The public charter school opened in September 2020. In 2023–24, Catalyst enrolled 485 students, 47% of whom were classified as low-income, and 16% of whom received special education services. For additional information, see [appendix A](#).

Practice Overview

What is this Practice?

In this guide, co-teaching refers to the practice of having two educators in a classroom — one lead teacher and one apprentice teacher. The lead teacher has more years of teaching experience and is responsible for creating curriculum and leading most instruction. The apprentice teacher works with individual students and small groups, leads classroom culture activities, manages student behavior, and supports social-emotional needs. Apprentice teachers are not paraprofessionals; they share responsibility for students and the classroom and take on more leadership as they develop.





SCHOOL PRACTICE: CO-TEACHING

- **Implementation Level:** School
- **Who Implements:** School leaders, Teachers
- **Practice Area:** Instructional practices, Teacher allocations
- **Practice Outcome(s):**
 - Teachers:** Teacher satisfaction (short-term), Teacher self-efficacy (short-term), Teacher retention (long-term)
 - Students:** Reduction in student achievement gaps (long-term)

CO-TEACHING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Co-teaching is most often implemented as part of a school's continuum of special education programming and services, with a general education and special education teacher pair who plan and teach courses together. Special education co-teachers can teach between one and six periods per day with one or more general education teachers.

Implementing co-teaching with general education and special education teachers can yield mixed results.¹ Many co-teaching pairs default to a "one teach-one assist" model that does not maximize the special education teacher's capacity. Furthermore, with special education teachers in high demand and difficult to hire,² few schools are able to use this type of staffing model as intended.

How is it Innovative?

Creating a Teacher Pipeline

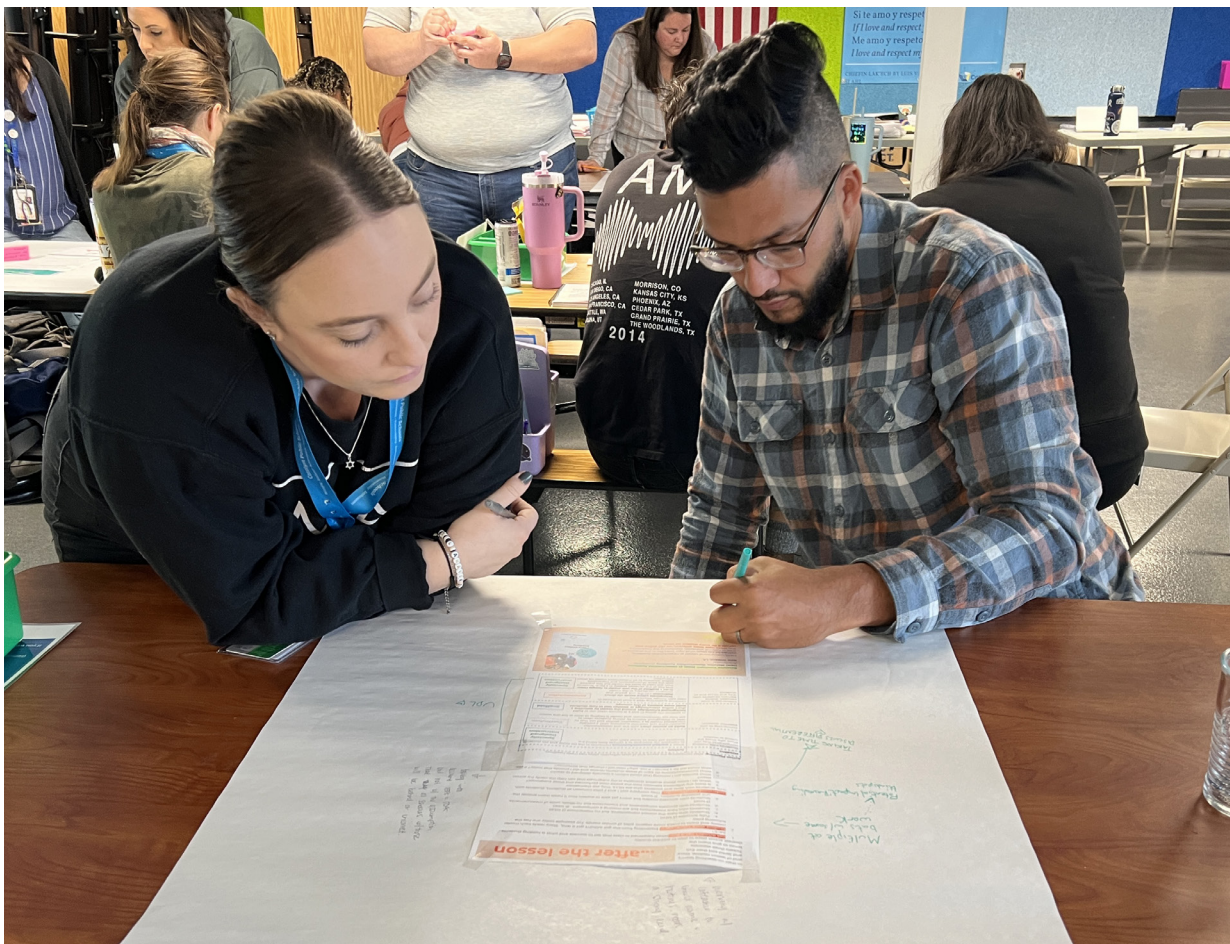
Unlike traditional co-teaching, the model described in this guide uses one lead teacher and one apprentice teacher with neither being a special education teacher.

Teacher residency programs that place teachers-in-training alongside a strong mentor teacher create professional pathways in a time of widespread teacher shortages.³ Based on a medical residency model, teacher residency programs provide professional development at schools while partnering with higher education programs for formal classes that lead to certification.

A co-teaching model that uses staff without teaching degrees makes teaching positions more readily available to local community members. [Grow Your Own \(GYO\) programs](#) that create teacher pipelines for existing school staff also help diversify the teaching workforce.⁴ When teachers educate students of the same race and/or ethnicity, students experience a greater sense of belonging and can have improved academic outcomes.⁵

CO-TEACHER ROLES AT CATALYST

Catalyst works to ensure that the lead and apprentice teacher [roles and responsibilities](#) are clear and transparent. Co-teaching teams can adapt these responsibilities, particularly as apprentice teachers demonstrate the interest and ability to take on more. Generally, lead teachers hold most of the responsibility for planning instruction, but apprentice teachers are responsible for specific lessons. Apprentice teachers deliver morning “Sunrise” lessons to start the day and “Wellness” classes, which are similar to electives. When a special education teacher pushes into the classroom, there are three educators to support students.



ENSURING HIGH QUALITY FUTURE TEACHERS

Catalyst views their co-teaching model as a way to train future lead teachers, hire more community members in the school, and provide students with individualized education. Apprentices have the opportunity to observe high-quality instruction and receive feedback throughout the year, as well as learn how to plan lessons through regular co-planning with their co-teacher. A school like Catalyst can train new and less experienced educators in the practices and mindsets that align with their school's model and values.

Teacher Retention

Co-teaching can also reduce teacher attrition by addressing factors that influence retention.⁶ Specifically, co-teaching can help facilitate:

- individual relationships among coworkers,
- support for effective practices (e.g., data-driven instruction or small group instruction),
- opportunities for professional learning,
- mentoring or being mentored, and
- opportunities for reflection.

Apprentice teachers help lead teachers with tasks like making copies, grading assignments, and monitoring student academic and behavioral performance during lessons. Relieved of these non-instructional tasks, lead teachers are able to focus on instruction, planning, and student relationships, which can help increase their job satisfaction and overall teacher retention.

What is the evidence for co-teaching?

Research has shown that co-teaching can have positive effects for students with and without disabilities,⁷ both in models with a special educator and in models with two general education teachers.⁸ The research is not conclusive, however. Some studies find few benefits to co-teaching for students with disabilities.⁹ Co-teaching can also be expensive to implement well.¹⁰

Co-teaching's effectiveness, regardless of teacher type, is likely due to a reduction in student-teacher ratios.¹¹ Teachers are able to instruct students in targeted small groups,¹² which improves student learning.¹³ It is also easier to form stronger student-teacher relationships with fewer students per teacher, which can lead to deeper learning.¹⁴

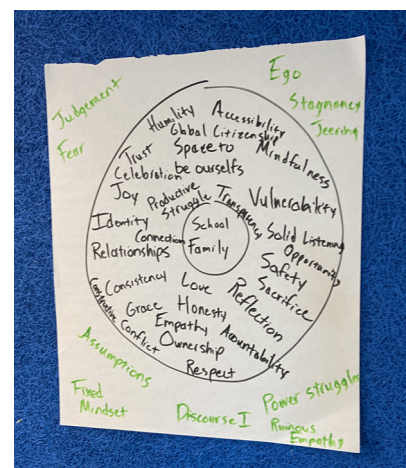
What isn't working about current approaches?

Inadequate Whole-School Buy-In

Many schools choose to integrate co-teaching into their instructional model incrementally. In these cases, school leaders first work with a small group of co-teachers who share common goals and have similar working styles.¹⁵ Leaders then rely on initial examples of co-teaching to demonstrate to the rest of their teaching staff what is possible when it is implemented well. While this incremental approach can generate short-term buy-in for the model, leaders need to still make sure to develop supportive mindsets for the entire staff (e.g., a desire to collaborate, a willingness to give up control, and an ability to take risks). This way the school is ready to scale-up co-teaching to include all teachers following the pilot period.

Lack of Co-Planning Time

Teachers cannot successfully implement co-teaching without protected time to plan together.¹⁶ During co-planning, the teaching pair collaboratively reviews data, plans instruction, and problem-solves student needs. However, setting aside time isn't enough.¹⁷ Schools also need to create explicit expectations about how co-planning time will be used.

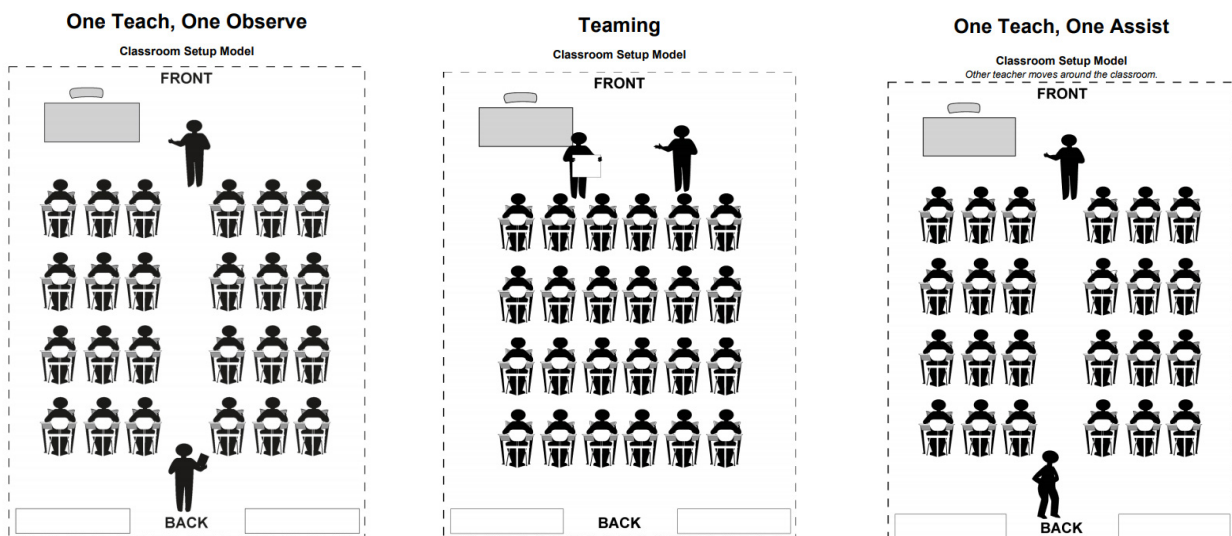


Use of Co-Teaching Structures

Less Effective Structures

Co-teachers who lack co-planning time or do not have the mindsets necessary for co-teaching are likely to default to less effective co-teaching structures (figure 1). Structures like these are easy to implement as they don't require both co-teachers to know the lesson being taught. However, they are less effective because they don't maximize each teacher's capacity.

FIGURE 1: Co-teaching structures that are less effective for individualizing instruction



One teacher observes the lesson while the other teacher instructs the whole group. The observer has a specific focus, such as academic, behavioral or social data on specific students or the class group.

Two teachers both contribute to instruction, teaching the whole class together.

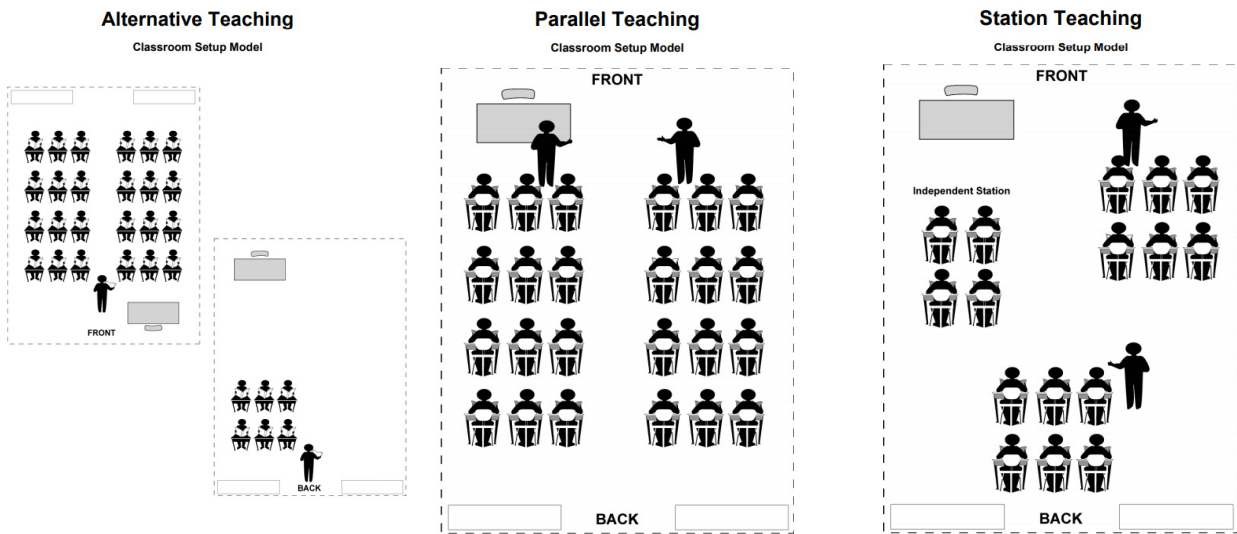
One teacher teaches the whole group while the other assists.

Reference: [New York State Education Department, Co-Teaching: A Comprehensive Approach](#)

Most Effective Structures

Parallel, alternative, and stations co-teaching structures (figure 2) all make it possible for teachers to work with fewer students, which facilitates individualized instruction. However, these more effective co-teaching models can be difficult to implement, as they require teachers to establish clear structures and expectations in the classroom to ensure on-task behavior during independent work. Additionally, co-teachers need to build trusting relationships with one another so they can coordinate and give each other feedback.

FIGURE 2: Co-teaching models that have the potential for more individualized instruction



One teacher instructs the larger group of students while the other instructs a smaller group that has specific needs.

Students are divided into two groups and both teachers present the same material while allowing for differentiation and greater student participation.

Students are divided into three groups. Each teacher works with each student.

Reference: [New York State Education Department, Co-Teaching: A Comprehensive Approach](#)



CASE STUDY

A New Take on Co-Teaching

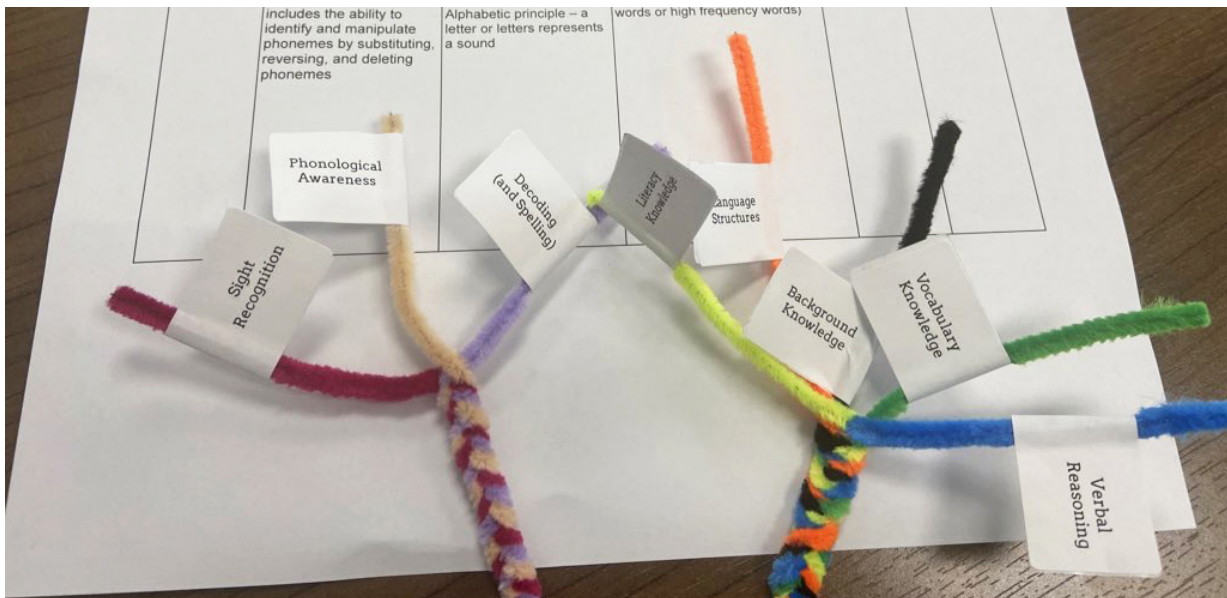
Catalyst Public Schools opened in 2020 with co-teaching in all K-8 classrooms. Co-teaching most commonly pairs a general educator and special educator in a single classroom to help ensure that all students, especially students with disabilities, are receiving individualized instruction. However, Catalyst practices an alternative co-teaching model, pairing a lead teacher with an apprentice teacher, or small group instructor (SGI).

The arrangement lessens the workload for lead instructors as SGIs take on the task of conducting “Sunrise,” a period of social and emotional learning in the mornings, and “Wellness,” a period of elective education for students. An SGI also leads small instructional groups based on students’ varied learning levels.

Co-Teacher Roles

Having two instructors in one classroom also improves the student-teacher ratio, which can lead to improved student engagement and more individualized instruction. In some instances, co-teachers lead instruction in their respective preferred subjects. One might lead the class in English language arts while the other heads instruction in mathematics.

Additional roles of an SGI are not explicitly prescribed and look different in each classroom, as they are determined by the two educators while they form a working relationship. SGI responsibilities can range from making copies and collecting homework to planning and executing full lessons in a role similar to a lead teacher. Some SGIs express a desire to participate more in a teaching role while others prefer to only observe outside of their baseline job duties.



Addressing disruptions in the classroom has become an essential role of an SGI, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic's precipitated spike in student behavioral issues. Across the country, classroom disruptions from student misconduct rose by 56 percent during the 2021-2022 school year, and more than 80 percent of U.S. public schools reported a negative impact on student behavior and social-emotional development, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

"I think the model of co-teaching really helped because while my co-teacher is teaching, I can check in with the scholars ... and build that rapport with them and make sure they know I'm here to help," explained one SGI.

Still, Catalyst's leaders advocate having both co-teachers participate in most instructional activities — rather than SGIs regularly stepping out of class with students — so that they do not rely on this as a method of classroom management and SGIs do not miss instructional time.

Opportunities Arise from Co-Teaching

SGIs usually aren't credentialed teachers, but being involved in K-8 education gives them the opportunity to have firsthand experience in the classroom. Catalyst's co-teaching model effectively creates a teacher pipeline, as some SGIs go on to become lead teachers. However, a lack of teaching experience for SGIs can present a learning curve when they're new to the classroom. Working beside a veteran teacher is an opportunity for a new SGI to quickly learn teaching strategies.

"It's just really been helpful seeing someone else teach," said an SGI, "because when you're teaching by yourself, you don't get the opportunity to go see other people teach."

Various factors play into the success of a co-teaching relationship. Different personalities, teaching styles, and classroom management preferences can affect the efficiency of a co-teacher pairing. Generally, educators at Catalyst have said that their roles become more clearly established after the school year starts, once they've shared a classroom for a month or two. However, lead teachers are often assigned a new SGI each year, which means having to build and refine a new working partnership.

"It adds a degree of complexity in managing both the adult side of the relationship and the student sort of culture," said a lead teacher at Catalyst. "Windows and opportunities for triangulation emerge."



The success of the co-teaching model varies depending on the compatibility of the two instructors in the classroom. Some pairings between SGI and lead teacher harmonize better than others. To help solidify lead teacher-SGI relationships, Catalyst uses the two-by-two method. The pairing meets quarterly to write down two areas where they believe their co-teacher is excelling and two areas that need improvement. Co-teachers then share their feedback with their partner.

"[Two-by-twos] were super helpful because we're able to get our ideas written out," said an SGI. "It's nice because you reflect on yourself but also the person you are co-teaching with."

Teachers have also suggested spending more time with their co-teacher during summer professional development to help build their relationship. Both roles in the co-teaching model have noted communication as a key factor to their success in the classroom.

"Your communication has to be 100 percent," said a lead teacher.

Challenges Still Exist

According to lead teachers and SGIs, compatibility and communication were the primary drivers of an effective co-teaching practice. Working together over time helped solidify their co-teaching relationships.

"The most successful co-teaching relationships begin with really strong alignment and clarity around the kind of classroom space that you're trying to co-create," said one lead teacher.

However, most co-teachers said that there was not enough designated time during the school day for lead teachers and SGIs to strategize and review curriculum together. Some needed to find time outside of working hours to communicate with each other.

"We don't have lunch together. We don't have our planning period together," said a lead teacher. "The only time we are together is when we are in the classroom, but we're working. We're teaching."

Early Effects of Co-Teaching

Students at Catalyst have higher proficiency rates in English and math than their peers across Washington state. The average student in Washington achieves 49% proficiency in English language arts and 41% in math, compared to Catalyst students who achieve 53% and 58% proficiency in ELA and math (figure 3).

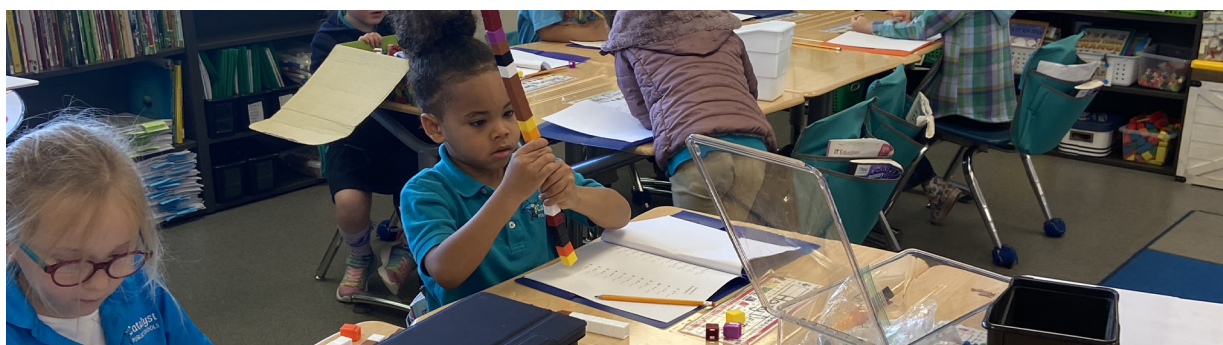
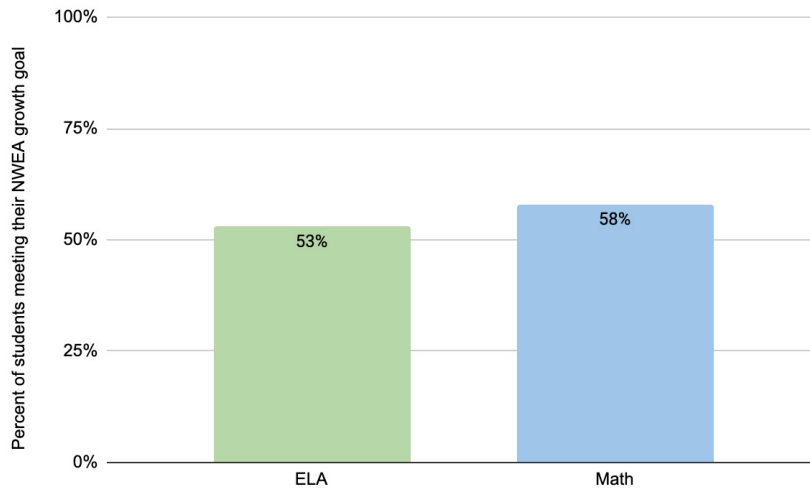


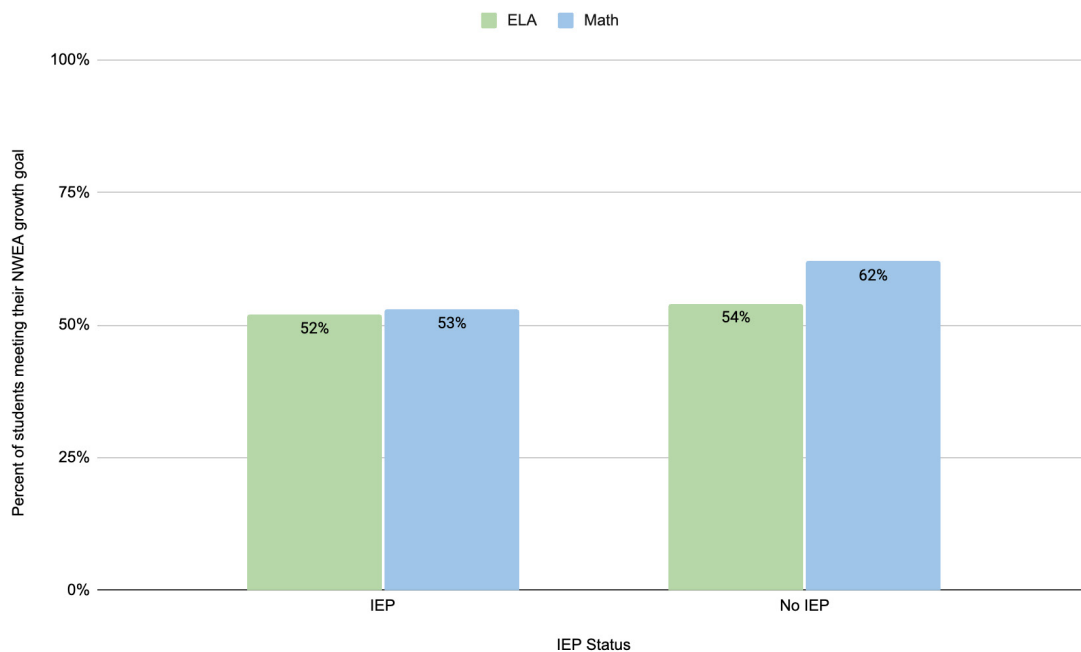
FIGURE 3. Overall percent of students meeting 2023-24 NWEA MAP math and English language arts growth goals



Source: [Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#)

A defining purpose of Catalyst’s co-teaching model is the reduction of achievement gaps among marginalized student groups. Students with individual education plans (IEPs), for example, have historically experienced much lower learning outcomes than their peers without IEPs. In Catalyst’s third year of operation, the percentage of students with IEPs meeting growth goals in English language arts was almost equivalent to the percentage of their peers without IEPs (see figure 4). This encouraging parity in Catalyst’s student achievement may be partially due to the school’s use of co-teaching to differentiate instruction according to the unique learning needs of each student.

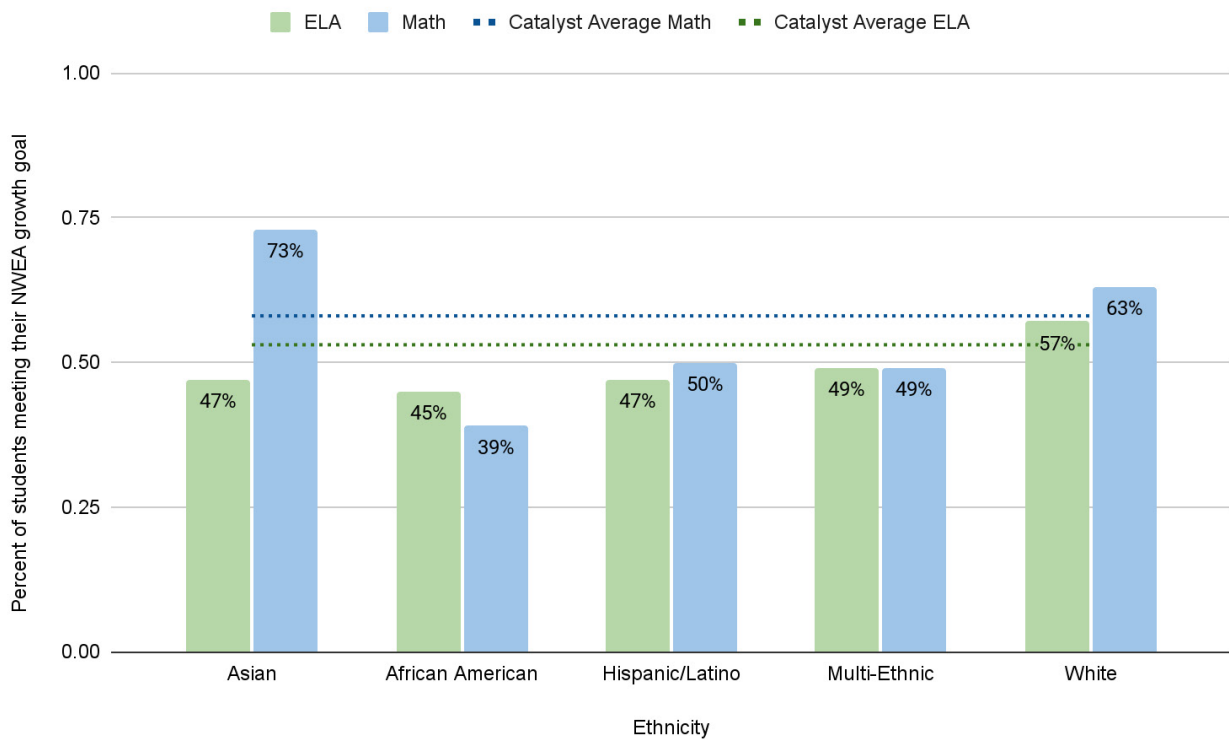
FIGURE 4. Percent of students meeting 2023-24 NWEA MAP math and English language arts growth goals by IEP status



Source: [Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#)

Catalyst also continues to work to reduce academic gaps between white students and students of color (figure 5). In English language arts, the gap between these groups is 8 to 12 percentage points.

FIGURE 5. *Percent of students meeting 2023-24 NWEA MAP math and English language arts growth goals by ethnicity*



Source: [Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#)

Catalyst continues to evolve and expand its instructional practices in an effort to increase the percentage of students meeting growth goals, both across the board and within demographic groups. Its co-teaching model offers a promising framework for implementing individualized instruction that meets the needs of all learners.

How to Implement This Practice



WHAT YOU NEED

SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

School

- Evaluation and coaching systems for all instructional staff members
- Structured time for co-planning activities
- Sufficient time for professional development before the school year starts
- Regular time for professional development throughout the year

District

- Recruitment of instructional staff qualified to be lead teachers as well as recruitment of apprentice teachers; this may include candidates with non-traditional teaching backgrounds
- Hiring practices that screen for co-teaching mindsets in potential teachers
- Payscale that differentiates roles while also incentivizing individual growth

LEADERSHIP MOVES

- Incorporate co-teaching competencies into teacher feedback and coaching
- Pair staff using data and consider the strengths of each teacher
- Create a system for teachers to have coverage of their classes so they can observe their peers

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- Open and honest communication with colleagues
- Knowledge of how to collect and use data to make instructional decisions

MINDSETS

- Belief that students are best served when two adults can meet student needs together
- Belief that all educators, with effective support and development, can successfully teach students
- Openness to giving and receiving feedback; belief that feedback helps everyone in a school improve



WHAT YOU NEED

RESOURCES

Staffing

- Fully certified teacher in each classroom
- Novice teacher in each classroom who has completed at least a high school education
- Instructional coaches
- Lean central office staffing, which may mean eliminating operations and curriculum staff

Materials

- Curricular materials
- Explicit set of roles and responsibilities for co-teachers
- Evaluation rubrics that assess co-teaching competencies

Budget

- Teacher salaries that are reasonably on par with local salary schedules; some modifications may be necessary to meet budget requirements
- Apprentice teacher salaries similar to those of paraeducators at local district salary schedules

Steps to Implement

Create Systems and Structures

STEP 1: Develop Roles and Responsibilities

Schools need to create and communicate explicit expectations for co-teacher duties.

To start, school leaders [make a list](#) of all teacher tasks for a typical day and for days with alternative structures (e.g., early release days, testing days, or schoolwide events). Leaders should consider all the roles that educators play in and out of the classroom, such as data collection, parent meetings, and lunch coverage.

Next, the school must decide which teachers will take responsibility for which tasks. Both teachers should have opportunities to interact with students in various ways so they can build strong student-teacher relationships. The school leader also needs to consider the apprentice teacher's professional development. Tasks should be assigned in a way that supports their skill development, considering factors such as whether the apprentice wants to become a lead teacher.

STEP 2: Match Co-Teaching Pairs

Successfully matching co-teachers can sometimes feel like luck, but leaders can make the process intentional.

Interview questions with teacher candidates can help leaders match new or returning teachers. Questions during the hiring process might include:

- How do you usually resolve conflicts with others?
- What do you feel needs to be in place for you to trust another person?
- How would you describe your communication style?

Performance tasks completed by potential co-teaching pairs can provide additional opportunities for school leaders to observe the suitability of co-teacher matches. Commercially available workplace personality tests can also be useful for determining whether a pair might work well together.

Developing Co-Teachers

STEP 1: Develop Co-Teaching Mindsets

While the interview process is essential to ensuring all hired staff believe in co-teaching and hold the values necessary for its success, professional development is important for building mindsets and setting expectations. Professional development can incorporate [activities to help all teachers align](#) on what co-teaching is and is not, its purpose, and its effective implementation.

STEP 2: Build Strong Relationships

During summer professional development, school leaders need to prioritize time for co-teaching pairs to build their working relationships. Co-teachers can benefit from rehearsing lesson routines, like how to effectively present together or talk through decisions about students. To learn more about how to build teacher relationships, read [Summer Professional Development: Creating a Foundation of Teacher Relationships](#).



Schools should also consider how to help co-teachers build strong, trusting relationships. Catalyst’s leaders devote a considerable amount of time in the summer to building staff relationships across the school. Catalyst’s co-teachers often describe being part of each other’s families, spending time together outside of school, and feeling like they can share anything with each other.

STEP 3: Develop Co-Teaching Skills and Knowledge

Once co-teachers have had the opportunity to develop common values and build professional relationships, school leaders can turn their focus to instructional planning and implementation. Topics should include:

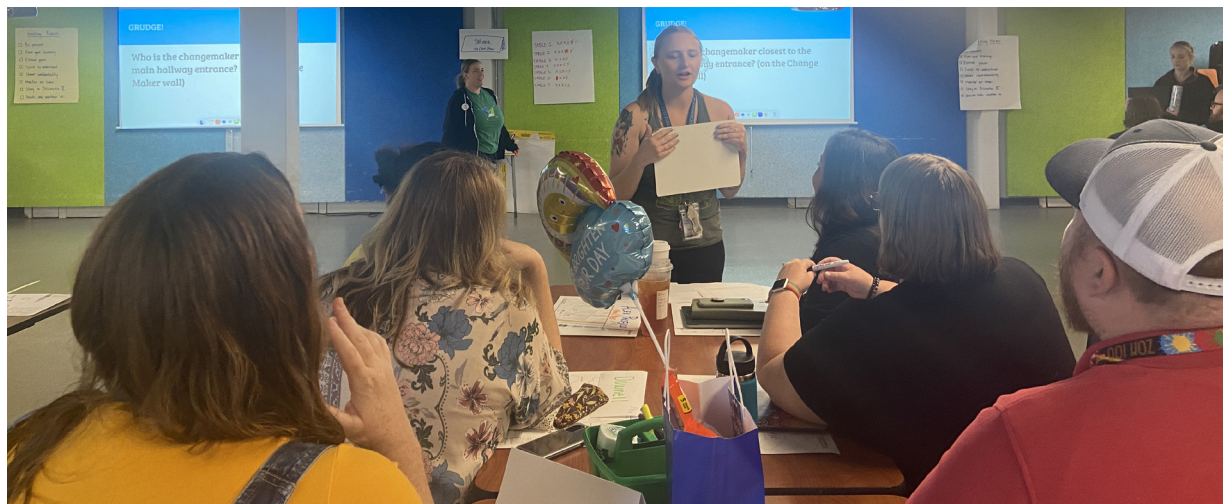
- Co-teaching structures: Teachers need to know the different types of co-teaching arrangements they can use in their classroom and understand why they might use one over another (see Figure 2 on page 8).
- Data use: Teachers need to understand the importance of using data during and after lessons.
- Communication: Co-teachers need to learn how to verbally and non-verbally communicate with one another to adjust their instructional approach as needs arise. Co-teachers also need regular time to build their relationship and give each other feedback.

Implementing Co-Teaching

STEP 1: Plan Lessons

Before the school year begins, co-teachers need designated time together to establish a shared vision for how they will structure and teach their lessons. They need time to develop their short-term plans — such as daily lesson plans for the first two weeks of school. With plans in place, co-teachers can practice how they will work together. Eventually, co-teachers will be able to anticipate each other’s actions and responses during lessons.

Co-teachers will need to experiment with different co-teaching structures. Each co-teaching structure is ideal for a different purpose. For example, while one-teach, one-assist is not most effective for academic instruction, it might be the best way to structure the classroom during whole-group morning announcements. Co-teachers also need to decide when to use homogeneous versus heterogeneous groups of students.



Co-teachers can dedicate a specific day each week to building lesson plans. For example, many teachers like to use Fridays to prepare lessons for the next week. They can then dedicate co-planning time the other days to reviewing lesson plans and student data. If co-teachers lack sufficient time to plan together, they will need to plan independently and then use co-planning time to communicate their planning intentions.

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS

Heterogenous or mixed-ability groups are best when teachers want students to learn from one another. Each student should have the opportunity to share their thinking with the group. Students may benefit from having explicit roles (e.g., notetaker, timekeeper, reader, process checker) to ensure participation. This type of grouping is advantageous when the goal is for students to learn new information and not specific skills.

HOMOGENOUS GROUPS

Homogenous or same-ability groups are best used when teachers want to hone in on specific skills that a small group of students all need to work on. This type of grouping reduces the teacher's need to differentiate during direct instruction. Co-teachers may choose to have each teacher work with only a subset of students focused on specific skill areas. For example, one teacher can work with groups on their reading fluency while the other works on reading comprehension.

STEP 2: *Co-Teach Lessons*

Excellent co-teaching balances strong planning with flexible delivery. Co-teachers need to implement lesson plans based on the roles and responsibilities they determined ahead of time, while also adapting lessons in the moment as they observe and collect data on students' needs. They should regularly reflect on how their roles and responsibilities are playing out in the classroom and make adjustments as needed.

Continuous Improvement

STEP 1: *Collect and Use Data*

Co-teachers who consistently use data to inform their instruction will be able to address knowledge gaps more effectively and maximize the potential of their co-teaching relationship.

Each lesson plan should specify how student learning data will be collected and who will do it. If both teachers are working with small groups, they will each need to collect their own data. During whole-class instruction, one co-teacher should be responsible for collecting data. Data can help co-teachers group students for future lessons, select the best co-teaching structure for different types of lessons, and identify growth areas for individual students.

STEP 2: Learn from Other Co-Teachers

Co-teachers can learn from formally observing other co-teaching teams. School leaders or coaches can support co-teachers by creating goals or “look-fors” to help them focus their observation of another classroom. After the observation, co-teachers can debrief what they have learned and plan their next steps. Apprentice teachers should also have opportunities to observe other apprentices.

STEP 3: Coach Co-teachers

Ongoing support can help co-teachers. Co-teachers will benefit from each having their own coach who can work with them individually. Co-teaching pairs also need opportunities to meet with a coach together to focus on strengthening alignment, using co-teaching structures they may not be comfortable with, and problem-solving areas of tension or miscommunication.

Instructional coaches can use a rubric to provide feedback and reinforce co-teachers’ defined roles and responsibilities. Typically, co-teaching is minimally represented in coaching or evaluation frameworks so school leaders may have to create their own.

EVALUATING CO-TEACHING

[Catalyst’s rubric](#) includes four co-teaching competencies:

- **Data-driven instruction:** Data is collected throughout the lesson and co-teachers adjust instruction in real-time based on that data.
- **Mindset & high expectations:** Co-teachers have a mutually respectful relationship that enables them to collaboratively plan and implement rigorous and high-quality instruction using the appropriate co-teaching model.
- **Responsive communication:** Co-teachers have strategies for communicating during lessons and outside of lessons to ensure that conflicts are addressed and feedback can be given and taken.
- **Planning & execution:** The planning and delivery of instruction is owned by both co-teachers so that each teacher knows students and can implement lessons to meet their needs.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

STAKEHOLDER	ACTIVITIES	TIME REQUIRED
Lead Teacher	Plan/co-plan instruction	20 hours per year
	Analyze student data	12 hours per month
	Teach core academic classes (English, math, science, history)	15-45 minutes per week
	Collaborate with special education teacher(s) so accommodations and modifications for students with IEPs are integrated into all lessons	5 hours the first year; 2 hours in subsequent years
Small Group Instructor	Plan supplemental content	1–2 hours daily
	Prepare instructional materials for whole class and small groups	1 hour daily
	Support schoolwide student supervision	1–2 hours daily
	Teach small groups during core academic classes	3–4 hours daily
	Teach supplemental content	1–2 hours daily
	Collect student data during lead teacher instruction	1–2 hours daily
Administrator	Observe both co-teachers during instruction	1 hour every other week
	Coach co-teachers based on student data and observations	1 hour weekly
Special Education Teacher	Plan specially designed instruction based on co-teaching teams' lesson plans	1–2 hours per class weekly
	Implement specially designed instruction within the co-taught classroom	About 1 hour per class daily
	Collaborate with co-teachers so accommodations and modifications for students with IEPs are integrated into all lessons	1 hour weekly

Potential Barriers

BARRIER	SOLUTION
Teaching staff is not bought into co-teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer instructional coaching to help teachers consider how to use an additional educator in the classroom. • Implement professional development before school starts. This will help teachers build trusting relationships and learn effective co-teaching structures that foster individualized instruction. • Adapt hiring protocols to ask prospective educators about their willingness to share control of the classroom and use co-teaching classroom models. Schools can also incorporate co-teaching into demo lessons during the hiring process.
There is insufficient funding for staffing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-evaluate all school staff positions to identify tasks that can be incorporated into existing positions. Leaders may be able to reduce before- and after-school supervision or central office roles. • Identify potential governmental or philanthropic funding opportunities to offset initial costs of co-teaching while restructuring pay and staffing structures. • Only use co-teaching for certain classrooms.
Teachers do not have coaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a teacher mentorship program that pairs veteran lead teachers with less experienced lead teachers across the school. Use a similar structure of pairing veterans and apprentice teachers. • Have coaches work with co-teaching pairs together rather than 1:1. • Lead teachers function as the coach for apprentice teachers. • Strategically choose which teachers will benefit most from coaching and have only them receive coaching.
Co-teachers do not have common planning times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicate time during professional development for co-teachers to collaborate and plan. • Encourage co-teachers to use time before and after school for co-planning. • Give co-teachers a clear protocol for co-planning to make sure their limited time is productive.

Sustainability

Schools will need to attend to factors that support the sustainability of co-teaching.

Funding

Adequate funding is a key barrier for most schools that consider co-teaching, as they must fund twice the teacher salaries and benefits. Schools that are committed to a whole-school co-teaching approach have to significantly rethink their staffing model. Catalyst is able to fund a lead and apprentice teacher in every classroom by:

- Offering base salaries to lead teachers similar to local school districts. Catalyst currently does not give salary increases for a Master's degree. School leaders explain to teachers that their role at Catalyst does not require them to do the majority of grading or clerical work; the apprentice teacher is responsible for those tasks. Leaders also communicate during hiring that lead teachers will be able to implement personalized instructional strategies much more easily with a co-teacher than without.
- Limiting central office costs. As Catalyst has grown, they have had only one elementary school principal, one middle school principal, and one part-time vice principal. They also hire minimal operations staff and use apprentice teachers for all before- and after-school supervision, as well as for lunch and recess. Apprentice teachers also teach their elective course, "Wellness."

Teacher Contracts

Teacher contracts should include co-teacher roles and responsibilities and also allow time for co-planning. Such contracts may be easier to create in small school systems with little bureaucracy. However, they will be especially important in large schools to help ensure all staff understand co-teaching expectations and requirements. Schools will have fewer problems in the long term when they have teacher contracts tailored to co-teaching.

Buy-In

Creating buy-in for a co-teaching model is essential for its success. The hiring process is a critical opportunity for school leaders to explain the model to new hires and select interested applicants who demonstrate aligned values. Professional development and coaching before and during the school year help build and reinforce the mindsets necessary for successful long-term co-teaching. The more successes co-teachers experience as a team, the more teachers believe in the model. In a school like Catalyst, where all classrooms are co-taught, it is far easier to create and sustain buy-in for co-teaching because it is simply the way the school works.

Local Adaptations

Different schooling contexts may require adaptations to successfully implement the practice.

Co-Teaching in Some Classrooms

For many schools, it may be infeasible to implement co-teaching in every classroom. These school leaders choose only some of their classrooms to be co-taught. For example, school leaders might decide to place more of their students with IEPs or students struggling academically in a co-taught classroom. Schools can consider starting a small pilot of co-taught classrooms before building co-teaching into a whole school model.

Co-Teaching in Some Subjects

School leaders with limited resources may choose to use co-teaching only for certain subjects, like literacy and math. That way students can benefit from small group instruction in core subjects. This adaptation is easier when subject teachers are departmentalized or there are subject specialists. For example, a literacy specialist can push in and co-teach during English language arts for all K-3 classrooms. A challenge with this strategy is that one teacher, in this case the English teacher, must co-plan and develop relationships with multiple grade-level teachers. Often, this results in the additional teacher not having sufficient information about lessons.

How to Monitor Success

It is useful to create a theory of change to identify the outcomes you want to measure. (See [appendix B](#) for a sample theory of change that can be adjusted based on your school's goals.) It is important to look at short- and long-term outcomes, as well as implementation effectiveness.

Outcomes

Co-teaching should result in improved student academic and behavioral outcomes as well as teacher retention. Other outcomes will depend on your school's goals for the year. The table below provides several common outcomes and related measures as examples. Select just **one to three** that work for your school.

POTENTIAL OUTCOME	MEASUREMENT TOOL
Increased student achievement	NWEA Map (reading and math), iReady, Lexia, DIBELS, or any other assessment given at least 3x annually
Narrowed achievement gaps	Subgroup difference on NWEA Map (reading and math), iReady, Lexia, DIBELS, or any other assessment given at least 3x annually
Improved student behavior/discipline	Referrals, detentions, or another way the school indicates a lower-level infraction than suspension
Increased teacher retention	Percent of teachers returning the following school year

Implementation Indicators

Monitor implementation indicators throughout the year and at the end of the school year. Progress on these indicators will help make sense of outcomes and adjust processes for the next year. Below are a number of options for measuring implementation.

POTENTIAL INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT TOOL
Student mastery of standards	Exit tickets or unit assessments
Use of appropriate co-teaching model	Observation rubric
Teacher sense of belonging	Teacher belonging survey (Gallup and Kelvin)
Teacher satisfaction	Teacher satisfaction survey (Gallup and Kelvin)

Resources

Materials for Leadership

- [Co-Teaching Observation Rubric](#)
- [Catalyst Professional Development Rubric](#)
- [Activities to Promote Values Alignment](#)

Materials for Co-Teachers

- [Catalyst Co-Teaching Playbook](#)
- [Elementary School Co-Teaching Agreements](#)
- [Middle School Co-Teaching Agreements](#)

Teacher Satisfaction Surveys

- [Gallup](#)
- [Kelvin](#)
- [Panorama](#)

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APPENDIX A:

Profile of Catalyst Public School

Location: Bremerton, Washington

Founded: 2020

Level: K-8 (will include high school as of fall 2024)

Teachers: 29

ENROLLMENT	2022-23 SY	2023-24 SY
Number enrolled	439	485
Students with disabilities	15.7%	15.5%
Multilingual learners	0%	0%
Foster youth	0%	0%
Low-income students	49.2%	47.0%
Homeless students	0%	0%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [school report card](#)

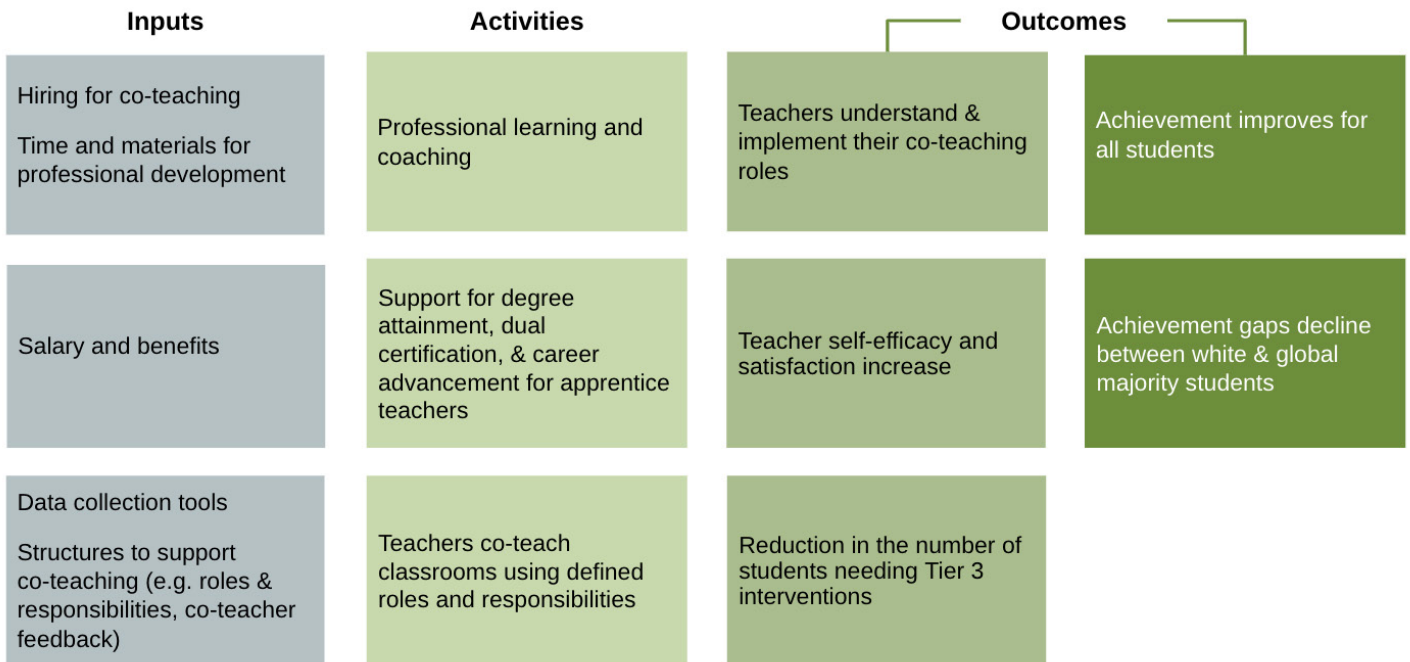
RACE/ ETHNICITY	2022-23 SY	2023-24 SY
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.9%	0.2%
Asian	3.6%	3.9%
Black or African American	8.7%	8%
Hispanic or Latino	15.0%	16.5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.2%
Two or more races	12.1%	11.3%
White	59.2%	59.8%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [school report card](#)

ACADEMIC PROFILE	2021-22 SY	2022-23 SY
Attendance	71.1%	73.0%
Percent meeting ELA standards	57.7%	48.8%
Percent meeting math standards	49.2%	45.1%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [school report card](#)

APPENDIX B: Logic Model for Catalyst's Co-Teaching Model



About the Project

Project Description

This guide is part of a two-year participatory evaluation that concluded in May 2024. We worked with Washington State public charter schools Lumen High School and Catalyst Public School. The evaluation started with a single question: “What is working in your school?” Researchers Georgia Heyward and Sivan Tuchman worked closely with school leaders to identify promising practices and create research plans to study implementation and outcomes. The result is [six guides](#) for each of the practices identified:

- Collaborative Conversations: Skill-Building Restorative Discipline
- Co-Teaching for All: Using Two Educators in a Classroom
- Cultivating Connection: How to Design and Implement School-Based Mentoring
- Social Health: A New Model for Wrap-Around School Services
- Station Rotation: Grouping Students for Individualized Learning
- Summer Professional Development: Creating a Foundation of Teacher Relationships

We also produced [a summary report](#) identifying how schools and systems can create learning environments that promote whole-school wellbeing. See that report for a full description of the research methodology.

Author

Sivan Tuchman, PhD is the founder of Datability Education Consulting. Dr. Tuchman is committed to helping her clients use data and evaluation to improve outcomes for all learners. Sivan spent 8 years as a special education teacher before earning her doctorate in education policy at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Prior to founding Datability, she was a researcher at the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

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